



**ginosko** *literary vision*

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## **ginosko (ghin-*oce*-koe)**

To perceive, understand, recognize, come to know; the knowledge that has an inception, a progress, and an attainment. The recognition of truth by personal experience.

One of the most  
beautiful things one can  
do is to paint the  
darkness, which  
nonetheless has light in  
it.

-Vincent Van Gogh

## CONTENTS

**Wings**

**E.M. Schorb**

**Sky Full of White Birds,  
So High They Might Be Clouds  
Michael Hettich**

**Aerial View  
Therese Halscheid**

**Moths  
Olga  
Les Enfants Morts  
Louise Bourgeois**

**The Empty Bed  
Mia Laurence**

**Singular Tense  
Adrienne Marcus**

**Seclusion  
Susan Merson**

**Pomegranate  
Francine Witte**

**Avocado  
Kirby Congdon**

**Dirty, Pinkish Sky**  
Greggory Moore

**Detail, Dali**  
Dennis Saleh

**Three Calls**  
Marc Swan

**From Here To There**  
Philip Kobylarz

**Woman Waking, Seaside**  
Andrena Zawinski

**Wings**

## **E.M. Schorb**

Generally, children are not allowed to get tattoos, so the boy had wings drawn on his back with a marking pencil by his friend. He had a long, narrow back, relatively speaking, so the wings had to be long and narrow, from his shoulder blades to his behind, where the pointed tips disappeared into his yanked-up short pants and came out behind his thighs. His friend objected that the pants would prevent the wings from opening, so, after a few moments of thought, the boy dropped off his pants and stood naked at the edge of the cliff. “How do you know this is going to work?” asked his friend. “It is going to work because these are not the wings of a bird,” said the boy, “but of an angel.” And he jumped and swooped down over the water and then swooped up again and flew into the clouds. “Goodbye,” called his friend, the artist, and “Goodbye” called the angel, waving.

**Sky Full of White Birds,  
So High They Might Be Clouds**

## Michael Hettich

1.

On windy days, seagulls huddled on the windowsill outside my parents' bedroom. I'd stand by the window and watch them and wonder at my skin and heavy body, while my parents moved around downstairs with the radio news turned low. My father's shoes in the closet smelled like living animals, and I thought about sweat. And then I decided to stand very still, until my hearing vanished and my eyes grew skin. By the time my mother called me down to dinner I'd have vanished for a little while. I wanted to tell them how it felt to disappear. Instead we talked about those huge nets fishermen throw from their boats, nets that open up for miles to strain the ocean bare of living things.

Mushrooms grew overnight, all over the back yard. Sailboat masts clanged in the harbor, where we once saw a seal, where we often saw dead fish and condoms and trash. Boys my age would catch horseshoe crabs just to turn them upside down and watch them slowly die. Boys I was friends with caught nets of minnows they spilled out onto the dock, just to throw knives into their bodies, just to see how long they would flip-flop after they'd been cut in half.

The seagulls hovered overhead, with other birds I still can't name.

2.

Then I was a small boy high up in a winter tree, afraid to climb down. There were alley cats above me, prowling and yowling, and I wondered where my friends had gone, who'd climbed so much faster and higher, laughing down at me. There were pieces of cloth in the tree's twiggy branches. Down below, frozen puddles and the ashes of a leaf fire. And then my friends, standing on the ground, were laughing up at me. And I was laughing too, though I was freezing and afraid to move.

*Dead swan by the water's edge, huge and filled with seaweed.*

*Dead swan by the water's edge, big enough to climb inside...*

I slept on a beach, out in the open, under a towel, covered in sand. In the middle of the night large creatures pulled themselves from the ocean and settled down near me.

Birds flew all night there. I slept by listening.

*The soul is a circle*, someone had told me, when I was young and impressionable. So I tried to imagine what such a circle looked like. I knew something inside me was clear like spring water yet grained like wood and fragrant like pine woods early summer mornings. I knew something inside me was happy and clear and would always be that way, no matter what else happened.

And if we came across the vivid breath, blowing through an ordinary landscape, would we stand still and inhale, or would we walk on, safe in our smaller selves, free of that feeling that takes us beyond and leaves us abandoned, out of breath and hungry. Like a stone no one picks up to build with or to throw.

Underneath that stone, thousands of insects, some of which no scientist has named, are building deep houses and secret tunnels underground.

3.

I walked all day, pulling through the branches, each of which was dotted with pussy willow cotton balls which turned, as I walked further, into pieces of cloth caught on thorns all around me, and ashes that had fallen from some huge distant fire. There were small forest birds flitting here and there. The ground was sandy and

covered with sharp leaves...

Then someone said he remembered when the wind had blown backward, and when it had blown without moving.

And then someone else, who knew all the stories about wind, told us how it grew hair and barked, how it blew down your house, how it made things wear away, including its own body, way back when the world was solid and new.

And I can only tell you more than I know because I am a student of rhythms and breath, because I am a student of gestures and blinking, because I am a student of the guts and groans of horses in a field of glittering tall grass, of small birds flying through that tall grass without brushing even one blade. Then landing there to sing, safely hidden in the grass...

4.

An old woman sits alone in her kitchen in her large house in the suburbs. Evening falls. It's been drizzling for days. The TV is on, but she isn't listening. She is drinking steadily, looking at the air. Every so often she says something, the same phrase each time, but we are too distant to hear her. Dark fills the spaces between rain drops, as the rain starts to fall even harder. She gets up, wincing, and walks to the living room, where she stands in front of the picture window. Then she puts her palm flat against the glass and says something loudly, in a slurred voice, twice. She falls into an easy chair and starts to cry, as dark falls across the living room, where a small reading lamp is turned low. The house makes noises around her in response. The dog stands by the doorway watching her cry.

There were fish inside the rain drops that fell today, so small they were eaten in a breath by the air and the lizards and whatever else was hungry. When I watched carefully I could see them flip-flop a few times before they vanished.

Reeds shudder ripples as a school of minnows shivers through.

A spider makes a web between our fingers while we sleep.

And the sky is full of white birds, so high they might as well be clouds, flying to some foreign climate, somewhere far away.

## **Aerial View**

**Therése Halscheid**

In your world  
it was winter. It was cold.

The clouds opened  
as night came

and from them, the selfless falling of angelical snow,  
a crumbling heaven then silence, the earth so white-  
laden.

What peace it would teach the dark — how you would  
feel  
me easing into a clarity I had not known in thirty years

a realm  
of being once more of sound mind

out of my ill body  
long before the last breath.

\*

You sat there, tired,  
through timed moments.

I flew alert  
toward weatherless light

you paced through that vacant look of the streets, going  
going under the giant holiness of trees but never once

saying aloud what you thought of

never out loud even days after my flesh took to cold  
soil, could you admit to anyone, your thinking.

Say it now though — just once

how you have felt

your mind break

because of me.

\*

*Dementia* — that word, what it is made of

speak it where  
no one will know

softly to plants you love so deep in safe woods

like telling on a bad dream, that it would be gone.

Admit my life destroyed you and hear then,

how air answers

for there will be such moving language, a forgiving  
breeze which knows my behaviors  
were not of choice.

My grown little girl, go where the wind talks as it  
covers you saying

what I only wanted to be your good father.

**Moths**

A man without eyes kept looking for himself in dark rooms. At the corner of his favorite room, he fell into a pile of dead moths and said for the millionth time, Why not? and proceeded to eat them. The night was full of moths, and many moths died before the light. The eyeless man ate the moths all night long. When the sun came up, the eyeless man began to cry because there were no more moths nor had he found himself.

## Olga

My first memory of you is in an ancient room, with rusty tools hanging on the wall, shotguns and rifles propped up in every corner, a nutria hide stretched across the wall, and a blood scream so loud that it still lives in my head, like a ghost. Creosote was thick in the room. Outside the window, dust blew between the pines. Little tornadoes formed throughout the air, as the sun died on the horizon. Then, there was the time you caught the gar. I remember how you struggled as you dragged it onto the shore of Lake Ponchartrain. Its eyes were full of fire, and it moved on wooden wheels. It wore a suit of armor that only we could see. It lashed out at me. You laughed. Your amber hair flowed all around against the July sun.

## **Les Enfants Morts**

With your rifle in hand,  
you follow a grey buck  
to the edge of the woods  
and stumble upon  
the remains  
of a children's cemetery.  
On a barren limb of an ash tree,  
a white Cormorant  
waits for you to leave.

**Louise Bourgeois**

**The Empty Bed**

## Mia Laurence

Perhaps she ought to get a new roommate to help with the rent, she thought as she sat down on Anthony's bed. She could wait one or two rent checks--if she got a lot of work this month. And the apartment wouldn't seem too lonely. Sammy picked up Cleo and leaned back, stroking the cat's black shining fur. The phone was ringing but she didn't want to answer. She wanted to make a cup of coffee and sit alone in the small white kitchen. She didn't want to take another job right away. She'd just had a dreadful eight days painting for a man who looked like a gorilla and wouldn't leave the house while she worked. She could feel his impatience breathing through the walls though she kept turning her music louder. Periodically he'd strut into the room where she was working, his belly rolling over his belt, and his ice cubes clinking against the fat round glass he pawed with furry hands all day long. Sometimes she'd get brave and tell him, "Mr. Simmons, I prefer to work alone." His glassy eyes would float around her. He'd smile with thick flat teeth and slowly, ever so slowly, walk into the next room. And getting her money when she'd finished the job. What an ordeal. No, she was not going to answer the phone today.

