

# S P I R E S

TWO THOUSAND ELEVEN  
FALL



# S P I R E S

intercollegiate arts & literary magazine

- fall 2011 -

Copyright 2011 of Spires  
Volume XXI, Issue II  
012345 First Edition 67890

All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from Spires and the author.

Critics, however, are welcome to quote brief passages  
by way of criticism and review.

Front cover: “The Crumbling Spires of His Mind” by Nancy Yang  
(acrylic, Washington University in St. Louis, 2015)

Back cover, top: “Bauhaus I” by Kait Mauro  
Back cover, bottom: “Bauhaus II” by Kait Mauro  
(photograph, Washington University in St. Louis, 2014)

[spiresmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:spiresmagazine@gmail.com)

# CONTENTS

---

Bridget Harkness	The Breakfast Crumbs.....	5
Sue Hyon Bae	The Author.....	6
	The Hermitage, Arkansas.....	7
Lisa Pang	This Evening.....	8
Alexa Mechanic	Hard As Nails.....	9
Juliet Kinder	This is a Love Poem.....	10
Trace Palmer	Love poem to the girl in the library, Level 2.....	13
Mikkel Snyder	Cameras.....	14
Vicky Plestis	The Bus Stop.....	16
Hilary Rasch	Red.....	23
Allison Becker	The Humans Reject Their Facebooks and Things Return to Their Origins.....	26
	Lime Green.....	27
Nora Long	Hope.....	28
Cassie Snyder	City Witch.....	35
Jason Schwartzman	Stick Figure.....	36
Abigail Droge	The Wise.....	44
Amy Conwell	catholic.....	47

# ART

---

Nancy Yang	The Crumbling Spires of His Mind.....	front cover
Rachel Sard	We Just Stand at the Jaws of the Cave.....	19
Allison Zuckerman	I Real Eyes.....	20
	Tethered Tongue.....	20
Natalie Uy	The Musician.....	21
Jordan Gamble	Holiday by the Sea.....	22
Kait Mauro	Bauhaus I.....	back cover
	Bauhaus II.....	back cover

# STAFF

---

Editors-in-Chief:	Eric Hintikka Adam Weiss
Literary Editors:	Nora Long Paul Gabriel Morales
Treasurer:	Trace Palmer
Layout Editors:	Alyssa Celentano Susannah Lohr
Art Editors:	Amy Novak Michelle Turgeon
Public Relations:	Cassie Snyder
Staff:	Jonathan Freeman Margery Gang Peter Jones Ellie Kincaid Juliet Kinder Aiko Krishna Sophia Nuñez Andrew Ridker Abishek Saxena John Schmidt Jason Schwartzman Eve Surcobe Leah Sutton Pete Vinotai Nancy Yang Miri Zawadzki

## The Breakfast Crumbs

The outside of the plate has small lines like the rings inside trees that show age. My fingers trace the blue grooves like circling condors. Crumbs collect in my finger prints, which I always thought resembled the liquid inside lava lamps.

It is strange, the way we assign meaning to abstract shapes.

My father, the soil scientist, clangs the dishes like a solo percussionist round the all-white kitchen. So white, occasionally I feel like I am on a ward for the cooking insane. His bruise colored shirt smells sour from day old sweat and the deep desert clay.

Mouth blackened with grinds he lets lose steam between lips like dragon fire. Raisin bran clinks against the big ceramic bowl like hail on tin roof. He sits and shuffles the paper to sports, left hand holds his #1 Dad mug. He has this way of speaking that makes everything sound like a comma and a sigh at the same time.

“Tomorrow is take your daughter to work day.”

“Yeah?” The top of his head peaks out like a balded mountain between two black brush hills. When I was younger I would draw his hair like an upside down triangle without a bottom.

“You used to like that.” He says. I check my cellphone, holding the keys of my green Honda like prayer beads.

“Yeah?” I am sucking the crumb dust off my pinky. I stand and bring the dishes to the sink. “I think I mainly just liked the swivel chair -- I used to spin until I was sick.”

I pause, looking out through the old blinds, “So I think I am going to go?”

His voice filters through page ten, “Well, it’s always nice seeing you.”

The screen door snaps behind me, like the jaws of a giant bear trap. The sun is lengthening across the sky like long yellow teeth between the horizon’s purple lips. The mourning bird’s coo cuts a path through the heavy morning moisture.

A mountain in the distance holds two fading clouds on its shoulders and I remember feeling small.

*Bridget Harkness  
Johns Hopkins University, 2014*

## The Author

The lawyer retired to a cottage  
to write his memoir. His lamp ran on moonlight.  
His chair creaked with spite.

He knew all the chapter titles:  
The Carpenter Who Climbed An Ice Ladder.  
A Shopping Bag of Heart Attacks.  
Frowning Song for Addicts.  
Navels and Umbrellas and Hot Plates.  
The Spy Who Sold His Copyright.

I think he lived alone  
in his cottage. I believe he once had a wife,  
a lepidopterist unfurling antennae with forceps.  
In his book, he pretends she is his secretary.

*Sue Hyon Bae*  
*Washington University in St. Louis, 2013*

## The Hermitage, Arkansas

We only meant to stop for lunch but a flash flood spilled over the only road through town. It was lovely to be able to breathe without lungs shriveling in the heat, it was worth letting in the damp stench of earth to keep our windows open. It wasn't raining. People stood in the roads dumb as cows staring at their shivering fences. Dad tried to find the stock market amid the weather reports in the tv box. The landlady herself brought around room service, all of her kitchen things on wooden trays. I wondered what kind of crops were drowning in our view. A dog hopped up putting his muddy paws and jowl on our windowsill. Mom offered him the celery stalk out of her bloody mary. He rolled it around in his mouth then spat it out on our carpet before leaving.

They sold me the auditorium and I moved all my parents' furniture on the stage, arranged like a crowded domestic drama. I kept them hidden behind the screen. Greta Garbo stretched her swan neck and warbled I want to be alone. And fell in love with a thief that same night, traitor anchoress. I kept everything my parents had. The clothes older than me were spread on the floor to keep down the rising popcorn fumes. Their college textbooks weighed down the seats to keep them open and occupied. I gave all the telephones to the neighbors, but Dad's tenants wrote postcards instead. I kept finding them grimy with postmarks, tucked among my groceries. ALL OF OUR LIGHTBULBS ARE DEAD, the note in the egg carton wailed. IF OUR CARPET IS NOT SHAMPOOED THE BABY WILL DIE OF ALLERGIES soaked up juice under the fresh chicken. How could I arrange to sell property home to agoraphobics and diapers? How could I leave before the end of the movie?

*Sue Hyon Bae*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2013*

## This Evening

I am wiping the dirt  
off my window, waiting for you,

and polishing the horizon  
between two slats.

For while there exist  
over fourteen definitions for love,

I have heard of only one definition  
for window cleaning.

And I am thinking about a poem  
I will write tomorrow, comparing

you to a grapefruit  
and me to a starfish

so I can ignore how  
love sometimes feels

like uncertainty and the greed  
of wanting just another bite

And I think, if this is love  
I don't want it.

It is messy,  
and makes me nervous.

But if you come,  
I will give you this rag

and let you touch me  
through the skin

while forty thousand city lights  
shrug on and off  
to the rhythm of your hands.

*Lisa Pang*

*University of Pennsylvania, 2013*

## Hard as Nails

One by one, María strokes the pale pink polish onto my fingernails. We sit on opposite sides of a small table, about a foot apart, my hands splayed out for her to massage and chisel and coat with lacquer. I stare at a photograph of a family in front of an adobe bungalow on the salon wall, letting María's own rough and polish-splattered hands blend with mine.

"You want design?" María asks, and I tell her no thank you, not today. María's face is absent of expression. Her sister works at the next table over, and, mid-manicure, receives a phone call and starts sobbing. María rises, speaks Spanish with the crying girl, and her face crumples. The two scamper out of the nail salon, the sister clinging to the cell phone. The woman to my left and I stare at each other, baffled.

The girls burst back through the door and break the peaceful bubbling of spa water. They cry to the owner about needing dinero and el hospital won't treat su hermano because no tiene una visa.

I stand up and sit with my mom and two other ladies at the drying station, placing our hands on a slick slab of black marble. We are a helpless cluster huddled together in a mess of wet polish and purses.

