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WHAT IS CLERESTORY?

Clerestory Journal of the Arts is a literary and arts magazine that curates submissions from undergraduate students at Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design. By offering students an opportunity for publication, Clerestory hopes to inspire young artists to continue their creative pursuits, help maintain a high bar of quality for the arts at both campuses, stimulate conversation about student work throughout each school and beyond, and foster engagement between student artists and the wider community.

This semester, we are continuing to test a subscription-based distribution. To opt in (free of charge!) please provide your name, mailbox number (Brown or RISD) and graduation year at clerestoryarts.com/subscribe.

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The editorial boards of Clerestory select pieces to be published through a blind democratic process over a period of several weeks each semester.

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We are always looking for engaged staff members. E-mail us at submit@clerestoryarts.com for more information about how to get involved with our next issue.

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JULIA

SNIPKINS

NOW, SHE IS A
TIME KEEPER

There is something lacking, the way
Bisabuela sinks into her mattress

my familiar wisp, a whiteness I can
see my fingers through. She is the kind

of translucent that hugs window frame in
winter, a waxing melancholy, releasing

histories into the bed frame so that Cuba
is only a photograph propped on the bookshelf,

a husband in abstract, children bring flowers
but names are for the walking folk and she

tumbles into atrophy, our generations overlap
in uncomfortable silence. Sickness would be

success now, the fragrance of interaction
with something other than a poorly stuccoed ceiling

or the woman lying in the corner bed, mind plagued
over into loose ends. Her chronology was not intended

GRANDMOTHER LEARNS SPANISH

to fall to pieces this way, a sharp forgetting—
in the lucid moments she cries for fluency—my

language now the only competition with her
pauses. There is a slowing down about the air

she breathes, in translation I can read it
though I am learning still.

I.

Tight black curls my grandmother is
a moth against the turquoise buildings,

white linen for another cuban afternoon
she is queen of the *calle* though she

is not yet nine. She moves in hops to
and from the gate behind which

the maid watches from a brown eye, as
she sweeps the courtyard *tish tish tish*,

until grandmother's mother finishes
bridge and sits in the shade of a palm

with her *Washington Post*, watching
her smallest american jump rope in

the road. On Wednesdays and Fridays
Batista comes in a dark black car, pulling

up to apartment building on the corner
with the metal flowers my grandmother

wishes she could pluck, his guards—
there are two—decorate the archway,

smoking cheap cigarettes while their
employer thumps away with the woman

grandmother has come to call the
“Singing Lady from the Second Floor”

when her mother is not listening. It is
often an hour, sometimes two, before

the man emerges from upstairs, calling
his men to flank back around him, out

of the warm plump arms of his *amante*
and back into a car. Yet in the hours

between, while music rings from the
second floor, my grandmother learns

the word for babe, for cigarette, how to
order a beer, ask for water, twisting her

consonants into fiery commands, passing
her father’s own stilted spanish,

growing into her adopted tongue,
the lasting memento of her island time.

II.

In February she visits the old neighborhood,
it’s been too long, an embargo on,

but she lets the taxi driver laugh at her
crazy while she runs up the turquoise street,

peeking behind closed gates and into
courtyards, searching for the one with the fountain

and the palms. When she finds it her camera
won’t turn on so she just looks, sees her mother in

a folding chair, hears the BBC over the radio
that brought her parents back each night into

a language that they could swallow fast, while
she wrote slow sentences on the back of

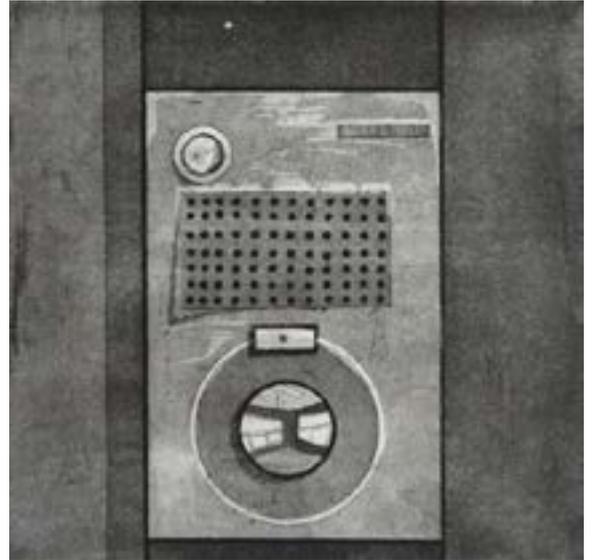
postcards, weaving out missives in
foreign grammar, ordering up a cigar,

tequila, a girl, if just for the afternoon.

