

New Haven Review

Benjamin Goodney goes swimming 6

Alexis Zanghi shows us around town 10

Genevieve Valentine tells us what happened when we found the deer 22

Nick DePascal encounters the Great Editor in the Sky 34

Sue D. Burton tickles the ivories 38

Katarzyna Jerzak hears multitudes in R.E.M. 42

Douglas W. Milliken goes joyriding 52

Maxwell Clark stares into the sun, a cup 64

Leon de Kock reckons with a giant of the modern stage 66

Mark Gosztyla cuts to the chase 82

E.A. Neeves on a girl in a little trouble, and a girl in a lot of trouble 84

Colin Fleming cries for *Help!* 102

Rachel Hadas has that dream again 120

Meditation on the Shore

(Ocean City, NJ)

Benjamin Goodney

Get out of your head once
in a while. Go swimming.
Bathe in hot July thunder
showers under flowering dogwoods.

Cross out mistakes firmly, and
with an air of aspiration.
Stenograph the murmurs of
brain-damaged men on the bus.

Repurpose them.
Do not dwell upon the malformed
letter 't', the infelicity
of words, choruses

written down in static.
Fill out forms with fountain pens,
transform lines into livestock,
veins into Venus. Pray

in the painted woods
on set at the theatre. Weather moods.
Trust the rhythm of your wrists;
twist text messages into a caramel

hour. Inspiration—any will do
if well done. Stake, then, good
reputation on a cartridge
of toner, boxes of ink,

signatures of a sculpture
dead before its sculptor,
embalmed and beautiful.
Study lepidopterists,

prepare dispatches to Nabokov.
Fold them unlit into pale
envelopes. Post them to the flats
where you used to live

where your great loves used
to live before they met
each other. Join
bare floors. Embody feedback.

Tell truth to hurt.
Make a fiction cure-all
bottled in a white label
with the staff of Asclepius

pressed carefully atop the seal
of a corrugated box that was once
marked *childhood*, borne on a wagon.
Sit meeting at the tables just like

all the other tables where the people
who sit at tables at the meetings
add their pains to a cement mixer,
tumbling them against one another

until each shines like polished stone.
Watch the sun set as the rains
spot that red shirt, think of the devil
crying at averted light—

curiosity turned away from what is
lost inside a cluttered head. Charge off
decision trees to the greengrocer,
the barber, the knitter of yarn

scarves at the market.
Extraspect at all times.
Call friends from the last payphone
in town, interrupt them by listing

fifteen accidental species of beetle
caught in the webs of a red back
pack, by praising the silent
busy night freeway median: no voices

to be heard. Burn that manuscript,
watch each sentence smokescreen stars,
inhale the brain's marvelous control
of the fingers. Say nothing

to the I, to Merleau-Ponty's projecting
activity constitutive of self,
to the faculties of memoir
and planning too. Drive at dawn

a stranger's four-by-four on blacktop
to elope with the sea.
Throw nets from a dinghy
captained by an old leather wallet

for jellyfish and horseshoe crabs.
Float, nipples up on swells, as a spring
tide goes out, until the end
of a hurricane joins salt water to sky.

The New Bag Men

*How it is in New Haven
when you don't win the
lottery*

Alexis Zanghi

Brown Sugar stands outside the door of the bar in New Haven

where I work, under the eaves at closing time. At first he's patient; then he isn't, and he raps on the plate-glass window, just above the name of the place, painted in silver sans-serif script. "Let's go, babygirl, let's go," he says to me through the glass, shouting over the rain, the wind, the students stumbling out of the bar to their warm, dry dormitories. "Let me in. Brown sugar melts." There is always an emphasis on the last syllable.

His voice is always urgent. He pushes the door open with caution, assessing what's behind him and with a quick mental inventory of what's been taken away already. The wind can bear back on the door's weight sometimes, and Brown Sugar and I begin our nightly ritual, handing over the ale-brown plastic garbage bins. Bottles and cans and bits of fruit and broken glass, cigarette and cigar butts, so many ashes, water that we dumped into the bins when we thought we smelled a fire starting; they all are handed to Brown Sugar. Our pale bare hands, some more calloused than others, struggle with all the heft of what others have discarded, until Brown Sugar takes it from us, helping us to tie knots into the black plastic as we go. Brown Sugar hauls trash for Yale and Yale's buildings. The bar isn't in one of Yale's buildings, but he does the job for us anyway, right at closing time, which is more than the city or a private will do.

"Now, the other guys, they ain't gonna do this for you, because they don't have our bond," Brown Sugar reminds me, nodding his head on the last word. "And don't you tell nobody that I do this for you."

Brown Sugar always wears a navy wool hat, even when it's warm, over a navy blue sweatshirt with YALE spelled out in that tell-tale white lettering. If there's a remote reference made to the city in our negotiations—Commencement Week, when no trash is to go out, but trash must go somewhere—Brown Sugar stops it before it

crosses that threshold: “I work for Yale,” he says, like we are customers about to spit in the ashtrays. “I work for Yale,” he’ll say again, as clear and bold as the letters on his sweatshirt.

Brown Sugar used to come around with the Boogie Man, a man with ash-black skin, slicked-back, Jheri-curved hair, wild eyes, and a sly smile that stays to the ground. “Evenin’, beautiful,” the Boogie Man would say, strutting, hands in the pockets of his dress slacks, shirt unbuttoned down his sternum and tucked under his pot belly, looking at the bins, waiting on Brown Sugar. His big ol’ bucket jalopy would loiter outside.

“Don’t open that gray one,” I said to the Boogie Man one night.

“Why, what happened?” Brown Sugar shouted.

“Someone pissed in it.”

“Oh, why they gotta do that!” Brown Sugar shouted like he was the one who just had to bleach down a bathroom. The Boogie Man chuckled and stared at the ground. “I’ll take that bag,” Brown Sugar laughed, shaking his head from side to side. “Yale’s got a compactor for the piss!”

One December, the Boogie Man stopped coming around the bar, before or after hours. His absence from the dark corners at last call—his skin no brighter under the unforgiving lights of closing time, but his sly smile a little wider—did not go unnoticed.

Brown Sugar was taking the garbage from the bins. It was getting cold and he was careful, as he always is, to remind us all that he is, in his words, a tropical person, when he announced his concerns to the babygirls—all of us who worked at the bar, in slinky black, layers of mascara and eyeliner smudged into bruises under our red eyes, hunched over our shift drinks and plastic ashtrays, running someone else’s money in our hands, trying to figure out what our take would be.

“I think the Boogie Man died,” Brown Sugar shrugged.

Sarah, the manager, ran her fingers through the pile of singles in front of her, looked at the night’s sales report, then Brown Sugar,

and laughed. “Now why would you think that? That’s a little morbid. It’s the holidays. He probably went away. Why is that the first thing you come up with, Brown Sugar?”

“I don’t know. I ain’t seen him with his bucket. He don’t wear no jacket either, he could catch a real bad cold like that. Ima go to the Elks Club this week. The Boogie Man likes to hang out there. I’ll see where he is.”

I didn’t look up from the pile of cash in front of me, and there was still bourbon in my mouth when I told Brown Sugar, “You let us know if you hear anything.”

Stonybrook is a private community within a private community.

It’s tucked away in a corner of Weston, Connecticut. In the early twentieth century—when Weston was not yet an enclave exclusively for the wealthy—a band of Zionists bought up a tract of land along the river and operated it as a commune. In those days, before Israel, Zion could be anywhere.

By the 1950s, Zion had a home and a name on a map across the sea, but new communists arrived. Ring Lardner moved in, along with several other members of the Hollywood Ten. In the sixties, a group of nuns sat on the porch of a Cape Cod and talked about kidnapping Henry Kissinger. There were community square dances every October.

Then came the yuppies, the magazine editors, the art school professors, the keepers of second homes. The clay tennis courts and the community newsletters, the speed bumps placed every three feet on one-lane unmarked roads, all to remind the visitors that they were visitors, and the people here, they belonged.

It was here where my parents settled, having sold first Koonabura Farms (really a house with some stables, two paddocks, and cherry trees lining the driveway), and then the house on Hill Farm Road (a pre-Revolutionary farmhouse that had once attended to a dairy farm). Koonabura Farms, my mother told me, had been built

by a prominent archaeologist who had spent some time somewhere in Africa, maybe Kenya, but my parents didn't buy it from an archaeologist. They bought it from the mistress of a French banker—a billionaire, my mother swore—who was impressed by my nurse's Guyanese accent. My mother told the mistress she could have my nurse. My parents always found ways to complain about “the help,” ways that I didn't know could bristle a person, ways that would lock my jaw and wrinkle my nose and send me swearing under my breath to the wait station when I grew up to become other people's help. With my parents, it was a low murmuring in the house, over bagels and orange juice and the Sunday paper and the local university's classical station, the manifestation of their casual irritation with a competent but not spectacular hiring decision, like the au pairs who lasted six weeks, six months, rarely a year; not unlike the pony they bought, who would only canter for sweet feed.

My mother uses the same voice when she talks about my father now, when she tells me decades later that he paid the asking price, plus an extra \$50,000, for Koonabura Farms. She uses the same voice when she says he's late with her modest alimony, and then she will whisper and shriek at once: It wasn't even his money.

Ralph Buonotto moves like a great walrus, shoulders rolled over and around his great frame, his gait a steady side-to-side waddle, his face shining, always smiling. He doesn't care for Block Island, like the rest of the service industry workers: the owners who run off for quiet weekends with mistresses; the managers who swap shifts to fall asleep in the sun with plastic drinks in their hands, for once, no customers to interrupt them; the barflies and regulars and friends of the house who need a change of scene and scrutiny.

“If you don't drink, there's nothing to do,” Ralph says. His deliberate waddle leads him behind the counter of the bar—a privilege reserved for the few remaining from the previous owners, what Harry calls “the old regime”—to pull a cigar from its case every Saturday morning, as unobtrusively as a man of his girth could.

“Behind you,” he’ll say, if he sees you working, as if you could miss him. Ralph and his wife, Linda, run the vegetarian restaurant on the corner. It is the sort of pre-Gwyneth Paltrow vegetarian food that made the place popular in the seventies, when they were pioneers. There was no Brown Sugar to pick up the trash, the city ran on pay-back and fixed tickets, and there was no guarantee that the students who patronized the restaurant would be able to cross the intersection of Chapel and College Streets, since renamed Bishop Desmond Tutu Corner, without getting mugged.

Ralph and Linda are loved, by neighbors, by former employees, by the blue-and-white Ivy League institution across the street that is their landlord. Their employees have health insurance and earn a living wage, so the spare change that would go in the tip jar goes to curing cancer, or feeding stray dogs, or whatever charity of the month Linda and Ralph have chosen.

It is a busy Wednesday night when Brown Sugar stops his Yale-appointed golf cart outside the bar and walks in. Brown Sugar and the others who pick up Yale’s trash do not typically go past the threshold of the bar, but this is an emergency.

“Where my man in the hat!” Brown Sugar demands.

This is how more than one person asks for my manager, Frankie the Hat, so named for the fedora that rests above his bulldog face. Frank has been married and divorced three times, dates only the young or the married, and drinks most of his meals, even though he is a diabetic who sleeps with an insulin pump attached to his hip. Because of this aversion to eating, Frankie is distinguished not just by his hat, but by his temper, and has, in the past, been asked to attend anger management seminars.

“Where’s the old man, with the glasses?”

Now Brown Sugar is asking for Harry, who has been at the bar longer than most white-collar workers get to be at their jobs: forty-five years. Harry holds a master’s degree in Spanish literature. He has never married, though he proposed to someone, once, and he spends

his days keeping stock and “watering the garden,” his euphemism for refilling the humidifiers. For many, Harry is the face of the bar, and most assume he’s the owner. He isn’t.

“Harry goes home at six, you know that,” I say.

“I need to speak with a manager.”

“I can give them a message.” Brown Sugar and I don’t have that much of a bond.

“Ralph,” Brown Sugar says. “You know Ralph. From round the corner. Comes here and gets cigars. Ralph died tonight.”

“How do you know?” There is always skepticism on what we call the Block, the stretch of College that runs between Chapel and Crown, just feet away from Yale’s Phelps Gate and Old Campus and all the places that seem so safe and old, ivy crawling around, with no trash in sight.

“I work for Yale. I take care of the building.”

Brown Sugar picks up two bags of trash and leaves.

I tell the owner, I tell the managers, I come in to tell Harry in the morning. They all whisper their sadness and oh, noes, but denying something doesn’t make it less true.

It was winter when Min was struck by a car, running across the roadside somewhere in the privileged hinterland on the border of Westport and Weston. The roads were one way, mostly, and marked with speed bumps, though there are few signs. Min had made his way to the turnpike that ran between Westport and Weston, a whole two lanes with few lights along the way, and my mother found him when she was driving home, a bloody black and white bear of a Maine Coon, and she nestled him in the silk lining of her camel hair coat and sobbed all the way to the veterinarian, and then ate two chocolate bars and a frozen pizza when she came home, telling my sister and brother the same thing she did every Sunday: “The diet starts tomorrow.”

The ground was frozen then, and Min came to rest in our freezer, packed in a cardboard box, mummified in black plastic garbage

bags. My mother came to like having him there. At the time, her joys were mostly Prosecco bought wholesale and on credit, entertainment television—the network shows that happen after the evening news—and napping. Min had been one of her few joys then, too, and she was not prepared to part with another thing. We had parted with so much already, or rather, my father had wagered them and lost them for us. My mother's inheritance, run over and flattened; the credit rating of any household member over eighteen, mangled and bleeding red; the house, as underwater as it would have been had it sank into the Saugatuck itself. We were left with the ugly accounting of what could you sell to fix it.

We learned to start paying our rent ourselves. One sister found a job as a personal assistant to a well-to-do couple and eBayed the wife's designer clothing. Another stayed an extra year in college, taking out loans, and slept in her friends' guest rooms over the summer. My brother was stuck with our family, moving between houses that had sat on the market too long, rented at a discount rate as part of a home staging service. My mother worked two jobs, more than she ever had in her entire life. My father slept mostly in his Prius, in friends' guest houses, and in rooms rented by the week. I drank heavily, waited tables, and eventually convinced someone to just let me bartend. Or write. Or rent from them. The someone was almost always a man.

"It's dead tonight," I whine to Paulie Maggadinno, undertaker to New Haven's stars.

"Yeah, I know," says Paulie, chewing on a giant cigar. "It's dead in my office, too."

We both know it's funny but neither of us can laugh. We draw tired smiles out of the sides of our mouths and snort through our noses. Paulie's nose is so prominent that before I knew his name, before we had a bond, I simply called him the Roman Nose.

Paulie and I have a bond, but not like Sarah and him have a bond. Paulie and Sarah are two closed-off people thrust into a world of smiling and shaking hands and wearing hair product and backing a

guy up. There are obligations in their world, and I feel like I am doing fieldwork whenever I enter it. Maybe they do, too, but Sarah and Paulie are from here and they don't call it *mozzarella*, but *mootz*. Their people have their houses down by the airport, their elaborate nativity displays for Christmas, their Columbus Day Parade, their old "connections", their private clubs on Grand Avenue from before the Mexicans took over the neighborhood. Their great-grandparents were immigrants. Their grandparents owned delis and grocery stores and were aldermen. Their parents went into construction and made the right donations. They run contracting businesses and restaurants and own property and work in banks, and they are Paulie's and Sarah's people, whether Paulie and Sarah like it or not.

So it is Paulie's job to collect Ralph's great blubbery body on Wednesday night, and the wake is on Friday evening. Ralph's financial managers are at the bar, laughing into their glasses of scotch. One of them, a short man with expensive taste, and the salary to afford the alterations his suits must require, stands on a footrest to get eye level with his peers. He's gesturing like he's conducting an orchestra and laughing at his own jokes. It's only two days after Ralph has died. They are "on their way" to the wake, they tell me.

I follow the wake revelers from the bar to the Maggadino Funeral Home and all of us line up in the cold, the service industry workers and the regulars all smoking cigarettes and cigars and riding out the weather in Wooster Square, still delivering the handshakes and the smiles and the say-hello-to-your-father-for-me gestures, just a little quieter, with their eyes to the ground and the air thick, waiting to move into the bright room inside. Wooster Square is filled with Christmas lights and nativity displays, and the char from the pizza ovens a block over mixes with the cigar smoke and everybody's frozen breath.

Inside, Linda dabs her eyes and tells me and Frank how much the bar meant to Ralph. That it is such a special place. Frank and I prop each other up; I am as full of scotch as the rest of us, and don't

know whether to feel less or more guilty than those who were closer to Ralph.

Outside the funeral home, with char in the air and lines stretching as far as the Christmas lights and nativity scenes, I am sharing in someone's sadness that isn't mine. When my mother moves to New Haven, I take her through Wooster Square's brownstones and cobblestones and parks. "I will never have anything to do with the guineas again," she tells me.

It's mid-January when the Boogie Man rolls back around. He struts in with snakeskin loafers like he was in the night before, like there has been no lost time or change in seasons. Jacketless in the snow, he has a dinged-up brown-black pick-up truck to show for his travels. The big ol' bucket jalopy is retired to its station outside the Elks Club on Dixwell Avenue.

"We were worried about you!" I say, scolding him.

"I was in Arkansas! That's where my people are." And the Boogie Man sizes up the trash cans and waits in the corner. At 1 A.M., Brown Sugar yells for him in relief.

"The Boogie Man is always out there, chasin' that bread," Brown Sugar says.

A few months later, Yale tells Brown Sugar not to pick up our trash. We are "causing a problem," he is told to say, but that problem is really that we aren't a Yale building. The owner demands that we lug the garbage down the block and through an alley under a parking garage, past several other less economical dumpsters, to a dumpster that is located at the corner of rapey and sketchy. We babygirls all take turns refusing to do so and threatening to quit. Each time, we all get a little closer. But it doesn't stop the Boogie Man from strutting through, every night, to say his heeeey, babys and evening, beautifuls. And it doesn't break our bond with Brown Sugar, doesn't stop us from blowing kisses to him through the plate glass window and asking him how his daughter is. Eventually, we all quit, having

outgrown something that was bigger than any of us in the first place.

