

Tufts Observer

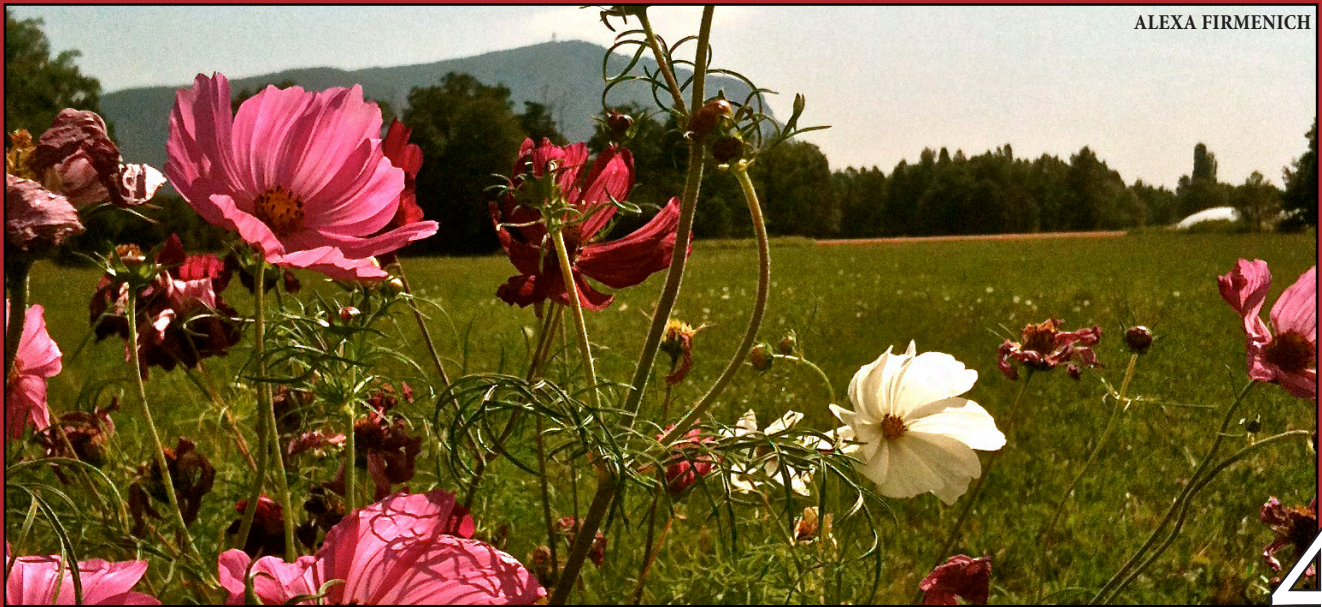
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The *Observer* has been Tufts' publication of record since 1895. Our dedication to in-depth reporting, journalistic innovation, and honest dialogue has remained intact for over a century. Today, we offer insightful news analysis, cogent and diverse opinion pieces, creative writing, and lively reviews of current arts, entertainment, and culture. Through poignant writing and artistic elegance, we aim to entertain, inform, and above all challenge the Tufts community to effect positive change.



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Correction: Last issue's article *In Pursuit of Pub Trivia*, on page 24 & 25, was written by Kasey Clavelle

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Since
1895

IT IS ALMOST THE SEASON

In this small frame of mine
lie pictures worth
a million words, words
which murmur brilliant things,
which mean to change the world, which will
(I know it) once they age.

Right now they're infants, see,
small fairies of words, dumplings
of words, not yet ripe. And each
day they grow letters longer, syllables
louder, from hard, tight bursts of noise
to soft, mellow plums of worth, until
some day they'll pop off the vine,
whole, brimming and dripping with the
fruit of me.

That day the giants of words, the
gentle beasts of words will strut
down your busy street, will
take a seat in the home of your mind, will
move the furniture around.

Put the tea on and wait.
By the time your kettle sings its song
I'll be singing mine.