"So sad," one of the women whispered.

"I feel useless," my mom replied.

We hastily spray our fingernails with enamel dryer. And after dousing ourselves in the translucent, protective cover, we quietly exit, the bell on the door ringing and ringing behind us.

*Alexa Mechanic*

*Johns Hopkins University, 2014*

## This is a Love Poem

I

I fell in love with my poet because he could twist his words into needles  
And send them darting into flesh  
So they would emerge and he could suckle out the bitterness.  
Not to taste life's inner rot,  
Or some such nonsense,  
But because he was infatuated with the taste  
Which I am told was of pomegranate.

II

He said you couldn't just write poetry:  
It coursed through your veins in place of blood  
Skin was formed out of words like 'concrete' and 'abstract'  
Woven together like a fine cloth.  
His joints were made of metaphors and  
His heart was a stanza that no one had yet read.  
This was his lofty way of saying that  
He did not want me to write poetry  
Just in case I might be good.

III

He needn't have worried.  
And I am writing him a poem anyway.

IV

His poetry had no frame; it was just line after line  
Stacked up like a brick wall  
And I wanted to wear him as skin so I could  
Smell him all around me.  
Close my eyes and only see his swirling thoughts

V

His pens were the kind that you could dip in ink.  
He looked at my laptop as if it carried  
The plague.  
'Computers,' he said, 'are the gravestones of poetry.  
They filch away romanticism.'

VI

I am typing this.

VII

I fell in love with him because he wrote poetry about her  
And because of the child that crouches inside us  
That still wants to pick at scabs to see how much they hurt.  
He wrote poetry about her even though he once told me  
That one-sided love was so  
Cliché.  
I loved him because he couldn't follow his own advice.

VIII

His sulky eyes and brooding chin bashed against the paper  
And he talked about dimples and ears and smiles and legs  
And the trembling of his heart;  
His heart which was so full that the slightest touch would bruise it.  
He wrote about her laugh- of bells, her tears- of stars, and her name.  
I forget what he said about her name  
But I think there was a metaphor in there somewhere.

IX

My poet would sometimes take my hand into his and intertwine our fingers  
Like the wood of a basket  
He would brush his lips against the tip of my ear  
And whisper "Am I your glorious today?" if he was feeling especially cruel.  
I had no idea what he meant, and I don't think he did either, but  
He was warm against me, and the word glorious  
Fluttered in the shell of my ear.

X

Haikus go 5, 7, 5  
And they have to be about nature  
This is a haiku:

He built her a cage  
Out of carefully picked words  
Something about grass

XI

I fell in love with my poet because he loved words  
More desperately than he loved her,  
He lapped at them and swirled their flavors against his teeth  
He let them rest on each individual taste bud  
And then ingested soundly.  
This poem is so I could taste them too.  
They taste of pomegranate, and  
Their juices stain my lips.

*Juliet Kinder*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2015*

## Love poem to the girl in the library, Level 2

I see you contemplating a book  
Admiring its sweet pages as you turn  
One over the other into infinity

In you concentration you raise  
Your plastic pen up to your lips  
And bite down hard

I dare to let my mind wander  
And I begin to wonder if perhaps we could  
Chew on our pen caps together

*Trace Palmer*  
*Washington University in St. Louis, 2015*

## Cameras

To the girl I met on the Quad last night:  
I still have your camera.  
I have no idea how I wound up with it in the first place  
But I have I tried looking for you and have been wholly unsuccessful.

I was slightly drenched because of a slight drizzle  
When I saw you across the courtyard taking a picture  
I'm not sure what compelled me to do this  
But I came up to you and said  
"I always thought cameras stole souls"

You took your eyes off your camera  
And looked right through me  
In that moment, I think we both knew  
That I was never photogenic  
While the camera loved you  
Even if you didn't always love it

You said it was okay though  
You told me souls couldn't be digitized  
There were no amount of zeroes and ones  
That could convert the ethereal to binary  
That you couldn't store ether in circuit boards or electricity

But I retorted that my mom taught me  
That lightning was God's way of taking pictures  
And I thought that was him taking a little back  
Because he had given too much before  
And a single moment could be enough  
To steal just a little bit of our souls, of our love back  
I wasn't sure I would want my soul back from those moments  
If it would mean I would take that love away

And as though He heard my declaration, the rain started to stop  
So we talked about the weather  
And God, and faith, and fate  
What it meant to be in tune with the seasons  
And with one another  
How beauty was really defined by personal preference  
But how anything that rose from the earth was beautiful anyways

By the end of our thirty minute conversation  
The rain had stopped and the sun had set  
And you had managed to convince me  
To have you  
Take a picture of the two of us

I developed a st-st-stutter  
At the thought of the camera shutter's flutter  
And if it sounds fake now I swear to God  
It was real then  
And all I am trying to do is  
Recreate the magic  
Of a moment that I wanted to last forever  
Like a photographer trying to capture God's flash  
Or a poet trying to use a thousand words  
To describe a picture and always coming up short

You asked me to smile

You said that if we had to give up a piece of our souls  
We might as well put them together  
To show how happy we were  
In this one moment of fleeting human contact

And that was probably when you were called away by a friend  
And I was left with your camera.  
A collective of a thousand pixilated souls  
Of places and people you used to know  
Still do know  
And I want to know them through you too

Every time I turn this camera on  
I see this picture.  
I'm not sure if I'm stuck in the past.  
Or just anticipating a future  
That will never really develop

*Mikkel Snyder*  
*Washington University in St. Louis, 2013*

## The Bus Stop

The bus is forty-five minutes late. Glenn sits back down on the bench, pulling his coat sleeves over his fingers. There is an old woman next to him, and every time he inhales the wisps of her perfume creep into his mouth, onto his tongue, down his throat. It is a stale, woody smell, like his mother's house.

Glenn puts his hands in his pockets. He forgot his gloves on the bureau that morning as he left the dorms, and the tips of his fingers are now turning numb in the cold. He squeezes them into his palm. The woman next to him has green velvet gloves across her lap, but she does not put them on. Glenn's lesson did not go well that day. When he played, he gripped the cello as if to strangle it. Once the last note stumbled out, his teacher stared straight at him and said, "You play as if you don't give a damn."

"Well," Glenn said, "that wasn't my intention." Glenn stands back up off the bench and rocks on his heels. He glances at his cello case, a hand-me-down from his mother—shoddy buckles and scratched plastic. From a certain angle it almost seems like the silhouette of a person. He cannot look at it.

The woman next to him shuffles in her seat, smoothing out her green woolly coat. She does not stop until Glenn nods in her direction.

"What a beautiful day," she says. He cannot understand why she is talking.

"It's going to snow tomorrow," Glenn answers.

"Really?"

"Seven inches."

It is an unreasonably sunny afternoon given the cold, and the light seems to reflect off her teeth and off the silver strap of her large floral handbag. As she leans in, he can smell her perfume edge closer. Glenn's mother is probably upset he did not visit yesterday.

"Do you play at the Conservatory?" the woman asks, eyes on his cello case.

"Just the Prep School," Glenn says. "I'm at Hopkins."

"My son went to Peabody, you know, ages ago. He loved it, he absolutely loved it. It's a very good thing they're doing there."

She pauses for a moment, and then murmurs, "It's a shame he quit though. It's a shame. He really loved it."

Glenn examines the cobblestones and the bench and the street until she settles back into silence. He was supposed to visit his mother yesterday. He wonders if he should have called.

Instead Glenn practiced for his lesson. He marched line by line through the Bach piece, played each measure slowly, to the metronome, marked out the articulations, compared hand positions. But somehow, still, the notes bulged rudely into air.

“Play it with feeling,” his teacher said.

But that didn't mean anything. It was, he thinks, a stupid thing to tell someone.

His mother studied at Curtis when she was Glenn's age. Once, when he was a child, she played for him in her nightgown and grey slippers. She stroked each string soft like a whisper. He had sat cross-legged by her feet.

“No good anymore,” she said afterwards, snapping the cello case shut.

Glenn sits back on the bench, and the woman next to him shifts until she is just inches away. She smooths out her coat and smacks her lips.

“You know,” she says, “My Tommy played the piano. Took lessons for ten years. He had such potential.”