Brown Sugar says that he knew someone who won the lottery. He hasn't seen them since, but he doesn't think they're dead; they just left the ivy on the university and the trash on College Street and the lights on Wooster Square and the private clubs on Grand Avenue and the Elks Club on Dixwell Avenue, just set out of New Haven and never saw a reason to come back. And when the Boogie Man goes missing again, it is because he has made his way to the casinos in his bucket, turning the black bags into the rough dollars that we run through our fingers, every night, after the revelers have left and other people's waste and sadness stop being ours to handle.

What Happened, the Winter You Found the Deer

Genevieve Valentine

In the evening, when Sister was tired, she said her prayers and then laid her head on the roe's back and fell sound asleep with it as a pillow. And if Brother had but kept his natural form, really it would have been a most delightful kind of life.

—"Brother and Sister," the Brothers Grimm

The antlers were four-pronged (he had been young). Your

brother held them to his forehead, and your heart turned over, you didn't know why.

"You'll stick like that," you said, and he laughed, swung his head away and up like he was ready to fight.

You wondered what had happened to the deer.

Your brother's eyes were dark, and his hands around the antlers pale as bone.

The house is all wood and white, like winter followed you home, and mostly empty. The only real color is the painting of the girl in yellow and the boy in grey, upstairs, in the room that your parents might have lived in.

(Sometimes you dream your parents were there and left you, sometimes that they've always been gone. Each one is true, while it is, and either way you can't remember their faces.)

Every so often your brother braves the room, but you don't like the painting.

Once you stood in the doorway and called for him, when he'd been missing too long, but there was no answer. When you leaned forward you could just see the edge of a yellow skirt, a pale foot, and you left well enough alone.

He came back anyway, later (a week, or three weeks). He set a crocus on the table beside you, flower and bulb and dirt, said, "Won't you welcome me home?"

He sounded like an old man, and sad about things that hadn't happened yet.

"Oh, did you go somewhere?" you asked, but you looked at him and your face must have ruined it, because he smiled and shed his coat and said, "We should get to work, if we're going to have a garden this year."

You smoothed dirt over the seeds, and never asked where he'd been; it didn't matter, if he was home.

The woods were cold, but the worst of the winter was over, and when the two of you went out you could wear the boots that didn't feel like anvils.

Your strides were the same length. You were efficient hunters (always were; there had never been a time when you couldn't hold a knife and run).

The creek had been swollen high when winter came, but there was still a ribbon of ice clinging to the bank where the current wasn't fast enough to pierce it. Beside it, tiny tracks were black against the frost—small and close, and then the leap.

You grinned at each other, set off.

(You wondered what you looked like, hunting together; you had the family faces, with only the hair to set you apart, and you remember once he touched your head in the cup of his palm and said, "Where did you get this long dark stuff," left his hand a beat too long.)

When you split up, he was the color of winter, like any empty space between the forest trees, if you didn't know how to look for him.

The rabbits saw you; they never saw your brother.

After you had skinned it and were paring the meat, he took off his coat and came closer, stood by the chopping block.

"You'll never be any good like that," he said, like there was anyone else you were ever going to cook for. Something in his voice

was a warning.

You looked up. You said, “Show me.”

(Had he been outside? He couldn’t have been, it was snowing outside and nothing had melted in his eyebrows, but he’d hung his coat. Why couldn’t you remember?)

He stood beside you, pulled the scarf from around his neck, wrapped it across your eyes.

“Try now.”

The scarf was gold, and warm where it had touched his skin. The hair on your arms stood up—this was a test and he wasn’t telling you why—but it didn’t matter. In the dark you woke up to the knife in your hand; there was nothing but the scrape of the blade and the thing that you needed, cut apart.

Your vision flooded with light when the scarf dropped into the meat. It was perfectly butchered, like a stranger had done it.

You lifted the scarf on the edge of the knife. When he took it back, his finger bled.

(He doesn’t say, You turned the blade to cut me. He saw it; he knows.)

But he’d been drawn and wary before he ever reached out to take it back—as if you’d done better than he’d hoped, as if it was a bad sign.

Before this, you’d thought he kept away sometimes because he liked to be a little cruel.

But his hands had shaken at the nape of your neck all the while he held the scarf against your eyes, as if you were the reason he was keeping away; as if he knew the signs you didn’t know. Why were you the collection of his fears?

You weren’t used to worrying—what was there to worry about, in a happy home and the woods to hold you?—and lying awake made your hands ache, made you edgy from glimpsing owls and shadows, looking for something out of place that couldn’t be.

In the sharp edge of spring, you found the shrews.

He nearly stepped on them, but when you said “Wait,” he froze, foot still in the air, and you were able to urge his leg back with your hands (his knee hot through the fabric), kneel in the dirt, push the leaves aside until the little shrews were uncovered, a nest she had made in a cradle of bones.

“It’s not safe here,” you said. “Why would she leave them?”

“Good thing you saw them,” your brother said, but his voice was flat and strange, and when you looked back at him he’d put his hands in his pockets so no skin showed, and you went cold all over.

You had known they were there even though they were buried, so buried by leaves that you shouldn’t have known.

(When you went hunting, the rabbits caught sight of you but never ran.)

It scraped away at you all that night, as you lay awake in your bed, with the owls casting shadows outside, and listened for his breathing.

You want to think, later, that there was some mark in the dust to which you could return, and scatter teeth, and try again not to wake up to what was happening. But it was always too late. Whatever this is, you were always going to open your eyes.

(Your brother knew it; he pulled his scarf against them, to see if it was true.)

In the painting in the room you don’t go in, you and your brother are in the study, amid the books and the animal heads someone must have put there long before you lived in it. He stands behind your chair in his grey suit with one hand resting on your shoulder. His fingers are barely pressing against your yellow dress, and there are chills up and down your arms, painted in by someone who didn’t see the point of keeping secrets.

If you ever had parents, they hid it here; they covered it up for a long time.

It’s never something you can think about for long.

You went walking, like you could find something you had lost.

Gold crocuses were bunched like soldiers, and the little shrews were nowhere to be seen, and through the frost there were the sharp twin marks that only deer made, and you followed (hunter's habit).

You found him, finally, at the edge of the creek. He was drinking; when you came into sight he was hardly even startled. He looked up for a moment, looked behind him for a way out—just the way of deer—but when you didn't move he took you in for a moment and walked on, like you were any other creature the woods had ever borne.

It was home, and there was no painting here to worry you, and every breath you let out was a cloud in the cold, and the air was warm and damp and nearly spring.

When you came back from the woods, he was drawing.

(Had your father been an artist, if you had a father? Someone had painted the picture upstairs.)

Outside it had barely been chilly. It was too hot now that you were within walls. Your temples itched with blood.

"You'll never be any good like that," you said.

He looked you up and down and smiled, just one half of his mouth curling—pleased but not happy, listening but not yours.

"Show me," he said. But it was a beat too late, and he hadn't moved.

You stood behind him and pulled your gray scarf across his eyes; his hand shook against the paper, a little line of charcoal that skipped and dragged.

He'd been drawing the deer. It wasn't more than a suggestion of the trees yet, a thread of antlers, but you knew.

You knotted it tighter than you meant; you knotted it so tightly you were upstairs before he could pull it free.

When you were very young, you ran into your parents' room

(you must have been looking for them, you must have had parents

once, you wish you could remember if it's true, you don't dare ask him).

The portrait of you and your brother looked down at you solemnly, dressed up in yellow and grey, hair brushed and shining, dark and light.

They were older than you were, by years and years.

It's a room you don't go in any more.

It stormed for three days in spring.

"Are you the cause of all this?" he asked like he was reading a joke off a piece of paper, not quite looking at you. He had just come in; his pale hair clung to his forehead so he looked half-dead.

You almost asked him, What do you mean, but you thought about finding the shrews that were buried, and about going hunting, and you thought about the way he'd looked at you when you told him that if he held the antlers to his head they would stick.

"You're frightened of me."

"No." He slid out of his coat, flexed his hands around it as he hung it up.

(He's done something terrible, you thought, but went no farther. What was there to know after that that you cared to find?)

You said, "Show me."

You held out your hand, beckoned him closer.

He looked back at the door like a deer caught out, looked out the window unblinking, until his hands fell from the coat, fists at his sides. The rain beat down against the windows; it was grey as a dream.

When you lifted your face to him, in the moment before he gave in, he swung his head away and up like he was ready to fight.

"I should never have left us alone," he said.

The words filled his lungs and the dark; they hummed under your hand. The rain shifted like the forest was trying to drown him out.

The paper in his room was a pattern of vines stamped in gold, and peeling at the corners as if it was tired. You thought about parents you couldn't remember, about the breadth of the forest full of buried things that you couldn't have seen, shrews in a nest of bones.

You thought of the room with the portrait, sitting empty, and pressed your forehead into his shoulder like you could drive it out again.

You're younger in the portrait than you are now; you're almost sure.

The morning after the storm, you went looking for the shrews,
your heart already in your throat.

They were trapped in an eddy, nest crushed on a rock, long drowned. They were slimy and heavy, a tangle of soggy fur and pink feet melting right through your fingers as you held them.

You set them on the bank, as if anyone was looking for them. Your hands were burning, tight with blood, and your bare feet ached.

You made a straight line home in the frost, the leaves behind you smoking.

Things got quiet after that, and you sat at the piano without
playing, listened to the house as he walked back and forth upstairs, as he moved at the edge of your vision in the kitchen or the parlor.

There were things you'd have to say, if you spoke:

"How could you set them in the water to die?"

"It did the opposite of what you hoped. Don't you see what will happen now?"

He kept his hands in his pockets, whenever he was near you. He saw it; he knows.

His room felt like a stranger now, even when he wasn't in it, and
you didn't cross the doorway. It didn't matter. It was just another room you kept out of, that was all.

Outside it got warmer every week, and his breathing and your

breathing filled the house to bursting, and out in the forest, green was covering everything living or dead.

“I’m going out,” he said. He slid on a jacket, tied his scarf in a knot.

You paused with the page of your book half-turned. It was the end of summer (his eyes followed your hand whenever you brushed sticky hair off your neck). He’d sweat to death in the coat.

“Give me that,” you said.

After too long, he pulled the scarf from his throat, handed it to you.

It was cold straight through. He was sick, too sick for his body to have any heat to spare. You cupped his neck (he flinched – your touch burned him, by then – but it was good to touch him, and you didn’t let go).

“I won’t live,” he said.

His skin was soft as shrews’ fur.

You said, “Good.”

But he’s your brother, and you watch from the doorway as he curls under blankets that can’t warm him, and you walk past his threshold at midnight to make sure he’s still moving.

The leaves get red, and you go hunting.

You make rabbit stew until he shakes his head, says, “It’s a waste of soup,” tries to smile.

“Don’t be selfish,” you say.

He looks at you for a long time.

“You can let me go,” he says.

You know that. Even in the portrait, even when that brother and sister were older than you, he had the look of a boy about to be eclipsed.

(It’s what you’ve tried not to think of; it’s why you went so long trying not to understand.)

“You’d deserve it, I hate you,” you say, and it’s mostly true

except that your throat is so tight, except that when you look at him you're already thinking about the fragile tracks that the deer made.

His face shifts as he watches you, like he knows, like he's worrying what you'll decide.

It would be so easy to let him die. You could bury his body under the leaves; by spring the shrews would be making nests in his bones.

"I understand," he says, and it's mostly true.

Somewhere else, far away, some other girl might have stood in this doorway and had this choice. Some other girl had a brother she'd already burned to death.

There's no painting any more, in that house. That house is cinders now.

It was winter there, a blanket of white, and that girl was lifting a handful of shrews to a bed of leaves at the base of a tree, where it was warm and covered over; she was sitting awake in her forest home, waiting for their mother to find them.

But you went into the forest.

The deer was too dark for a world this snowed over, it was sable and doomed, and when it looked at you its eyes were two black worlds against the white.

You were ready for a hunt, if it came to that; there had never been a time when you couldn't hold a knife and run.

But it looked at you and never moved. Its antlers were big, and pale as bone. You wrapped one hand around the knife, held out the other; beckoned it closer.

Then it was just the scrape of the blade and the thing that you needed, cut apart.

Your brother opened his eyes as you were wrapping his hands around the antlers. (He was trembling, all over. His eyes were covered with a layer of frost.)

"Do it," you said, moved back.

He had to do it himself. You couldn't help him; that much you were sure of.

He tossed his head, once, like he was preparing for a fight, but by now you knew his breathing.

Your hands were still aching from the knife and smeared with blood from your work. When you'd wrapped your fingers around his hands, you couldn't even tell how cold he was - your skin was so hot, he might have been well again for all you knew. You stood against the wall, pressed your hands to the paper stamped gold with vines.

He watched you the whole time he struggled with the antlers, brought them at last to his temples.

He was so pale; his eyes were black.

You go out walking with your brother.

You wear the gold scarf, but no coat (winter has no hold on you now), and you wear the thin light boots you use for hunting, just in case. You carry a knife.

Your strides are the same length; his feet make twin black marks, in the last of the frost.

Two Poems

Nick DePascal

And then the house exploded

No one says you'll not have to imagine
yourself without clothes on, just as no
one will tell us what is beautiful anymore,
and we're certainly the poorer for it. Like

half-deflated balloons we float around
the earth, touching ourselves and one
another, pressing our knees, our faces to
the dirt—looking for the one, the thing,

that flays the hurt. I squeeze myself into
the sheets, thin and nervous as a bride to
be. You paint me red, swinging your heavy
breasts, pausing only for a sip of coffee.

And then I succeed. Secede from the bed,
the room, the longing. What no one says is
that we're not alone, we never were, and
never will be. Its too late. Our orbits are too

similar, too close to measure, each of us a comet
passing too near the sun, melting, showing our
brightest side as we swing by, while white
sheets tangle and coffee cools in the cup.

And then I played hooky from the apocalypse

Wasn't it funny when the magician with
the greasy hair and a forehead gleaming
with flop sweat suddenly said "presto-
change-o" and the world was transformed

into a giant apple and we all started eating
our ways to the core? The Great-Editor-in-
the-Sky has asked for more terrifying
apocalyptic imagery in our poems—something

to rattle the cages of our ever tinier audience.
This means more death, more bodies piling
up, more smoke and fire, and similes for
smoke and fire, more flowers wilting in

a permanent nuclear sun. I raise my hand
and ask the magician to pull a rabbit from his hat,
but instead he breaks into tears and runs from
the stage. He's already guessed where this is

all going. What the next question will be. How
every thing in the world is bound to come to
the same end: some jerk in cargo shorts and sandals
whispering to his neighbor how every trick works.

One Poem

Sue D. Burton

**Over at the Shiva Piano Lounge the Woman Who Was Sawn
in Half Is Drinking a Hipster Variant (Green Chartreuse and
Gin) of Lydia E. Pinkham's 1876 Original Vegetable Com-
pound**

I do like a green Lydia after work. Though sometimes,
I don't know, Lydia kicks me.

This afternoon, at the matinee, when they lifted me
into the box, I pulled my knees up to my chest (that's
how it works—another woman dressed in red
crawls up from underneath—the saw
slices between us)—

anyway, when I tucked my knees,
I thought of myself as a shirt. A shirt being folded
and put in a suitcase. The suitcase was brown,
tweedy, lined with tan silk. The shirt was white.

Then I thought of myself as a nightgown.
A white nightgown. My great-aunt Nettie's.
The one they told her to bring to the appointment.
So to protect her clothes.

The thing about the Pinkham formula, all those roots
(life root, unicorn root, black cohosh)—
they're *emmenagogues*—they bring on your period.
So you got pep and a cure (18% alcohol
for your *womanly Complaints and Weaknesses*),

and you weren't pregnant anymore.
Except for Nettie.
She needed an appointment.

When my mother died, the undertaker gave her
a *nice blue nightgown* for the coffin.
But Nettie's was a white nightgown. No frills.

Cy Stewart was the "author of her ruin."
The family tried to shush her "dying declaration."

That was the language of the time.

A scandal, my mother said, *in all the papers*.

I have my mother's christening gown.

Nowhere to go but back alley.

White cotton and lace. I made it into a curtain.

The City Voiced

R.E.M.'s Überlin

Katarzyna Jerzak

All actual life is encounter.

—Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

The street... The only valid field of experience.

—André Breton

When I was eighteen years old I won the national English

competition in Poland and, as a prize, flew to Manhattan. It was June, the smell of fumes at JFK was overpowering, and all I remember is how impossible it was to get my Polish suitcase out of the cab that took me to my hotel on Lexington Avenue. The hotel boy helped me, for which I felt obliged to tip him with a five-dollar bill, half of the money the Polish Ministry of Education gave me for the six-week trip. A quarter of a century later I came back from America to Poland and was shopping at Manhattan, one of the first shopping malls that sprang up there after 1989. It is in Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz, at the crossroads of two major streets, very much in the heart of the city. Conscious of the irony contained for me in the name Manhattan, I thought of how I abandoned America only to find such palimpsestic traces of it inscribed at home. Walking around the mall, I heard a familiar voice call “Hey!” The voice came through the loudspeakers in a song, but I took its call personally. I felt addressed, spoken to, accosted even, but in a good way, as if an old friend called out to me. As I kept walking with my three children in tow and the voice kept singing, I realized that I knew this voice for sure. “Alexander,” I said to my teenager, “I know this man’s voice, who is this?”

“Mom,” came the nonplussed reply, “if you know him then I probably don’t.”

Then came the email from Athens, GA, about the end of R.E.M. as we knew it. And a Polish friend from Paris posted on Facebook the link for Sam Taylor-Wood’s video for the song “Überlin,” starring

Aaron Johnson. I watched it, mesmerized. Why? The setting is quintessentially urban and I don't like big cities. Graffiti make me yearn for fresh paint and I don't generally think highly of parkour. What, other than the song, made the video beautiful, even addictive?