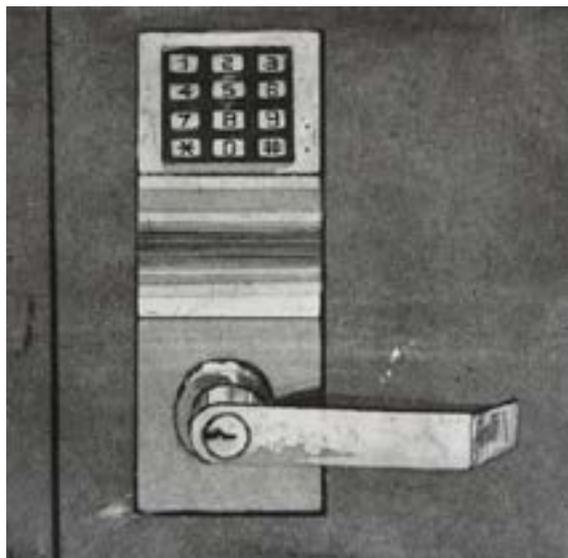
CONTROL

ELISE

MORTENSEN







JOE

FALLER

ON SWEARING

On Christmas

Once upon a time, an eleven-year old boy's hardworking middle-class immigrant father bought his wife a toothbrush for Christmas.

On toothbrushes

The Oral B Professional Care SmartSeries 5000 Electronic Toothbrush is the pinnacle of dental hygienic perfection, featuring the cutting edge of Oral B's advanced cleaning technology for ultimate plaque removal. With 40,000 pulsations and 8,800 oscillations per

minutes, the magnificent tool's deep clean mode can remove up to 99.7% of plaque from hard to reach places to offer outstanding whitening and polishing in just three weeks*!!!

On the asterisk

Warning, product may take longer than three weeks to whiten without proper use. As compensation, however, using this product as an anniversary present can ruin your marriage much much faster than expected.

On anniversaries

For clueless couples, AskMen.com published a list of shiny, expensive presents that were sure to "make her say 'Yes!' all over again." The list was topped with beautiful Michael Kors and Kate Spade watches, Coach and Prada handbags and clutches, earrings forged into pearl-splattered hearts and "love-knots," dozens of items that would be sure to make her heart swell as large as the price tag.

Unfortunately for my father on his twenty-fifth anniversary Christmas, electronic toothbrushes were not on the list.

On disrespecting my parents

I've only sworn once at my parents, although my friends will tell you I swear a lot; not too much, but enough to be more than necessary. What I meant to say: "Fuck you mom, fuck you

dad, and fuck you're 25th-silver anniversary-special Christmas present isn't good enough bullshit. You're gonna split up your family and your four kids because of this?" What I actually said: "Goddamn toothbrush." I guess it had the same effect though since I stormed out in silence.

On storming out

Note to all, storming out only works if you actually leave. A tweenage boy with tears in his eyes throwing a tantrum as he stomps away from the kitchen table down the fourteen steps to his room in the basement and slams his door and locks it since it's the only bedroom door in the house that locks does not qualify as storming out. You will look like a fool to everyone except your little brother. If you want to leave a mark, you have to swear a lot to show them how rebellious you are just like my sister Veronica did when my parents told her to break up with her boyfriend.

On Veronica

Veronica was the name of the woman who washed the face of Jesus while he carried the cross, hence the irony when Veronica my older sister, the true first-born of the family, got her own face washed out with soap after swearing for the first time. With the memory of every purgatory-filled sud on her tongue, she watched wide-eyed as the bad word hung in the air between my mouth and their ears like a lonely soap bubble.