She put Cleo down and went to the kitchen. It was Thursday. She would answer the phone after the weekend though it was dangerous to wait until Mondays to book a work week. She filled the blue kettle on which Anthony had painted random letters in white. She took the ground coffee from the freezer, filled the filter and auto-matically pulled two mugs from the cup-board, then paused, realizing she was the only one drinking coffee this morning. She ran from the room. "Cleo," she called. "Cleo." But the cat had fallen asleep, curled up in a little corner of the living room.

It had been a long time since Sammy had gone out on a weekday. The Museum of Modern Art seemed like a good place to go. She'd seen much better ones on her travels than the one in San Francisco, but there were a few good pieces here. It was refreshing to see the large canvases of squares and rectangles where colors mixed and blended. Sometimes into patterns, sometimes not. It was nice to see the work of creative minds. Her own work was plain and dull. It was work of necessity, not

passion ( though in his writing, Anthony combined both). She needed a job she could travel with." A job, Sammy, you can carry in your back pocket," said Peter, the old man who had taught her to paint. No boss, no sitting, no having to settle. Painting houses would, when she had work, pay her rent. Anywhere.

She would go out into the sunny September air .She would have a good day. She put on a clean pair of black Levis and a dark gray T-shirt. She put back her long red hair with a plastic pony tail holder, looked in the mirror , then brushed it out. She took off the Levis. She took off the T -shirt. She put herself in a black cotton dress and tied a blue and black striped sash around her small waist. She tied her hair back with a black scarf which she wrapped around the top of her forehead several times before securing it in a perfect square knot in the back. She liked the way the black contrasted with the red of her hair; the way the blue in the sash matched her eyes. She put on her black boots and quickly left the house.

Walking toward a cafe, Sammy swung her hips gracefully. Today she wasn't her black Levis. She wasn't a bucket, a brush and a portable tape deck. The construction men from across the street were calling to a finite Sammy Richardson --a figure she'd paint over tomorrow when she'd step back into jeans.

She stopped for coffee at a small cafe, but quickly added, "To go please," when she thought she saw someone she knew sitting by the wall with a cafe au lait.

"Can you spare a quarter, Miss?" asked a man in green sitting on the street outside the cafe.

"Sorry ," she said, switching her coffee to her other hand.

Sammy stood at the bus stop waiting. Sometimes it seemed as if all bus stops in every city were the same. People, cars, buses going the opposite direction from the way you want to go. The thick air of engine exhaust and scant whiffs of cologne. The smell of being alone. Strange, San Francisco didn't always have that smell. Why was she smelling that smell?

Trying to look occupied, Sammy rubbed her calf pretending she had an itch, as a large light-skinned black woman approached. The woman's eyes were round and bulging. Sammy sighed and waited for the sermon.

"There's gonna be a Armageddon," said the woman. But her voice was not repulsive. "You know what I mean?" She moved closer. "Things ain't right in this world," she said, pointing to the dirty gutter. "Look," she said, raising her finger to

Sammy's chest. "There's gonna be a Armageddon. Cause people don't live by the way of the Lord."

Sammy watched the large circles of powdery rose blush on the woman's cheeks clash against her dark eyes, which widened as she spoke.

"In the streets and in the projects, in the T.V. sets and the C.I.A." She leaned into Sammy, "You know what I mean?" Sammy nodded. Yes.

"You beware. You," she pointed, "are young. Do you want to die young?" The bus was coming. "There's trouble in the land. There's gonna be a Armageddon and no one's collecting any love to share before it happens." People fumbled for their change. "Things is gonna get worse."

The bus pulled up but Sammy could not follow the bulging eyes and painted cheeks. She watched the woman and the bus go off, adjusted the sash around her waist and noticed that the woman must have dropped something from her purse. It was a small plastic ring, the kind you buy in a gum ball machine for twenty-five cents. But it was strangely pretty --a platinum colored band with a light pink stone, rosy pink, like the color of the woman's cheeks. Anthony would get a kick out of it. Forget the museum. She would take it home and put it on his bed.

\* \* \*

She sat on Anthony's bed, petting Cleo and staring at the things she had collected. The phone was still silent but she'd managed last month's rent and the next wasn't due for a week. Maybe Mr. James would have some work for her. She'd call him tomorrow.

She looked to the window. So gray. And to the bed of objects. The platinum ring with the rose gem was her favorite, but the green pen, the blue feather, the gold dog tag that said, "Froggy," the clay bowl painted with quick black strokes, the two wooden chess pieces --the black horse and the black castle, the bottle cap she'd inadvertently put in her sweat shirt pocket on a walk one night, the small bouquet of silk flowers, the brightly colored head band --and the rest --all were special. She picked up the black chess pieces. Somewhere in an enchanted forest she would ride the horse to a haunted castle, plant wild rose bushes and watch them crawl over the castle walls, like ivy, thoming into vines of ever growing protection. Ever since she

was a little girl, she had loved to go to the woods and gather things. Bring them home to make her own secret collections.

She ran her fingers slowly down Cleo's back. She had to start hustling work again. Rent due next week. It was so gray outside. Gray. She'd worked six days last month. But the rent was a lot for one person to pay. She petted the cat for several minutes. His silky fur was soft and oily. Small flecks of dust and dandruff came off in her hands. She didn't feel like making phone calls right now.

Sammy walked to the window and stared at the world Anthony had stared at for many years. He'd taken his desk and his favorite chair, his typewriter, of course, and almost everything from his room. Except the bed. She sat back down. She couldn't go look for him. If she found him he would not come back. He didn't follow; he lead. The day she met him, she was carrying a small piece of agate she had picked up from the ground, tossing it from hand to hand. "That's pretty," said Anthony, stepping beside her from seemingly nowhere. He smiled as she tossed him the stone. He tossed it back, then invited her to his place for coffee. She picked up a feather from the pile, lightly brushed it back and forth across her wrists. She wanted it to tickle but the soft skin was almost numb.

The flat gray street. The dull quiet of his neighborhood. Where had he gone in such a hurry? Why hadn't he taken his bed? Maybe it was too heavy to carry? Did he go very far? It was hard to get used to the absence of the clicking typewriter keys, her late night reassurance that he was home and somehow with her. A quiet sound someone made alone in another room, like a father lighting a pipe...something she could connect with just by knowing that someone was there. She picked up the ring and the little chess pieces. Anthony'd appreciate these things. He might even write a story about them and praise her for bringing them home. Never before had she shown her collection to anyone. Laying down next to Cleo, she closed her eyes and wondered if Anthony would ever come home.

When she woke, she decided she'd be brave and make a few phone calls for work. She left messages on several answering machines, fighting the urge to hang up after the beeps. Her voice sounded so weak pouring into the tapes, she wondered if it left any impression at all. Perhaps each machine swallowed a piece of her voice until, if she left enough messages, she wouldn't have any voice at all.

Just when she thought she couldn't stand to make another call, Sammy got really brave. She'd call her friend Jeffrey. She hadn't gone out with anyone for a long time. She hadn't seen Jeffrey in over a month. He was the only person she had known when she arrived in San Francisco. It was a strange coincidence because she had met him in her own home town in Pennsylvania. He had been driving with a friend from New York City to San Francisco.

She had driven with her mother that afternoon into town for some medicine for Bonnie, their cow, who had an ear infection. Sammy was standing outside the veterinarian's. After over an hour drive with her mother she needed to stand alone.

"Hey Baby! Want to drive to San Francisco with me and my buddy?" asked one of the boys.

They wore blue jeans and T -shirts. But their hair was long. Her mother would scowl disapproval. Yes. She would like to go.

But she didn't say anything. They were probably joking. The other boy, Jeffrey, spoke a little softer. They needed a place to stay for the night. Sammy knew her mother would never allow it. She gave the boys directions to the farm and made them promise not to come to the barn before nine. Driving home she prayed they'd be quiet like they said they would. She didn't want to give her mother another excuse to hit her .

In the morning, she brought them corn muffins and a small sack of apples. Jeffrey shook her hand and said thank you. His skin was cool, dry , but not calloused. She felt her cheeks turn red and hot as he held her hand just a little longer than for a normal handshake. When the boys left, she took in their faces and carried them to her chores for the next few months. She could feel Jeffrey's skin in the palm of her hand, urging her to follow. She could see the two boys' long hair trailing in the wind that blew through her own, sparking the inspiration to get herself away from her mother, her mother's sometimes boyfriend, Cliff, and the farm.

Jeffrey answered the phone and after an awkward beat, she asked him if he wanted to go out, hoping he wouldn't want her to spend the night with him. Though their casual sex usually satisfied some physical need they both shared--shared --his to fuck; hers to be held --she feared that if he touched her tonight, she would cave in, turn from body to dust. She was calling because she wanted a beer and she knew

she couldn't afford it. Jeffrey usually paid.

They sat in a bar in North Beach, listening to jazz and drinking beer . She watched the agile fingers of the pianist press against the keyboard. Fingers long and slim, like Anthony's on the typewriter .

"Were you sleeping with him?"

"Jeffrey."

"Were you?"

"He didn't like me that way."

"But were you?"

"Why are you asking me?"

"Because you're in love with him. I wonder if it's fantasy or if he was leading you on."

"I'm not in love with him."

"You are."

The pianist began his solo. Each note penetrated her skin, stirred her blood, made her body move. Tears rose to the bottom of her eyes as she watched the musician's fingers strike the piano keys. She didn't even know where Anthony was. She felt his hand, his long fingers pointed and erect, brush against her face. She tightened her hands in her lap. The music quieted.