EMMA
SHAKARSKY



Death By Tuxedo

EVAN TARANTINO

My daydreams were in black and
white today

Lapels that smelled like too much
Old Spice

Employees dressed like formality
is casual

The tailor's Spanglish wasn't the
kind that I'm used to

An overly friendly man with grey
nose hairs that he could trim but
is too lazy to

Directed me towards the dressing
room with both arms at the same time
I felt like a plane preparing for takeoff
Mirror after mirror as I taxied
down the cheaply carpeted run-
way

Feed me more vanity

Slipping on elf-like shoes
that will never fit

Buttoning up shirts that look
like rumpled dishcloths to cynics

Either the vest of a giant or
that of a dwarf

Creepy, desperate glances
from the shorthaired overweight
cashier girl

The top button constrictsssss....

The door seems to share my disgust for
this boutique of absurdity
Flinging himself open in quite the self-
liberating fashion

He is envious, craving a pure,
sweet,

taste,

If only for a moment

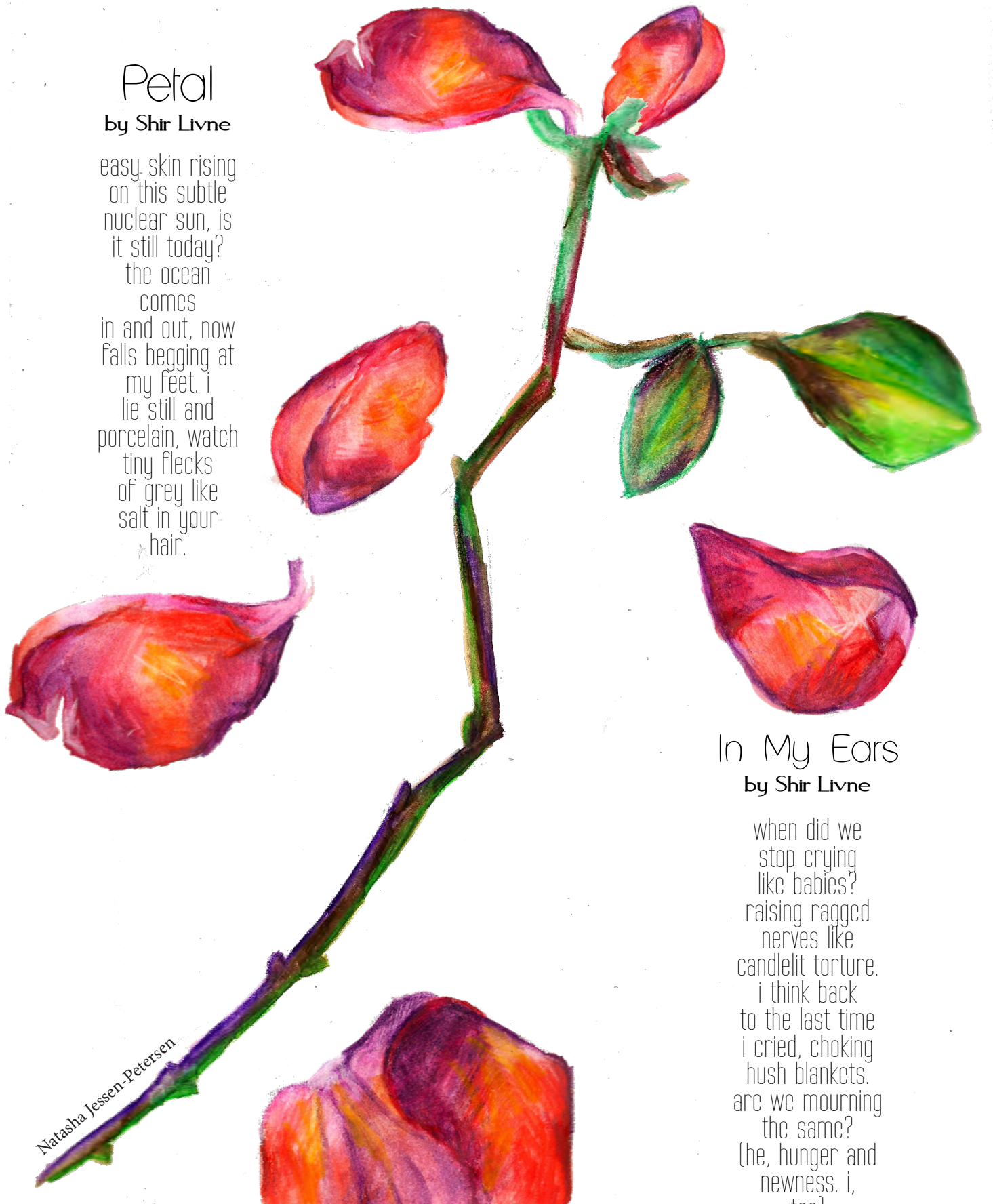
Of the noxious mall mixture of pretzels,
elevator music, and cheap perfume...