On soap

Whenever we open a new bar of soap for the kitchen sink, my mom describes the little soap shop in tiny town of Lucban where she would go every week on Saturday, how she knew the owners by name, how they would give her special bargains. She tells us about bringing that soap along with her family's laundry by the 50-pound wooden bucketful to the river every day and sudsing it up while she chatted with the other women in the village, later hanging it up to dry, leaving one older swatch of fabric aside to scrub the floors and dishes in the house with before making dinner, like some sort of Filipino Cinderella.

My father, who also grew up in tiny Lucban, didn't even know where the soap shop was.

On Cinderella

My mother always taught me growing up that women, while they work cooking and cleaning to pay the bills, have dreams of being princesses, and as a gentleman, I should do everything I can to make them feel like royalty, just like the prince in the stories.

Apparently these would-be princesses wouldn't have stuck with their prince for long if he brought them four children's worth of bills and a mortgage and a stressful life where they'd have to work fulltime as a princess and a nurse and a teacher and still raise the royal family and clean the castle and then topped it all

off with the Oral B Professional Care SmartSeries 5000 Electronic Toothbrush.

On princes

In the fairy tales, when the first-born son of royalty, the crown prince, gets married, he becomes the king, and inherits all the land from his father. Because he is the one meant to inherit everything that his father has worked for, he is pampered, doted on, favored above all else. So long as he does not disrespect the king, he can do almost whatever he wants without punishment. Because of this, it's easy for the prince to get spoiled, overambitious, cocky, the exact qualities that I, if I were king, wouldn't want in my son.

When the crown prince gets married, the second, third, fourth, etc. born princes then must find another kingdom without a crown prince and marry the princess. These princes then become king and inherit all the land from their new father-in-laws, bearing the responsibility of caring and ruling over the subjects.

There is no such thing as a crown princess.

On responsibility

It's an interesting feeling being told at age eight that you need to be a man and look after your teenage older sister who's supposed to be "dainty" and "delicate" but can still pin you down and drop a loogie in your face. It's interesting to find that when

your father isn't around, you are to be the man of the house, the crown prince, the Lion King at an age when you still cry when Mufasa falls.

On the Lion King

Simba, practically from the day of his birth, was trained by his father so that someday he could rule wisely and justly over everything that the light touched after Mufasa joined the Great Circle of Life. It's hardly a surprise that a child suddenly expected to protect thousands of creatures, meriting out punishment and reward, would run away, run away and never come back.

On punishment

Before he even knew how to read, my father had learned everything about cracking a belt: what material made the loudest sound, which hand to hold the buckle in, how to make the size of the loop just right so the two sides of the belt would fly together in a shattering snap that could echo all the way throughout the house to warn any other rebellious children.

My father was the second son of seven.

On rebellion

In Psychology 220, my professor taught us about normative theory and descriptive theory.

Normative theory is fact, natural law, morality. It's what you know you should do and think and say, or more importantly what your parents think you should know you should do and think and say.

Descriptive theory is the devil whispering in your ear, the I-know-this-is-wrong-but-I'll-do-it-anyways, screw-the-kids-you-got-me-a-toothbrush, swear-at-your-parents reasoning that is the flavor of life. Take that pure, white, normative rhyme and reason and dump it into a pot filled 1/3 of the way with water. Boil until water is mostly gone. Add diced onions and garlic. Stir in equal parts soy sauce and vinegar, and then season to taste using salt and sugar and your father's "secret ingredient", which is really just MSG that he didn't want the family knowing they were eating while your mom was on the big anti-MSG campaign. Simmer for 4 hours. And while the stew is simmering, go out and do whatever the hell you want. Screw normative theory.

As OneRepublic taught, "I feel something so right, doing the [descriptive] thing."

On teaching

A human child falls somewhere in between a shaved dog and a bland parrot: Bald, poop-filled, and, at the moment, essentially useless besides being able to repeat back what you say and do when you think no one is listening. We learn what to do by what is done to us.

On learning

Theodore Faller is my dad's older brother. When their side of the family gets together on the holidays, he's the only one of the seven of them who never learned how to crack a belt, though neither I, nor any of my cousins, can do it.

On holidays

A friend of mine once tried to convince me that living with divorced parents was great because he got two of everything: two Christmases, two birthdays, two lives. No, I told him. It's like having half a sandwich now, and then the other half two weeks later only on the weekends. And who wants a two week old, half eaten sandwich?