"Finish your beer. Let's get out of here."

Sammy reached for her purse.

Jeffrey touched her hand. "I'll get it," he said.

While they were walking to the car , Sammy picked up a plastic red top from the sidewalk, slipped it into her purse.

"What's that?"

"Nothing." A bus passed, spraying them with loud, dirty exhaust.

"Too much beer?" He put his arm around her shoulder.

They reached the white Honda with the gash in the passenger's side so the door couldn't open. She climbed in through his door and rubbed her fingers against the hard cold plastic, trying to warm it before they reached his apartment. But when he pulled up to the curb, the plastic top was still cold and her finger tips were raw.

His warm body felt alien but nice against hers after so many months sleeping alone, and he had never minded if she wasn't enthusiastic about making love --just as long as he got into her before the night ended. She usually came anyway, even if her mind wasn't all there. Sometimes it made her angry --if she came, he assumed he had pleased her. Tonight though, she didn't care. She hardly noticed what passed between them. Several times her body pulsed and shivered; it seemed to move without her .But it did not cave in.

Jeffrey wrapped his arms around her waist, gathering her against him. She liked the smell of his New York City skin even though it had been years since he had lived there. Growing up, it must have soaked into his body. He was the city hustle, while Anthony was more like what she remembered as a child --a wild cat in the pasture, moving in from behind the woods --stealthy, quiet, hunting its prey. Jeffrey was a wasp, swarming amidst society with a stinger he could project and retract in danger and delight. Anthony was a black cat. Watching, waiting, prowling; striking only in the silence of the night.

"What time should I set the alarm for?" he asked, relaxing from the heat of their bodies. "Does eight o'clock give you enough time to get to work?" "Yeah." She couldn't bring herself to tell him that she had no work.

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With Cleo in her lap, the objects piled all around her, and a cup of coffee in Anthony's black mug with the random letters in white, she sat all morning long, staring out the window watching the gray darken and lighten, change shades but never brighten. Six days of work in one month. She could move, she could. She'd done it plenty of times before. But she'd collected so many nice things here.

A broken watch chain, a piece of felt, two scratched red dice, a candy necklace Cleo had been chewing on all week. Strands of red hair on the blanket. The gray November swirling, pressing against the window. A telephone in the other room, ringing. A pile in Anthony's bed and the ringing in the other room. The grayness of gray. The rent. Anthony's bed. A place she had wanted to lie with him. A place he would not allow her to enter, but

would, like a jungle cat, emerge from; pounce her on her own ground.

"Hello," she said, grabbing the phone.

"This is Mr. Secant." She knew his voice. He had a friend whose friend was going to Mexico for two and a half weeks and wanted the inside of his house painted. She would have to meet him today or tomorrow. He was a very nice man. A rich man. Reasonable. The house wasn't too difficult to get to. She would be able to work alone. He had a great stereo. He would pay her very well.

She wrote down the number .

She went back into Anthony's room. Maybe she should get a roommate to help with the rent. At least then she might be able to turn on the heat. The phone number. Work.

She picked up the platinum ring. The rose painted cheeks. "There's gonna be a Armageddon." Her stomach growled. The phone number grew sweaty in her hand. The gray. The thick gray. Sammy gazed across the pile and picked up a pair of lensless broken glasses, small, round wire rims that curved like candy canes to hold on to the ears. She'd have to leave the apartment --leave Anthony's bed if she didn't make the next rent. The dullness of the street hovered outside. She lay back and put the glasses on her face.

She had picked them up because they reminded her of Peter. Glasses just like the old man had worn, the man who had taught her to scrape, sand, paint. It was a good thing she had met him. She had needed to start making money. She looked at Anthony's room through the wire rim circles.

She took off the glasses. It was so gray outside Anthony's window. Where was Cleo? There was a phone number in her hand. Work. Money. She picked up the platinum ring, examining it against the gray that was seeping in through the window. She examined it framed by the circles of the wire rims. Examined it with the glasses on. So many circles in circles, but no edges connecting. Each circle framed by another, but never interlaced. Ears of corn lying next to each other, each kernel separate. Where was the piece of paper with the phone number for work on it? How could she pay the rent if she didn't call?

Fumbling with the glasses, she remembered when she first met Peter. She had been traveling three weeks, swishing toilet bowls and mopping floors in hostels to

earn a night's rent or sometimes a meal. She was trying to save her money for San Francisco, though she knew she was taking the long way to get there. It was her theory that if she could slip along the water's edge, the Great Lakes' fingers could somehow hand her something she knew she needed though she wasn't sure what it was. She was so proud that she had left her home in Pennsylvania. She didn't know what kind of job she could get. She didn't want to swish toilet bowls forever and you probably had to have an education to get a job in a big city like San Francisco.

Sammy remembered sitting in the common room of the hostel in Madison, overhearing an older man in round, wire-rimmed glasses asking in a thick German accent if the two Swedish girls sitting next to him would like to work for the next couple weeks painting a house. They giggled and quickly decided that they were leaving the next day.

Cleo entered the room, meowed, jumped on the bed and started to chew the candy necklace. Not much left of it. Sammy took it from the cat, bit off a piece, gave it back to Cleo and looked to the floor where she picked up the phone number of Mr. Secant's friend's friend.

She had not wanted to work in Madison, but when the Swedish girls left and the old man leaned over to her with his small gray eyes alive behind his glasses and the strange accent of his voice asking her if she wanted to work with him, painting a house suddenly sounded alluring. So there would be life outside of a toilet bowl, she told him.

The calm strokes of Peter's brush. His soft voice teaching her to mend a house. To blend with life, he said. She had only planned to stay a couple of days but stayed a month and a half. Working just about everyday. Scraping, sanding, painting. listening to Peter as he mixed life into the bucket; stroked wisdom into the walls. He always had a smile for work. Yes, she had to call that number. Peter had usually given her the windows. He said it was symbolic, but when she looked out, she never felt it was a symbol: what was outside the windows was real, and she was part of it. Sometimes he took her out to dinner . And he was so gentle. Most of the time.

"The brush you can carry in your back pocket. like a turtle with his shell, you can take your home with you always when you have a talent like ours," Peter said, splashing her with a few drops of green paint. It had sounded so good then.

"When one pasture is eaten up," she remembered him saying one night as he

battered and salted his thick brown bread, "you go to the next." They finished their meal and cleaned the brushes, then went outside to look at the stars. But that night he had not been gentle. Sammy suddenly put her fists in her lap, crossed her legs and took off the wire rims. That night in Madison, she had put her paint brush in her back pocket.

But she didn't want to do that now.

She didn't want to carry her home forever. Where was Anthony, anyway. Why hadn't he left a note? She had been almost comfortable here with him. Three years. It had taken over four to get here. And never in one place very long.

She picked up a broken chain from the bed. Cleo must miss Anthony's graceful hands stoking his back. Three years in Anthony's other room, listening, waiting. Sometimes sharing. Bringing him words and phrases she heard traveling to and from her jobs. And occasionally ...She covered her breasts with her arms and lay back. Cleo brushed against her. She picked him up and put him on her belly, stroking him softly, his gentle purring vibrating against her.

When there hadn't been work for her, Anthony would buy food and she would cook. Here, the brush didn't slide into her back pocket if she was out of work a few days or even weeks. She'd go out in the day and bring home words, an observation, sometimes just a random letter --things from her eyes, he said. Cleo was warm and heavy on her stomach. "Where is Anthony?" she asked aloud. And it struck her how little he had talked to her. It was often the clicking of his typewriter, a sound so harmless and reassuring, that she heard. Not like a screaming mother's tirade. She put her hand on the pile of objects and picked up the platinum ring, tracing its circle with her finger. She touched the rose colored gem. She would have to call that number. But she was so sleepy right now. She closed her eyes, and rolled over, careful not to crush Cleo or to disturb the things she had collected for Anthony.

She did call Mr. Secant's friend's friend the next day but he had found someone else to do the job. He was sorry. He had thought she hadn't been interested.

She stood by the phone a long time. She could pack up. She could leave. She could carry her home away. She could try to get some work. And get a roommate to help with the rent. She didn't want to move. She made coffee, sat in Anthony's room until the cup was empty, then called number after number but spoke to no one, and

left no voice on any machine.

She made fliers and wrote her phone number on them in pieces that could be torn from the main poster. She put on her dirty black Levis, a large gray hooded sweatshirt; a smile that didn't seem to be her own. She'd love to take Cleo, but he was settled by the pile on Anthony's bed, chewing off the last bit of the candy necklace. Sammy didn't want to disturb him.

The sun had actually come through the weeks of gray. The sky was blue; the crisp air expanded in her empty stomach. She walked a few blocks, put up several posters and tried not to put anything in her shoulder bag but found herself taking two silver jacks and a small red super ball from the sidewalk.

She walked for a long time, feeling the bones in her feet press through her shoes into the ground. People looked so rich and happy. Everyone buying coffee and muffins, croissants, chocolate cake. She passed a crumpet shop. The smell of rich butter baking. Fresh blackberry jam running over the top of a biscuit.

"Spare some change?" Sammy was startled. She hastened her stapling.

Was there anyone she could possibly call for money? A place to go? She thought about the farm. It had been a nightmare of fists and screaming. How had she got herself out of it? The sour smell of milk splashed against the floor. The bloody scraps of meat on the butcher block. The hardened rings of bourbon under cocktail glasses in the mornings. She stapled her posters and tried to remember the will power she had summoned to save herself when she was seventeen.

