

ARTIST NAME
Building Title

AMANDA MORTON

In the Land of the Síde

The sky is barren and gray.

Flowers spring from the ground here, scattered in sweet meadows where dancing feet beat to the sound of drums in the twilight.

The people are beautiful here, tall and graceful, clad in exquisite mantles of green. They do not age, here. Their teeth gleam bright with laughter.

They graced my brow with flowers when I came. They gave me many gifts, of gold and precious gems, of three hounds with bodies white as snow and ears red as blood.

They held a feast in my honor. I ate their food and drank their drink. Their intoxicating ale is nearly as heady as the sweet winds that blow from the north, bringing the promise of sunshine.

Still, the sky is gray as stone.

Sometimes, when my mind wanders, I try to remember how I came to this land. I cannot think of it. It must have happened long ago. Sometimes I seem to remember another country, another life. It is like a dream, half real. If I put my hand through it it would stretch into dust and disintegrate. A face with two eyes looks down at me and says, "Do not go wandering among the mounds. The barrows of the ancestors are a dangerous place to play. They live there, underground."

But then the face vanishes and the words of warning are only dewdrops on a spiderweb. I think clearly. How could such a land as beautiful and plentiful as this exist under the earth? And then I shake myself, and stretch, and all such thoughts slip from my mind.

"Where are we?" I ask once.

"Between the hills," they say.

It is a satisfying answer.

Still, it is strange how there are no visitors in this land. In my father's court visitors would pass through often.

But when I think about it I am not sure that I had a father.

Sometimes I see a flash of a image, a lighting-bolt vision. There is woman sitting on a mound. She is ancient and blind, tangled in her long gray hair. She mumbles to herself, rocking back and forth, biting at her ragged fingernails.

Every day she digs at the side of the mound, trying to get

inside. Every night the earth refills itself, undoing her work. Her shovel broke long ago. She digs with her hands.

I know they leave. I see them ride out on their tall prancing horses and vanish through the wavering curtain that guards the distance. I cannot look at it for too long or my eyes will water and my mind forgets who I am.

I have asked, once or twice, where they go.

"Out of the hills and under the sky," they say.

"Can I go too?"

They laugh. Their teeth gleam. "Why would you ever want to leave? Don't you have everything you could possibly wish for right here?"

And I laugh, too, relieved. Of course. They're right. Why would I ever want to leave a place like this?

Still, the sky is uncanny. I don't like to look at it. It feels like it is staring back at me.

And the hag, I can see her still, gibbering on the mound. She looks straight at me. I know her eyes. They are mine.

JULIA HORWITZ Unbuttoning

Your kitchen stands under your ladder and you stand between the two

Sawdust up your arms sawdust in your hair flames curl up over frying pan sides

This is how to scrub her out of the room

Door clicks shut mousetrap string of beads bones click together bones pull apart tooth and fork scalding tongue seven inch heels on stainless steel step you will rip everything and this is no exception

When you crack the egg it falls twenty feet you will rip everything which is why everything throws itself over the edge (except for the skin that sticks the parts you can't unbutton)

By the time it lands butter burning yolk drips over frying pan side pierced through the heart sticky, golden hiss

This is the meal you eat with bare hands throwing another shoe in the fire saying to the mirror: it's the greed that's doing it if your fingers were more satin less stain

she wouldn't always insist on climbing out the window

But this egg doesn't cook either so you tape the shell back together go back to unbuttoning above your kitchen below your ladder hissing back at luck

Pincushion

Light as a feather stiff as a board I sat quietly while you cracked egg after egg over my head you watched, smirking the way they slid down my face, crushed each of my fingernails in the hinge of your front door printed every picture that you pulled from my stomach with a long piece of wire

But now it's my turn to smirk at the way you're still chained to that door staring at the arms of a body I left years ago you know I'm a nail biter and every bit of your blood was chewed from my fingers long before I wrote this

Today I spat your name in the shower watched it break apart in a cloud of pink

You are the pincushion buried in the back yard you are the one I won't burn because there's no reason to rush this light as a feather stiff as a board can you feel every lick of this? good.

Bobby Pin Ode

You are nobody's house pet plier-gnarled road smirking loop there are two ways to travel you: straight and oil slick or arched back curve ripple and repeat luring in strands of hair and pinching them captive

You are nobody's constant the weight of leaving your mark on someone else's bedside table

You are blood metal bite brittle on the tongue clicking between teeth Ms. Placed wanderer, going silently has never been your style

You are faulty lock pick stubborn to bend rubber-edged reminder scratch in tree name in diner booth that I was here rearranging myself once before