Resurrect me

Petal

by Shir Livne

easy, skin rising
on this subtle
nuclear sun, is
it still today?
the ocean
comes
in and out, now
falls begging at
my feet. i
lie still and
porcelain, watch
tiny flecks
of grey like
salt in your
hair.



In My Ears

by Shir Livne

when did we
stop crying
like babies?
raising ragged
nerves like
candlelit torture.
i think back
to the last time
i cried, choking
hush blankets.
are we mourning
the same?
(he, hunger and
newness. i,
too)

Natasha Jessen-Petersen

THE SEA + OTHER VICTORIES

BY DAVID SCHWARTZ

It finally happened in Florida, outside of Ms. Logan's house. It's a rickety old shack, and thank God it was painted red because I have no idea how they'll get all that blood out.

She'd been living in that shanty for some time—a "snowbird" she'd been termed by her few friends as she'd pack all of her things in tiny maroon suitcases and head south for the winter months. It was a ways away from Connecticut, but she had always been a fan of plane rides and the characters she would meet along the way. With her age and with her life, she figured she might as well.

And this house, well, if you had ever seen it you'd know—it was dying. It was falling apart, splintering under the weight of its poorly shingled roof. Even everything it touched twisted and baked corpse-like

in the sun. The rusted fence, the broken footbridge, yet a silent killer much deadlier than heat lurked there. In fact, it wasn't the faulty carpentry job that caused that house's deterioration, nor was it that tall, curving sabal palm that Ms. Logan always thought would force the once-mighty roof in. In the end, it was the Floridian humidity—the ephemeral yet lingering moisture that crept behind every condominium and dismantled them at their core. Like its owner, the house perished by waves, but they had gone one step further and attacked through the air.

Smart bastards. I should have thought of that.

Ms. Logan (who my friend Lloyd referred to as sharper than a human Cerberus) was very fond of the quaint Flo-

ridian Keys act. She'd drink tea, feign family, and even hang her dripping one-piece bathing suits out on the large clothesline in her backyard. As she'd do this, she'd occasionally wave to the fishermen or to those ostentatious enough to buy a yacht and explore the water that surrounded her home. They'd see her out by that clothesline often, I assume, aflame with a red sunhat and bright yellow sunglasses while backdropped by the multicolored clothes that hung heavy behind her.

I don't even know if she remembered me—it was dark out, but a beam from a far off lighthouse swung by us a few times. When we were struck by its beam during her final moments, we locked eyes. Her pupils dilat-



ed, but she didn't seem to express any sense of recognition. I bet that bitch was trying to do anything but satisfy me.

We met on a cruise some forty years ago. She was around thirty, though she would never tell me her age. I was eighteen and alone, bussing the tables in the ship's restaurant. I thought it would be an entertaining gig, and besides, since finishing school, I was antsy to travel. New York was New York, but on this cruise, I'd see the world.

Her table was in my section. I didn't see her at first, which is why I went over there in the first place.

"Excuse me, Sir," (she was the first woman to ever call me sir) "but the candle's blown out." She gestured to the tiny cup in front of her, empty and smoking, that left her face in shadow.

"Oh sorry, didn't see you, Miss," I said quickly, avoiding eye contact, "I'll fix that right away." I pulled out a lighter (the candles would blow out frequently on the tables closer to the bow), and it did the trick.

"Much better," she said, smiling. I looked at her and she looked at me and something was born within me. They say it takes leaving home or special ceremonies or even the first time you fight your father before you can really feel like a man, but all it took was those almond-colored eyes—a little amber, even, in that flickering light—to feel like I had finally grown up.