She remembered watching Jeffrey and his friend drive away the morning after she had secretly let them sleep in the barn. Watching their car shrink into the distance, her hand tingling with the cool touch of Jeffrey's skin, she had known right then that she couldn't stay at home. Her mother had just invited Cliff to live and drink with her and had decided after a fight with Sammy to "clean house," meaning she had thrown out Sammy's collection of the special things picked up on her walks alone in the woods, while Sammy was out doing the chores.

Sammy had packed her bags that night. She had a bit of cash saved up from working at the Jimson's doing odd jobs, picking apples, milking the cow, sifting oats and corn. As she put up her last flier, she remembered the strange flavor of time the night she had left. She had been stepping into a present she had wanted to walk into without her past. The night air had vibrated with crickets' song, the crisp cool

breeze blew against her face, whispering into her ear .The evening was singing. She had walked to the roadside and stuck out her thumb, looking only forward in the direction that she was pointing.

Several hours after she left that morning, Sammy reached Golden Gate Park. She needed to sit and relax for a while. Her fliers were all gone, but her shoulder bag was no lighter. She had found several things today. She sat down. And the gray started rolling in, thick and moving quickly. It was fine though. Fine. Her feet hurt. She was tired. The cold fog was rolling in. Fine. Roll over me, Mr. Fog. Roll me in your thick wet body. Make me cold. Turn me gray. Take away the little bit of sun that shines. It's just fine Mr. Fog. She took out the apple a woman had let her buy for only twenty-five cents when she couldn't find another dime. Some people were very nice. She ate it swiftly and threw the apple core as far as she could towards the beginning of the fog bank. Maybe Jeffrey would take her out to dinner .

Sitting across from him, Sammy watched the candle flicker to the rhythm of Jeffrey's voice.

"So he might lay me off. It wasn't my fault his truck got hit, but he's been so touchy since his wife left him."

Sammy buttered another piece of bread.

"I don't know what I'm going do. I guess Wallace's dad could always use extra hands at the factory, but I like the freedom of driving the truck all around. I love the truck." He poured more wine. "I hate the truck. I'll love it though once it's gone." He looked at her. "Cheers." Their glasses clinked.

She watched him eat to pace herself. The lasagna was warm and red. She was watching another human face. Eating. Drinking. He looked like a hornet --small dark eyes above a long pointed nose. She hoped he didn't mind her sloppy dress. Her dirty jeans.

"You're a little quiet," he said.

"Just tired."

"What's up?"

"Nothing."

"Sure?"

"Yeah."

"I'm glad you finally called. You never answer your phone."

She finished her wine with a gulp. He emptied the rest of the carafe into their glasses.

"I've found a girlfriend," he smiled. She bit her lip. "You've got to get over that Anthony. He loved his typewriter, not you."

Sammy pressed her eyes into the red checkered table cloth.

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In bed at night, petting Cleo, Sammy began to hear the sound of Anthony's typewriter keys. His words, his phrases, her desire to stay in the room next to his tonight, tomorrow night, the night after that, forever, and long ago after the first night she had slept here. But she had been so used to traveling, putting her brush in her back pocket. Crawling into her green turtle's shell. Why had she suddenly wanted to settle here? She got up to make coffee, pretending that it was morning, the only time of day he had allowed her to enter his room. Standing by his window looking out, she sipped the hot coffee, slowly. It was a different world. Anthony's window at night. A gray street turned almost black. A single street lamp far to the left pouring yellow light into the dense night air. On a clear night the light must have been beautiful, inspirational. No wonder he'd sat here night after night.

Sammy sat down on the edge of his bed, the center piled high with so many things. She brushed her fingers lightly over the whole mass, and then tried to outline each object one by one, until she felt she could pick up and handle some of the pieces of the collection.

He would like this one. She picked up a small plastic bear with a black nose, puffy cheeks and a very round tummy. Perhaps like Pooh, he had put his paws into the honey jar a little too often. She put the bear down softly and picked up a unicorn she had found. It was silver colored. Very light weight. The horn was shiny and she doubted Anthony would like it but the sparkle had caught her eye. Anthony didn't like symbols of fantasy; he often mocked the Pegasus and Unicorn fad that had taken up racks in stationery and toy stores. Cleo ran into the room and jumped into her lap. "Look at this Cleo, it's a harp." Too small to play. She put down the little

object and petted the cat, staring at the pile on Anthony's bed. She picked up a fluorescent pink earring, long and rectangular with a shiny gold hook. She had found it outside the Exploratorium. The night so black and gray. Black and almost blue. She stroked the cat, raking through his tongue-polished coat, put the earring down and fingered a broken piece of green glass she had found on a sidewalk. Would she have to move? It had been habit for so long; so easy, easier than staying in one place and getting close to people. But now it seemed so hard. The nights alone in her room, connected to Anthony by the sound of a typewriter, the clicking keys...and the occasional connection. Her turtle shell always in her back pocket, but her room always in the same house with Anthony. Three years. Her stomach growled but she wasn't hungry for food. "What shall we do kitty?" she asked out loud, feeling the energy from her voice fading like a dying battery. She scrunched her eyes to blur the outlines of each object as it rested against another. A wonderful collection. Hers. If she sat very still, she could hear the click, click; click, click click of the typewriter keys. I am here, she thought. Cleo felt warm and soft in her lap as she touched the piece of glass. She picked it up and dragged its sharp edge against the tip of her finger down past her palm, imagining that if her blood were to spill, it would pour liquid green.

# The Singular Tense

Adrienne Marcus

She has come to the island to run away. From her marriage, in the final process of disintegration, from her lover, who keeps saying he understands her need for privacy, and from herself, with whom she wakes up uneasily each morning.

The island is the closest she has ever come to a spiritual home or revelation; a place she has been invited to once before, by Ellen, the woman who owns it. Ellen invites people to stay as her guests on her private island. Ellen calls or writes them, issuing invitations. Still, many do not accept. The island is not for everyone. The wilderness is constant, the light unforgiving, and the solitude absolute and terrifying.

As she steps down from the pickup truck onto the slate stones of the patio, an unaccustomed emotion overwhelms her. She understands why explorers kneel and kiss the ground upon which they land. She wants drop to her knees, ridiculously, bend down and feel the fine Georgia soil between her lips; to give up speech, to stop explaining.

She is here again. The warmth from the island sweeps over her like the tides coming in from the sound. it is green and alive here. The land has had a terrible drought for over a year, but yesterday the rains began, and she imagines, if she looks up into the giant arms of the live oak trees, the Resurrection Ferns are uncurling, leafing out, with their small green statements of survival.

She rounds the corner of the big house and looks out; the giant azaleas are in blossom; bright sprays of pale coral seem to hang in the air. Other azaleas, lower bushes of lavender spread out over the soft ground. The wisteria vine is about to present its own shade of purple, the nugget-like blooms that will fill the air with high, sweet perfume.

Above her, the arching live oaks swing chiffon drapes of Spanish Moss, long grey-green beards waving in the late afternoon air. The sky over the Sound is darkening; rain tonight, thunder and lightning perhaps. The water is taking on a color she knows as a storm color, coffee and cream churned together, pulling in long

lines toward the ocean to be swept into the turbulence of the Atlantic a mile or so away.

Instead of walking directly to her room, she goes to the edge of the marsh. From here she can see the point of beach that is almost impossible for her to walk to, surrounded as it is by marshes. Beyond that is the ocean. She stands very still and breathes in the deep salt air, not wanting anything except joy. Joy she is alive, safe, here. A place where they may be answers. If there are any, they will come from the wilderness inside as well as the wilderness outside. And they will bloom like the massed azaleas, fluid and fierce, in their own time.

She wakes up in the middle of the night to the sound of the storm lashing her windows. The rain is forming a language of its own, tapping out messages against the small panes, gust after gust bearing words she can almost discern. A huge palmetto branch is flung against her window; she jumps out of a dark sleep and begins to feel the anxieties creeping back. No. She admonishes. No. They must stay on the mainland. They can't cross water to come here. Safe island. Safe. The rain subsides into the rhythm of one word until she falls asleep, not waking until the grey, heavy light forms itself behind the shade of her window.

She walks back up the main road, hoping the heavier rains will hold off. One of the other guests, a man named Arnold, accompanies her. He knows how to use the radio-phone and has offered to instruct her. It is a mile from the main house to the radio-phone. As they walk, the sky continues to darken. Suddenly, across the distant savannahs, a sheet of lightning appears.

"Yo betta put that umbrella down," Arnold says, "No use invitin' disaster. Mo' people killed here in coastal areas by lightnin' than anywhere else."

Obediently, she releases the snap on the black umbrella and it retracts. The skies begin to pour. She wonders if drowning is any different a death than lightning. They run toward the small house just ahead, trying avoid the open areas. She is not sure if it is guilt or duty that makes her call home. Perhaps she has not separated herself as well as she hoped from the past. Part of her wants to keep in touch, but only by radiophone. Only from a very long distance. She calls her husband. Their voices are

strained. Hers, on this end, with the joy of a survivor. His, on the other, heavy with the knowledge that she has moved away. The distance between them has taken years. She has finally given up trying to cover it with bridges and small causeways. Now it is fully formed between them, both open and solid. A palpable pain.

She makes one more call. To her lover. The no's in her previous conversation give way to yes's in this, but the effect is the same: separation. Yes, she is here. Yes, she is happy. When she hangs up she thinks of how much she needs time alone. To learn the terrors out of which her life has been formed. Here, on the island, despite the other guests, she is most alone. Perhaps there is a new vocabulary which is hers. She has had no language without plurals in it. She has never learned to speak first person singular. Or to dream in the singular tense.