Glenn cannot look at her eyes, her round little eyes scrunched up in the sunlight. They are ugly. Instead he stares at the gloves forgotten on her lap. He wishes he brought his pair. He left them specifically on the bureau to pick up right before his lesson. He clenches his hands.

The bus is forty-seven minutes late and every time he inhales, the woman's perfume shoots up his nose. It reminds him of his mother. Her house smells just as musty, as if no one has lived in it for years.

“It was a mistake Tommy quit,” the woman is saying. “We've only got a little time, you know, so you got to find the things you love and stick with it. I'm sure you love the cello.”

“No,” Glenn says.

“I'm sure that's not true.”

“No,” Glenn says. “It is.”

“Oh. Well.”

Silence spills around them. The sunlight reflects off her little round teeth.

Glenn was supposed to visit his mother yesterday. He was supposed to help her move. There is no use being in that enormous house by herself. He could suffocate in all that space, all that silence. And the smell. He does not want to be there. He does not want to watch her watch the boxes. It is her fault. It is her fault he doesn't visit. He doesn't want to see her—her bony fingers like spider legs, the sweaters she wears with the holes in the sleeves, the way the weight of her forehead seems to push her eyes down into her nose.

The bus is forty-eight minutes late.

“Well,” the woman next to him begins again, “we all need something. It doesn’t need to be the cello. But something.”

“No,” he says.

“What?”

The last time he visited back in September, when the leaves were stumbling off the trees, she had cooked him burned risotto, and, as he was about to leave, grabbed his hand with her cold fingers. “I don’t have much,” she said. “But I got you.” The whole thing was repulsive.

His fingers are trembling in the cold.

The bus is fifty minutes late and the woman next to him is still talking.

“No, you need to find something,” she says.

“Something. Tommy had the piano. It’s a shame he quit, you know.”

“Shut up,” Glenn says.

“Excuse me?”

“You need to shut up,” he says.

It is quiet. The sunlight flashes off her little teeth.

“You shouldn’t talk like that.”

“I don’t care,” he says. “Just shut up, shut up. I don’t want to hear it.”

The woman leans away and her gloves fall onto the cobblestones. She does not move to get them.

Glenn grabs the cello case and starts down the street. The woman’s shadow crawls after him, but when he turns back to look, she is still on the bench—her hands fidgeting with the buttons on that green, wrinkled coat. He walks until he cannot see her anymore, as if she has been swallowed into the pavement behind him.

*Vicky Plestis*

*Johns Hopkins University, 2014*



“We Just Stand at the Jaws of the Cave”

oil and construction paper on canvas

*Rachel Sard*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2012*

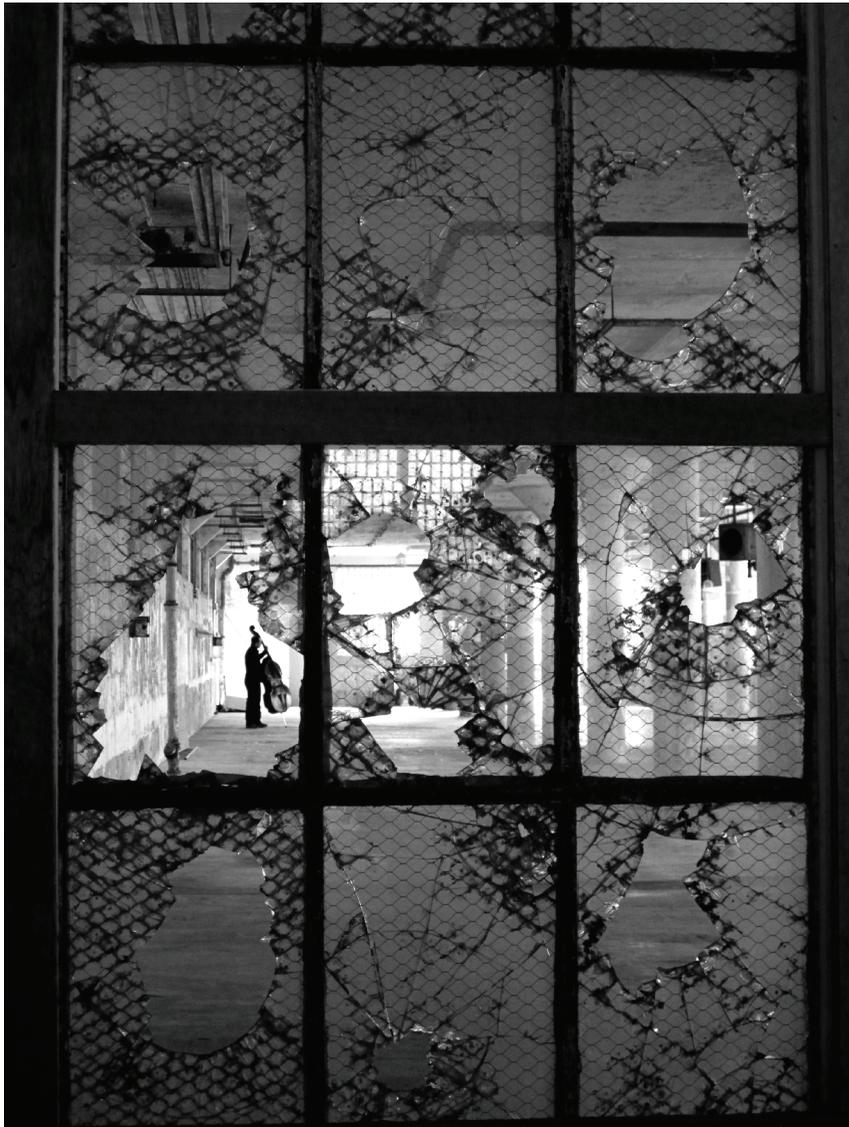


*Above: "I Real Eyes"*  
oil on canvas

*Right: "Tethered Tongue"*  
oil on canvas

*Allison Zuckerman*  
*University of Pennsylvania, 2012*





“The Musician”  
photograph

*Natalie Uy*  
*Stanford University, 2012*



“Holiday by the Sea”

photograph

*Jordan Gamble*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2014*

## Red

Barely standing under the weight of this  
Silvery water that runs down my body,  
White as Lenin's. I'm afraid  
Of the heavy metals from it, I close my eyes  
Tight as tombs, spit out the silver taste  
That slips through my red October  
Lips, pursed together  
Like I'm a babushka on the metro.

"Let's talk about the Russian bweet (everyday life.)"

"Russians do not customarily smile," my teacher says  
With a barely visible smile that makes me smile back  
(And also cry.)

"Is it customary to cry in Russia?"

I try to ask silently through my expression  
(For lack of words.)

But I wear the wrong one.

"Are you confused?" my teacher asks.

Yes, so so confused,

But I shake my head, no.

I fit right in at the restaurant  
The Idiot. It's filled with English speaking tourists  
Talking about their vegetarian diets,

(And making Dostoevsky cry  
In his grave at Nevsky Monastery  
Where the monks make homemade  
Ale to forget the tourists who pour in  
Like imported vodka, who do not know

How to properly cover their bodies in respect.  
God cries about this too,

The monks believe as they drink together.  
Tourists come in to try to buy some of this alcohol,  
So the holy men post a sign:  
“No more monk beer left.”)

The waitress does not smile when she approaches my table,  
But she does speak English.  
“Big or small bread basket?”  
“What is the price difference?”  
“Read the menu.”

I leave the restaurant knowing my idiocy.  
Culture is what makes me feel  
Like I'm a foreigner here.

I hear a rattle on the shower door.  
I've overstayed my welcome.  
(The shower is closed at midnight and it is 00:01)  
The door flies open, and I am a naked,  
Exposed idiot,  
And white-hot mad, like a St. Petersburg summer night.  
I wish I knew how to scream in Russian  
“How dare you expose my foreign body!”  
To the woman who wants to do her job,  
Lock the shower at the precise time.

Water adds lightness to the heavy  
Baroque style of St. Pete,  
According to the historian Orlando Figes.

He does not know that it is dropping on me  
Like a marble bomb.

“Where’s my bunker?” I ask,  
But Putin will not disclose the location.  
Without shelter,  
I fold over like a towel and try to cover

Myself in shame,  
Thinly drip back into my room  
And crash myself into bed  
To sleep forget and comfort on such red sheets.

In the morning I make kasha with embarrassed  
Red flecks of dried strawberries as she,  
The woman who saw me without clothes,  
Comes in to clean the kitchen.