Ms. Logan didn't even tell me her name until one of the last nights of the cruise. I woke up in her room, cramped and awkward, sitting up shirtless and feeling wistfully ill-equipped and inexperienced beside such a woman.

I started buttoning my top as sea winds crept through the cracks in the door. At the time, I might have thought they were trying to cradle me, but looking

back, I think they might have been trying to grab at me. Trying to pull me to relinquish me, to free me: the last tug of Mother Nature before her very own Siren trapped me.

"You're going?" She yawned and looked at her watch on the nightstand beside her. "So early?"

"I need to go to work, Ms. Logan," I said briefly, testing my double Windsor in the dark without a mirror.

"Daphne."

"Daphne," I repeated for the first and only time before I clicked the steel door unlocked, pushed it open, and shut it quietly behind me.

For a while, we wrote letters. Mine were awkward in the beginning, but I learned that cursive made them much more romantic. Abroad, I felt like a suitor instead of like a son, and thus this correspondence was our only communication for the next couple of years.

In writing, we'd talk about much deeper topics than we had ever mentioned in person. I wasn't afraid to bring up my fears or to talk of my family because the paper didn't seem to mind. But when I stared at her mouth, quite scarlet with lipstick, and its disapproving frown (slightly wrinkled with a few years of facial weathering only scientifically described as age), I was silent.

She rarely mentioned her work or social life or really anything about herself. Yet, somehow, through these monologues of mine and her empty replies, I felt closer to Ms. Logan than before. We always

seemed to just miss each other, though: she just outside of New York on business but she mistook the dates, or me close to her house in Connecticut but she happened to be away. It was the chase I think that, in the end, lured me like a moth. I fluttered, drooling and waiting, letting life slip around me as I crumbled to dust.

Most people advise against romantic relationships with colleagues. Well, Ms. Logan offered me a job when I told her my life of cruise adventures, odd supermarkets, and dumpster diving were over. I wrote in a letter that I wanted something “stable—maybe something where I could wear a collar, look presentable... or maybe I could find a job I liked and could advance in, climb the ranks of, be a CEO of or something. Or maybe just something even more exciting. But stable.”

And with her following proposition began the first rush of Ms. Logan’s letters that detailed more of her shady life, more of the intricate details of being not-quite-middle-aged.

“Love,” her letter began (this is how she would start addressing me, and it felt foreign and daring and I guess that intrigued me),

Now, I believe I haven’t told you about my work, but I believe I could set you up with something ‘stable,’ as you said. I do not work in something as corporate and white-collar as you mentioned, in something that involves pressed oxfords and

the hierarchy of CEOs and vice presidents. That being said, dear, I believe you’ll find it quite exhilarating. I know I do. It’s a moving company of sorts—a little like some movies that you might have seen. I’ll tell you more if you’re interested. I’m looking forward to seeing you much more often in the case that you take this job.

*Always,
Daphne*

It was here where my recent discovery of adulthood led me down the path of infatuation, guided by tiny white envelopes. Each contained a little piece of Ms. Logan whom I changed more and more in my mind. Her cursive t’s and occasional extra hump on an m made me think of her as more spontaneous and less calculating than I’d thought originally. Her prose and banter shifted her from sea nymph to scholar. Her always’s and love’s and dear’s made her impossibly perfect. She became a character of her letters. They allowed me to do what I wanted with her.

So I moved quickly to Connecticut after hearing more about the occupational opportunity. It was still a little hazy—she worked in trafficking of sorts, moving either hard drugs or some incredible technology that would be forever hidden from me in crates and referred to with odd street vernacular I never understood. There might be even something comical in it all: in being so led I failed to see I was blinded (a bright light still shocks me when I close my eyes sometimes, when I expect there to be

dark-
ness).

But I had said farewell to family in New York and, older, liberated, moved into an apartment. I saw Ms. Logan much more and even occasionally at work, where I would be in charge of lifting crates, moving them, and using the forklift for some extensive orders. I met people; Lloyd Robinson, one of my favorites, still remains a friend to this day. I would eagerly and anxiously anticipate the occasional “gig” that I was allowed to go on—wherein Ms. Logan herself and a few accomplices would meet the orderer and exchange, often near the shore where Ms. Logan lived and her company thrived.