I watched "Überlin" again and again. Then I understood. Aaron Johnson, in T-shirt and exercise pants, with all the awkwardness and grace of youth and all the nimbleness in his movements, is the modern Apollo. He is also the postmodern equivalent of the flâneur, the man who strolls through the city aimlessly. Like his Baudelairean counterpart, the young man in "Überlin" makes his way through the city as if he did not have to work, or to be anywhere in particular, as if time and space were at his bidding, the peripatetic chronotope his element. He is the epitome of youth, limber and clumsy at once. We recognize something akin to what J.D. Salinger describes in a 1957 letter justifying his refusal to sell stage and screen rights to *The Catcher in the Rye*: "A Sensitive, Intelligent, Talented Young Actor in a Reversible Coat wouldn't be nearly enough. It would take someone with X to bring it off, and no very young man even if he has X knows quite what to do with it. And, I might add, I don't think any director can tell him." Aaron Johnson has X.

Watching Aaron Johnson in "Überlin" I remembered myself at twenty, when I worked as a *petite vendeuse*, a shop clerk really, at the Hermès store at 24 Faubourg St. Honoré in Paris. The store, needless to say, was all form and class. Ralph Lauren would stop by and so would Catherine Deneuve. I lived in République and to get to work had to take the metro, of course, changing at les Halles, I think, and getting off at Concorde. I was miserable in Paris because my boyfriend stayed back in Providence, RI. He was cutting down trees as a way to pay for his ticket to Paris. When he finally arrived, I was properly groomed, my unruly hair tied into a bun with the help of an Hermès pochette, and sported a uniform, a little navy blue skirt and a polka dot top, with matching shoes. David walked into Hermès in a pair of torn blue jeans and a purple T-shirt with a cow on it. His hair was long and curly, and his sports shoes were held together

with silver duct tape. It was 1988 and Paris was *very* French and *very* formal, not the New Yorkish melting pot it is today. I thought the doorman was going to kick David out, but no—it turned out that clothes don’t make the man. David was twenty, tall and muscular from his summer job as a lumber jack, and spoke no French. The Hermès guys and dolls gasped with awe. The truth is that he looked like his namesake, Michelangelo’s Florentine David. And so does Aaron Johnson in “Überlin.” So much so that he takes me even further back, all the way to ancient Greek sculpture—to Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Archaic Torso of Apollo.”

Rilke wrote a poem about a statue so filled with energy that even headless, limbless, and scarred it is powerful, like a star. It is not mere stone, it is a challenge: “You must change your life,” demands the famous last line of the poem. Why, my students at the University of Georgia, Athens, asked when we read this poem, why must I change my life simply because Rilke looked at an amazing piece of marble in the Louvre over a hundred years ago? But if a piece of stone in human shape can contain so much energy, can be so moving, then how much more moving should an actual human being be? Aaron Johnson moves and is moving; R.E.M., too, is nimble after thirty-one years because they move us still. “Überlin” is about vulnerability as much as it is about strength. It is a wake-up call because if “take your pills” becomes as routine a task as “make your breakfast,” then something is wrong. After a four-day trip with his eighth-grade classmates from a posh private American school my son told me that what took longest was the roll-call for the distribution of medications to the students at breakfast. We must indeed change our lives.

But who is the speaker in the song speaking to?

In the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau posits that our imperative to talk is a consequence of our incapacity to remain contained. Help me or love me, says the first man. The lyrical expression of this need has been somewhat stifled since Rousseau’s

times, but contemporary music confirms that it's nonetheless here. Hence the young people everywhere with headphones. Michael Stipe's voice, as Peter Buck noted in an interview in *Rolling Stone* in 1987, is so emotive that people assume he is speaking to them. That, of course, is the mark of all good poetry. The way that Rilke felt addressed by Apollo's torso, and addresses us in its name.

"Who am I without you?" asks the poet. The language of prayer and the language of love: it is not a coincidence that love poems often deify the beloved. You want to know, to get to know, the one you love, but most of all you want to talk to him or her, you want to hear his or her voice. There is no lack of talk these days. Your microwave says "Enjoy your meal" in an undertone. Voice mail greets you and bids you to talk. Your car suggests in a murmur that it is dusk and you might want to turn on its headlights. Who is talking? Who is speaking to whom? It is irrelevant, you'll say, because these are not conversations. Nobody mistakes voice mail for a soul mate, just as nobody falls in love with the image on the screen of their plasma TV. Or do they?

Rousseau's exemplary man is sensitive. He responds affectively to the presence of the Other. If language, in the long run, culminates in a perverted sociability in which the individual seeks distance, not togetherness, nonetheless its first movement is a passionate movement of the heart, and hence the first human language is lyrical. The city, however, is the anti-lyrical space par excellence. In the city, everyone is a stranger and strangers do not talk, at least not meaningfully. On the New York subway, people don't start up conversations.

If we grant, along with Rousseau's imaginary scenario, that the first human language was poetic, a language of the heart, then we must concede that we are witness to its demise. Our model of speech, in our electronic devices, doesn't seem to be lyrical any longer. "Überlin" resists this tendency. "I am not complete," sings Michael Stipe, and we are stunned by this admission of insufficiency in the era of self-love, self-absorption, and solipsism.

The lyrical is the language of love, of desire, of worship, but

also of suffering. It speaks to the Other, not merely of the Other, it implies the Other as a subject, not merely an object, as an agent, not only a recipient. And what it says to this other as a bearer of meaning requires a response, to confirm a shared space. “Look at me,” the lyrical subject says, “say something to me.” Or he asks, like Eurydice, “Please, turn around. I am here.” The voice which extends to the other, which, as Martin Buber says, intends the addressee, that kind of voice is irreplaceable; it stands for the whole person. In the summer of 2006, during the *Fête de la musique* in Paris, I heard “Losing my Religion” played live in the street near Place Monge. I was away from home and R.E.M. was like home, except it wasn’t even R.E.M., only some random French band. It was not the real thing but it made me recall my not so real home in Athens, GA, and as a result made me feel more at home in Paris, where I was once more a stranger. When Stipe’s voice called out to me in Poland, I recalled the timbre of his voice but not the name of the band. The name was supplied by a couple of strangers, whom I accosted by the mall’s elevator, and who, as if on cue, said “R.E.M., of course. From the last album.” It was as if I met myself through them, and them through R.E.M. The circle was completed: away from my adoptive hometown, the voice took me on a journey back there, even though, like Orpheus, I was not supposed to turn back. The shopping mall, like the subway, is a peculiar kind of labyrinthine public space, half shelter, half purgatory—even though the mall aspires to be paradise while the metro can’t help but resemble hell. The voice that calls in the mall and in the subway recalls Orpheus in hell. A voice that breaks through the nearly infernal anonymity of public places. “Do you want to go with me tonight?” Stipe asks in “Überlin.” Eurydice may be rescued after all.

If the lyrical subject, willing to admit his need of the Other, is one protagonist of this song, then the city is the other. The city that’s part you, the city that surrounds you and serves as the Other, as friend and foil. And, despite the title, it’s not just Berlin. The hero

here—much more than a background—is the city of distraction filled with signs and advertisements. The street of the odd walk in the video is not exactly real, neither is it home. It's unpredictable, like the great outdoors, but it seems to be made tame by the man who walks through it, subdues it with his dance and gymnastics. Berlin—the modern city that was reborn after World War II, then cut through by the Berlin Wall and reborn again after its fall—is a changed city. The official lyrics video of the song may look like an interactive map of a subway but in fact it is a metaphysical GPS. All the roads are there, including the ones not taken. Akin to Jorge Luis Borges's "Garden of Forking Paths," this chronotope, or space of time, is painful because regrets abound, and once you are of a certain age, it is hard to make it "through the day and through the night" knowing that your choices are now writ in stone, that you have become who you are. That it is ever harder to change your life.

And yet the electrical charge, the potential for change contained in the invitation and in the ostensibly random trajectory in "Überlin" recalls the extraordinary promise of happiness, *une promesse de bonheur*, which Walter Benjamin experiences as a flammability of sorts as he, a stranger newly arrived in a city, unable to speak its language, walks the streets of Riga to visit a woman friend: "Nobody was expecting me, no one knew me. For two hours I walked the streets by myself. Never again have I seen them so. From every gate a flame darted, each cornerstone sprayed sparks, and every streetcar came toward me like a fire engine. For she might have stepped out of the gateway, around the corner, been sitting in the streetcar. But of the two of us I had to be, at any price, the first to see the other. For had the fuse of her glance touched me, I should have gone up like an ammunition depot" ("One-Way Street"). Every place is the place of potential encounter. This is an archetypal situation but Benjamin depicts it in terms of physics, as an impending collision between high energy electrons. If not here, then where; if not now, when; if not you, who? The flammable protagonist ignites the city

like a meteor. In the beginning of “Überlin” there is “no collision” while later there is change that will save, an encounter, a star flying into a meteor. There is Berlin, the city, and then there is “Überlin,” the city changed through the addition of the umlaut, punning on über and Berlin, and contrasting with *Untergrundbahn*, the subway known as U-bahn, making Berlin a city seen “over” and “under.” The “U city” is the city *apprivoisé*, tamed, as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s the Little Prince might say. Überlin is a different Berlin, one seen as a series of “stops” on the U-bahn, conceived as a place of encounter, an antidote to routine.

The song opens a cosmic space with the words “I am flying on a star.” Like the Little Prince, the lyrical subject connects two worlds: the U-bahn is under the city, the star is over the city, or *über* Berlin, and the metaphysical conceit links the underground to outer space. There are five thousand roses in the garden which the Little Prince visits on Earth but they are not at all like his rose because he has not tamed them, they are empty. “Count a thousand million people,” sings Michael Stipe, “with their stars on bright.” “Wait for a time, exactly under the star,” begs the narrator of *The Little Prince*. There are five hundred million stars, but on one of them there is a little man with golden hair and a rose, and therefore one star is unlike all the others. Find it.

Riding the metro with David that summer, with a vacuum cleaner borrowed from friends who lived in the 5th arrondissement—so from Jussieu to the 11th, changing at Châtelet-Les Halles, talking about going to see 37.2 *le matin*—did I know that I was flying on a star? No. I thought I was a poor student on a fancy internship, doubly displaced—an Eastern European come from the U.S. to Paris, with a boyfriend who was above all that angst and with whom I broke up because of an idiom I did not understand. “Are you getting cold feet?” he asked in a transatlantic call as I stood, barefoot, on the tile floor of a friend’s bedroom in Plaisir, wearing only a nightshirt. “Of course I’m getting cold feet,” I answered. He tried to explain

something, I cried, someone hung up. It's been twenty-four years. Oh my heart.

"I know this is changing me," Stipe sings. The city changes faster than the lyrical subject. The changes affect the speaker who is forever chasing a phantasm. But even if the city were more static, millions of people live in it, crossing paths in its underground channels and streets. Charles Baudelaire's "A une passante" ("To a Passer-by") encapsulates the lightning speed of love in the city: one glance in the crowd and she's gone, but I've loved her and she knew it, says Baudelaire, speaking the city's lyrical voice. "I know, I know, I know what I am chasing," insists Stipe, in the voice of the *flâneur*. Contrast this position with the person the singer addresses in the first lines of the song, who is "off to work"—the phrase impersonal and curt, imperative and deadly. So, the question is, are you off to work, your routine, or do you want to go somewhere else, "take the U-bahn, five stops, change the station," arbitrarily, or "Hey, man, tell me something, are you off to somewhere? / Do you want to come with me tonight?" If you come with me, you might not end up anywhere, but you will be with someone, you will stand in relation. "Where am I?" asks Snow White in the Brothers Grimm folk tale. "You are with me," answers the Prince. "We walk the streets"—together—"to feel the ground I'm chasing." Though what we're chasing may be the stop where one gets left behind, and the other goes on.

"Überlin" has something primal about it, almost like a fairytale as well: it tells of a city, real and figurative at once, where "intrusion" and "collision" are possible, in which one human being encounters another. In Rilke's sonnet, the energy of the statue bursts like a star, cannot be contained, while in "Überlin" the speaker flies on a star into a meteor. A meteor falls, but as it falls it burns bright, incandescent in the encounter with the atmosphere. The voice of the song, like the voice of the city, heard in a crowd, a mall, in the movement of the streets, carries us from the daily, deadly routine of pills, meals, and work, to an epiphany, a possible encounter that will ignite us like the young Benjamin alight on the streets of Riga, or Baudelaire

glimpsing a stranger in Paris, or like me, hearing Michael Stipe call me in a voice familiar from Athens, GA, recalling the Paris of David and me, to make “my imagination run away” from any particular city to collapse in a boundless, timeless Now.

James Taylor vs. the King

Douglas W. Milliken

After holding up the liquor store, they return to their motel and fuck standing up in front of the tall bedroom mirror. The whole thing has left them feeling sexy. But that isn't anything new. On the TV, Elvis is thrusting and dripping wet with sweat. Because she's so small, he can pick her up, hold her completely in his arms. It's not anything he's been able to do with a girl before. It feels sweeter than it looks in the pornos. She laughs loud, hair bouncing, and holds on tight to his shoulders. In the mirror, their eyes meet and do not part. The money's black duffle bag lies thrown in the corner. Someone in the room next door bangs on the wall. They howl.

It was just some little no-name town in Connecticut. They could have pushed ahead for another hour or two and been in New York City. But then they'd be in New York City. Neither one of them wanted that. They exited the highway into an anonymous congestion of strip malls and department stores and discount motels all wound up in industrial parkways, and after twenty minutes of circling around, they had it all figured out. They got a room at a Budget Inn and used their real names at the check-in, where the woman running the desk did her best not to stare at his scars. In their room, they showered together and he brushed her long black hair while she recited words to him in Spanish.

"...cicatrices...carajo...bocadillo...."

"That sounds pretty."

"You'd think so."

They drove across the street to a liquor store in a shopping plaza, and while Jonas asked the clerk all about Canadian whiskeys, Marie walked around the store, playing the mousy housewife. They bought big jugs of Collinsworth and Crown Royal and again, Jonas paid with his credit card. Afterward, they sat in the car and talked it out while Marie drew on the paper liquor store bags with a chunky

black magic marker. It smelled. The liquor store closed at nine. It was already six o'clock. Plenty of downtime. They locked up the car and walked around the Stop & Shop next door, goofing around while picking out snacks for later. Olives and cheese and sardines and crackers. They paid in cash but made sure to remove the receipt anyway before putting the snacks in their empty black duffle bag. It wasn't even seven o'clock yet, so they flipped a coin between eating or fucking, lost, so drove over to a seafood restaurant with nets and lobster traps hanging off the walls, and though the place looked stupid they had beers and baked scallops and ended up having a good time. They lied to the waiter and said it was their anniversary. He brought them a free slice of pie with their check.

After dinner, they parked the car behind the shopping center in the shadow of a refrigerated trailer that didn't have any truck attached. They waited until five past nine, when the clerk from the liquor store stepped out the back door, arms full of cardboard for the trash. He left the door open when he went back inside for more. Jonas and Marie strolled in after him. It took the clerk a while to realize he was being shadowed around the store.

"Should I explain this?" Jonas asked. He was wearing a paper bag over his head. "Or do you have this pretty well figured out?"

The clerk looked between them. Jonas carried the black duffle bag but Marie was holding the gun. She had a bag on her head, too. Jonas's just had two oval holes cut in for eyes and an abbreviated dash for a mouth. On Marie's, she'd drawn a kitty. Not just the face. The whole cat. The clerk nodded and walked behind the counter with his hands held over his head.

Because it was closed, the store had only two lights on, one over the register and one over the door leading to the storeroom out back. It felt calm in the dark. Jonas set the bag on the counter and the clerk started filling it with bills. His nametag said CHET. Nearby, Marie slow danced with a cardboard cutout of the Most Interesting Man in the World.

"While you're at it, Chet, could you put a few nips in the bag, too?"

“Which ones?”

From the dance floor, Marie dipped her partner and stage whispered, “Whiskey!”

“The woman would like whiskey, please.”

“Does it matter which ones?”

“Maybe two of each? We’ll do a survey later.”

The clerk turned to the shelf behind the till and started selecting tiny bottles. He took his time with it. Like he was really thinking about what these folks might like. After a while, Jonas told him that was enough.

“Thanks for being such a good sport about this.”

The clerk shrugged.

“Maybe you want to come with us?” Marie had joined them at the counter. She was wagging the gun around like she was teasing a dog with a toy. “We could go on a crime spree!”

“No thank you.”

Jonas grappled the bag’s straps and dragged it off the counter. “Do you have a warm coat, Chet?”

He did. The clerk fetched his coat from the office and they led him into the beer cooler. They apologized for everything and handed him their bag of snacks. He seemed to understand.

“Maybe I could come with you guys after all.” He was looking at a half-stack of ice beer 18-packs. It was the only place to sit.

“Sorry, Chet. The kids take up all the free space in the van.”

They locked the cooler and locked up the store, snapped off the remaining lights, and left. It was a brisk October night. Dead leaves rattled across the streets.

Jonas and Marie both prefer fish to meat. They like dessert but not candy. Gum doesn’t even blip on their radar. They both think their childhoods were long bad jokes but now and then, with the right delivery, the joke can be funny. Both would rather lose a fight than learn some terrible news. Each had gone to boarding schools but not the kind people brag about. They like watching movies but

couldn't care less about dialogue. Popcorn is gross. It is also annoying. Both used to think they were just biding their time but neither one feels that way anymore. It's agreed that pizza's best cold the morning after. Each believes their bodies are what attract so much trouble in their lives, but sometimes their bodies solve that trouble, too. Marie thinks Jonas's scars are pretty and are what give his face character and so are really a blessing of sorts, though he claims to maintain no opinion about them one way or the other, so in a sense, they agree on this, too. Both think the other is the one who bought the gun (it's Jonas's but he forgot: Marie found it in his closet, at the bottom of a bowling bag, underneath a bowling ball). Neither believes in spirits, but when they're naked together, they have their doubts. Neither one of them has ever been to Florida.

Jonas met Marie at a dumpy little bar in Boston's North End, not too far from the Garden. The place smelled like potato chips and farts. But as he'd just been fired from the warehouse for punching his supervisor in the neck, he really just wanted a beer. Marie was the only woman at the bar. She was surrounded by three guys who Jonas thought looked like meatpackers. It wasn't a description that made much sense to him, but somehow it felt correct. Slumped against the bar, tiny and dark and surrounded by goons, Marie looked miserable.