Together we are as quiet as mosquitoes,  
But self-conscious because we both know  
The troubles of our own existence.  
We meet each other’s eyes.

And finally she asks, “How do you say  
Dobre ootra in English?”

(There’s no better way to say  
I’m sorry  
Than to try to learn the other person’s language.)  
“Good morning.”

And so I eat my last bits of anger for breakfast,  
Then wash the pot.

*Hilary Rasch*  
*Northwestern University, 2012*

## The Humans Reject Their Facebooks and Things Return to Their Origins

*“and a billion computers blew apart  
and homed in chip by chip  
on the brains of the inventors”  
Margaret Atwood*

It was the college women who began it. Said,  
I am not a status, an “interested in”  
or a sans serif plastered wall.  
I am more than an album, green dot, half moon.  
Go stalk someone your own size.

The men agreed and vacated their blue  
and white virtual real estate. Kids packed  
up their favorite quotes and parents  
forgot their in-laws’ birthdays.

Time stalled and hurled backwards.  
The teenagers partook in more literal  
poking. Digital camera sales plummeted.  
Somewhere in DC a government worker  
knew a lot less, and the Paranoid  
said I told you so.

Keyboards were pressed only to make music,  
speakers remounted their town square podiums.  
Mice reclaimed their identities, wires  
crawled out of the earth, and Bill Gates  
decided to spend 10,000 hours  
masturbating instead.

The Internet imploded. Files returned to  
their rusted cabinets. Information seeped  
into collections of series of books of papers,  
whose letters splattered their ink back onto  
the Gutenberg press. Homer’s mother gave

birth to a handless, tongueless baby, and  
all the ancient libraries crumbled  
into dust.

And on the sixth day, a powerful wind  
blew that dust between the fingers of God,  
bypassing Adam’s unformed body,  
landing as a billion protozoan organisms,  
whose flagella now wiggle around an  
American landscape that looks like  
an abandoned bowl of soup.

*Allison Becker  
New York University, 2013*

## Lime Green

I was painting my living room lime green when you called to say it's not working. "It's not working," you said, and after you said it I continued to paint. I painted the same way I did before you said it, used the same strokes. Nothing felt different, except that it wasn't working. I finished the living room walls and moved on to the ceiling. I painted the kitchen walls lime green, then the bedroom. I painted the bathroom walls and the hallway. I painted the bathroom tiles lime green. I painted the shower, the sink, the towel rack and the mirror. I painted my mattress and the ceiling fan. The dresser and all the trinkets, dirty makeup and curling iron, buttons, dried nail polish, your last plane ticket, all lime green. I painted the wood floors and doorknobs and light fixtures until my apartment filled with a lazy lime glow. It made what I already painted lime green look lime greener and that was good. I painted the coffee mugs and canned goods in the pantry. I painted the dishes, clean and dirty, the refrigerator and the frying pan your mother gave me before I moved into my apartment, before you said it's not working, before it was lime green. I once read a story where a girl's teeth became rotten from eating too many limes. She had sadness you could see, the kind of sadness that lives on your skin and eats the dry flakes. I undressed and painted my body, around my eyes and into my scalp. I set the paint roller down, sat on the painted sofa and waited for the it's not working to dry, crackle and break.

*Allison Becker*  
*New York University, 2013*

## Hope

“At 12 midnight, I have been instructed to enact a sentence of death by lethal injection on Hope Alexandra Sheppard, for two counts of murder in the first degree.”

They hadn't had any trouble deciding on a name. When her girlfriends started having babies, she heard horror stories of husbands who wanted to name the baby after crusty old Aunt Eunice, or tried to invent names like Lemon, or simply rejected every name that was proposed. Her girlfriends would send their husbands to sleep on the couch, and the issue would be postponed and postponed until finally, three days after the baby was born, one would propose a name that the other was too exhausted to disagree with, and it would stick.

She and Nick never even had to talk about it. The baby was their Hope.

It happened after fourteen months of trying. Fourteen months of coming together in increasing desperation, fourteen months of whispering to each other in the sleepy aftermath about osh kosh b'gosh overalls, little league games, tricycles. Fourteen months of crying every time she felt the blood between her legs and knew she was still empty.

In the thirteenth month, a new word crept into the conversation. “Adoption. It's not the end of the world. It wouldn't be any less our baby. We wouldn't love him any less.” Nick's voice trailed off. She didn't

know who he was trying to convince. She looked into his eyes for a long moment. Then she pulled him close. He resisted for a moment, raising one brow, and she knew he wasn't going to let this go. Then he surrendered to her embrace, brushing his lips against her cheek, her eyelids, her collarbone. They fell quickly into the familiar pulsing movement, but there was a new edge to it now, the desire sharper, each sensation overwhelming her as she willed some part of him to take root in her. When it was over, they lay facing each other, and she held him inside her as his whole body went limp. He smiled at her through half-closed eyes, and they fell asleep without breaking that connection.

A young woman in an orange jumpsuit was led into the room, her hands behind her back in cuffs, her feet chained together so she could shuffle but not run. She kept her eyes on the cement floor, not looking at the table in the center, not looking at the straps that would hold her or the needles that would pierce her. Not looking at her mother, either.

“There's her heartbeat. See? She's a perfect little girl.” And she was, a constellation on the screen, their little Hope. Nick squeezed her hand beside her slightly rounded belly, and they both watched their daughter's heart beating. She tore her eyes from the screen to stare up at her husband's face, memorizing once more the subtle web of lines around his eyes and mouth. His lips were slightly fuller than most men's, and his eyebrows were thick and bushy. She had teased him once or twice about letting her pluck them, but she knew she would miss them if they were gone. His eyes were green

most days, but today she could see the flecks of gold as his whole face opened up in a delighted grin. She tried to imagine that face on a baby. A girl baby. A tiny face smiling that same smile up at her from the circle of her arms.

They were separated by a thin pane of glass. Shatterproof glass. Moments before, all her focus was on the shiny metal tray holding an assortment of needles, but now she turned her gaze on her daughter. For a brief moment, green eyes flicked toward her.

Hope was four months old, probably too young to be taken out among strangers, but her mother couldn't bear the thought of leaving her. She had dyed a little christening gown black, and cuddled Hope to her breast during the service. She had never expected to be doing this alone. But cars crash. Lives end. And she wasn't alone. She was never alone. Late that night, she woke to the telltale wail. It was a hungry cry. Even after Hope was warm and full of milk, her eyes beginning to drift closed, her mother couldn't bear to put her down. Instead she stood there, arms wrapped tightly around the baby, swaying gently back and forth, wanting to echo her daughter's cry. She sank into a rocking chair, and the sun came up to find them nestled there, mother and child.

The young woman stumbled as she reached the table. Her forearm came down hard on the sharp corner, and she cried out in pain. Her mother's hands jerked forward.

A screaming six-year-old sprawled on the ground next to a looming two-wheeled bicycle, clutching her elbow and staring at the blood. A moment later, her mother had gathered her into her lap. "It's okay, baby, you're okay. I'm here."

The guards surrounded her, guns out and trained on her eyes and chest as she gripped the table to stabilize herself. The moment passed. One of the guards came forward to free her arms and legs.

Hope was twelve years old. Her mother sat patiently at the kitchen table, waiting for the telltale creak of the banister that would herald the arrival of the birthday girl. Hope bounded downstairs in a Lion King nightgown, her tangly hair flying out in all directions, bopping the purple Mylar balloon tied to the end of the railing as she went by. She spared a quick grin for her mother and made a beeline for the guitar case leaning against the table, ripping off the bow. She paused then, and her mother gave her a drumroll as she slowly, lovingly lifted the lid. "Oh, wow, Mom. That's exactly it. It's perfect. Thank you!" And she threw her thin arms around her mother's neck.

"You're welcome. Happy birthday, sweetie. I arranged for you to take lessons with Mr. Meyer down at the school, okay? You start Wednesday." It was unclear whether Hope had heard or even cared. She toted her new guitar into the living room and started plucking random strings. Her mother shook her head at the breakfast she had waiting. French toast was Hope's favorite, but it seemed like Hope would be in her own little world for a while.

Hope's mother poured herself a glass of orange juice, smiling as Hope began to pluck out the first halting notes and sing "Happy birthday to me."