In the meantime, our written correspondence stopped, but it did not affect much as my illusion of Ms. Logan had already taken root and grown, spiraling out of control sometimes and sliding into reality only to shriek and dissipate. We went on dates and she would sleep over after the good ones—I once saw the outside of her house when I picked her up there, but I was never allowed in (not that I ever asked). Life with Ms. Logan was a state of being awestruck.

I learned that she loved clothes and took very good care of them. She often

w o r e
things in her
hair, be them feathers
or hats. She detested earrings
because she said her ears were nice
enough as they were. Yet, she wore an
assortment of rings on her spindly fingers
(which I still think were one of her few
flaws). Adorning her knuckles, they would
glimmer in and out except for a quick skip
over her left ring finger.

And I suppose you'd want me to come
out and tell you if this was love or fascina-
tion, if I had settled on my first forbidden
fruit, maybe even one too ripe, too sour.
My answer is I think it was a little bit of
both. It was twisted, hard to describe. Yet,
I know that, for the first five years that we
knew each other, I had originally thought
of our relationship as love, but, looking
back, realized that period was actually ob-
session.

At a date by the beach one weekend,
we talked. We, side-by-side, both in swim
suits and sitting on striped towels, arms
extended backwards behind us into the
warm sand, approached topics previously
unmentioned—topics not taboo, just un-
discovered. For one of the first times, I was
not afraid (maybe because I was staring at

the somehow distant, formidable sea in-
stead of her face). She told me of past lov-
ers; the stories were curtailed, sure, but it
was a start. Ms. Logan mentioned her busi-
ness and maybe even how it started. And
after we talked, we did something even
more telling: we sat in silence. We enjoyed
each other's presence. We waited, sitting. A
smile occasionally, a cleared throat, but for
the most part, nothing.

She mentioned later we should go in
the water—it was summer and the water
would be warm, so I had nothing to worry
about. I smiled and said, “No, thanks” and
remained sitting. Yet, before she turned to
approach the waves, her eyes searched me.
For this one moment I felt the same anxiety
I'd felt previously, prompted by her subor-
dinating, hollowing gaze that raked my
insides for details, for small periods and a
few semicolons that had gotten lost along
the way, for my fragments of subtext.

And when she was done, she smiled,
coily and with a slight skew, her thin lips
slipping in and out of tiny wrinkles.

Ms. Logan loved the ocean, and I sup-
pose that's where we started being differ-
ent. She loved the rocking water and its
sprite-like splashes that made everything
sag and prune and melt back into itself.

I'm sure she planned it all. Even though
a year had elapsed, she kept the knowledge
she gained that day tucked tightly in the in-
sidious folds of her cranium, as had Lilith
and every other bitch in history.

I had the opportunity to go with her
and a man by the name of Geoff Sham for
one of the company's most important ex-
changes. We drove in a dark black mini-
van, beat up and anything but sleek and
glamorous. When Ms. Logan parked it, I
stayed in, unsure, but she beckoned me to
come outside.

“Wouldn't want you to miss anything,”
she said, smiling, her top lip lifting slightly
over her canines so her gums, wet with
saliva, shimmered suddenly against the
black, dark abyss of the Long Island Sound
slamming behind us.

Crates were exchanged. A man,
cloaked, whispered to Ms. Logan as I lifted
a box and put it carefully into the trunk
of his van. Two men, barrel-chested with
root-like veins curling around burly bi-
ceps, watched me as I sweated. My heart
started pumping blood faster. There it was,
that deep, rising feeling of anxiety like a
smoke-cloud, twirling through a chimney
higher and—

Sirens. I'm not sure how, but this had
never happened before. We'd been coming

NICOLA PARDY

to this same location next to Port Andrew for months now and never had any problems. I'm sure she had called the cops herself.