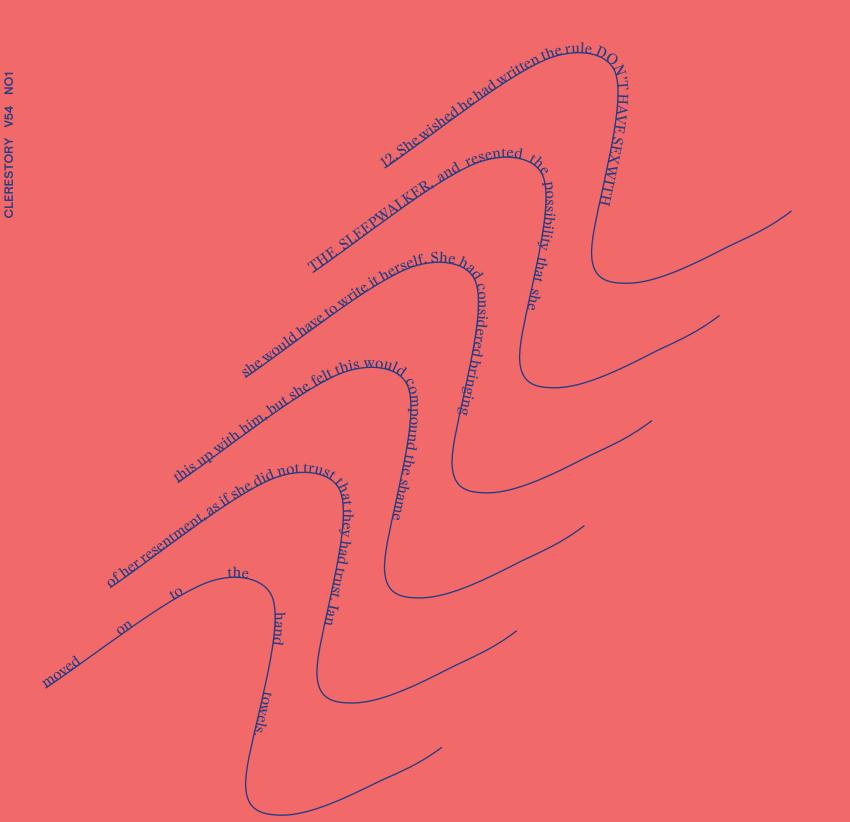
ARTIST NAME
Pen Plotter 1







home panels 1-4 Frannie Logan



13. Ears were largely unnecessary; the sound of the woods was quiet itself. Marcy was glad she could do without them. It had been hard when she lost the left ear first, because she had been forced to walk around in circles, the weight of her other ear tipping her head permanently to the right. Her mother, offended that her daughter kept looking at her cock-eyed, had receded into the forest as the mist at dawn. But now both ears were gone, and her head felt much lighter. The sky didn't make her want to vomit anymore; in fact, she felt like she was able to float closer to it, and let in a little more of its blueness. It was only when she became aware of someone gazing at her from the ground that she felt the sad need to come back down.

14. They were to TELL THE SLEEPWALKER WHAT THEY DID, Ian remembered. This was one of Marcy's only requests. She felt it would make the nights less lonely for both of them, and he was starting to see her point. Watching someone fall asleep is like watching someone walk away; after a while, they're too distant to see clearly. Telling each other their sleepwalking stories was an effort to imagine these nights as an experience they both were present for, ones that they shared. Even so, he wasn't sure how he was going to tell her this: her, crouched and clutching her ears tightly, screaming her head off. As he tried to think of some less concerning alternative he could recount in the morning, he forgot to ask the obvious question: how it was that she wasn't waking herself up.

15. This rule wasn't exactly what she had in mind. She would have preferred: TELL THE WATCHER WHAT YOU DREAMED. But she wasn't sure how to express her need for this, except for the weird explanation that being in a dream can be just as isolating as being awake. Nor was she sure that Ian would find it valuable or necessary. She thus conceded that the rule as it stood was fine; there were many ways of being alone.

16. You are very beautiful in your sleep, Ian told her over breakfast. Marcy was so tired that, as she added milk to her cereal, she was tempted to tip the whole carton into the bowl and let it overflow; she wouldn't have to exert the effort of carefully pouring, and at least then the bowl would be full. You're too lovely, she told him. She thought for a moment, and felt the carton becoming heavier as its milk emptied out. What, exactly, did she look like? she asked. Ian looked down, stirred his fourth cup of coffee. Peaceful, he said. You look peaceful. No I don't, Marcy said. Ian raised his eyebrows and smiled. How would you know? he asked. Because I don't sleep peacefully, she said. You read the articles, the entire cause of sleepwalking is that something is disrupting your sleep. Well, he admitted, there have been times where you may have been fitful. But who am I to say what's going on in your head? Her Lucky Charms floated in an opaque sea. Something feels wrong in my dreams, Marcy said. It feels like somebody's watching me. He laughed and said: well, isn't there?

17. Later, when she started crying on the train, Ian put his arm around her and told her it was OK, she would be alright, but she shouldn't let the dream be real. Marcy couldn't help but feel this was the opposite of what she wanted to hear. The dream was real. When she closed her eyes, her eyes fluttered rapidly behind her eyelids and her neurons fired; these were the makings of her dreams, but they were also facts. Other facts: she wanted to follow her mother, she wanted to rise off the hills as fog. If you could call a nightmare by its name, and say that it's the fickle creation of a fearful mind, couldn't you choose not to have it at all? She glanced at an old woman seated across from them staring intently into a brown paper bag. Ian's arm hung limply on her shoulder. Nobody could choose not to have nightmares, Marcy decided, and stood up, claiming she wanted to stretch her legs.

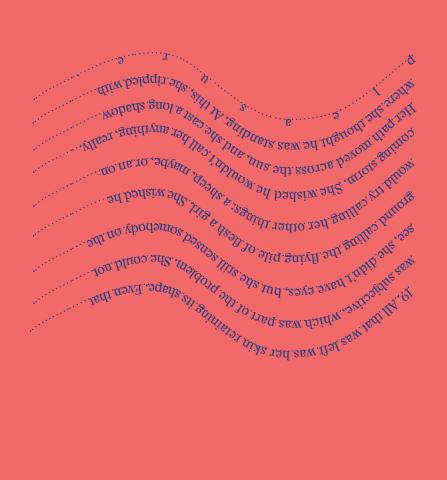
20. With little other means of recourse, Ian turned again to Google. He observed her behavior as closely as he could, so that his search terms would be precise. That night was simple: "pacing between walls and touching them repeatedly." None of the usual hits from the National Sleep Foundation or Sleep Journal came up. Instead, the first result was a Wikipedia page on the ritual practices of Scientology. The pacing in particular was one of two things. Either it was a form of trance, in which by focusing on the confines of the room for extended periods of time, the Scientologist could conceptually master, then overcome, the limitations of space, consciousness, and the body. Or it was a method of torture, in which a prisoner was made to fixate on the impossibility of escape. For a while Ian wondered which one she was enacting, and whether they amounted to the same kind of failure. Then he just felt grateful that she wasn't a Scientologist.