Her hands and feet free now, the young woman swung herself nimbly onto the table and lay down. Four of the guards fell back to cover the exit, while the others tightened straps around her wrists and ankles. On her right, next to the tray of needles, stood a man with a short clipped salt-and-pepper beard and smooth hands, wearing a white lab coat.

The years had passed, as years do, a parade of school pictures slowly taking over the mantelpiece until, at seventeen and a half, Hope put her foot down. "Mom, would you please take those pictures down? I look terrible in most of them, and it's just weird that you still have all of them. Look, Keith is coming over, so could you please just try to act like a normal human being for a few hours?"

Her mother sighed a secret sigh of relief. Every night that Keith was coming over was a night that he wasn't out there in the world with Hope. She said nothing, but silently took down all but the most recent picture, laying them in a careful stack on the dining room table. She paused as she returned to the mantelpiece, looking at her daughter's senior picture. Hope maintained that she looked fat in that picture, which was patently ridiculous. But what was really extraordinary was the way her green eyes sparkled as she presented the world with a crooked smile. It was the first picture where she was wearing mascara. Hope's mother had cried the day she sent Hope to school to take that

picture, just as she cried every year. Hope had rolled her eyes but said nothing, possibly in appreciation of the fact that her mother was graciously ignoring just how much cleavage was visible in her tight gold sweater.

Keith, when he came, mumbled a hello in the direction of Hope's mother and disappeared into her room. Eight months ago, Hope had started mentioning Keith's name almost every time she came home and her mother asked, "How was school?" She had also started rolling her eyes at the question. The beginning of the era of Keith had also coincided with Hope's sudden obsession with thong underwear, her need to get purple streaks in her hair, and most recently, her decision not to go to college.

"It would just get in my way, you know? All that money down the drain and for what? Four years of stodgy professors with elbow patches and a few frat parties? It's all about my music, Mom, you know that, and what I need to do is get out there with the band and play."

Keith was the manager of this band, which played in the Sheppard family garage while Hope's mother sat at the kitchen table with a cup of black tea and the comforting thought that the bands on the t-shirts Hope wore these days, Slipknot and Flogging Molly and Nine Inch Nails and who knew what else, must have started somewhere. Hope had long since traded in her grade school instrument for a Fender Eric Johnson Stratocaster electric guitar, which was apparently top of the line.

As far as Hope's mother knew, the band didn't

practice anywhere else. So when Hope said she was going to band practice, her mother would nod and kiss her on the cheek and slip condoms into her purse. Neither one of them ever spoke of it.

From Hope's room came a muffled giggle. Hope's mother went downstairs to put in a load of laundry before the ten o'clock news.

The trial had been short; the young woman had no defense, didn't deny the crime. "Reckless indifference to human life." The words repeated in her mother's head, over and over. Punishable by death. So here was death, calm and sterile and asking only for a witness.

Hope left home the day she graduated high school, and her mother met with real estate agents. An offer came in for the house, and Hope's mother explored listings on Craigslist for apartments just outside the city. Every Tuesday and Friday the phone would ring, and Hope would spend ten minutes rhapsodizing about what a great vibe she felt in Chicago. The clubs were amazing, the band was really coming together, soon enough they'd be playing real gigs. Then the phone calls stopped.

Ten days and untold voicemails after that first Tuesday when the phone didn't ring, Hope's mother answered the door to find a young woman, her eyes rimmed with red, holding a single suitcase. And just like that, Hope was back.

It took a few days, and much patient questioning, for Hope's mother to get the full story. Keith was gone. He had mumbled something about "moving on" and disappeared eleven days ago. The band had never gotten a gig. They never would. Most of the others would go on to wait tables or clean bathrooms or take off their clothes, dreaming of music. And Hope moved back home.

Neither of them ever said the word. Hope spent every morning the next two weeks in the comforting white of the bathroom while her mother perched on the edge of the bathtub and held back her sweaty hair, murmuring gentle words about stomach flu and saltines. She watched her daughter swell. New clothes found their way into Hope's room, vitamins invaded the medicine cabinet, doctor's appointments appeared on the calendar, and still neither of them said the word. Hope stopped talking altogether. Her mother watched her out of the corners of her eyes. Every once in a while she would catch her daughter with her hands on her belly, eyes glazed over, perfectly still, as if listening to some internal cry.

The babies were born at 3:02 and 3:12 a.m. on a chilly night in late March, a boy and a girl. When Hope was born, there had been no time even to get to a hospital. She still had dreams about the exquisite pain of it. It had been raining, more of a mist really, and she could feel the cool droplets on her flushed skin where Nick was leaning over her through the open car door. The whole mess of blood and placenta and rain and perfect, beautiful baby had jumbled together in her mind into a

Moment. This was the Moment she came back to in the months after Nick's death, the Moment she became a mother.

Hope had no Moment. For twenty-two hours she lay surrounded by monitors and IVs, her screams growing more and more anguished while both her slender hands clamped over her mother's. The wedding ring that Hope's mother had never quite managed to take off left deep red marks on Hope's palm.

The room was kept at 60 degrees, and the alcohol the doctor was rubbing on the young woman's arm must have been cold, but she gave no sign of discomfort. Her mother thought of the old joke: why sterilize it? What are they afraid the dead woman will catch? It doesn't matter now.

The babies had no names for their first fifty-three hours of life. After the birth, Hope spent most of the day sleeping, while her mother made a list of everyone who had sent the small ring of flowers and teddy bears that surrounded Hope's bed. When Hope got out of the hospital and things settled down a bit, she would need to send out announcements, and it would be nice for her to include a thank you to the people who sent gifts. After the list was done, Hope's mother haunted the neonatal unit, staring in at the babies. Her grandson waved a tiny fist. Her granddaughter blew a tiny bubble, sighing in her sleep. In front of the cribs were tags: "Baby boy Sheppard" and "Baby girl Sheppard." She tried to imagine what their lives would be like.

On the second day, a few of Hope's high school friends came by to see her, and to ooh and aah over the babies. They used phrases like "so grown-up" and "I can't imagine" and "they're beautiful," but on each face Hope's mother could see the absolute certainty that here was a fate to be avoided at all costs. Hope gave a very brittle smile, a baby in each arm, and asked about boyfriends, big parties, talent scouts. When her friends left, she fed her babies and watched as the nurses wheeled them away.

On the third day, Hope's mother bought a book of baby names. It sat on the tray table for a few hours before the questions started.

"Sweetie, have you thought at all about names?"

"I don't care."

"It's just that they do need names for the birth certificates. You can't go home until that's all taken care of."

"I don't care. You can pick."

Hope's mother would have none of this. The babies should have names, and Hope should be the one to name them. But after getting nowhere for half an hour, she tentatively suggested Nicholas for the boy. Hope nodded her assent.

"Well, then, don't you have any ideas for the girl's name? Just a name you think is beautiful?"

Hope was silent for so long that her mother was already searching for a new line of attack. Then Hope whispered, “Danielle.” And it was settled.

When she was gathering together Hope’s things to go home, she noticed that book of names, still in the same place on the tray table. She looked up the names of her grandchildren. Nicholas meant “victory of the people.” She liked that. It was a strong name, for a strong man. And Danielle? Danielle meant, “God is my judge.”

There she was, the young woman strapped to a table, a needle in the hand of the waiting doctor. Not much longer now. “Do you have any last words?”

The twins were eleven months and nine days old when Hope’s mother woke in the middle of the night to the familiar wail. A hungry cry. That was Danielle, but now it was only a matter of time before Nicholas was awake and screaming. They didn’t do this as much anymore, waking during the night, demanding to be fed, but it still happened. Hope’s mother just lay there a moment in the darkness, listening. She could feel the echoes through time, a young woman waking to nearly the same cry, feeling sad and sleepy and desperately wanting the coffee she couldn’t have while she was still breastfeeding, only to spend the night staring at a pair of green eyes.

Sure enough, Dani’s thin wail was joined by another. Soft footsteps in the hall. Hope was up. Hope’s mother sank deeper into the pillows. She was just a pair of ears, now. The rest was over, her baby grown.