Jonas ordered a beer and sat on a corner stool, watching the guys take turns leaning in to whisper whatever nastiness they had to say. He really didn't want to get himself into another fight. But there didn't seem to be much else as an option. After a few minutes, Jonas got up and approached them.

"I don't think she's picking up what you're laying down, sport."

All four of them turned to look at him. He could tell they were taking in his scars. Then Marie did some sort of feral rebel yell and grabbed the glass of beer from his hand and smashed it into the nearest guy's face. He fell backward gripping his cheek and ear,

blood mixed with beer foam scrawling strange designs between his fingers and down his arms. Jonas remembers: it looked neat. The other two backed away. Marie slammed down the rest of her drink, took Jonas's hand, and led him out onto the street. They walked a few quick blocks without speaking. He asked if her hand was okay, but she didn't respond. Then she asked where he wanted to go.

"Um ... do you like sushi?"

She stopped on the sidewalk and stared up at him, head cocked. Her skin was pale but he could tell, in the summer, it'd be much darker, almost brown. Her eyes were just dark spots in her face. She was doing a curious thing with her lips. His hadn't been the response she was expecting.

"Yeah," she finally said. "I do."

They walked to a place he liked nearby and got big bowls of chirashizushi and a bottle of unfiltered sake. There were fish in aquariums along all the walls. The light from the water made their white sake look blue. It didn't feel at all like they'd just been in a bar fight together. It was the closest thing to a date either had been on in years.

Signs indicate that the motel has a swimming pool. After fucking

in front of the mirror, they rinse off in the shower and head down to the pool, carrying plastic cups of the whiskey they bought. The pool is only twenty feet long and ten feet wide and maybe five feet at its deepest. But it's water. Because Florida has beaches, Marie has planned ahead and brought a bathing suit, a strappy two-piece covered in neon pink and blue flowers. Jonas goes in in his underwear. There is no one else in the pool. The back half of the poolroom is made of sheet glass overlooking a scrappy little garden, one leafless tree and some nude bushes gathering plastic bags and wrappers. Everything echoes madly. While Marie tries and fails to teach him how to float, Jonas sings to her in his most emotive voice, drawing out the syllables:

*The sad sack was sitting on a block of stone
Way over in the corner, all alone.
Big Boss said, "Hey buddy, don't you be no square.
If you can't find a partner, use a wooden chair."*

When he refuses to stop and refuses to float, she slaps his forehead and pushes him under.

Afterward, walking back from the pool, they get lost trying to find their room. Clapping her hands to her cheeks, she fake-screams, "It's a maze!"

"It's a horseshoe," he corrects her, and keys into their room.

Most people behave as though he's much bigger than he is: it's something in his carriage, the way he moves himself through the world. No one is willing to accept him as a welterweight.

Marie knocks into doorframes, bumps the corners of tables, knocks over chairs. Her hips and shoulders are always bruised. She maneuvers through a crowd like a pinball. She's noticed: other small people do the same thing. As if, being so little, they should be even smaller, fitting through spaces they cannot fit through. She has no idea how much room she takes up in the world.

Of course, after their date was over, they went back to his apartment and destroyed the place. He was twenty-eight years old and had never had sex like that before. When your face is jigsawed with scars, women either think you'll hurt them or they can hurt you. But Marie was something else. They were like two animals not thinking about what they were doing, just doing it and enjoying what they were doing. Or maybe they were like two suns in a close orbit, tearing each other apart while spinning faster around and around. Whatever it was, it was mutual. It made everything else feel silly. Afterward, they lay exhausted on his kitchen floor, sweat sticking their skin to the linoleum, and he stared at the sloped hollow of her belly

moving softly with her breath, wishing he could see it in the sun. So he made up his mind. Summer was a long way off. He had no idea if this would last that long. So he'd do the next best thing. He'd do anything to make it happen.

"I used to work in places like this," she tells him later. They are naked in bed, each with a tiny bottle of Johnny Walker Red. On the TV, *Two Lane Blacktop* is playing with the sound off.

"As a maid?"

"What, you think just 'cause I'm a spic I'd be a maid?"

"You're not a spic. You grew up in Ohio."

She punches him in the shoulder. "Yes, as a fucking maid. I was terrible at it. I kept getting fired and kept finding new work doing the same stupid thing. It took me forever to learn."

"Why would you get fired?"

"I can't make a bed to save my life."

"Oh, sure you can."

"Why would I lie about something so dumb?"

He shrugs and finishes his nip. She pushes him off the bed and strips off the blankets and sheets, then puts them all back on.

"Wow." He stands back beside the TV and watches her. "Really?"

"See what I mean?"

"You really can't make a bed."

"It looks exactly like two people have been fucking in it." She hops onto the mattress, bounces from her knees onto her belly. She does not roll over. She keeps her backside pointed his way. Sometimes her smallness makes him think he's sleeping with a twelve-year old. The idea scares him. He turns to watch the TV.

"James Taylor," he says, "might very well be the worst musician ever."

"Eric Clapton. Dave Matthews. The Eagles. Creed."

"But goddamn he's great in this movie."

"Uh-huh."

“You think it’s because he keeps his mouth shut the whole time?”

From the bed, a pillow sails to whap against his neck. He bends to pick it up, and when he turns to throw it at her, another pillow hits him in the face.

“Hello?” She snaps her fingers and points at her body.

“Oh. Right.” He turns off the TV and climbs into bed.

Marie left Ohio because it didn’t know what it wanted to be. It sometimes considered itself Southern and sometimes Northeastern and sometimes part of the Midwest, but it couldn’t be all three and so instead it was nothing. If a piece of geography so big as Ohio couldn’t know what it was, what chance did she stand there? She headed east because, like nowhere else, the East was certain about what it was. She worked her way first to Providence then eventually up to Boston and oftentimes stole because stealing was more interesting than work. She stole clothes from department outlets and food from grocery stores and restaurants. Petty theft. Now and then, she squatted in houses that were up for sale, which is also kind of like stealing. It rarely occurred to her that she could someday get caught. She was smarter than that, she believed.

Her smallness and her beauty were always weapons used against her. Most men simply thought she was theirs. Finders keepers. Defending herself so often against people’s wrong thoughts eventually built a callus around her. She had to remain hard to remain her own. This, too, she attributed to Ohio. Acting out against something outside herself that wanted her to be something else. On the night she met Jonas, when she smashed in the creep’s face with a beer glass, she was not thinking: Fuck this guy. She was thinking: Fuck Ohio. No matter where she went, Ohio always followed her there. Then she met Jonas, and Ohio was gone. She couldn’t explain how or why. But she knew that it was true. Jonas was her first new land.

For a few hours before sunrise, they sleep. All tangled in legs and arms and sheets. Jonas dreams that he's James Taylor's character in *Two Lane Blacktop*, at the starting line of his final race, but Marie dreams of the first place they robbed together. They didn't need a gun that time. It was an all-night gas station that catered mostly to truckers, a mall of energy drinks and jerky and radar garbage just over the New Hampshire border. They showed up after midnight and hung around back by the freezer cases of ice cream, keeping very still until the fat man running the register forgot they were there. When he stepped outside for a cigarette, they emptied the register and left a ten on the counter. Jonas carried a forty of Old Milwaukee out the front door. He was wearing makeup to cover up his scars. When the fat man saw them walking out of the store, surprise scrawled all over his doughy face, Jonas jerked a thumb back toward the store, drawling, "Keep the change, guy." The fat man smiled and kept smoking. Marie had her mouth on him before they pulled out of the lot. They barely made it five miles before pulling off down some access road, Marie squeezing into his lap between the steering wheel and his chest, already coming before he was all the way inside her. But in the dream, it's not like that at all. The fat man goes out for his cigarette, but when they head for the register, he's back behind the counter with a shotgun in his hands. From his bower of cigarettes and scratch tickets, he tells them to hold it right there, fuckers, and let me see your hands. And then he shoots them anyway.

She wakes up when the shots go off. Beside her, in his sleep, Jonas mumbles, "We're not going to make it." She touches the lightning jag running from his left nostril to his lip. But he doesn't say anything else after that.

He used to bare-knuckle box in his teens. In a parking lot behind the box factory. He made a lot of money one summer, then lost a lot of money, then got spooked and quit. It's why he has weird scars on his face. Other boys' busted hands tearing apart his skin.

But he's never told Marie about it. He tells her: a man's allowed a secret or two. It embarrasses him that he quit. It embarrasses him that he ever started.

The morning after robbing the liquor store, while Marie gathers provisions from the motel's free breakfast table, Jonas burns their paper masks in the parking lot. "Bye-bye, kitty." He squats behind the car, watching the ashes march across the pavement like little grey soldiers in puffy pantaloons. The sun shines white and cold. He loads their bags into the trunk and checks out at the front desk.

"Do we push on to Florida today?" she asks from the passenger seat, around a mouthful of rubbery egg-and-cheese sandwich.

"Let's just see how far we get today. I'm in no hurry."

"Me either." She reaches over and plays with his earlobe. "I'm having fun."

As they wait for street traffic to let them out of the motel parking lot, Marie points out the handful of police cruisers in front of the liquor store across the street. The pale lights on their rooftops spin uselessly in the morning air. They make it look like a panic. But nothing's going on. Though they can't be seen and it doesn't matter anyway, they both wave. Then traffic breaks and they join in its flow, anonymous and safe among the morning commuters and merging onto the southbound highway.

The Cup of Sun

Maxwell Clark

The origin of the sun is the water in my cup,
Because the sun begins in golden sunlight,
Burning so out along the rim of my cup
So sunny with the golden hue of sunlight.
 Let not the daylight of sunlight fail me now,
 I am burning alive within my cup's rim,
 I would that the sun were burning like me
 Then my cup would be full of water.
Much of my cup has been made of sunlight
And much of the sun is in my cup's sunlight
And when the sun burns me with my cup
I ask the sunlight to go ask the sun for my cup.
 Were all the sunlight come from the sun
 And were all my cup a cup made of water
 Then cups of sunlight would pour out then
 Into the sunlight of my cup in the sun.

Reckoning with Athol Fugard

*On the playwright, age
eighty-one, and his work*

Leon de Kock

Over a month-long season from March into April, Athol Fugard, the man *Time* magazine has described as the “greatest active playwright in the English-speaking world,” performed a remarkable feat at New Haven’s Long Wharf Theatre. Not only did he return to the boards at the age of eighty-one after an absence of fifteen years, but he pulled off the trick, night after night, of *acting* the part of a frail octogenarian as if he himself were thoroughly chipper—which he indeed appeared to be as he commanded the stage with exacting precision. In truth, though, Fugard the playwright-actor was every bit as vulnerable to mortality as the character he was playing with such zest, a grandfather called Oupa who does, in fact, fall down dead at the play’s climax.

Several years ago, Fugard underwent revascularization grafts to aid his circulation. At the age of eighty-plus, with declining physical powers, there is no telling what might happen from one day to the next. Indeed, in an interview during rehearsals for *The Shadow of the Hummingbird*’s world-premiere run, Fugard said: “I really don’t know what comes after this. I’ve got five stents in my body. You know, I could be gone before the opening night! I don’t know how much time I’ve got.”

The two figures, Fugard, the aged thespian, and Oupa, the doughty grandfather of a beloved grandson, Boba, share too many similarities for the audience not to see them as versions of each other. Like Fugard, Oupa is given to writing daily journal entries about life, nature and people, and he is a bookishly homespun philosopher of sorts. And, as in Fugard’s case, his spirit appears to be indomitable, as if his continued thrusting through the tides of time is motored by sheer obstinacy. It is almost as though Fugard’s will to life is more convincing, by a long stretch, than Oupa’s acted death on stage.

Protean spirits such as this, in addition to visceral engagement with the challenges of human existence in hard geographies

and difficult circumstances, have been the hallmark of Fugard's long career. In the annals of South African letters, he has no equal in staying power, except perhaps for Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer, who seems to have recently announced her retirement from novel-writing. Many of Fugard's contemporaries, both South African and global, have passed on: Harold Pinter, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, John Osborne, Guy Butler, Anthony Delius, South African poet-playwright (and close friend) Don MacLennan, Jack Cope, and a clutch of others. Fugard, by contrast, seems unwilling even to slow down. As the artistic director of the Long Wharf Theatre, Gordon Edelstein, notes in the program for *Hummingbird*, Fugard is currently working on two new plays *and* an extended work of prose fiction. The man is unstoppable. Or so it seems.

Still, Fugard's "late style," reminiscent in some ways of Philip Roth's last half dozen books, shows a preoccupation with beginnings and endings, and with how best to complete the circle of life. If the end must come, Fugard's *Hummingbird* seems to be suggesting, then let it come in ways that return us to the realms of discovery and play. Let the spirit of quizzical wonder, of hopefulness despite the odds, never relent. This determination to remain buoyant is Fugard, writ large. He has been acting on such an apparently uncomplicated impulse, a rebellion against the death drive, one might say, over his entire working career as a playwright, which now comprises a span of more than fifty years.

Identifying various examples of the "Fugardian" spirit—as manifested in the playwright and his characters' special brand of back-against-the-wall pluck—is a useful way of charting the shape of Fugard's extensive body of writing. It is worth considering, from the vantage of *The Shadow of the Hummingbird*'s performance in New Haven, spring 2014, how different manifestations of rebellion against defeatism have shaped the playwright's creations since 1958, when he first began to "work" the drama, one might say, of

very pronounced, and regionally located, human predicaments. One of the ways to understand the trajectory of Fugard's work is to see it as a gradual development from a more to a less socio-politically specific domain, and from a less to a more personally reflective space, although both sides of this all-too-easy polarity are present in lesser and stronger shades, in asymmetrical combinations and sequences, throughout his career, making a mess of any overly schematic long-range view of his work. Nonetheless, it remains true that the post-apartheid period has seen Fugard exercise a greater sense of freedom to follow what one might describe as a whimsical, or philosophical and personal bent, than in the iron-barred apartheid years. This is certainly true of *Hummingbird*, which by Fugardian standards of length, intensity and dialogic freight is a mere whimsy of a play; it is, indeed, a wistful one-act meditation on the wonders of the human imagination, without confronting the dictatorial intolerance of the "real world." Such speculative content, bodied forth in a grandfatherly dialogue between Oupa and his grandson Boba about Plato's allegory of the cave in *The Republic*, would in the South African struggle years of *littérature engagée* have been met with raised eyebrows and even a measure of disapproval in some circles. Thankfully, times and contexts have changed. New Haven in 2014 is anything but Johannesburg, Cape Town or Grahamstown in 1988, places and periods in which Fugard was occasionally under suspicion for being "bourgeois," and insufficiently revolutionary. But such misgivings, understandable as they may have been in the light of contextual pressures, would have missed something very important, the golden thread, one might say, that connects Fugard's more political plays with his less political works: the unquantifiable substance of spirit and the defiant pluck that shines through every Fugard production since the late 1950s, culminating in its forgivably airy and whimsical voicing this year in New Haven.

It is common cause that Fugard's social conscience was sharpened in 1958 by a period of employment, while in his twenties, as a

clerk in the Fordsburg Native Commissioner's Court in Johannesburg. The tribunal was essentially aimed at pass-law enforcement, a place where black South Africans were prosecuted for failing to have the right endorsement (an official stamp) in their hated "passbooks," allowing them (or not) to spend time, for purposes of employment, in areas designated under apartheid for white people only. "During my six months in that courtroom," Fugard has written, "I saw more suffering than I could cope with. I began to understand how my country functions." Fugard duly went against the lynch-gang political current, befriending black people in Johannesburg's famously cosmopolitan Sophiatown area—later razed to the ground by state bulldozers to make way for a white suburb called "Triomf"—and meeting the likes of actor Zakes Mokae and writers Lewis Nkosi and Bloke Modisane. The playwright, along with his wife Sheila Fugard, launched the African Theatre Workshop group, which saw the staging of Fugard's first full-length play, *No-Good Friday*, alternately featuring Fugard himself and Lewis Nkosi in Johannesburg productions: Fugard acted the part of Father Higgins when the piece was staged at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, and Nkosi acted the role when *No-Good Friday* played at the "white" Brooke Theatre, where a multiracial cast was deemed illegal. Though both *No-Good Friday* and Fugard's second play, *Nongogo*, are—by the dramatist's later standards—a touch wordy and melodramatic, they feature black characters that refuse to lie down despite annihilating odds. Willie in *No-Good Friday* bravely declares: "There's nothing that says we must surrender to what we don't like. There's no excuse like saying the world's a big place and I'm just a small man. My world is as big as I am." In *Nongogo*, Johnny tells the "shebeen queen" [speakeasy proprietor] Nongogo that the only time a person is really safe is "when you can tell the rest of the world to go to hell."

That's the Fugard spirit for you, and it has remained constant, in one form or another, for over half a century. It has outlasted apartheid, and it will go down laughing at the antics of "Zumocracy,"

the current bout of public stealing and economic disenfranchisement riding high in an ever-gaudier “rainbow nation.”

Nongogo and *No-Good Friday* made their appearance in the late 1950s. Almost twenty years later, in the mid-1970s, materialist critics located at South Africa’s top three English-speaking universities would begin to find fault with Fugard for the “liberal” fallacy of seeking salvation in individual acts of rebellion rather than class action, but the strategy of downright refusal, of swimming upstream and damn the consequences, is arguably the bottom line in all forms of resistance. Symbolic forms of renitence, consciously *staged* and aesthetically mediated as acts of public persuasion—later to find the ungainly descriptor “conscientization”—were cornerstones in the fight against apartheid, especially in mobilizing international opinion against the South African police state. The only way for a minority to oppress a majority, as whites did for over forty years during apartheid, is to break people’s backs, to render abysmal conditions as “normal.” The single manner with which to combat such downgrading of human worthiness is to reassert an unyielding will to betterment. For this alone—quite apart from his many other achievements—Athol Fugard deserves a few streets named after him in South Africa, if not a national holiday.