22. Of all the things she wanted to tell him, but couldn't, the most tragic by far was this: if your eyes are lifeless enough, and your shuffle convincing enough, the right pharmacist will basically offer you Ambien on the house. Ian would have been on the floor laughing, if he was there. As it was, however, he was just plain on the floor.

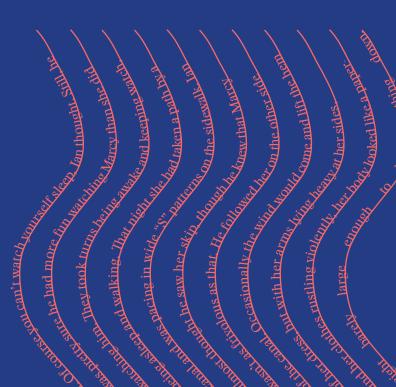
23. Marcy put a pillow under Ian's head, blew out the candles, and left quickly. She believed the dosage was enough to sedate most physical movement, but she locked the door behind her, just in case. It was only until after she got in her car that she realized she had never chosen where she wanted to sleepwalk alone. There were only so many solitary places in the city. As she stared blankly at her dashboard, trying to think of a direction to drive, she slowly remembered something her mother had told her when she was a little girl. Her mother, who had grown up out in the country, always looked for a way to beat the light pollution after she moved into the city. She found that she could more closely replicate her childhood's night sky if she was on a up on a high roof, way above the man-made lights below. It is the privilege of being on our tiny rock, she told Marcy, that we can fall asleep seeing so many stars. Marcy got out of her car and started walking down 4th Avenue, looking for fire escapes.

24. What she had forgotten on the ground was that, beyond the cloud level, the sky is always clear. Now she and her mother only knew this in terms of a reversed and happy vertigo, an infinite up. But she was sure it was beautiful too. In a way, she wished he could have seen it.

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21. On Ian's next night to watch her, he decided that what Marcy really needed was a bubble bath. A little rest and relaxation. For somebody who could have neither, it felt a bit like a farce, but Ian was willing to entertain the possibility that it could actually be romantic. Her, lulled (hopefully) by the enveloping warmth. Him, sitting by her side, holding her hair so her head stayed above the water. They could even light candles, he told her, as long as he could keep her away from any open flame. She smiled, said she adored the idea, and handed him a cup of tea. So we can both relax, she told him as they took their first sip. Ian's cup wasn't halfway empty before he collapsed, which lead Marcy to believe that he was much more tired than even she had planned for. No Po



vember, the trees were too bare and the landscape would come out looking like a thick haze. But she couldn't tell her that because her mouth was gone, and besides, she was tired. Her mother extended the legs of her tripod. More sky or more trees? she asked, and added, in the composition I mean. The sky was eggshell blue and large. Marcy wanted to vomit under it, and wondered where that vomit would go if it didn't come out from where her mouth should have been. She tugged at her mother's sleeves as she convulsed. Sorry honey, I need to keep this steady, her mother said, and began nailing the tripod into the earth with wooden pegs. You never answered my question, she said. Marcy point-ed up to the sky, her shaking hands following the path of birds circling. Her mother prepared her impossible picture. and Ild c

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3. One of the benefits of being a sleepwalking couple, Marcy had realized, was never experiencing your partner getting up in the middle of the night. That feeling is especially bad when she was just starting out, when she went over to his apartment and was still memorizing the thread count of his sheets. Sooner or later he'd have to go to the bathroom, she realized, but when it finally happened, she still counted the seconds she spent alone in an unfamiliar bed, staring up at the ceiling until he got back and she could pretend this was a kind of home again.

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And March March March March Street Street Street that she up alone 4. A downside of being in a sleepwalking couple was that he doesn't come back. Another was didn't feel him get up, either, hardly felt her own body lifting itself out of bed. She still woke u

> might bring a person peace. world, waking up to that much blue and Ian's view of the sky was entirely over the sun. But from the roof, Marcy рауе seen her reaching fingers passing against her side. Her arm swung so hanging out of bed. Ian was pressed ledge, in fact, because Marcy someapartment building. Right up on the

> One of the window-washers watching ble off the edge. He grabbed her as her sudden fear, Marcy would tum-