Amanda. Arnold. Richard. Barbara. She repeats to herself the names of the guests. Amanda and Arnold. Richard and Barbara. They are not couples. They are names; easier to learn in pairs. Perhaps that is why she has stayed married so long. It is easier to think in pairs than to think alone.

She begins to separate them. Amanda has red hair. Barbara has long brown hair. Richard and Arnold both have beards and mustaches. Only their eyes are different.

She has begun to talk to the island. The long beige savannahs, the forests of palmettos, the heavy underbrush are now constant companions. She has less to say to the other guests each morning. Words are used only for tasks: please pass the salt. Please pass the butter. Thank you. Please. When Arnold asks her, casually, after breakfast, if she is married, she hears: Marred. it is the way the word sounds in Georgia. I am marred. But I won't be marred forever, she think. But she nods her head yes. Then, no.

The water is the color of the slate slabs on the patio: a cold, hard blue. The steps are also slate, but in other colors. Green, blue and a peculiar shade of red. The color of a bruised heart. She knows that slate is not indigenous to the island, and wonders where it comes from. But she does not ask.

She goes with the group to the beach today. It is an eight mile drive through the interior. Finally, they break through the heavy cover of trees to the dunes. They are warned about snakes. The huge rattlers which are beginning to wake from hibernation. To stay out of the underbrush. To stay on the beach. Everyone nods. They separate, except for Richard and Amanda who seem to be walking together. She sees this as she walks toward the water. It is a long white strand of beach on the Atlantic; deserted except for the five of them and Driver. She picks up shells, looks at debris. A horseshoe crab, its brown helmet stiff and unyielding in the sand, swarms with scavengers. Aside from cockroaches, she remembers, this is the oldest unchanged life form. And it is dead. She wonders if the horseshoe crab was marred. She has filled her small green bag with as many shells as she can carry. There are the beautiful Lightning Whelks, their insides still pink and vulnerable. The bigger ones are brighter inside, orange. She has found some Lettered Olive shells. That is the name that Driver calls them. She bends down, picks up a Little Striped Venus; the grey pearliness is slightly open. No one home. Egg ribbons lay half buried in the beige sand. She finds two Moon shells and places them with the Whelks and other bits of the ocean she is collecting. At her back are the dead beach trees. They frighten and intrigue her. The high tides have eaten at their roots. Salt kills. Only the branches and trunks refuse to leave and stand as grey, oblique warnings to the greener palmettos and oaks behind them, still out of reach of the high tides.

There is no one in sight now. She puts down her bag of shells, all she has been carrying, and article by article, strips off her clothing, hanging it on the limbs of a dead tree. She rushes down to the water's edge. The ocean is quite warm; she remembers that it comes in over two miles of low sandy stretches. Warm enough to swim in and she walks out to where the water lifts her body up and bears it easily. There is nothing on the horizon but water meeting sky. How simple it would be to float out and out, she thinks, but then her eye is drawn to the shore. There is the glint of something distant on the beach. Driver's truck. Reluctantly, she leaves the water. As she climbs into the air she reaches the tide line. The hard packed sand forms wave after wave in the pattern on the retreating ocean. She wonders if this is the way she looks, just under her skin.

In the house are books about the island. One of them is a shell book. She reads

that she has collected an Incon-gruous Ark. It makes her smile. She glances through the pages, trying to identify by memory what she has. What she has not.

After dinner they all gather in the large living room. It has grown cooler tonight so there is a fire in the fireplace and the fatwood burns with an intensity the color of the inside of the Lightning Whelks. She is listening to some of the other guests. Barbara, who is young and arrogant, has pinned her long brown hair up. She is smiling from the mouth down, with the look of someone who thinks she will be famous. Her mouth is a red orifice; it stretches and pulls her face into what should be sensual lines and circles as she talks to Arnold.

Arnold, framed by the window. Listening to Barbara. She leaves for coffee. Arnold is alone. He looks out toward the dark sky as if waiting for lightning. But the sky is black, relieved only by a thin scar of moon which shines like obsidian on the equally dark sound just beyond the window.

Amanda comes slowly down the stairs. Her red hair haloes out around her lovely face, but there is a small look of fear in her eyes. She does not believe in her own loveliness. Richard stands apart. He is watching her closely; something in his eyes is trying to balance violence and gentleness.

All of this she watches, just as she watches the guests. She has already heard their voices, the soft murmurings of the women, the more deliberate bass notes of the men. Arnold is talking to Barbara again. He is now explaining a story. His face, hidden by glasses and a beard, is serious. His words come out of a long patterned maze to reach air. When he tells a funny story, he is unable to laugh. Barbara, she of the arrogant smile, automatically laughs at the pauses as the words form sentences, paragraphs, closures.

Now Amanda joins them. She, too, is smiling, and her tall, thin body weaves in and out of the conversation; she is like a reed, able to bend with their voices, able to speak, able to sing the intricate passages. Only Richard, still slightly apart, is punctuation. He is commas, semi-colons; periods. He is used to being heard. But there is a gentleness about him that he is not quite sure how to show to others. He is always more considerate than he first appears.

Someone asks her what she thinks. She smiles and shrugs. Pain has a long

memory.

Driver sees her walking down the main road. "Anything you need" he asks. She shakes her head.

"Remember," he nods at her. "Stay on the marked trails. Snakes cumin' out now, and you best watch yo' step."

She smiles and nods agreement, begins to walk off.

"And be sure to get back by supper. Or we have to come fetch you. And you know cook don't like that." He laughs his thick laugh. He knows she remembers the rules from the last time. To stay on the trails. The deep palmetto groves and heavily burdened oaks block out the sun. It is hard to remember directions on the island. Easier on the beach.

A letter for her on the living room desk. She recognizes the handwriting. It is from her husband. She knows before she opens it what it will ask. How is she. Is she happy. Each black line is a long string that wraps around her ankles. Arms. Each paragraph is a knot.

A blue heron lifts up off the savannahs: she is outside, keeping an eye out for the alligators that are in the brackish waters along the causeway. She thinks she sees one, but it turns out to be a half- submerged log. It is the same color as an alligator. Slate-grey.

When she wakes up this morning the entire island is encased in a dense grey fog. The trees are thick skeletal shapes, looming figures that cling only to air. She waits until the fog lifts, then she walks through the forests, finding the new shapes of things. The air is still dense. It alters the sound of her feet on the leaves.

A new guest arrives. Roger. He is deliberate and methodical and asks too many questions. At first she avoids him, but he keeps following her, asking about her. She finally speaks and attempts to explain to him that questions have more than one answer. He may have the wrong interpretation about events. About her. She tries to explain that no, her husband or ex-husband is a nice man, and he deliberately

mishears her.

"I think it's hypocrisy to stay in a marriage that's been dead a long time."

She doesn't answer. No use to tell him the only words she remembers: responsibilities. Obligations. Entanglements. Amanda sees the exchange. When Roger goes off to stalk someone else, Amanda comes and tells her, quietly, that Roger wants to leave his wife and five children. But he doesn't know how. She listens to Amanda, who is both tentative and sure.

She has begun to forget what her husband looks like. Her lover is not much clearer. They have taken on sepia tones, blurred lines. Everyone off the island fades, like old photographs, into some faint image she wishes to remember. Fixed poses. Mouths frozen in silence.

Richard and Amanda come down the stairs together. She realizes they have become lovers. They glow in each other's presence. Their bodies shine with a clear, burnished light. She is pleased at their circle of happiness which includes, rather than excludes.

That evening, there is music and dancing. Everyone laughs a lot. Even Roger. There is a full moon over the water and she goes to the large window in the living room to stand next to Arnold who is also watching the reflected moon on the Sound. The moonlight lays on the water, spreading waves of pearl; the whole surface is opalescent and grey, shifting slowly toward the waiting Atlantic. She has begun to forget what lies beyond the Sound. She vaguely remembers that there are other islands.

That night she dreams she is flying. Her body touches the tops of nesting places without disturbing the white egrets curled like enormous pearls in the dark branches. She is both participant and viewer in this dream. It is like looking through the heart of the shells she has found.

She wakes up to rain. It is still dark outside, but she hears the bell ringing. That answers her questions: it is time for breakfast. She dresses slowly, unable to remember what she wore yesterday, puts on her walking shoes last. It will stop

raining after breakfast and she will walk. Arnold, already at the table, asks if she would like to walk with him this morning. "Walkin' is good for the heart," he assures her. But not lightning, she thinks.

Driver is waiting for her. He has brought over the mail from the mainland and hands her two envelopes. Each is marked special delivery. She places them in her pocket, unopened. She already knows what the letters will say, importune, demand. She no longer cares. Returning to the forest, by mid-afternoon she is in the middle of the island. The sky filters through dark palmettos and hickory trees with small streamers of light. A red-shouldered hawk swoops to a low branch; he has a snake in his mouth. Lunchtime, she thinks.

Huge magnolias are on either side of her, they will bloom months from now. Their flat green leaves are too dark to allow the sun through. When she comes to the washed out bridge, she is upset that she cannot get across. She skirts around, but there is no way over. She must retrace her steps, and discovers, on the way back, an immense oak that has wrapped itself around an upstart palmetto. She laughs out loud and is answered by a red-shouldered hawk. She wonders if it is the one she saw earlier, but she cannot be sure: there is only its brief shape against the darkening sky.