The big watchmen pushed me out of the way and slammed the doors of the van's trunk closed. The two men ran into the vehicle along with the cloaked man. Ignition, headlights, squealing tires, and meanwhile I was just trying to regain my balance after having fallen down from the shove. My head turned up, looking for a form of reassurance or at least some sort of assessment of facts. I was greeted with a look from Ms. Logan, already stationed in our own minivan with Geoff Sham next to her. Her hand hidden from the windshield, blindly shoving the key in over and over, suddenly caused the car to come to life.

I had seen her eyes and studied them for some time, yet to this day I don't know what they said in that darkness barely illuminated by a low hanging moon, swelling with dim fluorescence. They were mean eyes, they were apologetic, they were scheming, they were maybe even a little in love.

So I ran, scraping myself off the combination of sand and silt that made up that dirty beach. I ran beneath docks and splashed in water, hiding beneath the firmament on which the police were looking for me with their flashlights. I sulked back into my newfound cave roofed with creaking seaboards.

I don't think the abandonment was the worst part. I don't even think my brief bout as a fugitive in a lawless shelter was.

It was that in my solitude while I waited for the police to leave for what seemed like all night, I was trapped beneath that dock with nothing but the ocean. Waves in, waves out, all slowly getting closer to me, touching and groping just hoping to be human if only for a moment. Their crashing and their breaking—both noble sacrifices only to stir up yet another liquid legion, on and on. Staring out into that dark blackness: I have never felt so alone, contrasted by the ocean's infiniteness.

And I couldn't let something planned so well not go repaid.

The end of our correspondence sounded like a crash of glass with the shattering of Ms. Logan's illusion. This noise I heard often over the next forty years, yet right now when I try to listen for it, I hear nothing but waves.

Which brings me to where I stand at this moment, inside of Ms. Logan's beachside retirement home, staring down at decaying floorboards instead of up at them. I've just washed my hands because red has never looked great with my skin tone.

Let's just say it was a journey. It took me quite a while to track her down. It involved newspapers and pictures and even a few maps. Not to mention that plane tickets are pretty expensive nowadays. And the tussle itself, well, I was actually impressed with how much she fought for a woman of her age—we both bled on the side of the shanty after mashing each other against it quite a few times. It wasn't until I managed to rip off that

clothesline and bind a few of her limbs that she stopped trying to hurt me. Her hanging swimsuits, still wet, rained off of the clothesline during my rage as if they were snowflakes in a liminal moment of uniqueness before becoming a single mass on the ground.

I then did Mother Nature a favor and returned one of her lost Sirens to her. It was dark out, so I didn't see much, but she was beautiful in her descent: eyes closed, wind blowing and playing with her hair carefully as to not put a single piece out of place. Then she splashed and succumbed, and finally did I see the sea as a pretty thing—something I too could conquer.

The sound of waves crashing is not as frightening now. In fact, I kind of enjoy it. Even the moisture isn't all that bad. Let it try to decay me, to rust my bones.

I had said our relationship was something of love and fixation. I don't take it back. And I had mentioned I was positive that the beginning of our affair was the latter, was obsession. Staring at an unlit candle resting on her dining room table, I think I can honestly say that it was in the time that we spent apart that we realized we truly loved each other.

And I'm just glad I could come back to tell her that. ☺





Thaw

by Craig Dathe

Awake.

You have slept long enough.

Stir from your rest at the bottom of your lake and begin the thaw.

Beckon to the orb, summon it closer. Ask it to whisper with the soil
Breathe into the bellows you've built beneath the stones.

As heat rises and descends the snow slides, then settles. Now you must be patient. The heat will take care of all.
Water dances beneath the snow, velocity rising: a tremble becomes a trickle, a step becomes a bound, a whistle becomes a roar.

Water emigrates from wreathed peaks to arrive in columns at your lake. Fluid phalanxes write in ribbons across the film of ice that covers it. The trees drip and time stretches, into restlessness.

Streams coalesce and make the lake swell beneath the ice, beneath the frozen astronomer's lens. Water knows not what you see or what you fear, because you fear not and you see not, but see through.

The ice melts at the mouth of the river and in a growing circle at your lake's center. Fish abandon slumber and flock to the surface, to sun their scales. The birds hear them splash and gather at the ice's edge to feast.