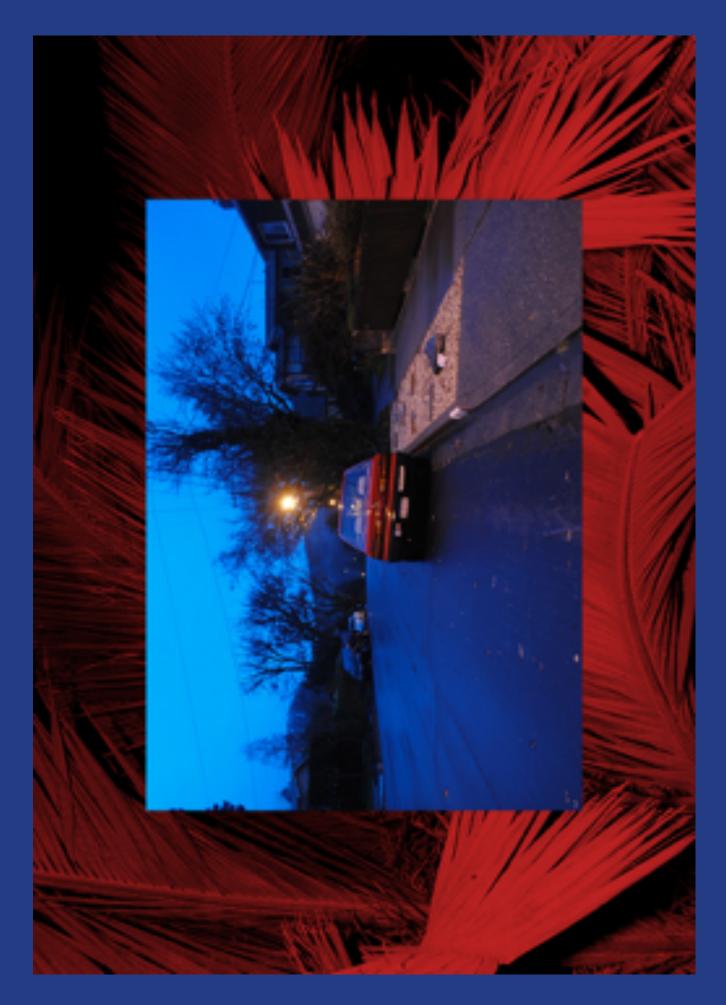


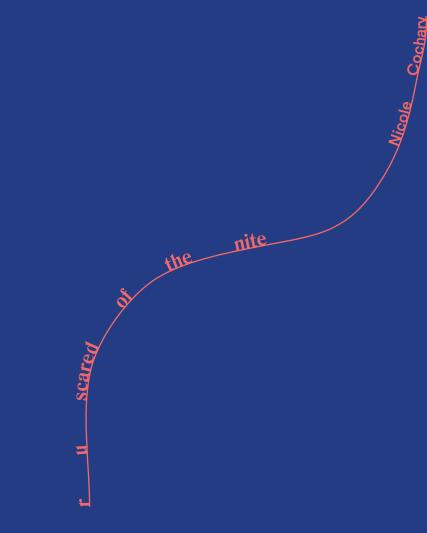
Stand clear, honey, she shouted from the treeline. You could look up at a cloud and think that it's a sheep or a vagina or something, but you'd be kidding yourself. It's all just water that got stuck on its way to being water again. Her mother lit a match and off her clothes and add each item to the growing flames. Marcy had never seen her mother naked. She suspected that this was something daughters were supposed to already have done, Perhaps it was her time to witness this, standing there where the smoke could choke her if she had a mouth

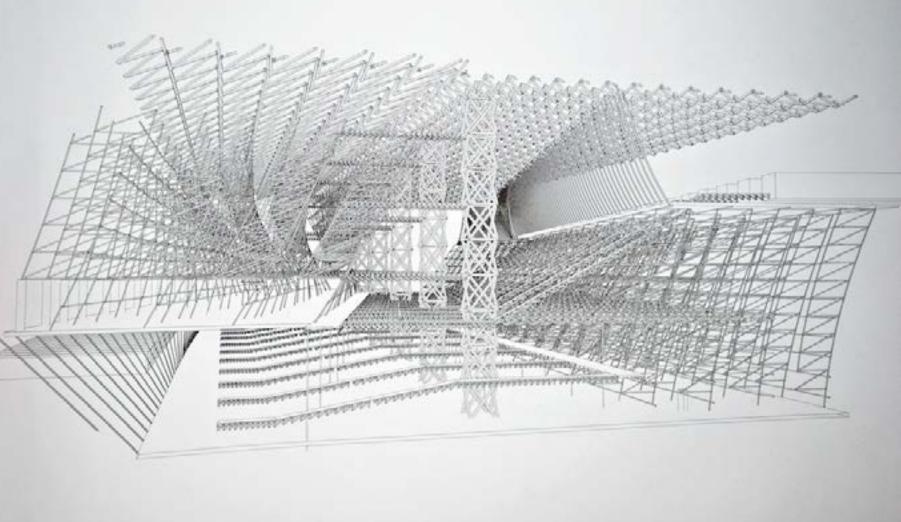
rather quickly, but one line in particular caught their attention: the sleepwalker might quietly walk around his room, or else he might run and attempt small but noticeable comfort. To keep from dozing off, they researched symptoms late into the night. Reading scientific journals on sleep, they real-ke. Nowhere did any of the articles mention sleepwalking shared between couples. The closest they got was an assertion that sleep deprivation could schronically snored. Both of them separately accepted that this sealed their fate as a freak-show couple; neither of them snored. In the early days they lie they still could. What they thought they heard was each other's breath, quieter than the sound of the outside seeping through the window. What ch other listening.

r rules. He wrote down some possibilities one night while Marcy attempted to order coffee in bulk. The first was DON'T TELL ANYBODY. Luckily, d as an inconsequential embarrassment and had rapidly became too X-Files for comfort. Unable to have real nightmares during his sleepless nights o in intensive clinical trial, or worse, the news cycle. We have to sleep, though, Marcy said. For one thing, I don't trust the caffeine content of coffee ng will kill us. He reminded her that sleepwalking in front of an errant taxi would do the same, much more quickly. Marcy paused, thinking. What if e said. Both ways of dying? he asked. No, she said, both being able to sleep and being able to live. Ian rubbed his eyes and worried that she was closer d at her again and worried that she was much more awake.

Was it empathy? Or was it simply that this was the only sustainable nen, was keeping them from waking the s that soon, they too would have their turn?