His tears told me that he agreed.

On crying

A friend once told me she wouldn't cry in front of someone, even in front of her parents.

Odd, I said. I especially wouldn't cry in front of my parents, just like my father and all his brothers before me and their father and his brothers before them.

What a difference a word makes.

On words

According to Dr. Anna Wierzbicka, a swear is a word so powerful that it can express emotions that are so intense that the speaker can't or won't express them with conventional language. Swearing is like pressing the dial on top of the pressure cooker, letting the steam and anger and sadness fly out before we explode or, lord forbid, cry. It's associated with crassness and unsophistication, but really it should share a pedestal with the high-brow music and art.

On music

"There was a time I used to look into my father's eyes. In a happy home, I was a king; I had a gold throne." – Swedish House Mafia, "Don't You Worry Child" 2011.

On art

In elementary school, one of our assignments in art class for parent-teacher conferences was to draw ourselves being good and behaving the way our parents wanted us to behave.

I drew myself sitting on a throne.

On being the favorite child

Have you ever sat on a gold throne? I don't think my siblings ever have either.

On The Prodigal Son

Jesus said: Once upon a time there was a man with two sons. The oldest one worked hard all day long. The other one partied and then ran away, probably with some lady friends, and then came back dirty and poor when he ran out of money and alcohol. The Father threw a party when the youngest son returned, and of course the oldest son was pissed off, because he worked hard and never got anything in return. The Father told the oldest son that he must think more with love and generosity than law and merit.

What Jesus didn't say: After the father died, the oldest son got all of the inheritance anyways and sent the prodigal son away again as a beggar, never to see him again.

On divorce

[dih-VOHRS] – 1. n. the complete separation between two people or things 2. v. to break the marriage contract between oneself and (one's spouse) by divorce. (Note: This process has an even greater effect on those cultures such as Filipinos from a tiny town called Lucban, where family is valued over everything.)

Eg: After thinking about how much more family means than a goddamn toothbrush, my parents never actually did get divorced.

On swearing

After I came back up, rather than cracking a belt and washing my mouth out with soap, my mother, her fight interrupted by my outburst, asked if I enjoyed swearing.

I thought about the correct, normative answer. I thought about the lie for forgiveness that was already slithering off the tip of my tongue that would re-solidify my parents' perfect snapshot of their obedient crown prince. I thought about the crown prince or princess I would someday have and saw the lines of the graphite-sketches picture of inherited responsibilities and expectations I would trap my child in already darkening.

"Yeah, I guess I do," I said.

And I erased that picture.

JENNIFER

OVI

HOW ARE YOU?







EMILY

NNS

THE FUNERAL

On the Day of the Dead they line their doorsteps with bright flowers and bread and soup and other warm offerings to help the spirits find their way back home. But it is not Mexico or October; it is a neighborhood with white and peach and tan-colored houses situated near russet hills and an abandoned nuclear testing site. It is July, and the sun churns the sky, beats the pavement until the asphalt smells like metal. When I look out the window this morning all sorts of bouquets, small rags of carnation pink and hydrangea orange, line the sidewalks. Wooden bowls filled with rice and stews crawl up our doorsteps.

The street is quiet as usual when I emerge from the door, but already the prickly fuzziness of July heat drapes itself over me. I watch Mrs. Houton glance quizzically at the flowers and candles and food as she grasps the sprinkler in her hand, ready to water and prune the roses as she does every morning. Her gaze follows trails of flowers funneling past our culdesac and perhaps onto the next one. They head far towards the east, where the light spills over the withered hills and tints the bouquets rusted white. Thinking better of it, she slips off her gardening gloves and deftly back into her house.

The offerings wait in patient expectation. I wonder how the flowers do not dry and the food does not rot in the sweltering heat. Throughout the day my neighbors take care not step on the delicate stamens, the pale, cream-colored china, the orange wax of fragrant candles. Josh plays outside, reaches to play with the offerings, and I tell him do not touch.