When she finally returns to the house everyone is already seated for dinner. The last chair is left vacant for her and she simply sits down, offers no apologies.

"We were about to send out a search party for you," says Barbara, pursing her too red mouth. Roger frowns in agreement.

The dinner is punctuated with small bursts of laughter from both of them. They find each other agreeable. But they will not become lovers. They are too selfish.

She tells Cook she will not be there for lunch. It is the polite thing to do. She says she is going to walk to the beach.

"Driver will take you," offers Cook. "It's nine miles; there's bad marshes along the way." Driver comes in and agrees with Cook. It is not a walk she should take, they insist. And once again she is told the snakes are stirring. It is 80 degrees out. Copperheads. Coral Snakes. Rattlers. Water Moccasins. She remembers what she has read: if yellow and red bands touch, it is a coral snake. The only member of

the cobra family that occurs in this country. There is no anti-toxin for its bite.

Walking under the Live Oaks, she glances to her right and left. Sounds. Small rustlings in the leaves. She pulls back, momentarily frightened. Then a family of pigs darts out from the underbrush. The multicolored piglets are brown, black, white, spotted, striped. The huge sow is black and stands between her piglets and the intruder, who is now laughing in relief. She continues to stand motionless until they have all crossed and disappeared deep into the underbrush on the other side. Then she moves on.

It is not just out of caution that she watches the ground. There are bluets in white and blue patches. This morning, she saw her first wild violets. Snowdrops, near the gate. And in the back, hidden away by the rotting fence, there are a few bushes of pink azaleas. But she has to look for them. Things are hidden away in strange places on the island. Like the row of camellias that lead back to the wilderness in the rear of the main house. Roger has informed everyone that these are the remnants of what was once one of the finest formal gardens in all of Georgia. There is also the remnant of a pool. Roger has found an old book which proves all of this.

Midday again. There are no shadows where the light fans through the dense hands of the cabbage palmettos. She knows the names of many of the plants now: Blue stem palmetto. Saw tooth palmetto. In the distance she sees a swamp maple. When she arrived it was fiery red. Now it has subsided to greyish green. She hears a noise behind her. It grows louder. The pick up. Driver. She steps off the road and he slows down. "Checkin' the hog traps," he informs her. He puts the truck into low gear, rumbles off. She tries to calm herself by repeating the names of trees: White Oak, Live Oak, Loblolly Pine, Youpon, American Olive, Hickory, Slash Pine, Laurel Oak, Willow. Everything that grows on the island. But it does no good. At the next place the road forks, she takes the one she hopes he did not.

Before falling asleep, she thinks about the hog traps. She has tried to open the gate when she sees the little piglets trapped inside, but she cannot manage it. Only Driver can. She hates the way they huddle at one end, terrified, squealing. She also understands where the bacon comes from at breakfast.

She is not sure if she is dreaming. There is an argument going on. Two people, a man and a woman, are fighting. Each wants what has been promised. The woman says the conditions are different now. The man disagrees. A bargain is a bargain. She has no heart, he says. She does not care who she hurts to get what wants. His voice is violent, angry. He shows her a note: she is sitting across from him, shaking her head. She wishes he would leave her alone; that he would quit moving his mouth and speaking at her. In the darkness of the room there is a question as to what is dreamed and what is real. It is very cold; she pulls up the covers around her, but the voices continue. Finally, she puts the pillow over her head. The smothering darkness is soothing. It blocks out the voices. When she wakes up she thinks she sees two cigarettes stubbed out in the ashtray on her dresser. She says nothing about any of this at breakfast. When she returns to her room, it has been cleaned up. The bed is freshly made. There is no ashtray on her dresser. It is in the living room, she knows, safe and empty.

Later that day she feels the storm gathering. Weather pushes down on her skin the way clothing does on other people. There is a small scuffling noise behind her. It is the donkeys that wander over the island at will. Some are tame enough to allow themselves to be petted. She does not reach out and touch them; she simply looks at their sad patient faces, watches as they lower their heads to eat the fallen Spanish Moss. Last night heard one of them braying; a loud guttural sound twice as large as the animal. The donkeys are grey-taupe. The color of Spanish Moss. Perhaps in time everything turns this grey-green color on the island. Except the palmettos which maintain their fierce sense of indignant green, but even some of them hold the waiting grey in their thick spiked trunks.

She is beginning to hear better on the island. It must be the stillness that is everywhere, for, far in the distance, she hears a boat approaching. She cannot even see the wake of water or the small form yet. But it is there. In a few minutes the white object pops out of an aperture in the air. It is the small island boat, she realizes, as it comes closer and closer. It slows down at the approach to the dock. For an instant, she thinks it is her husband. Terror cements her feet to the road. She

cannot move. She cannot hide. As she watches from behind one of the palmettos, she notes the way he walks. Now she can hear his voice. It is not her husband. She continues to watch as he approaches, closer, closer; she likes the way light strikes his eyes, turning them the color of the island. Grey or green. She cannot decide which color.

His name is Arthur, he tells her. He is an artist. She does not ask which kind. That would be a question on the mainland, not here. She wonders how the island will look, the colors he sees. It is as if he learns new ways of combining colors. Pleased that she has remembered this, or just learned it, she smiles.

She takes Arthur with her on a walk that afternoon. It is strange to try and talk to a person, she realizes, so she pretends she is talking to the trees or the birds, or her companions, the ghosts who live on the island. That way it is easier to form thoughts. Arthur does not seem to mind that she doesn't complete sentences, that she begins a thought and lets it drift into the thick underbrush. She does point out the important things: the distant marsh grass, *Spartina*, that is just beginning to turn from its golden red into the green look it will have until late summer when it bleaches out. Now it is the color of a blonde woman's hair that is just going grey in streaks. The river curves around and frames this part of the island; one long dark streak curving across the marsh and through the palmettos with an easy motion. She shows Arthur where the bridge has been eaten away. The banks are undercut, gouged out in grey and brown striated layers. Only the pilings, leaning at strange angles toward the former roadbed, still stand. This must have happened just before she arrived; the top of the wood is still raw looking, as if the wound has not had time to heal itself to a weathered finish yet. The nails still glint in the sunlight.

More letters arrive today. She has not read the ones that came days ago. There is also a phone message for her. The checkmark asks that she return the call. She throws it away. There is one picture postcard as well. She makes the mistake of looking at the picture then turning the card over. She cannot decipher if it is from her husband or her lover. As she attempts to read it all the old pains and anxieties return. All of the failures of which she has willingly been part bridge the distance

from the mainland. Her face moons up like an orange that has been left in the sun too long. Slowly deflates. There are her hungers. The unwelcome visitors.

Deliberately rips up the card, lets the pieces fall into the wicker wastebasket.

Now she feels better. She walks slowly into the kitchen and begins to prepare peanut butter crackers. It is good, she thinks, to no longer be responsible. To voluntarily be a child again. She wonders why she ever decided growing up was a desirable state. It was simply the accumulation of a grey many bad experiences, something called maturity. She is stripping away all that, cracker by cracker. For dessert she wants something soft with a sweet filling inside. Pudding, tapioca.

On the point, at daybreak, she sees the face of her husband-lover floating in the water. The face has long teeth, rows of them, like an alligator's. The mouth opens forever. It is crawling up the point toward her. She holds her palm upright, as if to gather the lightning still hidden in the sky to deflect it. The thick knobbed grey skin appears to shrivel. Stunned, the face retreats to the water, waits just below the surface.

That night at dinner she tells Arthur and Richard and Amanda about a friend who left the island. They all have many things in common, she tells them. But not what. She looks carefully at the three of them; Arthur is young, the future spreads out its possibilities for him like definite leaves, trails, branches. He thinks of the future in terms of steps. One thing leading to another. She thinks of it as a spiral, curving back up and down, over and under, but never the same. She wonders how Richard and Amanda will deal with the future once they leave the island. She sees them moving toward and apart.

Cook brings out the barbecue pork with a hot sauce. She likes it so well she goes back for seconds. As she is about to take the final bite, she remembers the pig family. She eats it anyway.

Amanda and Richard are now deeply engrossed in one another. They hardly eat at all. They are devouring each other with lips, tongues, eyes. She remembers that love is a consummation.

Ellen has not returned. Each day someone reports that Ellen is to arrive that very afternoon. It no longer matters; the house runs efficiently, quietly, by itself. The animals graze contentedly except when the afternoon brings a storm in. Then they hide under the heavy branches of a tree. Just as she does.

Her clothes are loose on her. She thinks about going to the mainland to buy new ones, but each time she approaches the dock she turns back. The pig family is not seen anymore. She wonders if she has eaten them. There are other pigs, of course. The island seems to breed them faster than they can be captured. She is thankful for that. Pigs kill the snakes that live on the island. Coral snakes, rattlers, water moccasins. All these live just behind the bushes, under the palmetto trees, in the water. Once she saw a tiny chicken snake, just hatched, crawl under the palmetto leaves. She knows that the island permits her entrance on its terms. For now.

That night she dreams of Barbara and Roger. In the dream Arthur is speaking, telling them about his plans for the future. They discuss alternatives, options, ways of making the future agreeable. Positive. She says nothing to any of them and watches the way light strikes the insides of their mouths when they talk. It shines through the membranes like the unhinged jaws of a snake when it is ready to strike.