ARTIST NAME Pen Plotter 3

LAUREN SUKIN

The House

It was almost dark beyond the walls of the living room, and we were sitting there together: the small plant that was growing bigger inside my veins and you and myself. There were only seventeen people at the New Year's party, but I couldn't remember who among them had invited us. The little plant just kept chugging and I held a wine glass between my thumb and my forefinge like a card at the end of a magic trick. The plant sighed. Yeah, we met in college, a girl told me and looked at you. I thought he was brilliant because he could quote just about any philosopher you've ever heard of. Ain't that something, I replied. Turns out they're all just tidbits from Calvin and Hobbs. But yeah. We're really happy together. The plant wrapped its tendrils around my liver, squeezed.

Looks flitted between ex-lovers, one girl tottered on her heels, had to sit on the couch while her wine wore off. I asked her what her name was. Does it matter? She said. I guess not, I said. I admired the grandfather clock. I admired the silk painting. I poked at hors d'oeuvres with a toothpick. The plant stayed quiet; it was bedtime; it was sleeping. The nervous host dropped a plate of sweet potatoes on someone's toes. I helped because I had nothing else to do. I took the remnants of the glass tray back to the kitchen and licked the edges.

Every New Year's Eve, I have trouble sleeping. I knew I would probably stay up all night. I would probably stay up all year. I'd make pancakes in the morning. I'd buy myself a good book, a new pair of sunglasses. The clock

drifted on, and the plant shivered. It had lost almost all of its leaves. It looked like a shaved poodle. It looked pitiful. I thought about putting it down. I thought about buying it a coat. It sulked, and its roots grasped for something in my lungs to hold on to.

What's your resolution? you asked me, when midnight had come and gone. Your tongue is bleeding, you said, after the obligatory kiss. Did I bite it

2.

I knew that I could not undo this mistake. I had pulled the flesh already off the bones, checked that it had turned the correct color of pink before I would squeeze lemon over the remnants of its body and wonder whether it had ever had friends, or if it was capable of such a thing, anyway. I had already slid the knife against the grain of its scales, before I tossed the fish in the trashcan and opened up the refrigerator.

The mistake was really that he had sent me only photographs of the house in the first place, since a picture does not accurately represent how rooms can feel like quiet, grumbling giants, and empty bookshelves can wonder whether the inhabitants that swirl around them have ever learned anything at all except how to cook salmon and watch television and leave sticky notes on the front door with messages like "umbrella & thumbtacks" or "Stewarts coming at 7."

On Mondays we played dominos. Our daughter wasn't old enough

that we could tell her not to cheat, but her father would rearrange the game back to fairness when she would get up to refill her glass of milk or look out the window or ask again where her goldfish had gone to. Mommy, can fish become ghosts? she said one night. Yes, said her father, that's why you shouldn't waste water when you brush your teeth. Otherwise the fish will

I have nightmares. One is about an antelope on the dining room table. I draw steals all my good pairs of socks. Norman Mailer brings all but one back. When I am not sleeping, I am contemplating writing a novel. It would be She weaves stories as she likes. In another, a lifeguard drowns with the final

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ARTIST NAME Photo Title 1

nt you. Later, when I tucked her into bed, I whispered that fish couldn really become ghosts. Daddy had just been joking. Later, when I tucked myself into bed, I crossed my fingers and hoped that the ghost of the salmon wasn't haunting my bathtub. If it had been, though, I would have been okay with it.

it furiously, night after night, for fear it will disappear. One is about the water in my shower turning to oil. I blame it on the salt. Restaurants these days. In one, all the houses are balsa wood. All the townsfolk taste like cardboard; they all own paper pets with ribbons around the necks. In another, F.T. Marinetti about a woman in a cutting room, working with bits of time instead of film. thought: Of all the bad habits in the world, my girl had to bite her fingernails. She goes under without a struggle. The third is little more than stock market

advice, all of it gathered from overhead conversations in the elevators of hospitals. Anyone is an expert these days.

My mother told me there were only three things to look out for: people who think everybody is important, people who are actually imp kind of people who would believe that you are important. Then she gave me a glass of lemonade and we looked up at the sun together, our lips pursed. The weather sure is nice, I said. Yup, she replied. And that's just about all you need to know about that.

Nowadays I think her advice was often more self-indulgent than it was helpful, but I sure learned how to cut grass and bake snickerdoodles, paint my lips and the rest of a house, fall in love and get something out of it. Now I possess a small repertoire of potable skills, of which bringing things upon myself is only one. That's what she said to me, too, when the sun stopped shining and the whole marriage was over. You brought this upon yourself.

CLERESTORY

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SARAH VAN CLEAVE

Because You Should Never Trust a Man Who **Places Larger Significance** on the Turning of a Stoplight

I was slow dancing around the perimeter of the world's rattiest rug-cigarette in one hand, baby head in the other-when I realized how much Roy looked like some ugly newborn bird from a National Geographic special. I know I'm not supposed to say that, that I am supposed to say how he's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, how my life will never be the same again, and maybe that's true, but right now he looks like some sort of CGI baby phoenix staring up at me with his little eyes at half mast. He looks so damn surreal that I start to laugh and little bits of ash shake off the cig and fall on his face. He doesn't cry, doesn't make a single sound, just looks at me and the ashes with such wonder I swear to God he must think it's his first Christmas snow. I guess that makes me some sort of dirty Santa Claus. Merry Christmas and welcome to the world you little bastard.

Roy doesn't do a whole lot these days, though I don't resent him for it. He doesn't scream, doesn't cry, just sort of looks at me like he knows something I don't. I certainly have nothing against him, just don't have a lot particularly for him, that's all. And I know people try to pass that off as postpartum, but I think most of that mother-baby attachment stuff is a selfprescribed illusion to lessen the blow of switching lives, slipping into a new one that you wear for the rest of ever. But that's okay, they say in long-distance relationships the key is to have an end point in sight, and some days there's a lot of distance between Roy and me. So we're counting down together to the end of ever.