The crying took a confused pause for breath. She wondered if Hope was checking Danielle’s diaper. Somehow, Hope had never quite mastered which cry was which. She was getting better, though. Or at least, she would go and tend to her children without her mother’s help or prompting now. And there it was, the sucking sound that meant Hope had started feeding Dani. Hope’s mother let sleep lap at the edges of her consciousness, a sea of milk. She could still feel herself heavy with milk. Nick was still screaming. He hated when Dani got all the attention. Hope would need to pick him up for a few minutes. Hope’s mother’s arms closed around a pillow. She rocked back and forth, lulling herself into a doze.

The sucking stopped. They were both screaming again, Nick to be held, Dani in solidarity. She couldn’t tell exactly where the sound was coming from now. It was almost soothing. How much of her life had she spent listening to crying children? Then, water running. She supposed that a bath might calm them down, although it seemed like overkill so late at night. Hope just needed to find her own way of doing things.

She remembered Hope’s first bath. She had been so jubilant at being wet. Each time Hope’s mother flicked her with little drops of water she would squeal and giggle, and soon everything in the room was damp.

The water shut off, and a second later so did the screaming. She lay there a few minutes, enjoying the thought of Hope breathing a sigh of relief, tickling

Nick's toe as she wrapped Dani in a towel, feeling the surge of joy that went with knowing she was a good mother, she could give her babies what they needed, and now she could go back to sleep knowing they were taken care of.

Hope's mother lay there, waiting for footsteps going back down the hall, Hope taking her children back to bed. Everything was quiet. No footsteps came. She pictured Hope nodding off beside the bathtub, a baby in each arm. Not a problem for the babies, but it would give Hope a terrible neck ache. Hope's mother smiled to herself, her head full of another young woman asleep in a rocking chair, and swung her feet out of bed into her slippers, padding down the hall to the closed bathroom door. Everything was dark except the faint light coming from around the door.

She would remember that moment, standing in the hallway, feeling full and needed and warm. She had no memory of actually reaching out her hand to turn the knob, pushing the door open, feeling the light envelop her as her eyes fell on her own reflection in the mirror directly in front of her. Her face was deeply creased but relaxed, her hair a bit frizzy from sleep, her nightgown in disarray.

It seemed to her, looking back, that the door pulled open on its own, and her gaze flew immediately to the tub.

Hope crouched there, not asleep at all, both hands underwater. Beneath each hand was a pink lump. Dani's hair floated out in all directions from under Hope's left hand. No bubbles rose. There was no

splashing. No blood. Blood might have been better, something real, something spilling from them saying here they were, this is what was lost. Their images rippled under the surface of the water, and the silence was absolute. Hope's mother wanted to scream. She stood behind Hope's left shoulder, wanting to scream, thinking about screaming. Then she stepped forward slowly, slowly, and dragged Hope's arms away.

The still forms bobbed to the surface, a sick parody of the dolls Hope used to take into the tub with her. Hope's mother grabbed them, cradling them to her chest. Still on her knees, she turned toward her daughter. She caught just a glimpse of wide green eyes before Hope slumped to the floor. Hope didn't cry. After a moment, Hope's mother, holding two very wet, very still babies, lay down beside her, crying enough for both.

"Last words? No. I don't think so. There's nothing left to say."

She didn't make a sound when the first needle entered her arm. She'd always been brave about shots. After that, they said she felt nothing. Her mother watched the monitor tick away the last beats of her heart. Seven minutes and fourteen seconds later, everything went silent.

There's her heartbeat. See?

*Nora Long*  
*Washington University in St. Louis, 2012*

## City Witch

She paints dust with her fingertips,  
glosses it across the marble walls,  
across the stop signs and the news stands  
with their smeary, grinning newsprint  
that actually means nothing to no one,  
good for only the salty pleasure  
of guilt.

Ravished by the thousand eyes  
of jealous, briefcase-toting husbands,  
she catwalks, swishes, glides; the gloat  
is plainly pinned to her rouged cheeks,  
where (old) smile lines are hidden by the miracle  
of modern day magic.

Will none but the moon touch her there,  
skimming soft places?  
Delicious curves are sweet and pure (or so she'd have you think).  
She's free from distractions but needs them, needs them,  
can't face forward the whole way:  
truth is the hedonist's poison.

*Cassie Snyder*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2014*

## Stick Figure

I thought about what it must be like to dream if you're blind. I thought it must be like having a view with no horizon line, with no end. I turned down the volume of my work radio before I went to sleep, the chatter reduced to a monotonous hum. Tomorrow was a big day.

\*\*\*

I felt new and released. I closed the door. Out of the hallway, past all the other doors, down the stairs, out of the building, some kind of bombed-out old warehouse, nestled in wild twists of uncoiled barbed wire. Outside it looked like the kind of countryside people pass by on trains to big cities, looking out the window between naps and convenience store paperbacks. The ones people talk about as being charming, that function as a communal view, a postcard to send. The ones people never go to. Mine was the only building in sight. I walked along the sunless road until I saw a little house. Similar houses, all isolated, were scattered over the flatness. I pulled open the door. There were Legos everywhere, big and little pieces of shrapnel littering the room like a minefield. A man was razing what seemed to be a vast empire: outlook towers with gunmen, armories sparkling with silver swords, a central palace with immaculate black walls. He was cutting through it all like a tornado. A kid sat quietly in the corner, watching. I moved fast and grabbed the man by the scruff of his shirt. He removed my hand with the ease of gritted, aged muscle. I caught a glimpse of his face. For a

second it almost seemed like it was an older version of mine, a mistaken vision from a soiled, steamed mirror.

"What is this?" I stammered.

I looked to the younger boy for an explanation. I knew him. I thought, I scrolled, I rummaged through my memory and I realized he was wearing the same clothes, the same faded red shirt, the same blue gym shorts, that I wore in a picture of me when I was ten or eleven. He was me. The man moved toward the door. I reached to restrain him but something held me back. He picked his way through the ruins, the crunch of his feet on the pieces, and then nothing. I sat down on the floor, looking at what was left of the Legos. I held a few of them in my hand.

"Sorry about all this. My name's Randall," I said dumbly. The younger me nodded. The crookedness of his bottom teeth seemed familiar. I tongued over my own.

"Doesn't that bother you, all the hours you must've spent making that...and someone comes and destroys it all?" He surveyed the wreckage.

"Hitler knew Munich would be bombed because it was the Nazi capital. He had subordinates photograph every building in the city so they could be rebuilt in exactly the same way," he said.

I smiled. My old World War II fixation. Out of the corner of my eye it looked like the younger me was

pressing his hand into a little brick Lego. I could almost feel the rawness, the pressure.

\*\*\*

It felt like we had been walking for hours. We were on the outskirts of a city. The housing complexes were low and strange, jutting angles, asymmetrical surfaces, large curves. Just like I designed them, years ago. I reached for my notebook and pen, but I couldn't remember where I'd put them. I searched deep into my pockets. Nothing. I always write things down. If I don't have a notebook, I'll write on a napkin. If no napkin, my hand. The ink makes me notice the tiny systems of wrinkles that mark every pore of skin. If I write everything down, if it's all recorded somewhere, I can't lose it.

Farther in, the city was a grid, the buildings getting higher. There was almost a complete absence of sound until we heard voices coming from some kind of office tower, a new age byzantine bureaucracy. A whole world of cubicles. We walked through, following the voices, higher. Every cubicle was empty. Every cubicle was the same. One window, one desk, one chair. The younger me spoke, as we moved through square after square.

"If we were in the middle of the war, we'd be safe here. Precision bombers need the tallest buildings as landmarks. If the tallest buildings are gone it all looks the same from above." The voices reverberated through the stairwell. We climbed.

"I don't want to know. Stay away," said one voice. It sounded the same as mine.

"You need to know," my voice replied in a different tone.

"No. I'm happy. I'm Thirty-five. I don't want to know anything about Thirty-six or Thirty-seven or you. I don't know how you found me. I just want to enjoy what I have. I met Forty-five once and he looked terrible. Old and wasted and overdriven. Alone. I don't want to know what happened. I don't want to know you."

It sounded like someone shouting at himself. Eleven was looking down at the steps, blank. The rows and rows of stairs. The shout turned to a moan then a whisper. I could only hear because of the echo.

"Thirty-six caught her in bed with Paulson. You must've met him by now, head of detonation dept. at that time. She moved out a month later." It felt like hearing about a character in a story. They seemed to be projections of an older me. They had to be. I'm only twenty-eight. They don't exist yet.