I say all in this in retrospect, of course, having had no idea the offerings were offerings of any sort until early that next morning, when in the 4 o'clock darkness I hear music drift up the street. Chants maybe, from an instrument half in-between strings and vocal chords. Sounding chaotic, like an orchestra warming up in dissonance before it begins to play, or floodwaters, beating methodically at the head of concrete dam. By the time morning blue breaches the sky, the walls have given.

At first a slow and steady flow. The people in their green, flowing robes, families in colorfully embroidered head-

dresses. Some just in white t-shirts and torn jeans, vermilion powder streaking their faces. Smell metal crosses prodding the air. Footsteps weighted with sorrow. A few men had instruments, at least as far as I could tell they were instruments, those wooden contraptions that they breathed into with their lips. The rest chanted, like the evening vespers that would drift out the windows of the neighborhood church, hallowed by the golden haze, in languages that could only ever sound like music to my parched ears.

A cool breeze nudged at their backs, ruffled the ends of their loose clothes so they marched like wheat yielding in the wind. Pushing the heat outwards; the sidewalks still burned my feet, but now the asphalt rested, cool and pleasing to the touch. Mr. Grimes drew his blinds in half-derision around 11:00; the neighbors soon followed suit, shut themselves in their houses, peeked out of the cracks in the blinds when their curiosity pulled a little too hard at their shriveled hearts.

Downstairs, I drew curtains closed until the furnished rooms melted into a sepia darkness. I don't know how long I slept down there; the coolness irresistible, a small haven from the noises and the solemn people and the omnipresent heat, those things which came from nowhere, which I did not understand. The procession dragged on into the night, where the marchers stooped and lighted candles, small yellow eyes flickering in the darkness.

Only on the third morning did unease begin welling in my throat. The flood of people had only accelerated. By afternoon, the crowds pushed their way up hairs' breadths from house sidings and garage doors. Their bony shoulders knocked against the hollow glass windows. They trampled the flowers and candles that had been placed there just days before. They knocked over mailboxes, snapped gardenia bushes. Nowhere did I see an end in sight. Josh wanted to run excitedly out onto the streets, but I locked the doors, and so did many other neighbors, anxious as they were. But I could see how the solemn carnival drew him like a circus, the drooping, colorful tents, the sad elephants with their broken tusks.

Ms. Parker and I sat on her porch chatting, our voices killed quickly by the escalating noise. Her tiny frame swelled when she talked, when she got angry about something. How can they do this, she said. Don't funeral processions have the right of way, I mused. Yeah, but I have my property rights. If any more people join this caravansary my house is going to get plowed under. Who the hell brainwashed this many people in their lifetime? It's like a cult. It's bigger than a cult.

Maybe I was just wishing, but I thought it wasn't an act, or just a mindless ritual. I hoped the grief, the emotion, something underneath the parade, was real.

I need to do something about it, Ms. Parker said. She was always like that, easily provoked. I admired her for it, really. Always watching over people, ready to pounce. When one of

those summer loves got serious for me, she noticed. The boy wasn't any good, she had said. We're in love, I said. There's a whole lot of things that know better than love, she said.

I think of how she was married at fifteen, crying in layers of broad, unsoiled white tulle. Her mother home from the coal mine with ash streaked over her blue overalls, consoling, fixing her hair. Ms. Parker yells at the marchers, but they pay her no heed. She rolls her wheelchair down the ramp steps. She forces herself out of her wheelchair, but the crowds are moving too fast, and she has forgotten how to walk.

On the fourth morning, Mrs. Rheyne calls me over the phone, tells me how she caught her husband putting on her yellow dresses and lacy panties. I don't know how to console her, so I just listen as her voice seeps through the crackling receiver. But my mind fixes on the crowds that have not ceased, that pale green-blue mass waving flags of white and emitting a discordant din threatening to shatter the windows. I ask her about it. She doesn't say much, only that she has kept the girls watching TV downstairs, and, like anything, it will all blow over in a few days, soon to be forgotten. I say the same about her husband. It will all blow over in a few days.

The marchers now carry altars raised above their heads. Balanced on top more candles, and blurry pictures. Several raise poles attached to heavy masks, dangling listlessly. Others fly ragged kites. Occasionally, people kneel down

and kiss the dirt. A man drags a sky-high bundle of misshapen balloons, like the pig bladders we blew up with air and kicked around as children. He lets them go occasionally, about twenty or so at a time, and they only float up for a second before bursting. Josh has grown restless and I let him play in the streets while watching worriedly from the window. He likes collecting the withered balloon husks falling from the cloudlessness, pocketing them like money.