The most significant counterweight to the dogged optimism in Fugard’s early characters was the playwright’s immersion in mid-century existentialism. By his own admission, Fugard was profoundly moved by the existentialist philosophers, Sartre and Camus in particular, and his second wave of plays, especially *The Blood Knot*, *Hello and Goodbye*, *People are Living There*, and perhaps his most famous single work of all, the classic, *Godot*-esque *Boesman and Lena*, all stage a protracted showdown, *lutte à mort*, between a sense of coruscating futility on the one hand, and a determination to dream, to hope, and to believe, on the other. Morris and Zachariah, the half-brothers in *Blood Knot*, square off against each other, and against a godless world, in the squalor of an apartheid

tin-shack set in the industrial backwaters of Port Elizabeth in the early 1960s. For them, the one brother's half-white "blood" (Morris) betrayed the other's deeper blackness (Zachariah) in a race-obsessed country; more, they were born into a secular empire in which an empty modernity after Auschwitz rendered their (poignantly staged) condition universally recognizable, not only in Johannesburg, where *Blood Knot* premiered in 1961, but also in New York, where an off-Broadway production directed by Lucille Lortel launched Fugard's American career.

From this point on, Fugard's work—like that of major South African writers Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, Breyten Breytenbach and Antjie Krog—found the seam of regional as well as universal significance. For all these writers, and especially Fugard, it was an interweaving of cultural, racial and socioeconomic conditions, a twisted "knot" whose painful torsions were felt in local predicaments and their derivation from a larger sickness, a moral destitution at the heart of twentieth-century Western civilization. In the "Port Elizabeth plays" featuring poor-white characters, *Hello and Goodbye* and *People Are Living There*, one destitute individual after another stumbles through an evacuated modernity, struggling with the futility of an existence in which self-interest on a massive, social scale finds a fitting home "in a province," to borrow the title of a famous Laurens van der Post work. Fugard's down-on-their-luck white chancers, however, were never going to find traction on the world's big stage, given their relative economic and racial privilege, and it was only when the playwright hit upon the figures of Boesman and Lena, two "nonwhite" characters (in the racial parlance of the time) that the world at large came to see—and more fully appreciate—the special gifts of Athol Fugard.

Take, for example, the review in the *New York Times* after the play's revival at the Manhattan Theater Club in 1992, in which Frank Rich found that Fugard's "image of an itinerant homeless couple sheltered within their scrap-heap possessions and awaiting the next official eviction is now as common in New York City, among other

places, as it was in the South Africa where he set and wrote his play in the late 1960s.” Who would have imagined, Rich asked, “that the universality would soon prove so uncomfortably literal?” Although the New York of the early 1990s was a far rougher place than the Manhattan of today, following Giuliani’s “zero tolerance,” police-driven clean-up, it is fair to argue that *Boesman and Lena* found a near-perfect coalescence between the universal and the particular on a transnational scale, in a way that few other writers have managed. In the same way that noir films (such as *Escape From New York*, for example) found a turning point of rebellion in the gothic shadows of capitalist modernity, *Boesman and Lena* spoke for the plight of ordinary humanity in a world that appeared to have lost the balance between success and succor. Boesman is a sinewy, tormented man who reprises the material and moral humiliations he has suffered at the hands of a heedless racial capitalism by mercilessly tormenting Lena, his luckless partner in life. As many critics have noted, at its core *Boesman and Lena* is a love story, a parable of Adam and Eve twisted almost beyond bearing by circumstance. In its many performances, and its two film versions, the piece, with searing feeling, spoke at once of both the symptom it dramatized and the condition from which the pathology arose. Whether one calls that condition neocolonialism, or apartheid, or capitalist modernity, in one way or another it implicated everyone who watched the play. Something was not right. For as long as it remains possible for people to be cast out as rubbish in the way that the characters Boesman and Lena are, and for as long as the world knows that these two individuals are by no means mere fictions, but suggestive of real suffering, on a day-to-day basis, who can continue to turn a blind eye? Yes, it was due to apartheid, a local sickness in a small corner of the world, but it was also due to the historical pillage that had made apartheid possible—the continuing co-implication of apartheid and capitalism—that transformed Boesman and Lena from local play-actors to Beckettian figures in the symbolic imaginary of the Western literary canon, as emblematic in their way as Vladimir and Estragon.

And yet, sitting around a makeshift fire in the middle of nowhere on the pitch-black mud-flats near Port Elizabeth, Lena sings her way through the small hours of the night. She has been run ragged by Boesman, rendered the object of ugly threats and cheap jibes; she has sacrificed her daily portion of Boesman's bottle of wine in return for the company of the mute, dying man, Outa, and she will not be deterred. In his pioneering study, *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*, South African poet, playwright and Fugard contemporary Stephen Gray identified Lena as an avatar of the "Hottentot Eve," an immemorial figure in the region's literary canons. As such, she is a multivalent, potent trickster, and she is innately wise in a way that defies the western project in Africa or the depredations of the white man's guns, trinkets, and magic potions. The Hottentot Eve drinks wine and laughs and sings with guttural abandon. There is, in her, the Bacchanalian flint of humanity itself, and her presence calls to order the systems and processes, people and politics, that (continue to) deny and degrade her. In cheapening her, they cheapen humanity, and they degrade themselves. In the guise of Lena, played magnificently by Yvonne Bryceland (opposite Fugard as Boesman) in the early productions of the play, and in the first movie version (directed by Ross Devenish, 1974), this African "Eve" is possibly Fugard's most magnificent creation.

It is also true, however, that writing and acting the part of Boesman in 1969 in apartheid South Africa rendered Fugard a white author "talking black," so to speak, or speaking on behalf of the Other (in postcolonial lingo), and this did not always sit well with the rising wave of black consciousness that began to emerge in the 1970s, its rage exacerbated by the death of Steven Biko in 1977 at the hands of the South African Police. Fugard, though, was well ahead of the game. Already in the 1960s he had begun working with a group of amateur performers called the Serpent Players in New Brighton, a black township near Port Elizabeth. According to Albert Wertheim, author of *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard: From South Africa*

to the World (2000), this engagement allowed the playwright to reconnect with the pulse of life in the black areas from which he had largely been estranged by the physical and legal restrictions of apartheid. At the time, Fugard was developing a version of “deep” or method acting in the guise of Grotowski (and before him, Stanislavski)—urging his actors to draw on their own inner resources, based on personal experience, when “acting.” It was a kind of anti-acting, a form of “getting real” on stage, especially when set against the version of drawing-room theater that was still predominant in neocolonial white South Africa, and it produced—in the plays *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, *The Island*, and *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*, among others—an explosively unique South African version of play-making.

Sizwe Banzi and *The Island* must surely rate as among Fugard’s best plays, combining keen dramaturgical innovation with a form of shocking, or “raw” human revelation—a stripping away of reductive or inflated frames of reference, restrictive categorizations, and deceptive language games. The plays do this, “dramatically,” by means of personally invested enactments of experiential feeling whose “acting out” is all too real. *Sizwe Banzi* performs its theatrical work by cutting through various frames, or boxes, if you like, of self-staging—ways in which people act themselves out or are acted upon—in stories they tell themselves about themselves; in corny “happy snaps” (studio photographs or, today, selfies and facebook photo posts) by which they try to convince others that they are “successful”; via restrictive endorsements stamped into apartheid pass-books; in workfloor sociolects of master-slave (non)communication, among other such templates. The play then digs down beneath the acting out of one’s life, or the acting upon a human life from without, and searches for an expression of the human core not smothered within such representative enclosures, such real-life mimicry. True to Grotowskian “poor theater,” the “fourth wall” is broken down in this process. In *Sizwe Banzi*, studio photographer Styles talks directly to the audience, drawing them into his punishing and witty play

with verbal and pictorial frames, and rendering them vulnerable, or disarmed, in the process. With Fugard, one is often rendered more susceptible, more open to a kind of undoing, than one is accustomed to, losing that carapace of defensiveness by which we tend to keep the outside out. Similarly, in *The Island*, the audience is drawn into the spirit of play-acting (here, a prisoners' performance of Sophocles's *Antigone*) while also being affected by the exposed underbelly of such "acting" in the faux-actors' "real" dramas, played out behind the scenes of the play-within-the-play. These two works achieve an intricacy of wit, feeling and depth from both the Fugardian creative direction and the communal authorship that arose as John Kani, Winston Ntshona and Fugard "workshopped" the plays into being rather than composing them beforehand. Kani and Ntshona are duly credited with co-authorship of these seminal works, plays that set the stage for a new generation of revolutionary "township" drama, in the South Africa of the 1970s and 1980s, such as the definitively South African pieces *Woza Albert!* and *Sarafina!* among others.

The jointly authored "township plays," as Dennis Walder's edited collection (1993, 2000) dubbed them, gave way later in the 1970s to solo-authored, deeply conceptual and more cerebral work, particularly *Dimetos* (1975) and *Orestes* (1978). This should not surprise anyone who has witnessed the range of forms that Fugard has traversed in his career, from journaling (his published *Notebooks* make for fine reading), to fictional prose (*Tsotsi*, in its original form as a novel), to memoir (*Cousins*, too, is riveting), to film-writing (*The Guest*, Fugard's dramatic rendering, with Ross Devenish, of the classic Afrikaans poet-naturalist Eugène N. Marais's morphine addiction, based on an episode in Leon Rousseau's biography of Marais), to still other modes of expression in addition to playwriting. Indeed, Fugard embodies the protean creative spirit, refusing to be pinned down or restricted, and this is of course a version of the writer's greater spirit of refusal, making him a classical humanist despite the "posthumanist" climate of the times as he entered his sixth and sev-

enth decades, and, in the 1990s and 2000s, continued to write from the (defiantly human) heart, undeterred.

This is not to say that his work after the collaborative, cross-racial “township” phase was not politically engaged. Despite Fugard’s own frequent disavowal of the term “political,” plays like *A Lesson from Aloes* (1978), *“Master Harold” ... and the Boys* (1982), *The Road to Mecca* (1984), and *My Children! My Africa!* (1989) continued to home in on the predicaments of defiant individuals seeking to reinvent themselves in ways that particular circumstances, both material and moral, rendered next to impossible. In *Playland* (1993), the desire to regain a state of free human “play” is set in the context of two characters’ haunting by the murders they have committed in racially defined conflicts and lodged in a past that won’t go away, despite the “playland” of the looming post-apartheid era. In this drama, however, “Playland” is a cheap traveling carnival, more show than substance, and Fugard here sets the tone for an aptly ambivalent reading of the post-apartheid period, as his later plays would reaffirm. The future, this play suggested, is as much in the past as anywhere else, and the past is every bit as uncertain as the days ahead, as becomes apparent in plays like *Valley Song* (1996) and its sequel, *Coming Home* (2009), in which Fugard takes on the human consequences of former president Thabo Mbeki’s disastrous AIDS denialism.

It is beyond question that, from about the year 2000, Fugard’s writing becomes more reflective and autobiographical, as if he is allowing himself some respite from the responsibilities of an artistic selflessness that his work carried aloft so vigorously for over forty years. *The Captain’s Tiger* (1999), *Sorrows and Rejoicings* (2001), *Exits and Entrances* (2004), and *Victory* (2006) are good examples of situational complications in which Fugard allows his own stories, and his artistic persona, to enter more freely into the picture. It is also true that many critics detect a waning in the powers of the great

playwright's work in the post-2000 period. Laurie Winer, reviewing a production of *The Captain's Tiger* at the La Jolla Playhouse in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1998, comments that "Fugard sets the stage to address his long-ago failure of nerve [to tell the first story he ever attempted to weave in writing], and then politely declines.... Fugard instead gives us just an amiable exercise in nostalgia." Charles Isherwood, writing in the *New York Times* about a production of *Exits and Entrances* (2004), comments drily that the two-character play "is not a major addition to this South African playwright's oeuvre." Such respectful diffidence becomes fairly commonplace in reviews of Fugard's late plays, occasionally giving way to strong disaffection, such as is evident in John Simon's scathing review in *New York* magazine about *The Captain's Tiger* at the Manhattan Theater Club, opening his account with the rhetorical question: "So, you think you know what boredom in the theater is?" What follows is not pretty for Fugard fans. In *The Telegraph* of London, Charles Spencer's review of Fugard's *Victory* (2006) at the Theatre Royal in Bath was equally unsparing: "This is a desperately sad play, partly because its author Athol Fugard is writing below his best form, but largely because of its anguished pessimism." Spencer closes his review with a rueful reference to "this exhausted and despairing play."

Equally, it must be said that *Have You Seen Us?* (2009), Fugard's first play set in the U.S., and a premiere at Long Wharf in New Haven, got panned. In the *New York Times*, Isherwood called it "a distinctly minor addition to his renowned and influential canon" and "an anecdote worked up into a drama." Sandy MacDonald (*Theatermania*) called it "a thin, staticky mewl, like that of a faraway radio station playing a vaguely familiar, once-popular tune." Despite such notices, Fugard's late work has continued to find traction, as is evident in more favorable reviews of plays like *Sorrows and Rejoicings* and *Exits and Entrances*. The line between a profound simplicity that creates universal recognition, on the one hand, and sentimental cliché, on the other, can be very tenuous, and derives perhaps from historical specificity, or the bond between time, place and story. It

is unfailingly hard to find the perfect pitch, no matter how many times one has done it before. Fugard seems to have found this note in his 2010 Long Wharf production, *The Train Driver*, which is a theatrically bold “outing” of inner guilt and complicity, borne for decades by a tortured “white” South African conscience. (The parallels with Fugard’s own situation are of course overt.) The train driver in question was driving a carriage when a black woman jumped to her death in front of the head-locomotive. The infant strapped to the mother’s back was also killed. For many Long Wharf Theatre patrons, Fugard’s work had by 2010 become something of a draw for the regional theater, and *The Train Driver* was an example of the unusually frank reckoning that had perhaps become the hallmark of the playwright’s late or “U.S.” phase, culminating in his marked preoccupation with beginnings and endings in *The Shadow of the Hummingbird*. In the *New Haven Review*, Donald Brown wrote of *The Train Driver*: “[I]n its stark drama, [the play] asks us to feel for a moment as shattered as Roelf [the train’s driver] ... as at a loss to deal with the violence of the world except through words that find a voice for what no one ever says.” While finding the messages in the play at times too banal and lacking in subtlety, Christopher Isherwood in his review of a 2012 production, directed by Fugard, allowed that the play “makes a modest but eloquent addition to Mr. Fugard’s oeuvre,” citing its depiction of how people “separated by great social divides can, through the power of the imagination driven by empathy, feel their way into one another’s lives and be changed by the process.”

Indeed, finding the means to make his audiences feel, and never to give up on feeling despite neoliberal consumerism run rampant, remains imperative for Fugard’s spirited rebellion against the common view of things. In an interview in 1989, he said: “The most immediate responsibility of the artist is to get people feeling again.” And, true to his lifelong mission, he refuses to let up. If there’s nothing else one takes from later Fugard, then it is this near-blind determination to continue doing the hard thing. And it’s as

profoundly difficult as it is simple, because it's in the performance, the doing, that increase is achieved. In the Long Wharf production of *The Shadow of the Hummingbird*, the playwright's ability to evoke poignant feeling, and to provide cathartic entertainment, was beyond any doubt. If Athol Fugard does ever stop, it will certainly not be for want of the quality of spirit that his work both engenders and evokes, defying the all-too-evident reasons for pessimism that are all about us, always.

Vague You

Mark Gosztyla

You wanted out; you're out. My back pocket believes you, but my soul is not as sold. There is always a first time. This is my first time. Cue the heavy breathing & clandestine parking garage chit chat, the first thing I will never forget, the first thing I will never remember remembering. When I say you consume me, what I mean is every time I go to kiss you on the cheek you try to eat my face. The way a baby's early cries are swallowed by the echoing corners of the cathedral. The trembling spider web out of reach of the housewife's broom. The deepening of the shadows beneath the dancer's cheekbones as she thrusts herself on pointe. The witching hour: the hour at which witches are supposed to appear, usually midnight. Let's cut to the chase scene. The whole movie's a chase scene.

Hooky

E.A. Neeves

Under a canopy of chestnuts, atop a canvas of beach towels, they lay on their backs. He took her hand, briefly, then released. She still wore the top half of her bikini.

The sun warmed her toes, dried her skin, and she could hear the reservoir lapping against the rocks. That morning, after dropping her little sister off at school, she had leaned against her car in the parking lot, waiting for him to arrive. She was already admitted to college, he'd reasoned, placing the backs of his fingers on her cheek. She should live a little, he'd said. She wondered now if he had planned this part, or if he had only been thinking of cliff jumping.

He was two years above her, home from college for summer. They'd run into each other at the school's catered luncheon for seniors to mingle with recent alumni and talk about the transition to college life. At first he joked that she didn't remember him, but he was wrong. Noah Coolidge. They'd taken a photography elective together, and for his final project he'd assembled a collection of pretty color stills taken at Race Brook Falls. Back then, he'd had sun-bleached caramel hair, but now it was dark like chocolate and it matched his eyes.

She remembered what it had felt like to step off the rock and out into the air, plunging some twenty feet to the water below. She was soaring and then she was surrounded, suspended, slingshotting like a rubber band. Noah's fall had been much more graceful than her own, slipping into the water like he was part of a cascade.

Her phone beeped, a text message, but she didn't look at it. A few weeks ago she had never even kissed a boy. Her younger sister had had her first kiss at fourteen. But then, Shannon had always been more socially adept than Erin. She sought boys and popularity the way Erin sought grades.

"What are you thinking?" Noah's chest vibrated against her

cheekbone. Today marked date three with him, four if she counted the luncheon.

There was a time when the excitement of her first date would not have been kept secret from Shannon, but instead shared in midnight whispers. When they were in elementary school Shannon had devised a pattern of knocks to call Erin from bed after lights out. She had most often used the code to talk about boys, but Erin had used it once when she'd been frightened about going away the next day to a sleep-away science camp. That night, Shannon, who'd been seven, had told her that if she ever felt lonely or scared at camp, she could knock on the wall of her camp room in their secret code, and she would know that Shannon was thinking about her. She had said they had magical powers because they were sisters, and that's what happens with sisters; she'd read it in a book.