Driver is in the kitchen, talking to Cook. She notices them glance toward her, then pretend not to see her. She reaches up into the cabinet and takes a box of cookies. I Returns quickly to her room. Goes to the closet and checks what she has secreted away. A jar of peanut butter, a box of saltines, a knife, a spoon. Matches. a Bit by bit she has gathered these things to her. She adds the box of cookies, unopened. Rolls up her coat, stuffs it in the duffle bag. A rain slicker would have been nice, she thinks, only she does not have one. She walks to the window, repeats to herself the names of birds: Red-shouldered hawk, red-tailed hawk, cardinal, pileated woodpecker, buzzard, boat-tailed grackle. She is summoning her allies. Tells them in a high whistle she will be joining them soon.

A dense fog closes in. It thickens itself like pudding around the house. She knows

this is the time to leave. Tells herself that she is just taking a long walk. Gathers her things, takes them out of the duffle bag, inserts into her knapsack. Puts it on her back. Once out the front gate, she begins repeating the names of the trees again, adding Magnolia Grandiflora, Red Bay, Youpon. Their names will protect her. She looks up at the giant Live Oaks with their grey and red lichen clinging to branches and trunks, and then upward to where the Resurrection Ferns form a lacey green overlay. She knows that by nightfall Driver will come looking for her. And he will have her husband, who is trying to claim her by degrees, with him. They will take her back, trap her, all in the name of love. Or her lover, who has slipped onto the island with Ellen, pretending he is worried about her. She is no longer sure they are not the same person, since they look alike, have special ways of finding her, trying to contain her.

She is wary now. She tells herself they have waited because they wish to surprise her, to catch her like the wild pigs in their traps of words and reasons, to bring her back to the mainland where they will tame her, teach her the language she has forgotten. But she has become part of the island; she can hear them approach miles away. She will curl up at the first sound of them, like the grey sticks that become the fern only when conditions permit survival. She listens for any civilized noise; at the first sign of human noises, she must return to a dormant, unrecognizable state. Become the grey green of the island, assume its camouflage to protect herself.

She moves stealthily through the dense leafed forests. She has gone miles off the path, circled back, curled around, doubled over intersections to confuse them. The fog has burned off. The sun sings her passage as it slants through the late afternoon hollows of the sky. She imagines that in the far distance she hears her name lifted, helplessly, on the wind, but it is so far removed, so indistinct, it is no longer her real name, but a collection of strange syllables. A word that might mean something to those whose vocabularies are bound by words.

Soon it will be night. The sky darkens slowly, turning the color of bruised plums, slipping over the grey green land, robbing it of what little light there is. Soon she will be as alone as she ever hoped to be.

Heat begins to radiate back from the ground enclosing her in long, warm waves.

Then she hears the other sounds beginning. The island that looked like grey green heart on a map she carried with her, alters. It bears almost no relationship to the wilderness that is now encroaching upon her. It beats with its own life; pauses. Like valves opening, it pulls her in.

## **Seclusion**

**Susan Merson**

Her father sat at the head of the table. His bulk was barely balanced on the spindly chair that elegantly set off the mahogany. Looking into the glass of the china cabinet, the child could see from her vantagepoint in the next room if his expression changed. It did not. Lowering clouds. Thunderstorm threatened. Inky horizon.

At one point the child slipped into the silent dining room. His car keys were right there. Silver against shiny veneer. He had only to lift them up, get into his Imperial and drive back to Chicago. He had lived there before the War. Before my mother and her two children who won his hearts in the middle of a measles attack. He came back. Never went to the Orient to take care of the postwar mess in Japan as he had planned. He came back to the Midwest. The snow. The flat, gray terrain. A stormy marriage. Two carrot topped stepchildren his wife would not let him get too close to. And then there was me. The product of the union. He would stay for me. But so still.

He didn't look at me. Just sat and thought. So loudly I thought my head would burst. I didn't dare speak. I sat for a while. Looked at him and then didn't look at all. Then slipped off the green striped satin and went back to my room. To bed. I would check and see if he was still there in the morning. He was like stone. Too heavy to flee. He couldn't move to the door. Not in this state. Still. He had never been so silent.

And it was the same now. In their marriage. Her husband hadn't spoken for two days. No angry words just a palpable disgust that kept the two of them apart, out of the sphere of the other. She waited. It was up to him to break the silence. It had been the same before. A deep disgust from him. A disappointment at his choice. Not just her. He wanted so much to not be disappointed and it was this he was working on. At least this is what she thought. She didn't intrude. He needed time. Until he worked it out. Whatever it was. Whatever conversation he was having with himself about whether it was worth it to stay. Whether it was worth it to split the

household, disappoint the child, fight for the scraps of what would be left of a substantial time spent together and built.

There was always an uneasy truce. After they realized that neither would give. They made a gentleman's agreement. This is how it was. Each of them said yes and continued to say yes for fifteen years, now maybe 17 years. The child born, the business grown, the dreams deferred. Still, it was not a bad life. If one said yes on a periodic basis and saw it for what it was. An amiable union. And even familiar. Too fearful for it to be passionate though each longed for passion, in their work, in their lives. So bleak on paper but rather fulfilling and sporty in the living of it.

Still. Now. There was a waiting . To see what would emerge from the private struggle happening in the bedroom all alone with himself while she slept hapl: in the office. Relieved to have the doors open to the cool night air, the dog snuggled against her legs and the soft down of the aging sofa holding her every curve.

She remembered the marriage. The wedding trip. The first night in Paris when she silently lay awake figuring out how she would manage to return all those wedding gifts. How she , at the same time, needed to use his toothbrush. Feel it in her mouth, feel him in her mouth, that close. As he slept the sleep of the innocent. The sleep of the adored. Of one who had done a good deed and believed in the goodness of it.

In Paris, she hadn't believed that they would be welcomed as old friends. Even though they were, a huge bouquet of lilies oating above the Paris streets, heading straight to their little room on the 5th. Propped up on the mantelpiece choking the room with beauty.

The small deux cheveaux putt-putted them to the northern coast of Spain, to restaurants that were always empty, because he liked a large empty room when they could be alone together, though he rarely spoke. The paseo every night the town of Gaudi. Architecture where they

strolled with the summer crowd of regulars, a couple after dinner  
digesting a life to be.

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## Pomegranate

Francine Witte

She liked to eat everything with chopsticks. Rice, of course, but even ice cream. Her favorite thing was pomegranate — hard red skin and millions of seeds. When he saw her for the last time, he brought her one. *Red*, he said, *was the color of goodbye*.

When the landlord told her she had till the end of the month, she washed the chopsticks carefully and wrapped them in tissue paper.

At the new place, her first night's dinner was pomegranate because she wanted to change it to hello. The chopsticks packed away, she tore through every carton. Books and sweaters, but where had the chopsticks gone? How would she ever eat again? With a spoon or fork or even her lovely opposable thumbs?

She took a breath and bit straight on. Sank her face into it. No utensils now. Sometimes, life takes teeth.

## Dirty, Pinkish Sky

Greggory Moore

It's flat and turbid. The ram clouds are an amber-brown, collecting dust and not parching this desiccated basin. The air is close and full of heat, slightly smothering everything. The birds don't seem to want to fly in it, even though the onset of dusk is when they like to play around here. Someone's coughing underneath all of this, and I realize it's me, I'd forgotten for a minute. There's a pink behind everything, the sun must be going down somewhere behind those clouds. They must be huge to hover over everything that can be seen from here. I look behind me, but there's no sun, just worthless clouds.

I keep walking east. I've been walking east for an hour, walking in between coughing fits, so I don't know how far I've gone. I spit on the dusty sidewalk and look at the wad of brownish phlegm (with a bit of blood that looks like the nougat center in one of those little rolls of caramel that you can buy as bulk candy at the supermarket), disgusted by myself, disgusted by my dying, the way it's happening, the decay, the rot, the deliberateness. I want it to rain, but I know it won't, I know this place too well, I know that fucking sky.

It's been so long since I've been here. Why did I come back? I hate this place, I always hated it. I think I just didn't know where else to go, what else to do, and there's an instinct to want to make a pattern of it all, to describe an arc or circle instead of a random, inscrutable squiggle of a life. Dumb.

I look up at the hills, at the faux-adobe houses up there. They're all pink, vibrant and alive, illuminated, and I remember them as uniformly being a nauseating yellowish-cream. The clouds seem to glow from beyond, and I realize it's the sun. I look back, but I can't see where it's broken through, can't see the where it could have descended beneath the cloud cover before dropping off the horizon, a horizon that in any case I couldn't see for the ugly urban sprawl. But up there the houses somehow are beautiful, the hills, they visually sing. I knew a girl who lived there once, 50 years ago, I wonder what she's doing now

## *Detail, Dali*

**Dennis Saleh**

Crimes of the genitals  
have frightened a sky Later, a collar returns to the  
scene of a crime splayed and unruly while  
unconscionable grime smudges the glass face of a  
time piece upon the plain of eternity where the  
horizon frets evenly in its blue sleep

## **Avocado**

**Kirby Congdon**

Are these monuments-in-miniature  
memorials to a thousand griefs?  
I, greedy, eat the fruit  
an ego's season gives  
as I put the pit aside to pot.  
Ripe, its root sprouts eager pleas  
like shouts for help in appendages grabbing out  
at some infinity's relief  
where I read encyclopedias,  
in their extended epitaphs  
of tropic leaves, to expiate  
what, deathless, still has ceased.  
The birds, the trees, a neighbor's hello  
have no monument.  
Avocado, with your new leaves,  
here's your water.  
There, the sun still stands.  
Memorialize the thousand labors  
through those thousand years  
your history's memory knows.  
Vulnerable avocado, generous, forgive  
this continuous dying of each thing.  
Deny the destiny of the dead.  
In your own green and eager ego  
as if eternal, show me how you grow!