And, you know, we trip along till then. I take him to the drive-in movies sometimes when I've saved enough quarters and we watch the back-to-back gory ones together. Sometimes the people in the next car over give me this disapproving look when they see Roy behind the wheel with me, so I hold him up and make him dance just to tease them a little bit. He gives them the stoic face while his limbs jiggle happy and I laugh and take some drags between mouthfuls of oil and popcorn.

On nights like that I want to kiss everything I see, leave little lipstick smirches on each piece of popcorn, each cigarette, each roll-down car window, and especially on Roy's little chubby wrists. I hear that's where your veins are closest to the surface, so I figure if I kiss him there, maybe some of my smile will seep into his bloodstream and he'll grow up to be the world's greatest comedian. I figure he's saving up all the little chuckles now for one big avalanche of ha-ha-hee-hee that'll set the world spinning just a little faster. That's what will happen.

I'm sitting on a bench in the town's tiny little park, just about an acre of crispy grass and a rain-stained statue of a fish, its big orb eyes without any pupils. I think it's supposed to look majestic, like it's leaping out of the lapping waves, but it just looks like it's been caught in a lie or something. It's hard for big eyes to not look guilty. I look down at Roy stretched across my lap and think that he's about the only wide-eyed animal that doesn't look like it screwed up.

The park's right next to a busy road, so it's actually a pretty good place to listen to music

since all the teenagers roll by slow and cool with their windows down to annoy the old people walking the streets. I tell Roy the names of the songs, and the bands, and their lead guitarists and anything else I can remember that might impress him. Pretty soon, a bump-bump bass line pulls up to our bench and when its car catches up with it, I see the driver's just another boy begging for a beard and listening to the sex music he doesn't get yet. I miss boys like that.

You see, when you're nineteen and knocked up, the usual suspects are always to blame: that deliciously slutty sex music, the one more shot than you should have taken, the boy with the crazy come-hither superstitions. My boy's name was Tom, and he had so many beliefs that I thought he had his finger in the current of the world's energy, that he saw something the rest of us couldn't. He made bets on everything-the way the trees swayed, the color of a stoplight, how many times Russell Wilson would thank God in a single press conference. He was always trying to push a bargain.

On the day of the Super Bowl, he refused to say "game." What day is it today, Tom? I'd ask, and he'd run away, covering his ears just saying Sunday! over and over. We made a deal that if he accidentally said "game day" he had to drop and give me twenty, so naturally I egged him on a bit in hopes of seeing that marvel. We also bet M&Ms on the game win (no money since our pockets were dry and holey), him on the Broncos and me on the Seahawks. I swear to God I've never been more turned on than when my man Marshawn ran the ball in so hot and clean, threw himself spiraling into the end zone like some sort of sex torpedo. So, yeah, little Roy was conceived after Super Bowl XLVIII. The sex was celebration for me and consolation for Tom, so it worked out nicely. That is, until Tom left four months later and took every last M&M with him

I couldn't tell you why I kept Roy. I guess I was hoping he'd lean more into his 50% celebration than his 50% consolation, and he'd be the world's most explosive touchdown dance. It was never about the XXs and XYs with him, only about win or lose, horse or hawk, run or pass. So I swore little Roy was going to live to be a win. I told myself that every night before going to sleep, till it was engraved in my brain, became a part of my biology. Sometimes you've got to make your own truth.

Roy is sort of looking tired and I can tell he hasn't been listening to me or to the ten-second snippets of songs anyways, so I think it's time for us to go. I take him in my arms and we make our way to my old junker car, which doesn't play any sex music anymore since the stereo is burned out. I continue to sing him bass lines and bounce him to the beat. If I bounce him enough, he can sort of head-bang with me. I look around to see if there's anyone to appreciate his dance moves, but we're all alone.

It's Christmas Eve for real this time, and I want to do something special for Roy, if I can. Of course, there's not a lot I can really buy him, but he's not too interested in things like that anyways. Sometimes we walk into stores just to look at and touch the fabrics and plastics and metals, and everything is so bright and busy I think for sure he'll like something. But he doesn't react at all, just keeps staring, his eyes like the stillest mucky lake you've ever seen. Maybe he's too big for material items. Maybe he's the philosopher type, and he's solving all the universe's problems in his little head while other babies are gooing and gaaing at all the rattles and dolls. Or maybe he just knows we're piss-poor. Either way, I guess I appreciate it. It's like he doesn't want to make his presence too tough on me.

Anyways, it's Christmas Eve and we're out in the junker, me in the driver's seat, Roy in the passenger's seat, and I don't have a car seat like I'm supposed to so I just set him there and strap him in. When he sits upright like that, he looks like a tiny mini man, like one of those old man baby Jesuses in the church paintings. That makes me laugh, and he watches.

So we're driving down the backroads and everything's spooky-shady and I count the trees' shadows as I run them over, and that makes me feel powerful. The car shakes up to toe the line in front of the only stoplight in town. I can never tell if it's broken, or if I'm just unlucky, but either way, I always end up turning on red.