I don't want him to approach the balloon man, so I try to drive to the Safeway and buy him some new balloons. It's only five minutes away, and still I have to get out of my car and walk; the flood of people has blocked the road. The balloons squeak against each other as I carry them into the house. Josh doesn't want my balloons. He keeps collecting the broken ones from the streets. So that people won't step on them, he says. I once found three dead birds under his bed. He told me at midnight they will come back to life.

Even so he has reached that age so quickly, where he asks all sorts of questions and I'm not ready to answer. He asks about his father all the time. Someone at school had asked him about his father, he told me, and he didn't know. Did he die, or something? The way he talked he thought of his father as already dead, and that was okay with him. Sometimes I think I spoil him, under a half-illusion broken people can't come from so much love.

The fifth day dawns, and they finally bring the hearse. Their arms stretch upwards, in consummate mourning. The ground moist with tears. The coffin, a bare open crate, rests on a bed of flowers. My neighbors vacuum their carpets, make the work phone calls at home. Occasionally a frizzy-haired head will jut out of a window, looking at the body. I do not want to look at it, have this gut feeling that I will recognize the face.

And I think it must be ending. They've brought in the body, the penultimate object of worship. And the ending frightens me more then when the whole thing began. The spare, clean emptiness of the after, so different from the impulsively decorated before. Someday maybe I can tell this to Josh, how when you grow up things hold on in certain places and others fall away, and you think it's because you let go, and after awhile you forget to hold on in the first place. I run out into the streets, join the crowds, clasping Josh's hand. The chants are more subdued now, like a shared heartbeat too loud for the blood. The wind picks up. I breathe in the sun-soaked smell of sweat and metal and the sweet fragrance of flowers blending into the strange, narcotic smell of death, surrendering to the groundswell of noise and air.

Josh and I move with the crowd towards the hills, whose high heads graze low-hanging telephone wires. Fences like thin pencil strokes surround us, and we overlook the gaping gravel pits where they used to mine plutonium in the 50's. I don't see the flames, only shadows as the body dissolves into

ash, a charcoal smoke floating like a veil in the air. White flags, ragged prayers, billow from spindly willow poles that people hold, faces simmering. I think of the wars, airplanes strafing the villages, the refugees fleeing in long, white robes, palms upturned towards the sun.

The next morning our ears ring with the sound of silence. We pick up orange rinds and shattered vases and balloon husks from the streets, like farmers clearing a field after a hard drought. Mrs. Houton can water her roses again, passing her morning like the everyday we all clung to, bracing ourselves against nothing.

ARIADNE

ALL DOLLED UP

ELLSWORTH

It was a tight photo booth for two, the type that encouraged first dates to sit on laps if it was going well. They squeezed in side by side, her left leg crossed over her right. His hand settled gently on her kneecap as he leaned forward to slip in quarters. Her left toes grazed the back of his calf. She liked the idea of proximity. She was wearing stripes that day so she drew her button-down down around her. She was always worried by stripes, that they would make her look wide. She had had her nails done the day before. They were deep red and perfectly round. Her hair looked good that day, tousled by the soft summer air, but she hadn't done much to it.

As he backed away from the coin-slot the booth's bright light started blinking and the machine started to beep: one, two, three. He settled back down, in the narrow booth his shoulders were wide and almost forced his arm around her. His hand brushed her hair as he settled down. The machine flashed.

She moved forward, grabbing the one by five strip that the machine spat out.

"That was bright," she said.

"Let me take a look at them?" He moved to grab the strip from her.

The hand holding the photos snatched away, he grabbed her wrist and she tensed, playfully, "Oh, you think you're stronger than me?"

"Never," so he let her arm go.

She looked down at the photos letting out a laugh-stifling cough, his face was a wet streak of gray.

"Unbelievable—photo booth 101 is not to fight over the pictures before they're dry, Sellars."

"Photo booth 101 is not to fight over the pictures at all—Emily."

Right as a lull in the conversation settled, her words pelted him again.