It had been years since either girl had used the code. At the time of Noah's inquiry, Erin had been imagining Shannon's eager curiosity and slight jealousy if she were to use it tonight. But she couldn't explain any of this to Noah. It was too complicated and childish, so she lied and told him that she'd been thinking about going for another swim.

When they finally packed up, on the hike back to the car, Erin found four text messages on her phone. All were from her father and said some variation of "Where are you?" and "Call me." All were sent during the school day. She also had two missed calls from home, but no voicemails.

"Trouble?" Noah buckled in.

"No." She did not want him to see her fret over having been caught playing hooky and think she was too much the good girl.

Noah was an environmental science major, and as he drove he talked to her about his lab work, how they simulated different types of pollution and the long-term effects it might have on an ecosystem. He talked very fast and got technical with terms like biomagnification and soil leeching, terms she only half understood, but she nodded along anyway, too amused by his enthusiasm and embarrassed

by her own ignorance to stop him. At the bottom of her driveway he told her that he was glad he'd met her again, and even more glad she'd let him convince her to play hooky. He would call her, he promised, pressing his lips against her forehead before she got out of the car. Erin watched him drive away and when she was sure that he could no longer see her, she walked up the long, steep driveway to the house.

The front door was locked, so she lifted the garage door a foot and ducked under. Neither of her parents' cars were there. She turned the doorknob to enter the basement. Remembering the text messages, Erin pulled her phone out of her pocket and called her mother.

The phone rang four times and went to voicemail. Erin hung up. She tried her father, but his phone did the same. She told herself that it was only a coincidence. Her father was in a late meeting, perhaps, while her mother was probably taking Shannon to a friend's house for dinner.

She hadn't eaten since the picnic lunch she had shared with Noah, reclined on a rock face that sloped into the Saugatuck Reservoir. She felt flushed as she remembered, and also hungry, so she jogged upstairs, crossed into the kitchen, and swung open the fridge. As she rummaged for something that looked appealing, her cell vibrated against her leg. Erin slipped it out and answered quickly. It wasn't her parents, but Noah.

"Hey, I just got in. This is a little weird—"

"Erin, is your family home?"

"No."

"Turn on the TV."

"Okay." Erin shut the refrigerator door and crossed into the family room. She found the remote stuffed between the sofa cushions and pressed the power button.

"What channel?"

"Any channel."

The television had been left on NBC. On the screen was a picture

of the front entrance to Eastport High School. A reporter stood before the doors, which were blocked off by yellow crime tape. She was talking about something that couldn't be true. A student, yet to be named, had opened fire in the cafeteria. "There have been three confirmed fatalities," the reporter was saying, "including the shooter, who took his own life after killing one of his teachers. At least five students lie in critical condition at Danbury Hospital."

"Erin," Noah was saying from somewhere far away. "Your family is probably okay. They're probably just out looking for you. Erin, are you still there?"

Three had been killed. She thought of her friends and then the strange midday messages from her father. Shannon. But it wasn't likely. That her sister would be dead. There were around one thousand students in Eastport High School. If only three out of a thousand had died, then it was unlikely, statistically, that Shannon was one of them.

Across the room, the house phone rang. Erin told Noah that she had to go, but she was too late to reach the landline. Her father spoke on the answering machine, telling Erin that when she came home, she had better come to the hospital. He hadn't wanted to tell her this way. Shannon had been shot.

The word dropped in her stomach. She wasn't sure she even knew what it meant. It could be a graze or a flesh wound or even death. She called Noah and told him that she needed a ride. Her car was still in the high school parking lot. "Please," she said. He was quiet for a long moment.

"Yeah, all right," he said. "I'll be right over."

He didn't say anything when she stepped inside his car. They were driving, and she could watch herself like an actress in a film. There I am, sitting in the car next to Noah, on the way to the hospital to see my shot sister. The word still sounded so odd in her head—a din in a foreign language. Meaningless and exotic. Shot. She wished Noah might say something, or do something, that would call her back, but he stayed silent. Earlier, his silence had put her at ease.

She was content to listen to his breathing fall in sync with the water as it swept over stone, to hear his heart throb, his lungs fill, his stomach bubble. The silence let her think freely. Now, she did not want to think.

Noah had trouble finding a place to park. There were too many vans with television logos, too many people holding microphones or cameras or notepads, and he had to drive extra slowly to weave through them all. Far away from the E.R. entrance, Noah turned off the car. She knew she ought to move, but something held her in place. Noah stepped out, moved around the vehicle, and opened her door. He held out a hand, and Erin took it.

As they neared the E.R. men and women in suits talked into cameras. She heard the words *Columbine* and *execution* and *Juilliard*. Noah had his arm around her waist now, leading her forward. He pushed through the doors and the fast chatter of reporters cut off.

There was no one at reception. "Hello?" Noah called. An orderly whizzed down the hall, carrying several pints of crimson blood. Some moments later a woman in pink scrubs rounded the corner. When she saw the young couple, she inhaled sharply and slipped behind the reception desk. "Name?" she said.

Somehow Erin knew to say her sister's name rather than her own. The nurse typed into the computer and said Shannon was in the intensive care unit on the third floor, waiting to stabilize before being taken back into surgery.

"Back?" Erin echoed.

"I'm sorry," the nurse said. "I don't have the details. I'll try to page the front desk. They'll send someone down here." And then the nurse was gone.

"Erin?"

She swirled to see her father crossing the lobby, on his way back from the cafeteria. He paused mid-stride, and his body relaxed as she approached him. How absurd she must look. Her T-shirt was still crisp from the lake, her tangled hair was pulled into a low,

sloppy ponytail, and she smelled like sulfur. If her father noticed, he said nothing. She crashed into his chest and he squeezed as if afraid she might vanish. When he finally let her go, he took a large, deep breath. “Erin,” he said. She watched him compose himself, watched him sniffle and inhale and suck the tears back. He said that he hadn’t wanted to deliver this sort of news over the phone. That when it all came out, what was happening at the school, he and her mother had been so panicked that no one could find her. For a while they had assumed the worst. That her body was lying in some remote part of the school. That she was bleeding to death, alone, out of contact. And then the secretaries had produced a list of students in attendance that day, and Erin’s name wasn’t on it. She had called in sick. We found this out, his words zoomed around Erin’s head, about the same time we found out what happened to Shannon. Oh, Erin. Thank God. Her father repeated the phrase. Thank God, thank God, thank God.

“I’ve asked them,” her father said as they walked toward Shannon’s room, “what her chances are. And all they ever do is nod and tell me that they will do everything they can for her.” He didn’t ask her where she had been all day, or who the boy was, trailing behind her.

Shannon had been shot in the back and the bullet had lodged in her lower spine. The first surgery repaired some of the damage, but they had to be delicate. That was the doctor’s word. Such a dainty word, for what it ultimately meant. Her father wasn’t saying it and the doctors weren’t saying it, because they were all trying to be delicate. Delicate because Shannon might die. Delicate because if she lived, she might not ever walk again. Erin, too, couldn’t think about that, so she imagined her sister like one of those expensive porcelain dolls she had played with as a child. Be delicate, her mother always said, even though Shannon carried the doll around in a basket on her bike. Erin had never liked the porcelain dolls.

When they reached Erin’s mother, she was looking at Shannon

through a glass window. She had her hand over her mouth, as if she'd only just then heard the news. "Linda," her father said, and her mother turned. Slightly behind her father, Erin stood with Noah. Her mother ran to her.

Without a word or even a glance at the boy beside her, she enveloped Erin in a hug, clasp ing her to her breast even though Erin was three inches taller. Then she slapped her. The smack was loud enough to turn the heads of nearby nurses and hard enough to leave a lingering sting for minutes after contact had been made. "Why didn't you answer your phone?" Her mother was hugging her again, and the nurse who had started over to intercede paused in the hallway, reconsidering. "Why didn't you call me back?"

Dimly, Erin felt the sting from the slap. "I'm sorry, Mom, I was out of range, I didn't know what was happening. I didn't know, I wasn't there." Her words were muffled against her mother's shoulder, and Erin watched the fabric dampen. Until she saw this, she hadn't realized she had started to tear.

"Linda." Erin's father put his hand on her mother's shoulder. "Linda, let her breathe."

Her mother released her. "And who is he?" Noah had moved behind Erin after the slap, and now cupped her shoulder from an awkward distance. Through the glass panel Erin could see her sister lying on the bed, a slender tube running into her open mouth. If she could ignore that, and the IV, the heart monitor, and the polka-dotted gown, Shannon looked like she was just sleeping, not delicate at all.

"He drove her here," her father said.

Erin took a step backward, so that she could lean against Noah. Following her lead, he stroked her hair, his fingers snagging in the stiff knots.

"That's where she was all day? With him?" Erin's mother made no effort to keep her voice low. She told her father that Erin should explain Noah's presence. But Erin didn't want to explain his being there. She wasn't even sure that she could. Noah didn't have to take her to the hospital, and once he had decided to do that, he could

have simply dropped her off. He could have left once she found her father; he could leave now. Erin didn't want to enter into the conversation her parents were having just four feet behind her because if she did, she would have to merge her day with this day. There was a timetable, moments when her sister had taken a bullet to the spine, when her parents received a phone call, when Shannon had first gone into surgery. Over eight hours of tragedy that lined up minute for minute with the time she'd spent jumping from a cliff into the Saugatuck and having sex with a boy her family didn't know. So it was easier to pretend she wasn't listening and feel Noah's chest press into her back as he breathed, just as it was easier to not think of Shannon as delicate.

"I'm glad she was with that boy if it meant she wasn't locked inside that fucking cafeteria," her father said.

"He can't stay." At her mother's words, Erin felt Noah stiffen, and she reached around in search of his hand. When she found it, she squeezed, trying to convey *yes you can*. "He shouldn't be here." Her mother whispered this time. "We don't know him."

"No," her father said. "But he's not here for us."

After her father had shepherded her mother to the hospital

cafeteria, Noah asked her if he should leave. In response, she led them to the waiting room. "Do you want water? Or something from the vending machine? They might have Oreos in there. You like Oreos," he rambled, but she told him that she didn't want anything except to sit. When his cell phone rang a few minutes later, he shot to his feet, saying he would take the call outside.

Erin stared at the tiles on the floor. They were small white squares, efficiently laid, and she wondered how many it would take to fill up a room, a wing, a building. The waiting room overflowed with people sobbing, hugging, moaning. Doctors came and brought news and it never seemed good. The death toll was rising, Erin thought, watching a woman she recognized as a classmate's parent fall into the arms of her hulking husband. He hardly caught her, and

so she collapsed against him, supported by his bulk and her arms as they hooked around his waist. The doctor who had spoken to them let them be. Erin's parents were in the cafeteria, where she didn't know if the doctors could find them.

Noah returned, glancing at his watch. "I can get you something," he said, still standing. "Something from your house maybe?"

"What could I possibly want from my house?"

"I don't know, I just thought..." He fell into the chair beside her. "That was my mom."

"She's still awake?"

Rough fingers touched the bottom of her chin. "You're so warm." His mouth parted as if he had something else to say, but whatever it was, he held back. Instead, he put his hand on her forearm. Though the hospital was air conditioned, her skin was moist, and they stuck together.

Her little sister's back was split open on a table, and she sat in the waiting room, thinking about sliding her tongue between his lips, his hand careening up her thigh and her fingers weaving through his overgrown hair.

A little over a year ago, Shannon had burst into Erin's room. "Guess what," she said as she launched onto the bed. The force of her plop caused Erin to draw a line diagonally down the page of notes she'd been writing, and she closed the notebook to prevent any more damage.

"What?" She had clicked her pen closed but kept reading.

"Guess what Gavin Anderson did to me during study hall!"

Erin looked up from the book. Her sister was wearing eye shadow and lip gloss, something she'd been doing since middle school. Now at fourteen, she somehow looked not like a child too eager to grow up, but like a young woman, already grown. Shannon had always been the pretty one, despite the fact that underneath her clothes and make-up and poise, Shannon looked remarkably like her elder sister. They had the same shade of blondish brown hair, the same dark hazel eyes. Although they were roughly the same height

and both trim, Shannon did have a slightly larger cup size, and she highlighted her emerging curves with tight jeans and blouses, whereas Erin always imagined herself to be like one of those walking stick bugs. Slender, awkward, and camouflaged. Shannon may have been growing up, but she was still Erin's overeager, bubbly baby sister, and Erin assumed she was about to hear some tale about how Gavin had smiled at her, or winked at her, or touched her hand. Gavin was Erin's year and in with the popular clique. She doubted he would take her little sister seriously.

Playing along, Erin sighed. "What did he do?"

"He kissed me! Erin, it was so romantic! We were in the cafeteria, and right in front of everyone, he pulled me close to him and kissed me. I don't know if I did it right. If a guy sticks his tongue in your mouth, are you supposed to put your tongue in his mouth, too? At the same time?"

Erin looked back at her textbook. She couldn't answer Shannon's questions, so she clicked her pen and started writing again. "That's great, Shan."

Her sister sat there for another minute or so, as if waiting for an answer. Eventually, she left Erin to her books.

In the hospital, Erin slid her hand from Noah's. "What did your mom say?"

"Some of the names are out."

At this, Erin sunk back into the chair. Brighton, she remembered now. The woman whose husband had failed to catch her was Mrs. Brighton. Her daughter, Isabella, was in Shannon's grade. Noah hesitated. "They're saying five are confirmed dead now, another three in critical condition. It was a lot of seniors. I don't know who you're friends with."

"Just tell me."

He rattled off a list of names, all of which she recognized, but none of which she knew well. When he mentioned that Isabella Brighton was the only other non-senior "hit" besides her sister, Noah winced, then apologized for his insensitivity. He suggested that he

should leave before he said something else to upset her. Erin assured him it was okay, she wasn't offended, she wanted him to stay. Isabella was not just "hit," Erin thought. She was dead now. Whatever had happened in that cafeteria, they were all dying. Perhaps she should feel offended. Her sister had been shot, might be dying, might even at this very moment already be dead. Any minute now a doctor could emerge from the doors of the surgical wing and announce his condolences.

"Who else?" she asked.

He finished the list. There was another vaguely familiar name, but they would probably be more familiar to Shannon. They were Shannon's friends. Then he said a teacher had been killed: Miss Rhodes, Erin's A.P. Biology teacher.

Already sitting sideways in the chair, she leaned back against the armrest, not caring as the plastic dug into her spine. Noah didn't try to touch her or offer comfort this time. He held his lips tight. His eyes angled away from her face, toward the window overlooking the parking lot. "Miss Rhodes is dead?" Erin said. The words could have come from someone else.

Noah nodded.

"Have they released yet who did it?"

"Benjamin Finley. He committed suicide after he killed Miss Rhodes."

Out of all the names, besides Miss Rhodes, she knew Ben the most. He'd probably been in every honors class she'd ever taken, but he rarely spoke. Sometimes she would go to the library during lunch, and on the way she would pass the music room. He'd be in there, playing Bach or Chopin on one of the pianos. He was quite good, and supposedly he'd gotten into Juilliard.

"Ben did this?" She tried to picture the gangly boy with a mop of floppy blonde hair wielding a gun. The image was so discordant, it might have been funny. Once he'd helped her adjust the lens on her microscope when she'd been having trouble getting it to focus. She tried to remember a moment when he might have seemed off, or

violent, but she couldn't think of one.

At some point she crawled out of her own seat and into Noah's lap, where, sometime later, she awoke to the sound of her father's voice.

"Your sister is out of surgery," he said. He was looking at Noah. Erin sat up and stood up all in one motion. Noah rose more gracefully, his fingers brushing her palm.

"Is she ...?"

"She made it."

Erin closed her eyes and took a breath. Shannon was alive.

"They'll let us see her, one at a time." He looked down the corridor, at the floor, anywhere but her face. "You should come with me. Your friend can come too, if you like." He got ten paces down the hall before Erin and Noah followed.

Her mother was in the room when they arrived. Erin, Noah, and Erin's father stood in the hallway to wait. There was no glass panel, like there had been in I.C.U., and it seemed absurd to Erin that her sister, who rarely stayed still for anything, could be lying so still for so long. Even when Shannon had pneumonia last year, she'd shuffled back and forth from her bedroom to the sofa, antsy about lingering in one place. Despite all that she'd seen, Erin still had the sense that this was some sort of mistake, that when she opened the door, the person lying there would not be Shannon. According to her father, Shannon wouldn't be awake for a few more hours, until the anesthesia wore off. Then he told her there was something she needed to know before she went inside.

He had trouble getting the words to come out. He said things about the doctors trying hard, about the damage that was done to Shannon's spine, about swelling. He reiterated the doctor's tagline "wait and see," trying to instill hope in the phrase. As he talked she noticed that the tiles here were different, smaller, than the ones in the waiting room.

Her father shuffled his hands into his pockets, then took them

out again, and offered one to Noah. “Declan Brody,” he said, and Erin wondered why he was introducing himself by his full name. Maybe he, too, was on autopilot.

“Noah Coolidge.”

They were shaking hands when the door opened, just enough for Erin’s mother to slither out. She curled into her husband’s embrace, arching her eyebrows at Noah. Erin brushed against his side before she entered the room the same way her mother had exited it: like a snake, slipping into a crevice unknown.

It occurred to her that she shouldn’t have left Noah with her parents, and she worried for a moment that he might leave to avoid the awkwardness. But then she reminded herself that Noah could hold his own against the silence—or the non-silence, if that’s what met him. Two years ago, they had been partnered on an in-class photography assignment, and she had drawn from a hat the theme “silent picture shows.” For a half hour they had traipsed the hallways, photographing black and white stills of each other with overly expressive faces. All the while Noah talked in mock-1920s slang, calling her “doll” and “dame” and saying things like “ain’t that the cat’s meow.” He used a rough, radio-announcer voice that made her laugh.

At the memory Erin smiled too quickly, before she could stop herself. With Noah she felt all her emotions crisp and tangled, like weeds washed ashore and dried in the sun. But when she thought about Shannon, all she could feel was the details of the day slipping through her grasp, as if she were struggling to hold on to the specifics of a dream. Trying to banish Noah from her thoughts, Erin closed the door.