"But why? Barbara is in love with me." I recognized my own whine of defensiveness. "What changed? I don't see what could have changed."

That's strange. I know Barbara. We talk about drawing all the time. We laugh about how two architects work for a demolition company, plotting how to take buildings apart instead of putting them together. The way she likes to press her face right against the window when she's looking at a view. The way she doesn't like to talk when we're sketching. The way she likes the scratch of pencil against paper.

"It's strange, I can't really remember the details, I've talked about it so often. I think all I remember is the lack. And the story." He spoke slowly, "I think the story has replaced the memory."

"I'm going to go find Thirty-five. He was there. He'll know."

The voices stopped. We continued to walk up. A man passed us, thundering down. I thought about how if I had to identify him to a sketch artist, I could only give a vague outline, a frazzled thickened blur. We reached the top floor. We walked beneath the dimmed fluorescent lights until we found a man in one of the cubicles. It was obviously me, maybe ten years older. The aging was apparent. I looked more tired, more hunched, my spine arched and stretched like a tether about to snap. There were stacks of blueprints everywhere, piled high from the floor, immaculately arranged, not a single stray paper.

"Ah, the dreamer," he said, eyeing me. He looked uneasy. "You have to understand, when you lose the one person who..." His voice trailed off. "I didn't want to make things anymore. I haven't drawn in years. After Barbara left, I stopped even talking about side projects. The demolition became everything. That's how it is still, for him."

"Who?"

"Randall, of course." He looked at me, the folds of his eyes unfurling.

"But..." I started. I could never really have been that way. He seemed to be poorly programmed, supplied with inaccurate information. My office looked nothing like his, anyway. It was always a mess, a vast jungle of papers, the excitement of rediscovering old designs. I had no need to order my existence like he had. It all looked alphabetized and coded and arranged. I would not become this man.

"Ah, I see." He chuckled to himself, shaking his head, looking at me, past me, thinking of something else. "Forget the whole thing."

\*\*\*

We were at my old high school, a concrete New Brutalist behemoth, slabbed and barely windowed. We passed by the entrance, the railing on the steps off its moorings.

"It always reminds me of a prison." I said, looking back at the building. I remembered the crowded, funneled hallways, the cartels of security guards, the small musty windows. All institutions are modeled after prisons. We need things that are bigger than us. We need things that make us small.

"Hitler's architect, Albert Speer, went to prison after the Nuremberg trials. He walked halfway around the world in his cell. He counted every step and imagined all the places he'd go. The only reason he didn't make it around was because they let him out in 1966." I nodded, wondering if this was really how I used to sound, this sterile little authority. It's too easy to become foreign within your own life. Notebooks are our bridges.

What looked like Twenty was sitting on a stoop nearby. He greeted Eleven, who was unresponsive. His voice sounded different than mine. I wasn't sure whether it had changed with time or if we are all just deaf to how we actually sound. It was the same feeling when I used to play back the tapes of my audio recorder, the sense of interior and exterior, the sense that other people know you as someone else, the sense that you don't even know your own voice.

"Of course there is something odd about Eleven," Twenty was saying. "He seems sort of rigid, empty?" I was getting uncomfortable. Eleven was staring at the ground.

"As I remember him," Twenty continued, "Eleven should be energetic, always asking questions. But that's what happens when you try to reassemble a person from memory. You do it piece by piece and when it's finished, all you have is a model. I know that Eleven used to trace his fingers over the creases in brick buildings. He had to touch everything. He used to look everyone in the eye. But this is the best we can do, remembering him in fragments. Memory works through landmarks, through associations. It's indirect. That's why you can't really talk to him. You have the model, but you can't plug it in. It's like explaining color to someone who was born blind. You can describe varied contrasts, suggest metaphors, but you can't make them feel color. It can only be a vague guess. You can know something without feeling it. He's here, he's remembered, but this isn't him." I pulled Eleven close to me. I tried to talk about something else.

"Why do you still hang around the high school? Shouldn't you be off in college?"

Twenty shrugged and displayed the beginnings of a smile. "What can I say? I just miss it." When I turned to say something to Eleven I felt a knife-like movement at my side. Twenty sprinted away, rounding a corner. I checked my pockets, filled with bric-a-brac. Had he even taken anything? I couldn't tell if anything was missing, just had a vague, sinking feeling of loss.

"Did I used to do that? Did you?"

\*\*\*

A withered old man sat there playing chess by himself. We were in a cellar. The building felt like it was about to collapse, the foundations buckled into the ground like cigarettes speared into ash. Half the board was empty, the white pieces missing. He must've been Eighty. I was unrecognizable within him. The projection seemed off. Nonfunctional. His body was so brittle that he looked incomplete. Long, streaked hair, filthy matted beard. Teeth that looked like someone punched through glass.

This would be the worst thing, I thought. Being only half there, all the other years of your life stored in other brains. Years missing and forgotten and lost. His eyes were closed. He looked blind. He grabbed me, his bony claws clenching my waist, the slugs of his veins colored through his skin.

"Which piece do you think you are?" he said, some of the whites in his hand. I froze.

"Easier question. What's your number?"

"I'm not a number. I'm Randall." He shrieked so loudly with laughter I had to step back. The pieces jangled in his hand. It was scary to think that someday, this man was all that would be left of me.

"This is Randall," he held up the king in between two bony fingers. His thinned skin made his metatarsals ridge outward. I thought of how his bones could be whittled into chess pieces.

"This is you." He held up a pawn and put it in my hand. I moved to leave; it was too much. I felt a flash of recognition: the way, in poorly drawn portraits the model can sometimes get the feeling of himself within the image, even if none of the features match up. The old man grabbed me again.

"How old are you?" I shrugged him off. "How old are you, tell me."

"Twenty-eight."

"That's your name. That's you. Randall is someone else now. It's no longer meaningful to describe you as the same person. You're a memory." He let the pieces clatter to the floor. "Ah, I see. He's kept you locked up. Curious. What happened in your year? Tell me, Twenty-eight."

\*\*\*

I dropped the pawn in a gutter, watched it circle itself like a pendulum. We headed for the heart of the city. I wasn't thinking anymore, just walking. I saw the building I grew up in. The cylindrical structure, the wavy stone segments. I headed for it. Everything else

was plated glass, strong geometrical lines shooting into the sky. The street was a maelstrom of activity. Towering cranes hanging above, their machined elbows crooked, framing the buildings. Massive scaffolding systems clinging to the sides of structures, endless tubing twisted upward in networked patterns. The streets filled with ditches, the sewage pipes exposed in certain places, like an x-ray. Everything was still dark. Certain plots of land were just empty, nested in knotted silver, mortar blasted into heaps. There were signs everywhere. Randall Creighton Demolition. RCD. RCD. On orange traffic cones, on windows, on windshields, on equipment, graffitied onto walls.

We arrived at the building. I could see the corded explosives snaking through it, strategic and tight. Twenty appeared out of nowhere, doubled over, breathing hard. He put a single Lego brick in my palm and then enclosed my hand around it. I could feel the little ridges that enable it to connect to other pieces.

"I'm sorry. It's become a habit. Twenty-one told me he grew out of it."

The box. I remembered. In high school I used to hang out in my neighbor's apartment, his door right next to our door, on the same floor. When we wandered past his parent's bedroom once, I saw it. A diamond-encrusted box, the metal rusted and grooved like it had survived thousands of years. It was a thrill, taking it. At first I didn't even care what was inside. It was enough to just admire it, to have it rest on my shelf.

When I finally did lift the lid, a protracted creak, I saw that it was filled with old photographs, piles of stamps, folded letters. I gave it back right after that. It was only then that it occurred to me what it meant that it wasn't mine.

Twenty brought me back to the present, shouting hey, hey in my face.

"I thought you should know that he's only CEO because of what you did. Everyone was leaving the company. The fire changed everything. It was a big mess. He was the last man standing. We all know this. Randall knows this, even if he won't admit it to himself."

"But you're only Twenty. How do you...?"

"Do you really need to ask? Look what you're doing."

\*\*\*

We saw a man sitting by his window, looking out onto the city. Polished brown plaques crowned the wall of his office. He turned and looked at me, not unkindly, with a certain curiosity, as if he had seen a new species on television and then encountered it in person.

"This building has been here long enough," he said, expecting argument.