Pretty soon, we pull up to a dewy old middle school field encircled by a chain-link fence. I used to come here to watch meteor showers with my old high school buddies. We always brought hot cocoa and Fruity Dyno Bites, the knock-off generic of Fruity Pebbles, which is alright because I always thought they tasted better than the real thing anyways. We'd take in enough sugar to keep us up all night, and lay down on the cold, wet grass, soaked and shivering and smiling till the sun broke. One time we decided to try to get on the roof of the middle school so we gave each other boosts to stand on the electrical boxes and then pulled each other up from there. The roof was so grimy that we could make perfect scum-angels while we looked up at the stars. I guess we got ourselves a bit of a reputation because on that night, the cop cruisers rolled around at about 2 am, and noticed us scurrying on the roof, heard us trying to stifle our giggles. They pulled out one of those spotlights and a megaphone like you see in the movies and started demanding that we come down that instant and telling us our town's curfew was at 1 am. I remember thinking we must live in a pretty shit town with pretty shit cops for them to instate a town curfew, let alone at 1 am. But apparently that was a rule, and they were threatening to come up on the roof after us, so we had no choice but to run and jump. We left behind a smartass named Teddy, whom no one actually invited because he liked to write big words on his Wal-Mart canvas shoes to prove he was better than the rest of us. He refused to take the leap and instead tried to outsmart the cops by using quadruple negatives ("so you don't not want me to not not get down right now?"). They blinded him with the spotlight while all the rest of us snickered and ran into the woods, never ever to be caught.

I figure if I'm going to share anything with my touchdown dance kid, it had better be this. So I get out of the car, and I pull out Roy, a thermos of cocoa, and an old thrift store blanket made out of itchy wool that probably is still home to some remnants of the smallpox virus. I hop the fence with Roy and the baggage cradled in one arm, using the other to steady myself. I am so light today.

We set up our blanket on what would be the fifty-yard line if this school paid for stuff that mattered. Roy lies out like a starfish on the blanket, like he's trying to stretch big enough to touch everyone and everything, just a little bit impatient like all the best people are. The stars flash and flicker and sometimes seem to vanish altogether, so I try to stare at them so hard they refuse to leave. We do everything you're supposed to do with stars: gaze at, wish on, play connect-the-dots with, find constellations in. To be honest, I don't know any real constellations, so we make those up, and I hope Roy understands that that's not exactly what you'd call lying. When we run out of stars, I draw the lines between his moles with my finger, and try to figure out what constellation he makes.

I light a cigarette and Roy watches the stars filter through the smoke. I wish I had a handful of Fruity Dyno Bites to throw at the sky to see if they'd transform into rainbow stars. But I don't have any Fruity Dyno Bites this time around, so I open the thermos of cocoa, take a swallow, then give some to Roy. He doesn't make a face, but he immediately spits it out, and it slides down his chin, leaving a big angry red mark in its wake. How stupid can I get, I think, I just burned my own damn baby. I don't have any ice or anything, so I just flip him over facedown in the cold grass till I figure I've caused enough damage and we should just go home.

So we get in the junker, and start driving, and I'm just talking excuses, promising Roy that someday I'm going to do things right, and someday I'm going to learn to try better, and someday I'm not going to hurt you any more, and his little eyes look up at me as if to say that's a whole lot of somedays mama.

And then suddenly, the junker belches, sputters and crawls a bit, and then dies, just at the bottom of a hill. There I am, in the dark, stalling out in my car, and just over the tippy top, barely in view, is that damn red stoplight challenging me to a staring contest I will never win. I turn to Roy, who's still got his stoic face on, though now he looks like he's got a red goatee and I want to laugh at that, but I can't. So I grab the smallpox blanket from the back, tuck it all around him, lock the doors, and wait till sleep catches us. I float off to that mocking red glow as my eyes fall shut, and I pray that I didn't pass my electric dream genes on to my son.

I walk up to the automatic doors at Red Apple Market and they open just for us, like we're royalty or something. The air inside the store is warm and damp like taking a bath, which feels good after having been outside, where it's just cold and wet and my toes are so stiff they don't curl when I walk. I still haven't fixed the junker, so now Roy and I have to walk everywhere which isn't so bad most days, but today the rain is coming down like it wants to hurt the d, and we need food in a bad way, so I just tucked Roy under my rain jacket and ou went

Just inside the store, to the left of the front doors is a group of guys smoking pot, and when I walk by they give me that spacey smile till they see Roy in my arms and they close their lips and turn back to each other. Though they don't seem to like me anymore, I still like the pot smokers because weed smells cozy and they're just so happy when they don't know what's happening. But I am kind of worried about Roy being around all the smoke. Then again, I guess skunk smoke isn't that different than cig smoke, and Roy's used to that by now. He's got some strong little lungs.

We weave around the displays back to the aisle where the canned beans are, and I am happy to see that they haven't moved, that they're still there like they always will be. I pick up a couple cans of kidney beans, and am grateful they only sell kidney beans at Red Apple because that means I don't have to choose. That would be tough for me because I don't know much about the relative pros and cons of bean breeds. Sometimes I go to the other grocery stores in town just to see what it's like, and there's this one fancy place called Central Market that has seventeen different types of beans from all around the world. I don't know why anyone needs that many options, or even who can afford some of them. There's this one special type called hyacinth beans that are apparently from Africa, have purple flowers, and cost \$34.00 per pound. That's like eight boxes of Fruity Dyno Bites! I guess that's beside the point, because if I could

afford hyacinth beans, I could probably afford a lifetime's supply of Fruity Dyno Bites. Hell, I could have a lifetime supply of Fruity Pebbles if I wanted.

I grab a few more things—some bread, some milk, some plastic cheese—and then walk up to the cash registers, trying not to look at anything else. I can ignore the booze and the potato chips, but I can't ignore the washed-up people we keep passing. There's something weird about them, you know, like they've all had their volume and color dials turned down. Is that what this life does to you? Is that what it looks like to be hungry for everything?