She had kept the handle turned so as to minimize the sound of the latch clicking into place, but the seal seemed to reverberate off the walls. Erin took a step into the room and heard the rubber of her flip-flop plunk against her heel. She stopped, swallowed. Even though it seemed as if she was being preposterously loud, Shannon, still sedated, had not woken.

A chair had been pulled up along the edge of Shannon's bed and Erin sat there, surprised that she could still feel her mother's shape on the cushion. She heard voices—Noah's voice—but she couldn't make out any of the words. In the hall there was also the sound of footsteps and carts being rolled over tile and in the room the hum of the air conditioner drowned out the low beep of Shannon's heart monitor.

Dwarfed by all the machinery, she looked younger, but otherwise normal, as if she might jump up at any moment and scuttle into Erin's room to deliver the latest news on her social life. Well, Erin thought, she could do that, instead.

"I played hooky today." The words sounded so trivial now. In the hallway, Erin heard a stifled chuckle, but it was low, her father's baritone. She guessed that Noah had managed to make her father smile, and for a moment, that made her smile, too.

The air conditioner cut off. Without it, the sound of the monitor was all Erin could hear. After a few seconds, she got up and went out of the room.

As her father went inside, Erin told her mother that she needed to take a walk, and then she motioned for Noah to follow her.

"How does she look?" he said.

"Like she's half-machine."

"Erin, I'm sorry, I didn't mean ..." He took hold of her hand. As they walked she thought about raising his arms above his head, pinning him against the wall. With a kiss, she could go back to the reservoir and slingshot herself off the cliff, plummet underwater. Two years ago he was just a boy who made her blush. Now he somehow made her forget that she was in the hospital where her sister lay crippled.

Noah's gaze went beyond her face, to something behind her. Releasing his hand, she turned around, saw the clock on wall. Quarter past three.

"It's late. You should go home."

"I can stay," he said. They kept walking. He touched her hand

again, and this time, without understanding why, she pulled away. Maybe it was because she knew that he would leave soon. He'd been wanting to go all night, and finally, she wanted the same. Something had changed, and although in time the comfort Noah brought her would morph into a horrible memento of this night, for now, she only wanted to be alone. When they reached the end of the corridor, she told him that she had to go back and be with her family. He didn't ask if he should come back with her, only nodded and left with a promise to call her the next day.

When she returned, her father was the one standing in the hallway. "Your mother is going to stay here overnight," he said. "I'm going to take you home. We both need to eat something, and try to get some sleep. Your friend, Noah?"

"He went home."

"At some point you're going to have to explain him to your mother. But not tonight, and not tomorrow."

They said nothing in the car on the ride home, nothing when they pulled into the garage. In the kitchen her father dropped two ice cubes into a glass and poured himself some bourbon. Erin went upstairs. She doubted she'd be able to sleep, so she walked into Shannon's room, and without bothering to turn on any lights, she curled into a half moon on Shannon's bed, wondering if her sister would have to be carried up there from now on.

Rolling onto her back, she noticed the glow-in-the-dark stars taped to the ceiling fan. Erin remembered when Shannon had picked them out as a reward for good grades. She must have been six or seven years old, and had been struggling with reading aloud. For weeks Erin had spent the hour before bedtime acting as her sister's audience while Shannon stumbled over pronouns and compound sentences. Now, the stars were the only decoration in the room that hadn't been swapped for something more adult.

Lying there, all Erin could think about were the things Shannon still didn't know. Who had died today. That she might not walk again. Noah.

The television was on downstairs. Erin slid off the bed and went to join her father.

He was watching Animal Planet. Some show about life on the savannah. When she sat down beside him, he put one arm over her shoulder, pulling her close. Eventually, he set his drink down.

Erin thought of Noah. He'd be home by now, maybe even asleep. She knew he would call tomorrow. It wasn't just one of those things people said. He would call because he liked her and because, despite the terrible turn the night had taken, he was not afraid to be a part of her life.

Beside her, her father slept. Tomorrow, they would sit with her mother in the hospital, waiting for her sister to wake. Beyond that, Erin didn't know. She listened to her father's heartbeat against her ear, and she stayed like this for a while, watching giraffes forage.

Depending Upon Whose Side You're On

*Living with John Lennon's
most personal Beatles song*

Colin Fleming

The first time I saw *Help!*, the Beatles' second film, I was

fifteen, home alone, in Ridgefield, Connecticut, in January, 1991.

The basement was my private lair, unsuccessful though I often was in keeping out intruders, like my two younger sisters. That's probably how it went for a lot of teenagers in a time when it was pretty uncommon to have a TV in your room. And so, master of the house, I welcomed the opportunity to be a Phantom of the Rec Room, the sole inhabitant of the furnished side of the basement where I curled up on an aged, calico pillow—it looked like a cross between a mushroom and a pin cushion Swift's Gulliver might have used—devouring bag upon bag of taco chips and salsa, a familiar pastime for which I conferred upon myself the sobriquet Sir Salsa.

I wasn't a complete layabout, though—I was a hockey player, which is why I was home on my own on that gray January day. You know those kinds of days, where the sky is all marmoreal and reminds you of a slab of borax. The rest of my family was up in Massachusetts, where we used to live. Someone was being confirmed—an event important enough for my family to make the three hour drive and put in an appearance, but not important enough to excuse me from hockey practice.

With the place to myself, my friend down the street was primed for an epic bacchanalia, which, I well knew, would involve drinking several sodas—orange if we were feeling especially crazy—and a game of knee hockey, which is just what it sounds like: scrambling on your knees with a little hockey stick, hitting a pink foam ball, the giant mushroom/pin cushion serving as one goal, and a turned-over table as the other.

But screw that. I had more crucial business to attend to. *Help!* was showing on a local TV station and there was no way I was going to let anything get in the way of me seeing that bad boy for the first time. *A Hard Day's Night*, the Beatles' first film, from '64, had not only changed my life the year before, it had changed the very person

I was. Or, perhaps I should say, it was the inception of the person I would go on to be, in all of my different iterations of myself. Though, to be honest, I was pretty certain that *Help!* was not a very good film. But there I was, thinking, as I unscrewed another jar of salsa, that manna, of a sort, would soon be at hand. After all, you only get one chance to see a film for the first time, and even if the film sucks, still, it was the Beatles.

The film is terrible, with the Beatles mucking about in a sort of James Bond pastiche, with the whole plot turning about the silly device of a special ring on Ringo's finger, but I didn't care. I wasn't watching a movie, I felt, so much as I was watching sounds. You can watch *A Hard Day's Night* for its casual and assured artistry—a blend of zonked-out surrealism, crisp cinematography, inspired lighting, and grab-you-and-get-you-going energy. The only reason to watch *Help!* is the music.

And so on a day when I still thought of myself as a burgeoning hockey star, the gourmand known as Sir Salsa, and a master *TV Guide* scanner all at once, the first phase of an epiphany that would later save me—as of this writing, anyhow—was put in motion. What no one tells you, whether you're fifteen or fifty, is that epiphanies can have parts to them, and the first part can be ignorance, with something happening to you, and lodging in you, that will fructify later when you need it more, when the stink of your hockey equipment bag isn't choking the air of your basement lair where you sit and hope that you're loads cooler than you really are.

“Help!” is a song that crashes into you, an explosion to the chest. Beginning with a full-throated shout, the transition from silence—that moment after dropping the needle or pressing play—is more pronounced with “Help!” than any other song that kicks off a Beatles record, even more so than the mega-chord that ushered in both *A Hard Day's Night* and a new cultural era. It's what I think of as a pouncer. You are sitting there, doing your thing, and boom, that sucker is upon you.

On “Help!” George Harrison’s guitar chords have a Wagnerian *oomph* to them. They feel physical, like sounds that can actually inflict some damage on you. People tend to associate Jimi Hendrix’s playing with channeled lighting, but Harrison’s fret work here strikes me as even more live-wire, like his guitar is channeling the electrical possibilities of the creation scene in James Whale’s classic film *Frankenstein*, where Boris Karloff’s monster lurches to life way back in 1931 in a sequence that seems destined to remain futuristic.

Beneath Harrison’s lead work, thrashing forward in an attempt to keep up—or else find a secure, stable center, a place of sonic respite—is Lennon’s rhythm guitar. And one scrappy rhythm guitar it is. I think of it as the song’s spirit, in a sense: overwhelmed, drowned out at times, it bashes onwards regardless.

Lennon’s guitar is also more percussive in its way than the drums, a neat trick. What you really hum along to—when you hum along to “Help!”—is that acoustic guitar work. Lennon was no technical master, but he could drive a song (have a listen to “Roll Over Beethoven,” from *With The Beatles*; the entire rhythmic chassis is that churning guitar pattern under Harrison’s more nimble—and practiced-to-death, no doubt—lead) and “Help!” needs to be driven. Or, one suspects, it would never have taken shape. Because we’re talking about something awfully bleak here, in a way, and, naturally, more effort is required to rip one’s self open, in effect, and say, “Bloody hell, this is what’s going on, this is the place I’m coming from.”

Befitting the jumble the film became, the title for *Help!* remained in considerable flux for a time. Director Richard Lester favored *Beatles 2*, which might have gotten the Beatles’ second cinematic venture confused with a classical opus at first glance. Ringo Starr, who had a knack for uttering bizarre phrases that stuck—“a hard day’s night” and “tomorrow never knows” were both Ringo coinages—suggested *Eight Arms to Hold You*, lending the slant of a Liverpoolian octopus’ garden, perhaps. Someone hit upon the idea of simply

going with the word for that most desperate of human calls—it was very direct, at least, though unintentionally suggested the film could use some aid, dear viewer—and Lennon and Paul McCartney went off to try and write the title track with only a title in hand.

But an inertia had no doubt by then corrupted that usual workmanlike approach both Lennon in particular and the Beatles in general had applied to the business of writing songs in the time since *A Hard Day's Night*. That album—the one perfect album the band ever waxed, and the lone Beatles LP to be entirely comprised of Lennon and McCartney originals—had been followed-up by *Beatles for Sale* in December 1964, the album that effectively began the band's interregnum period.

After the likes of “A Hard Day's Night,” “She Loves You,” “Please Please Me,” “I'll Be Back,” “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” “I Saw Her Standing There,” and “Can't Buy Me Love,” it's hard—not that one was disappointed, exactly, as the Beatles still had a knack for making the old sound entirely of the present—to get geared up over covers of Chuck Berry's “Rock and Roll Music”—which Lennon joked, in an interview segment on the BBC, went on for an age—and Buddy Holly's “Words of Love.” *Beatles for Sale* was patchwork. They knew it, you knew it, they knew you knew it, and you knew they knew you knew it.

The tempo—*molto allegro* beat group style—of Lennon's composition for the title “Help!” is enough to let you know things are changing. Fast songs tend not to express deep introspection or emotions we associate with desperation. The same can be said for songs featuring driving snare drum fills of the sort Ringo executes before every chorus. *Rat-tat-tat-tat!* Drumming in jackhammer mode.

Four years later, while recording “Don't Let Me Down,” Lennon asked Ringo to create this big, wild surge of noise—just before the chorus—to give him the courage to come screaming in. Some Lennon songs are more naked than others, and on that score, “Don't Let Me Down” is pretty damn exposed. “Help!” though, covers things up

a bit. Scale back the tempo, knock out the power drumming, quiet those *Frankenstein*-ian lead guitar lines from Harrison, take some of the rumble out of McCartney's bass, soften Lennon's chording, and you'd have a sort of Delta blues song by way of the river Mersey rather than the Mississippi, sung by a man who should have been anywhere but in the place that, say, Robert Johnson was when he was forced to try and fend off hellhounds.

With Lennon, we're talking about a rich guy at what the Beatles once described as the "Toppermost of the Poppermost." Fame as big as anyone had ever had. Which, for Lennon, didn't mean a jot in alleviating other, more internal concerns.

The lyric speaks of need. It is a song of desperation, with a sense of its own slant on posterity. The man who reaches an end, or thinks he has, stops thinking in terms of what he will do later, and begins to look back, framing everything against what has come before, as though making a final tally of his life.

This is not a good place to be in, but it's where the singer of "Help!" definitely is. Time becomes untethered in such a situation, dislocated from its standard conventions, its very rules. And so, the young man can talk as though he were an old man about being "so much younger than today," because what goes on in one's head, what one feels as far as pain goes, is not subject to the same rules that time imposes outside of the head, back in the real world, where only so much can happen to a given person at once.

The song's quietest moment occurs on the bridge, after we've exploded through a couple choruses. This is the track's offering of a respite, or as near as we're going to get, the sound of a fatigued singer, gathering himself for one final, violent push, much as Janis Joplin would gather herself, before announcing that she was "coming around for the last time" during her Monterey Pop performance of "Ball and Chain." But this is no enjoyable respite. There's a wheeziness to the vocals—an inhaler might prove useful, you sense—which have now slackened, some of their virtuosic intensity having been

replaced with a need to purge, to be purged, to just have done with everything, once and for all. A straight up declaration of need sounded, at this point, not so that pleas might be answered, but because there is nothing else to be done, no clever solutions are coming. And when there is no more left to be done, one does what I think of as the right thing—that thing you do because you should do it, not because it’s necessarily going to lead to anything—and hopes for the best.

When the racket resumes, you are pleased, relieved. The lone voice has rejoined its mates, and their enthusiasm, reflected by that frenetic ensemble playing, may buoy our man through. But we do not know that. More to the point, we know that he does not know that. That’s been the gist of what he’s been trying to say. And him not knowing is far worse than us not knowing, and leaves you considering how you’d feel, if his lot ever became yours.

My early encounters with “Help!” saw me listening to the song in what was mostly cheery company. That is, on compilation albums, starting with *Twenty Greatest Hits*, I think it was called. Generic. No esoteric selections, just those mega-sellers. The so-called Red Album, a compilation covering the years 1962-66 was a step up, as you got a better sampling of that most fecund period, with some album tracks amidst the radio hits.

It’s easy now, when we consider the Beatles’ music half a century on, to think of them as these manic hit-makers—sublime popsmiths—with records instantly recallable to memory following one after another, and another and another. But they were also—or primarily, you might even say—an in-your-face rock and roll band, a band that was tighter and more badass in their way than anyone else. Stones, Who, Yardbirds, Small Faces, you name it. With the Beatles, so much product was created that it became ever easier to think of the band as a cottage industry, maybe the biggest cottage industry, as far as entertainment acts go, and that’s an idea at odds with hell-for-leather rock and roll bad-assery. Which means, mostly, we could do with listening again as our lives change. Art and the self,

I have learned, may not ride together, but they do tend to serve as filling stops for each other.

I bopped my head to “Help!” as a kid in the back seat of the car as my family rolled along to the latest clam shack on those North Falmouth Cape Cod beaches, oblivious to whatever my parents were saying up front, or even to how my sisters were poking me, a futile pursuit when I was “in my Beatles”—I liked to put it that way, after reading, somewhere, the expression “in my cups,” and having no clue what it meant. These were the Sir Salsa years, so, yeah, I was a bit of a twat. But doing that head bop thing to “Help!” had the effect of making me feel like I was tapping my foot along to a piece of piano music being played at a funeral, despite the breakneck tempo. This was unnerving, but it wasn’t my funeral, near as I could tell, so I didn’t sweat it too much. On other occasions, those crashing guitar chords—I mean, Lennon was power-chording on an acoustic guitar—gave me the sense of making my way through some foreign locale, with customs I did not understand, and swaying to music I had mistaken as a soundtrack for something happier.

In these imaginings, a guy looking like Juan Valdez, that coffee-hawking fellow from TV who was dressed like he might have stepped out of Howard Hawks’ *Rio Bravo*, would put his hand on my arm, and say, “no, *señor*, no,” and then I’d fall back in with the proper modes of behavior.

“Help!” probably should not resonate with you as much at fifteen as it will later in life, although I would be the first to say that I wish it had never resonated with me in the way it eventually did. The song, no doubt, was useful during those adolescent years when one thinks one’s problems are gargantuan in scope, full of angst that could inform a Greek tragedy, or a Shakespearean one, anyway. Such feelings are what *Romeo and Juliet* is for. I remember raising my hand once in English class, getting called, and saying something like a total dickhead. Everyone stared at me, and, God help me, I thought of making a Beatles comment about how I used to bop my head to “Help!” before the Juan Valdez guy started coming along,

and did anyone have any insight about why that might have been, or any clue about the whole piano-funeral-music business? Turn the entire venture around, you see. But I just kept my mouth shut. And I wondered more about a song that I thought I would understand better later. That made me nervous.

Lennon's voice is especially flinty on "Help!" That gorgeous, leathery tone of 1963 and 1964—a leathery tone with honeyed overtones and melodic upticks on the ends of words that round each line into the next—is gone. It is no more. It will not do.

The bray that we hear on the bridge of "This Boy," the November '63 B-side to "I Want to Hold Your Hand," which features a quintessential Lennon scream—one that is executed sequentially, like it has parts to it—on the word "cry," is in evidence here, but "Help!" so far as the singing goes, is a screamless record.

The song is a scream, make no mistake, a howl, a plea, a prayer, and, most disturbingly, the sound of an epiphany: namely, that the howl, the plea, the prayer, may not be answered. Or, worse still, not heard. Or maybe heard and discounted. Supposing that we can, at times, inhabit a sort of hell on earth, hell becomes all the more hellish when you attempt to convince someone of your current residence, only to have your words blow past them, not gaining a foothold, like wrappers going down the street, because there is not enough overlap between your experience and any they have had. And what you don't realize when you're fifteen, that you may come to realize later (unless you get lucky, and life never puts this challenge to you), is that few things, if anything, are harder to ask for than help.

You are not just asking for something. We ask for things every day. Milk in our coffee, more pay at work, better table manners from the kids, a blow job at night. But when you ask for help, the kind of help that Lennon is singing about in this crashing, electric blast of a song that sounds louder than it actually is, you are saying: *I am not up to this. I thought I was, but I'm not. I have failed to find a solution on*

my own. My life, should it ever become entirely my own life again, now requires the presence and assistance of a person who is not me. Will you help me make my life mine again? I am sorry to ask so much of you.