"I saved it. You're going to destroy it?" I remembered the feeling, the hollowed center, the pressure sinking inward in my stomach when I heard about the target. I remembered not even being able to write it down. I

remembered going to the building on the day before the demolition, knowing the way in, all the years I spent there, the passageways second nature to me, even later. Warping the fuse boxes that were connected to the dynamite. The failed explosion, the blown-out first floor, the singed workers, not wanting to know how badly they were hurt. Yesterday, to me.

"I haven't thought about that in a long time." He paused. "What I did." He looked at his desk for several seconds.

"That building has been rotting for years. They wanted to convert it into a playground, then a museum. But the area was dangerous afterward. No one was willing to touch it. I've changed the landscape of this city. My work has sculpted the skyline into what it is today. I've had my eye on this building for a long time." His hand was planted on the desk, arm extended. His hair had thinned, grayed, but he seemed sturdy.

"We lived there..." I pleaded.

"We didn't. He did," he said, motioning to Eleven.

"You don't even remember him. That's why he's barely a person." Eleven flooded back to me right then. Few friends, alone all the time. Making models, little airplanes, little boats. Gluing together all the pieces, the bundle of wooden sticks becoming a whole. Craning my neck upward to ask questions, needing to know things. Needing to accumulate things. Learning facts. Tying myself to other things. Trying to be big. Feeling

a little less alone. Because I remembered, Randall remembered. We looked at each other.

“It’s just a set of walls. It’s just a space. There’s nothing there,” he said softly, almost imploringly. Eleven was tugging on my shirt.

“It’s my memory,” I said. The way we diffract our memories, our emotions into other people, into other objects. When we lose those people, when we lose those objects, when they’re taken from us, then we are our only authority. This is when the trouble starts.

“You don’t need things to make you remember.” Randall said. He swiveled out of his chair and snatched a handful of his plaques off the wall. He flung them across the room, the frames cracking, the glass panels slipping out. I thought of my shelves of journals, my stacks of scribbled notes, my boxes of postcards. I thought about where they were now. I thought about how real those memories were, having to turn impatiently through pages, flip through photo albums. I thought about if memories are yours if you have to look them up first.

He opened a drawer and removed a Polaroid from under some sheets of paper. His hand trembled. He put it back carefully and closed the drawer.

“I don’t need anything to tell me who I am. I built this company.” The volume of his voice decreased and he slumped back into his chair, turning away, looking out through the glass into his city. I understood something then, looking out the window too, the little stickered RCD’s on each building informing and

defining the view through the panes.

I was feeling nauseous. It felt like I would shatter if someone spoke too loudly. I felt a pull. I felt the end. I was this man. But he didn’t know me at all. We become more and more disconnected from who we used to be.

Eleven smiled at me. His face was full of color, alive, happy.

“Most of the bridges along the Arno were bombed,” he smiled, as if this were a private joke between us. I imagined angry fighter jets unloading litter after litter of TNT, massive chunks of stone crashing to the river floor like an anchor. “After the war, they rebuilt the bridges using the stones from the river. The same stones. You can see the cracks.” He held my arm so hard it hurt.

\*\*\*

We were outside the broken building I came from hours earlier. Nothing but fallow land. Eleven was asking me what it was like to be older. I put my hand on his shoulder, the bony twist of muscle. I reminisced. Then he left, to start building again, he said. He walked away, kicking stones over the ground the way I still do sometimes.

I was fading fast. I climbed the stairs, one step at a time. The journey was interminable. I felt another pull. I was moving toward my door. I had no control. There were dozens of other doors. The hallway stretched on and on. I tried to open one, then two, then three. They were all locked. These weren’t my memories. They weren’t anyone’s anymore.

\*\*\*

I sat up in my bed, the quilt cascading in heaps onto the floor, my radio crackling in from the office. The bodies of skyscrapers filled the view from my window. I went to work like any other day. The building was there, the circle in a sea of squares. I walked across the street, past the demolition workers smoking their thin cigarettes, past the gangly links of chain draped from the cranes, past the turrets of tractors waiting to remove the debris. I gave the building a last look. It was picked clean, any loose material scraped out, an exoskeleton without an organism. An emaciated dead husk. I pressed the button. My privilege. The building lurched, the rupture of its beams, the TNT going off like great titanium punches, the sense of an industrial struggle, the rubbery grey smoke, the view impeded, obscured, the air thickening, clearing, revealing at last, more buildings.

*Jason Schwartzman*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2012*

## The Wise

One thinks  
The wise remember  
Everything,  
That they lock away into  
Elephantine, gray, and wrinkly minds  
The smallest sandy moments,  
Knowing that upon later  
Discovery,  
Amidst the oysterish goo,  
Sand will have turned  
To seed pearls  
From which  
To string  
A creed.

Not so.  
The wise are the forgetful.  
They want one pearl only.  
The now is enough  
Without the cankerous,  
Carbuncled seawall, hash-marked  
And cross-hatched with jags of  
Coral and shell that may have been pretty  
Once, as you walked up to them, but only cut  
Your feet and turn to  
Hoaxing sea-grit  
That gives a soft and sea-swirled chuckle  
As you limp  
Away.

The seawall is too  
Much, requires too much  
Upkeep – someone to come with  
Mortar and trowel and  
Dangle willing hands down the wall-side  
To the distending crack and wait  
Indefinitely  
For a  
Hesitation  
In the waves.  
The seawall is too much,  
Trying to hold back the  
Whole ocean or the  
Whole shore, one can never tell  
Which.

A single pearl is better,  
One little rock, washed smooth  
And claimed for now with only  
A bit of sea-greened moss  
For interest.  
Or, if one must,  
A whole run of little rocks  
Can be managed  
If the cooling waters of  
Lethe and short-term memory  
Loss are allowed to flow  
Between.

They emerge always after  
The crest, hearty and dripping,  
These pearls.  
But string them together and only  
Feel them strain and brawl with the ever-  
Birthing waves and the ever-  
Burgeoning sand.  
They are easier unstrung.

But still  
They crouch in the dark,  
In the wash,  
In the night.  
What if  
They should join hands and  
Coax the sea-flung mist  
Into a golden chain, so fine,  
So frail, so  
Stark.  
What if  
You should chance to look  
Back and see the other pearls  
In foam-laced sleeves and  
Wigs of weed, with  
Shell-shard eyes, lurch,  
Stagger  
Towards you.  
What if you should see the pattern –  
Whether spiral or arc,  
Truth or farce –  
They make, in their  
Wave-played dance, as they  
Count to the beat of the  
Moon – what if  
They have mimed  
Their charade every  
Night, even now, in your dreams?

The wise can't remember.

*Abigail Droge*  
*Yale University, 2012*

## catholic

Processing down the aisle Monsignor swished  
white skirts, swung incense under stained vestments.  
While racing to our favorite pew, we slid  
in playing Squish-the-Lemon, stole

white skirts, swung incense. Under stained vestments  
we blew each other kisses, signaled, then  
in playing Squish-the-Lemon, stole  
the better spot. We inched far from his smoke,

we blew each other kisses, signaled, then  
together slid on Sunday satin toward  
the better spot. We inched. Far from his smoke  
delinquent cigarettes burned the community

together. Slid on Sunday satin toward  
St. Joseph's statue, praying for smoldering streets,  
delinquent cigarettes burned the community  
by tithing class. Still, smoking joints behind

St. Joseph's statue, praying for smoldering streets—  
while racing to our favorite pew we slid  
by tithing class, still smoking joints— behind,  
processing down the aisle Monsignor swished.

*Amy Conwell*  
*Johns Hopkins University, 2012*

This publication was designed by Susannah Lohr and Alyssa Celentano set into type digitally at Washington University and printed and bound at Midtown Printing, St. Louis, Missouri.

The type face is Centaur MT, designed by Bruce Rogers.

Spires accepts submissions from undergraduate students around the world. Works are evaluated in small groups and then recommended for further review or for elimination from the review process. Spires is published bi-annually and distributed free of charge to the Washington University community at the end of each semester. All undergraduate art, poetry, prose, drama, song lyric, and digital media submissions are welcome for evaluation.

Special thanks to: Washington University Student Union; Mike Rogger of Midtown Printing; and the authors, poets, and artists who submitted.

SPIRES  
[spiresmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:spiresmagazine@gmail.com)