"You know what this means?"

"What does it mean?"

"We've got to take another photo."

His stomach turned all oily, squirming in on itself and threatening to form a knot in his throat.

"I guess you're lucky I have four more quarters then." He tilted forward on the bench and felt into his right pocket.

"You're the one who looks like a stroke victim in these photos, and you're telling me I'm the one that's lucky?"

"I guess we better make this one last."

Sellars slipped his last four quarters in, backing away from the coin slot before the machine started counting to three. Emily shifted in her seat and he bumped into her as he settled back down. She watched him sit in the framing screen in front of her. As they moved, they left grey trails.

"Remember, you've got to make these four count." He glanced at her from the corner of his eye. The machine flashed.

She threw her head over to look at him, jabbing him softly in the side. "Too late, you've already wasted one."

"You've got to stop moving, those were my last four quarters!"

"Well if you wouldn't take up so much space!"

He threw his arm around her to hold her still. He felt her body tense and then slowly settle. The second photo caught them perfectly still.

"Make a silly face, quick!" She told him.

Spotches from the flash still swum in her vision, marking his

face as she looked up at him. There was a spot of green in his thick black hair, a spot of pink on his milky skin. Sellars looked down at her briefly before turning back to the camera in the middle of the black box. His hand settled on her knee as he shifted forward to growl at the camera.

His hand was small and warm, she thought, and he had gorgeously square wrists but he didn't wear a watch. As she looked down at the warm spot his palm left on her jeans, the camera flashed.

"Shit I wasn't looking," she said.

"Only one left, what's the point in looking now?" One rough finger under her chin, he brought her up to his lips.

She closed her eyes because that's what she was supposed to do and she let him bring her face up to his lips. There was stubble on his chin and his tongue parted her lips. He pulled away to say, "We missed the picture."

"More like the picture missed us."

"Alright let's go. We don't want to be that couple that hogs the photo booth."

The word couple rang hollow in her head.

"Then what couple will we be?" But before the words could make it past her teeth she bit her tongue.

The pictures were folded into his wallet, the long strips creased down the middle and losing their shine. He thumbed them as

he pulled out a \$5 to pay for his beer. He often dreamed with her but he had never dreamed of her. Or at least not when he was asleep, he thought, as he watched the sinewy black hands move over the clock's greying face hanging on the wall directly in front of him. The minute hand was bent ever so slightly in the middle. Over the years as he sat at the bar, arms laying across its shiny, sticky, wooden expanse, thumbing the rim of his beer, he had looked at the clock's hands long and hard. Long and hard enough to notice, head buzzing, that dust had collected all along their edges. He remembered thinking, that first time, that the clock must have been spinning there forever for its hands to collect a layer of grime even their steady rotation couldn't shake.

He watched her from the doorway. She was always moving, even if it was just a little toe. The sheets were in a knot at her feet because it was August and they never made the bed. He often came home to find her face down, as if she could lay low and avoid the heat. Gauzy white curtains from her childhood room framed the bed. They moved disconcertingly softly in the wind.

Emily turned over in bed and asked him how long he had been home already.

"Do you ever dream of me?" he responded.

"I have."

“You know, I was thinking about it earlier and I don’t think that I’ve ever dreamt of you. I dream with you.”

“Great, we’re on the same page then.” She rolled back over.

“Great.”

“Hold on, Em. When you say you dream with me, what do you mean? Do you mean I’m in your dreams?”

“Yeah, what else would I mean?” Her voice drifted to him over her exposed back.

“Well what I mean is that I dream with you, as in—we dream together in the same bed? There’s a certain intimacy in that isn’t there?”

“Yeah maybe, the same way there’s a certain intimacy in fighting over an arm rest on an airplane with the stranger next to you, or drooling on their shoulder as you sleep.”

“No. I can’t just dream next to anyone. If I were sleeping next to a stranger I would be too uncomfortable to sleep well enough to dream.”

He watched her back. She sighed, and her ribcage expanded just enough for him to see the space between her middle ribs. He knew there was a freckle on her other side.

“You don’t find it strange, Sellars, that you’ve never once dreamed with me in the... traditional sense?”

“Not until now.”

“Well did you ever dream of me?”