That is not a fun thing to have to say. Some of us, no doubt, are far better at saying it than others. Others of us are much worse. I would have thought, after so many years of listening to this John Lennon composition, thinking about it, thinking about why it made me so uneasy, and about why the Juan Valdez guy had to step forward in my imagination so many times to stop my foot tapping, that I'd have been up for the challenge. Alas, I would have been way wrong.

I called them train days. They didn't happen often, but I'd know, very early in the morning, when one was upon me.

Having lost the most important person in my life—a person who I had been—without any explanation, nor, as it would turn out, any closure that comes with explanation, I spent a lot of time alone.

One of the reasons I spent a lot of time alone was because—and I could hardly blame people—I had become that guy whose pain was so encompassing that you feared some of it would rub off on you if you stayed too long in his miasma. You had tried to say things, and you had said things, but you knew, at the same time, nothing could cut into that pain, and you were glad, frankly, that it was not yours, but you did not enjoy the guilt that realization made you feel. Maybe time could make a dent in the pain, but time works best in these matters when answers are available, as though answers are the healing process's equivalent of starting blocks. Sans starting blocks, there is nothing to push off of, firm ground turns to quick sand, and one finds one's self ensnared in a boggy spot that might as well be chock full of clocks—it all goes a bit Dali-esque—for all of their failures to do what clocks should do and tick off the seconds of some kind of progress being made. In these situations, it all goes into the soup.

At thirty-six, trying to keep myself going, trying to keep myself from putting myself in front of a train, I had both a need to listen to “Help!” and to avoid “Help!”

I had a little bag. A tote bag. From a place I used to go—a farm on the North Shore of Boston—with the person who defined, in many ways, the person I had become, whom I no longer knew.

I had a bottle of water in the tote bag. Some granola bars. It was a biodegradable tote bag. I made sure of that. Because I knew I’d be leaving it in the woods, and, as someone who likes the woods, I didn’t want to litter. I figured I’d take the train up to Gloucester, Massachusetts, where there was a good stretch of forest and cover. You could walk out into the sticks, sit there with some food and water to sustain you through the decision-making process—I determined I’d have to sort of persuade myself to go through with it—and then walk back out with enough stuff to hide behind and obscure your purpose such that when you made your dash in front of the oncoming train, it’d be too late for the conductor to do anything about it. Nor could he blame himself later. That was also important to me.

There is a demo version of “Help!” that Beatles fans like to argue over. It’s just Lennon at the piano, and it lasts less than a minute. The common argument centers on whether it’s from 1965 or from later in Lennon’s career and after the Beatles’ career: a man with a need to revisit his own previous—but prior—hell on earth. You can listen to the cut on YouTube. It’s sparse, and has more in common with a Skip James piano blues than a pop nugget from Liverpool.

Lennon had a curious relationship with his own song. The Beatles performed it throughout their 1965 concerts and on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and on *Blackpool Night Out*, which was perhaps their most spirited TV appearance. Invariably, he’d screw up the words. Like, every time. You have to wonder about something like that. Here’s this guy’s most personal song to date, by his own admission, something he had lived and knew, and yet, the lyrics never came out right.

On the August 1 Blackpool date, the penultimate number is Paul McCartney's "Yesterday," a song that, in spirit, at least, was its own form of blues, even though its balladic trappings—and string section—obscure that sensibility, somewhat. The song is, on the surface, about the loss of McCartney's mother, but it's grander than that: it too expresses that notion of a young man, made emotionally old before his time, looking back on an earlier, happier self.

During my train days, I also struggled with "Yesterday." The Beatles had always been the great constant, and comfort, in my life. Well, almost always. Sometimes, there were troughs to go with the crests. But I did not wish to have the Beatles wrested from me, as everything had been wrested from me. My house, my life, my piece of mind, my spouse, my best friend, my once happy memories, my health, my ability to trust anyone.

After his mother died, in September 1958, Lennon became an angry drunk, super aggressive and violent, akin to that terrified dog who would bite you first rather than assess your intentions, a kick or kindness. As I packed, emptied, and repacked my pathetic biodegradable tote bag, from a farm which doubled as a symbol for a lack of pain I never thought I'd know again, I realized that I was a version of that dog myself.

I could not listen to the *Help!* album, but for some reason, I could listen to a bootleg of the Blackpool gig. I didn't know why, for a while. I didn't know why it was that version of "Help!" that I could tolerate, that I could find instructive.

McCartney concludes the definitive live version of "Yesterday"—his performance is a solo turn, with just him on the stage—and you are conscious of having seen something very intimate, something less like live rock and roll and more like an almost healing form of emotional voyeurism. Lennon then walks back to his microphone without the most assured of gaits. He does look heavy, and he doesn't wear his newfound weight well. He cracks a joke by saying, "Thank you, Ringo, that was just wonderful." A capable joke, but something of a diffuser—

of tension, maybe of expectation. An outburst of teenybopper *ooing* and *ahhing* follows. It's awkward, like, now is not the time for this. Lennon becomes somewhat confrontational, but with a smirk.

"This is our latest record," he begins, before pausing to look down at his Rickenbacker guitar. He does a violent little impromptu jig which was a defense mechanism—and a nasty one at that—stemming from how uncomfortable crippled kids would make him at Beatles meet-and-greets. This is awkward. It is also time to get on with things. "Or our latest electronic noise, depending upon whose side you're on," he concludes. You pick a side. You aim to pick the right side. Maybe you don't give a rat's ass and you just end up on a side. Maybe, more than anything, you hope people are on your side. Or, maybe, more than that, you hope you yourself are on your own side, and for the right reasons.

The version of "Help!" that follows is one I tried to watch whenever I woke up and felt like a train day had started. Each time, I'd stop at the point Lennon starts to cock up the lyric, feeling as though I had heard enough. It was like the sacred, that which must not be corrupted—our need for assistance from our fellow man—had been intruded upon by the profane, this useless slurring in the middle of something that was as human as human can be, and so, in a sense divine. But that's like what everything had become for me. Those North Falmouth Cape Cod memories had been vitiated—raped—and there was the hollowing pain of every day, which meant my present was a mess, my future looked anywhere from bleak to nonexistent, and now even the happier portions of my past had come undone.

I did make it as far as those Gloucester woods, but obviously I made it back from them as well. I sat there for a while. Couldn't eat any of the granola bars, because I knew I'd throw them up. Which shouldn't have mattered, as I threw up most days, and the blood vessels in my face seemed to be perpetually exploded so that I often had this lattice-work of red lines across both of my cheeks. I saw a turkey. Got right up next to me. That was nice.

But in the end, I came home, and I listened, over and over again, to that plaintive piano version of “Help!” which I am certain is older Lennon looking back on younger Lennon during the latter’s crisis of the soul. He would not have had train days, but the singer of “Help!”—as a character, or the actual man—would have known what I meant.

I reached out to my friend John, who lives in D.C. I told him I was having a hard time keeping myself going. I thought I was being all heroic, and doing what was so hard to do: namely, asking for help. That wasn’t easy for me. It wasn’t easy needing to be phoned and babied through every day of my life, such as it was.

There was one person who was harder than any other person to ask for help, and that person was also the person who, it seemed, was least suited to give it, something I knew better than anyone, considering it was me.

My favorite scene in *Help!* shows the Beatles in the studio, recording “You’re Going to Lose that Girl,” a sort of “She Loves You” lite, and a song I probably should have heeded as especially melodic life advice, back then.

It’s a fictional recording session, of course, not some documentary look-in. And, like “She Loves You,” this is what you might term one of the band’s warning songs, told from the perspective of a guy giving advice to his lovelorn buddy. Only, unlike with “She Loves You,” which is mostly well-intentioned—the idea of, “hey, mate, straighten up or she’s going to leave you”—this one is a touch more rapacious. As in, “ha, keep screwing this up, kid, and I am going to be all over your girl.”

The colors seem to be toned down in this particular sequence, with the soft recording studio lighting providing a muted aspect to a film that otherwise shouts its head off at you. Cigarette smoke dominates the *mise-en-scène*, creating this velvety, plush—but sooty—effect, like the haze from the TV might make its way into the

room where you're sitting and gobble up your taco chips and salsa, like something out of John Carpenter's *The Fog*.

Lennon sings the lead in "You're Going to Lose that Girl" and his voice is different than it was in '64, when *A Hard Day's Night* came out. The perfect rock and roll voice, which is what you get with Lennon from '63-'64, has become more tart, less wide-eyed, you might say, and more astringent, as though a certain impurity has entered into the mix, one that is jostling for a place of its own within the familiar frame of love and girls and the usual stuff that goes along with all of that.

My first thought when I heard "You're Going to Lose that Girl" that initial time was: What the hell has happened? I didn't mind the downbeat feel. I rather liked it, actually, although I didn't know why. Lennon was always game for warning people in songs, in this pretty threatening way, like he couldn't wait to do it, and was just looking for the latest opportunity. Normally he—or the protagonist he was portraying—was a total dick with these warnings, telling you, basically, to fuck off and get away from his woman.

"You're Going to Lose that Girl" was darker. It was personal in a way I'd never heard any song be personal before. I don't mean because of that surfeit of aggression. Sure, I liked that. At fifteen you like that sort of thing. You think you're hard. You think about how you'd probably look good in sunglasses and that look would reveal inner, deeper things about you, and the girl you were too scared to ask to dance would finally start to understand you and what she'd been missing. You start to think about what your own eventual adult world will be like when you've sliced the mooring lines and finally committed to shipping out for something bigger, better, more you.

None of those things, of course, will happen, and you probably know that, on some level, even when you're a fifteen-year-old basement denizen, but that's not the point. The point is that yours will be a malleable future, and the final form will be of your choosing, and your daydreaming is enough to suggest a kernel of this enormous

truth that will power you through the next few years, at least. That's how you think at that age, because you are in no position to realize, let alone comprehend, how any time you think you've turned into one thing, you're busy turning into another. Others. All at once.

But Lennon seemed to offer some control, a way to manage these internal forces and hopes and doubts. In "You're Going to Lose that Girl," control comes in the form of advice which says, in effect, change your conduct, or else you're going to find that your girl is done and gone, and guys like me—the baddies—well, we're out there waiting for your moment of weakness. We're like a lot of things in life that way. Don't learn it the hard way, dude.

Harrison's voice is more pronounced than is usual for him in the backing vocals, which have a lovely lilt, as though they've come straight from the pages of a volume of Irish poetry. There's a madrigal aspect here as well, the feeling that this is holy advice, that we are in on a compact, delivered in a quiet, unassuming way, with all of the bristle coming courtesy of the song's undercurrent of "this will happen if that doesn't."

Lennon had evolved as a singer to such a degree that his lead vocal is informed by the backing vocal, and he builds various climatic exhortations off the series of vocal waves coming from behind him, so that we end up with a soundscape akin to a lead orator and Greek chorus engaged in counterpoint.

The blues is at play here as well, but the singing is so communal that it's hard to imagine Delta luminaries like Robert Johnson, Charlie Patton, or Son House, so accustomed to bearing their burdens alone, finding anything to drink in. Maybe, hearing "You're Going to Lose that Girl" in some dive bar in some corner of the afterlife, they'd be moved to try to compose some vocal polyphony of their own before returning to those highly individualized, forlorn laments, the fallback stuff for when life leaves you little opportunity to fall back on anything.

Those artists would later inform my life as well, in ways I did

not know were possible. But even still, I realized that their blues, that killer, “it-is-two-in-the-a.m.-I-am-all-alone-I-see-no-hope-Oh-God-please-finish-me” blues, was not as deep—nor as effective—as Lennon’s. Effective as what? Panacea? No. Not nearly. Comfort? Hardly. Cautionary tale? Nope—Lennon’s blues, his ’65 variety, was more than that. Effective at getting you to do something you might be helpless to do on your own.

The Death Row Dream

Rachel Hadas

This latest iteration: I was given
an index card on which to write last thoughts.
But what to write, and to whom to write it?
There were no chairs. We three in a dim hall,
mini-skirted, leaned against the wall.
Heavy maroon curtains barely stirred.
Hours passed. No resolution.
And woke back into human time, its mercy,
its stern redistribution.

The following individuals have supported the *New Haven*

Review through generous donations. We wish to thank them for their confidence and support in our effort to represent the talents of writers from the Greater New Haven area and across the globe. The *New Haven Review* is a community-inspired effort and depends for its success on readers, writers, subscribers, donors, interns, volunteers, and a whole assembly of individuals of good will. We wish we could thank all of them right here, right now. But for the moment, we shall let tradition dictate the matter and offer our deepest thanks to our individual donors:

Bruce Tulgan and Debby Applegate

Maureen Auger

Carl Blumenthal

Frank Bruckmann and Muffy Pendergast

Pang-Mei Chang

Gloria Cohen

Cynthia Cross

Carol Desmond

David Fitzpatrick

Maureen Gaffney

Jack Hughes and Patricia Dillon

Tim and Jaeme Kane

Ruth Lambert and Henry Harrison

Sharen McKay

Benjamin Meyer

M. Carol Mihalik

Thomas Mikelson

Jeff Mock and Margot Schilpp

Dona Munker

Troy and Zoe Resch

James and Jean Silk

Brian and Stephanie Slattery

Sean Smith and Susan Hyde

Ben Solnit

Audrey Solnit

Willard Spiegelman

Patricia Thurston

Edward Tivnan

Jonathan Vogel

If you've missed the *Southwest Review*
in the past few years, you've also missed:

John Ashbery • Stanislaw Baranczak • John Barth • David
Bromwich • Rosellen Brown • Hortense Calisher • Andrei
Codrescu • Annie Dillard • Millicent Dillon • Tom Disch •
Rita Dove • Margaret Drabble • Alice Fulton • Angelica
Garnett • William Gass • Dana Gioia • Albert Goldbarth •
Debora Greger • Eamon Grennan • Allan Gurganus •
Rachel Hadas • Vicki Hearne • Shelby Hearon • Rolando
Hinojosa • Edward Hirsch • Alice Hoffman • John Hollander •
Michael Holroyd • Garrett Kaoru Hongo • Galway Kinnell •
Mary Kinzie • Georgina Kleege • Ursula Le Guin •
David Leavitt • David Lehman • Wendy Lesser • William
Logan • Alison Lurie • J. D. McClatchy • Alice Mattison •
Arthur Miller • Iris Murdoch • Joyce Carol Oates • Grace
Paley • Molly Peacock • Robert Pinsky • Reynolds Price •
Adrienne Rich • Mary Jo Salter • Jim Shepard • Charles
Simic • Lee Smith • Elizabeth Spires • Helen Vendler • David
Wagoner • William Weaver • Edmund White • Charles Wright

Don't miss it, or them, any longer.

Subscribe now.

SOUTHWEST REVIEW

Southern Methodist University, P.O. Box 750374,
Dallas, Texas 75275-0374, (214) 768-1037

www.smu.edu/southwestreview

Sue D. Burton is a physician assistant specializing in women's health care. Her poetry has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Water~Stone Review*, and on *Verse Daily*, forthcoming in *Shenandoah*.

Maxwell Clark is the winner of the 2013 SLS Arkadii Dragomoshchenko Award for innovative poetry, as judged by Charles Bernstein.

Leon de Kock is the author of three volumes of poetry (*Bloodsong, gone to the edges*, and *Bodyhood*), a novel (*Bad Sex*), and several works of literary translation. He is the compiler of several collections of South African writing and criticism and is currently professor of English at the University of Stellenbosch near Cape Town.

Nick DePascal's first book, *Before You Become Improbable*, is forthcoming from West End Press. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Narrative*, *The Laurel Review*, *Interruption*, *Superstition Review*, *RHINO*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Aesthetix*, and more. He teaches at the University of New Mexico.

Colin Fleming writes for *Sports Illustrated*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The Atlantic*, and publishes fiction with *Black Clock*, the *VQR*, and *Boulevard*. He also contributes to NPR's Weekend Edition. His third book, *The Anglerfish Comedy Troupe: Stories from the Abyss*, is forthcoming in spring 2015.

Benjamin Goodney holds two degrees in philosophy and resides along the Orlando–Minneapolis corridor. He freelances and designs books, and edits for *Storm Cellar*. Recent work appears in *Guernica*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Oxford Magazine*, and *Confrontation*, and is forthcoming in *Hotel Amerika*.

Mark Gosztyla's poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *The Associative Press*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Noctua Review*, and *Tuesday; An Art Project*. He has an MFA from the University of New Hampshire and currently teaches poetry at Tufts University. Mark lives in New Haven with his wife, daughter, and hound-dog.

Rachel Hadas is Board of Governors Professor of English at the Newark campus of Rutgers University, where she has taught for many years. Her most recent book of poetry, *The Golden Road*, was published in 2012. A new collection, *Questions in the Vestibule*, is in preparation.

Katarzyna Jerzak is the co-author, with the French director and artist Woodkid (Yoann Lemoine), of *The Golden Age*, a meditation on the loss of childhood that accompanies Woodkid's musical album. She teaches American literature in Europe.

Douglas W. Milliken is the author of the novel *To Sleep as Animals* and the codex *White Horses*. Other work appears in *McSweeney's*, *Slice*, and the *Believer*. "James Taylor vs. the King" was written as part of a fellowship with the Hewnooks Artists Colony.

E.A. Neeves earned her MFA from Emerson College. Her fiction has been published in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Salamander*, *Midwest Literary Magazine*, and other journals. Currently she is working on both a collection of linked short stories and a novel.

Genevieve Valentine is the author of *Mechanique: A Tale of the Circus Tresaulti* and *The Girls at the Kingfisher Club*. Her short fiction has appeared in *Clarkesworld*, *Strange Horizons*, *Journal of Mythic Arts*, *Lightspeed*, and others. Nonfiction and reviews have appeared at NPR.org, The AV Club, io9.com, and *LA Review of Books*.

Alexis Zanghi lives and writes in New Haven and Queens. Her writing has appeared in the *New Haven Advocate*, the *Washington Spectator*, and elsewhere. She is a contributor to *Savoring Gotham*, forthcoming from Oxford. The names and some details of people and places in her piece have been changed.