## **Three Calls**

**Marc Swan**

*There was blood in my semen* he says when I ask of his recent medical visit. He tells me they went in with a probe and sliced seven pieces of flesh out of that quiet organ with the walnut shape hidden deep in the soft folds of his rectum. The next call is a job offer, quite unexpected, punctuated with the fact that I have one week to make a decision. The third is of another kind, this time my wife answers. A neighbor has called about another neighbor, a quiet, attractive, single mom with big eyes full of wonderment who discovered her thirteen-year-old son hanging in her garage. I have no words to say when my wife tells me this between gasps and sighs and eyes wide with the confusion that accompanies a parent's worse nightmare. I told my friend with the bloody semen that my heart was with him, that there are treatments now that far exceed our imaginings. *I imagine they won't be necessary* I tell him. It is the karma thing I operate under. The job, it is the right offer for the wrong company, and I will deal with that another time, but the child, the barely adolescent I spoke to last week after the blizzard as he tromped through three feet of snow making his way home, what words are there in the lexicon of human kindness that can make any difference at all.

## **From Here to There**

**Philip Kobylarz**

“You’ve got to breathe,” I told her. “You’ve really got to breathe, afterwards. I don’t care how good it is.”

“Oh, you don’t care?” she asked from behind the black veil of hair that concealed her face. I couldn’t see her mouth moving.

“You know what I mean.”

Marie had a tendency to give her all, to go all out. She was really wild when we were together. But afterwards, she would stop breathing and lie there as still as a sleeping body. I would have to nudge her or watch her back to see it rise and sink, to see if her lungs were tenuously pulling on a thread of air. She could be so still. Sometimes she wouldn’t say a word for a half an hour. Sometimes it scared me.

We were at the Blufftop Motel somewhere in the arid zone of southeastern Colorado. Our bodies and minds were drained as we both rested quietly while staring at the red glare of a digital clock. There must have been a recent storm that knocked the power out. It’s common knowledge around here that you wake to sunny skies, clouds roll in late afternoon, it rains fiercely, then clears up. The rain stops you for a minute from whatever you’re doing to watch the sun light up the dust in the air and extinguish behind cloudbanks that look like another distant range. It’s been so long since I’ve been West I had to spot the scud and smell the cold dirty rain to remember what it was like. Most days it worked like clockwork.

The transparent white curtains were split open and in between them we could see a creme-colored plateau, streaked in green stripes of some kind of vegetation, maybe sage or juniper. I doubt pine, at least not yet. We hadn’t come far enough to see a forest. This city seemed to be surrounded by tableland that was fissured into a million canyons like hidden mazes leading somewhere way beyond our gaze. And in them, the bones of dinosaurs sequestered. We would never find them though. Maybe no one would. Anyhow, we were just passing through.

We were going to the ocean. What we were really doing, who knows? Perhaps eloping. Maybe leaving our lives behind in a city where we had decent jobs and happy lives but not enough ways to get out. Maybe just taking a few days of vacation in the dying weeks of summer knowing we would return to our old selves safe and locked behind the deadbolt of an apartment’s door.

The day after, we rose early and crossed Utah and the wretched desert of Nevada. The sun shone blindingly the whole morning of driving ~and our car hummed over the pavement like a well-oiled fan. She drove for hours with her eyes fixed on the unending slit, sometimes jagged, line of the horizon, switching the radio dial around to find any kind of music. Anything. A lot of rockabilly, low-budget classical, and whiny,

excitable men talking about the divine tricks of Jesus. How Our Lord walked much the very same landscape as these wastelands speaking of fecundity and the God in man. How he could make wine out of water and fish out of nothing but stones in baskets.

I was seeing the illusions of Palestine myself come to life in the vapors of heat above the highway. A sidewinder was really only a streak of orange desert sand brought to life by a gust of air. The mountains in the rearview weren't moving and the Santa Fe train line underlining them wasn't moving backwards. The wooden sign marking the playa couldn't have said "next exit 150 miles."

There were tens of different brands of gas stations and hastily erected warehouses. Sometimes a Calder of a refinery lit up with circus lights. I thought of ranch houses on the moon. Cattle trails were ground into the land like directions cut for the single engine airplanes flying above us. The few cactuses were in bloom with feathered hats of yellow and orange-like red.

"Pull over!" Marie yelled, waking me from my road dream. A rooster tail of dust enveloped the car. She ran Out, leaving the door open, onto the scrub and piñon of wilderness. Flinging her leather purse along, at full-sprint, into the dying light of the desert, where the only cover was bush and rock streams of arroyos. Her glasses were sitting on the dashboard, fingerprints about the edges of the lenses.

Fourteen minutes passed before she was back. Her hair in switches and her

cheeks blushed by the wind.

“What’d you do?”

“I had to pee. It’s really beautiful out there. Everything’s alive. Even the dirt. i think I saw a scorpion. There was something out there. I mean i saw something moving on the ground.”

We guessed we were still in Nevada. Tumbleweeds and gray stone hills in rows like monuments to nothing. The gas stations petered out on the highway where only fence poles marked the highway’s direction and served as civilization’s minimalism. A mantle of cool air was descending. A naked hand on the windshield left a stain of condensation. I began, I believe, seeing cradles of fog here and there, ghosts of clouds for seconds under the brights, Seeing ~5 believing.

Marie drove for the rest of the night. One arm on the door, the other changing the dial or adjusting the mirrors. i wondered: to see what? She found a station that was on the frequency of short wave, emitting only beeps of sound, static and eerie feedback “There,” she said “that’s it.”

When I woke, we had come all the way to Sacramento. The plains rolled at the same speed as us and buckled into a crease of hills behind. After them, the ocean. Further west, Asia. She pointed to a jack-knifed trailer. Four cars had piled up behind it. There was an ambulance and the few cars of traffic were slowed down at the scene. A man lying on a stretcher, tied to it, with a reflection of red in his eyes similar to that of a wolf’s I thought I saw once as a boy in the north woods. Two men were carrying him to the open doors. He could have been seeing angel wings. The Greek becoming visible in the blue writing on white background: PARAMEDIC.

We had miles to go before we would reach the Grapevine, then the unending patchwork of Los Angeles, if the city could be seen under the blanket of early

morning fog to be replaced by the opaque grey of afternoon pollution. We had arranged a place to stay somewhere along the coastal highway. It was an abandoned shack on the beach that was formerly used as a summer house by Marie's sister who worked from time to time as a writer for television. She was now in between jobs and wanted the consolation of company. We would stay there and visit her in her new place in the hills. She warned us that we might become enchanted by the larger than life billboards on the road to her house and would never want to leave the glorified brand of reality that Southern California breeds. She referred to the region as "So Cal."

"You wanna drive now?" Marie yawned.

"Sure."

The suburbs began and never did they cease. There was so much visual stimuli that I could barely keep my eyes on the road. Road sign. Call box. Weeping willow. Little Saigon. Traffic light. Palm trees ruffling their feathers in the breeze. We had made it to the end of a continent. The odometer changed over. Warm air filtered through vents and smelled of pavement and ocean sand.

A sidewalk extended into the sea. On the concrete platform, the iron railing had rusted to a deep maroon. Blotches of deep blue paint remained like thumbprints of limpets. Wooden benches with mainly seagulls aligned on them. It smelled of the cheap seafood restaurants burdening the pier. The word *crab* in Chinese and an airbrushed watercolor of the bright orange spider on a poster fluttering on a false kiosk. Marie got out of the car. The ocean was just across its empty parking lot.

The Santa Monicas leaned into the water, green in the distance, a mist beginning around their base and the lip of the ocean. The arcade was lit up. There were the musical chords of a carnival.

The first thing Marie said was "Oh shit."

“Look, it’s not that bad. There’s seagulls, a mist coming in, look at that, down there, those models. It looks like there doing a fashion shoot

There were women dressed to kill behind lights and some men in leather. One had a camera. Another was telling the women where to stand.

“My pants. They’re ruined.”

I looked over the top of the car. Marie had a dark halo around her lap. What she called her monthly curse had followed her. I remembered the cactuses in bloom.

“So what,” I said. “Put a long shirt on. We’re here.”

We walked along the pier breathing it all in. At a tall, wooden building that had the word “Sinbad’s” painted on it, we stopped. It was abandoned but once must have been an arcade or a bar. Its gabled roof with warped planks peeling apart from one another seemed really western even if it wasn’t. ‘truth was the only thing that wasn’t a commodity in this town, maybe even this era.

The continent lay behind us. If there is such a place, or feeling, or state of something called happiness, we had found its momentary location. But like a hungry seagull, it took off on the next ocean breeze.

Marie, with her eyes scanning the distance and the ends of her hair feeling for the salt in the air, said, “Well, we made it. We really made it.”

“where’s that?” I asked.

“From there to here,” she whispered. We breathed in the iodine of coastal air.

# **Woman Waking, Seaside**

**Andrena Zawinski**

The shroud of coastal fog rolls over  
a woman lifting herself up  
  
from deep pockets of sleep, from night's  
low note still whispering in on the lip  
  
of the wind, on a slow drum of rain.  
She rubs the slumber from her eyes,  
  
lifts herself up to the cool  
wet of the dawn, while the boats slip in  
  
edging the tombola near Point Sur.  
High above a sand spit, trade winds  
  
wrap like scarves at her neck, the day  
long and languid stretching itself  
  
ahead, imagination her ear  
pressed to the wall of the heavens.

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