I get up to the cash register and place the milk on the belt and wait for the register lady. Her nametag ARTINETIMAN! Like the princess, I think, except for this lady's tubby and has

some hairs grouping out of plears and looks like she's sinking. She says the milk is two domars, but know that can't be right, so I correct her: 1.89, I say, and she says 2 Pen Plotter 2

1.90, I say, 1.93, she says.

1.92, I say, 1.92, she agrees.

I imagine Roy's eyes bouncing back and forth between me and Diane, like they do in cartoons sometimes and that makes me laugh.

What's so funny, she says.

Nothing, I say, and I drop my coins into her hand and they jingle-giggle as they fall. Sometimes I think that all anyone ever wants is a fair deal.

I passed a church sign today, the electronic kind that flashes ultra-positive messages one after the other. I don't know how long I stood there, watching the whole loop play over and over, but it must've been awhile. First, it flashed 2 Timothy 4:7 in big blue block letters. Then a pixel explosion led into "Go Hawks!" with a picture of a seagull that looked downright pissed. Then it flashed, in that pretty pretty cursive: "Need a miracle?"

Tell me stupid billboard, don't we all?

The Hawks won the NFC Championships so they're moving on to the Super Bowl again. It's a bummer I don't have anyone to fuck after the game this year. Actually, that might be for the best. I'm glad I have Roy because it would be pretty sad to watch the game alone.

All the people I pass now on the streets are wearing their blue and green in preparation. It's not that sharp and shiny blue and green like you'd see in the stadium, it's more like a grass stain, but I like it all the same.

Roy and I have been catching buses to the closest mall a lot recently because they put up those big TVs in the electronics stores, and set up some folding chairs so that people can watch them. I don't think I'm fooling anyone into thinking I'm buying a flat screen, but they're good people so they let us stay. The days leading up to game day are almost better than game day itself because you get to hear all the commentaries and the interviews and see the store clerks dress up. I wonder if Diane is repping the Hawks. I hope she is. I think it'd be good for her.

My favorite part though is those interviews to get people riled up. Whenever I watch, Russell Wilson is saying all the sweet, saintly words, and Richard Sherman is saying all the loud, angry words, and Marshawn Lynch is saying none of the words, but he's got this flash in his eye and his fists clenched like flaming meteors, so you know he's set.

There aren't many people here who don't watch the Hawks, but every time you meet one, they say the same things: I don't get it, I don't see the appeal, it's just a game, why do you care so much, why do people go so crazy?

But they're missing the point. It's not 'cause some people love to watch other people throw balls and hit each other and run and cheer and sneer and jeer. It's not any of that. It's 'cause people love to watch a fire burn.

ARTIST NAME So here we are, sitting in one of those vibrating massage chairs at the mall, facing six different flat screens all showing the Super Bowl. I've got Roy in one hand, Prooto otheritle 1 and I'm just talking to him, telling him about football and game day and painted his face to look like a tiny Seahawk, so now when he stares back at me, he looks a little bit tougher, a little bit menacing, and I like that. I look around to see if there are any Patriots fans I can wave him at. Not a one.

It's almost kickoff, so they keep showing all the CGI graphics of the players trying to look cool with flames behind them and stuff, which makes me laugh because then I imagine snarling at the camera in front of a blank green wall on a Tuesday boring like that. It's funny to look at things like that because you can see the lies of it all. Still, I like the graphics, and all the fire and confetti and screaming gets my heart beating loud, stomping all the way to kickoff. I imagine everyone's heart making the same music right now, the meanest sing-along song you've ever heard.

I look at Roy to see if he feels it too, but he just gives me that someday stare. And I know then, gazing into the eyes of my little boy birdman, that I have a bet to make. Hawks win, I say, to no one and everyone in particular, you're going to be okay. Pats win, well, I just don't know, now do I. Is it a deal?

The answer must have been yes because the game started without me, the ball already spiraling through the air without my consent. I don't know how I missed that.

The first half is nothing too special, since the Hawks are just trying to heat up. People are tense, but people are trusting and people are warm and buzzing and humming their own little fight songs. In all the downtime, I point out our players to Roy, teaching him their numbers and names, and what string picks they were, and where they played in college. Though he can't play football yet, I think that if he starts learning about it soon enough, his chances of being good will be better. And maybe then he could get one of those big scholarships to play at college. Maybe little Roy will get out.

At the start of the second half, we're 2-2 and all the mall people have started gathering

around, till we're boxed in by a sea of faded blue and neighbors and talking theories about their players and to be a real player. Hope is just floating in on those T fawning over Roy, calling him the youngest member like such a strong little man. When we're all tied up i impossible, people start asking if they can kiss his hea and think about how perfect everything is, how muc

And Roy must be the real deal because with tw catches a deep pass after it bounced off his body a hu ground. Never touched the ground! Like he was mag Now everyone's on their feet and I'm bouncing Roy the style of our hometown hustle. With just five yard and runs it in to the one-yard line and we know we' celebration, and help him give out high-fives to his b

Wilson tries to score the final touchdown with but it's intercepted by the Patriots. And none of us kn got some downs and we've still got some time and w got a win. That first down was just a throwaway, I asse just a sacrifice to the football gods, just a token to tra what a sacrifice is?

But then the Hawks get an encroachment p we get an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty and we g in the crowd can believe what is happening and we p run down the clock, while we all sit in shock as it all leaking apologies till I cry myself dry, explaining to h start with a win.

> Tell me, how often does God show up at foo How often does He disappoint tiny little bo How often does He deny someone a touchdow

I sure don't know, so I look down at my bird with answers. And he looks up at me, and I am looki so maybe I'm still making stuff up, but I swear to Go

3/2





Sec. ******** NORTH N