“No, I haven’t. Like I said, Em, I’ve always been comfortable enough to dream with you, but you’ve never been in one of my

dreams. But it doesn’t matter, these are just thoughts I have, bored in the car. Sorry I woke you.”

“I wasn’t sleeping. But, no, that’s not what I mean. It’s not like I want to be haunting you even in your sleep,” a dry throaty laugh escaped her, “What I mean is have you ever dreamt of the life or relationship we could have had?”

She turned around, it was the wrinkle in the pillowcase had drawn a line from her eye to the corner of her lip. So she’s been in bed a while, Sellars thought.

“I don’t know, probably. That sounds more like daydreaming to me. Is it a dream if it came true?”

He could tell she was holding her breath by the way her rib cage was caught expanding. “Sellars, if this is the life you dreamed of, I didn’t sign up for this.” She bit her tongue just in time. She had only held her breath a second, but she felt starved for air. She resumed breathing, but the words, like marbles, sat heavy at the back of her tongue.

“Sellars, I’m still dreaming,” she closed her eyes because that’s what she was supposed to do and she rolled over in bed. “Let me get back to sleep.”

She heard him leave the doorway for the kitchen and opened her eyes. He hasn’t had dinner yet, she thought. She heard him pull a pot out to place on the stove, a box of pasta shuffled dryly on the counter, and she drifted off to sleep.

His feet were cold. She stirred.

“Sorry love.”

“Don’t worry, I had barely just gone to sleep. That was a quick dinner, you do the dishes?”

“Eh, just a late night snack really.”

“You do the dishes?”

“Nah, but I’ll get them first thing tomorrow. It’s late, got to be up early.”

Her body ran hot so she pulled off the covers. It’s just August, she told herself.

She heard her mother as she drifted back off to sleep, “Never go to bed angry.”

“I, Sellars Leonard Tomes, do take you, Emily Margaret Ames, to be my lawfully wedded wife. I promise to be there for you in times of need, accompany you through happiness and sorrow” Sellars could tell Emily was cringing at the corniness of these lines as he spoke, and so he almost cracked a smile, running through the rest until he got to his surprise vows, “I promise never to let us be that couple that hogs the photo booth, gets mad over smudged pictures or dirty dishes, or goes to bed angry, but most importantly I promise mac and cheese at least once a week.”

In her dream she looked past Cellars down the pier “Never be that couple that hogs the photo booth. Gets mad. Over smudged pictures. Dirty dishes. Dirty. Dishes. Goes to bed angry. Angry. Never be. That couple” he yelled at her. She fiddled

with the ring and dropped it. They both looked down as they floated up from the pier, and watched the ring fall in between the cracks, down into the water. She sat up in bed with a start.

Next to her Sellars stirred and she thought how she had noticed the little things, slowly at first and then all at once, like water just beginning to boil, how the first few bubbles take forever and then start coming faster and faster. “A watched pot never boils,” she could feel herself think, half asleep, “But you can’t look away or the damn thing might boil right over.”

He felt her sit up next to him. She had suffered night terrors when she was little, he knew, and they tended to recur when it was hot out. Yes, it was August, he thought groggily as he rolled over. He closed his eyes again, somewhere between wake and sleep her voice becoming a migrant itch under his skin. “Sellars, I’m still dreaming. Sellars. I’m still. Dreaming.” She was impossible to ignore, to get out. “Sellars, I’m still. Dreaming.” Her voice squirmed just under his reach, coming to settle, uncomfortably, between his last rib and the top of his stomach, but he let himself drift to sleep. He dreamed of placing the photos of them down on the bar counter with the \$5 bill, setting his wet beer over their faces, barely a minute would pass before their faces were no more than a splotch of grey.

August’s light was bright as it made itself through the white curtains on the eastern facing wall. He rolled over and kissed

her back. His shoulders were wide and almost forced his arm around her.

“You sleep well?” she asked.

“I did. Even dreamed of you, I think. Yourself?”

She turned around to plant a kiss, and the sunlight danced along her spine.

“Dreamed of you too,” she said through a chuckle.

The night’s fragments drifted through the windows, hitting him like shards.

She rolled back over and pulled his arm around her. “Don’t forget the dishes.”