Bone ache plagues the harts and hinds, who scamper to the lake to drink. Groaning entrails roll the bears out of their caves to follow them. Wolves wait their turn as foxes stalk across the ice to swipe at the birds, and an eagle watches the elk brave your lake's frozen lid with their quivering ankles.



WILLIAM VAUGHAN

A great village full of humans resides not far off. The humans huddle, shoulder-to-shoulder, and draw shapes in the dirt with sharpened sticks. Most of them know what is happening and what is to come, but none of them understand either one.

In silence the humans collect their spears and fan out around your lake. They crouch like boulders, then they holler and collapse their circle. They drive the animals from them to cower together on the ice, wolf and fox beside elk, sparrow and eagle perched on bear. The winged creatures cannot remember to fly away, and the wind has risen too high. The humans thumb the tips of their spears to be sure and step onto the ice.

You do not blink. You do not flinch. They are here, every one of them. In the cavernous depths of your lake you gather up your great length and tighten your sinews.

The humans chant as they draw closer to the unfrozen circle. When you can distinguish their words you explode upward, faster, faster, hurtling, screaming, mouth unhinged and open, and you burst through the ice, through that astronomer's lens, the circumference of your body just thin enough to pass through without touching the land, and you consume them, every animal, every human, you consume them all, swallow them whole, every last one, your momentum hurling you into the sky like a monolith to block out the sun—and then you slow—and you sink—disappearing back into the deep—and then you are gone and it is silent except for the river.

If those that were swallowed could tell something of you to their children, they would say this: You came up from beneath us all, and you made us all one.



a story
by
Laura Moreno

What the birds said

When my wife Martha noticed that I was oddly content at the end of a day gone by, she longed to feel the same. In the black night, we closed our eyes and fell asleep.

The sun spilled strings of yellow light into our faces. It was my cue to get up from bed and struggle against our bittersweet idleness.

“What are we doing today?” Martha asked me, lying in bed with her eyes closed. I wanted to say that we could hop on a plane to Hong Kong, drive to the warm coast of Cartagena, or climb the Andes Mountains. But I could not keep any of these promises. Martha had been sick and peeling away like an onion for five years—she could no longer walk or move her arms.

“I’ll make eggs.” In the kitchen, I placed a medium pan on the stove and cracked two white eggs on the side of the pan. My hands shook and fell into routine as my mind wandered back to bed—back to Martha. Nothing had ever felt ephemeral between us, even now.

Everyone was crazy if delved into deeply enough. We found that out in 1966 sitting in El Retiro, the park in the colonial town of Villa de Leyva in Colombia, where yellow and green birds talked to us, where Martha and I had met on a day like today, many years ago. We were born in this town and never left because it was the only world we knew, a tourist town with all sorts of people who came and left. Young Israeli backpackers fresh out of the army smoked hookah in the dry streets, a Polish hippie going nowhere smoked a joint in a lurking corner, and burnt out teenagers searched for the meaning of life in psychedelic mushroom trips. Martha and I agreed that normal people were the strangest people. We were eccentric together and we didn't need to know it all.

"I can listen to the birds," she said that day. There was so much we could never understand, secrets we kept to ourselves.

Martha's breakfast was ready in nine minutes. I placed two fried eggs, freshly squeezed mandarin juice, and black coffee on a blue and green clay tray that Lucas had sent us from his home in Lima, Peru. *The Inca people handcrafted it*, he wrote in the letter that came with the tray in 1999. We hadn't seen him since he got married and left seven years ago—Lucas said he didn't have money or time to travel. I carried the tray back to Martha, who lay in the same position as before, with both legs stretched out underneath the thin white sheets. Her gaze was absent.

"What are you thinking?" I asked, propping her up and placing the tray on her lap. She said nothing and turned her head towards the window briefly before sipping the juice through a straw. We avoided each other's questions—it was the only way we knew how to be happy, to love each other, to be alive. In simplicity we found bliss.

We fought sometimes, when we thought we might be getting tired of ourselves and of each other, but we couldn't be apart because no one else existed as we did.

"I'm going to leave Villa de Leyva," she had threatened about five years before getting sick.

"I think you should," I answered.

"Alone."

"Yes."

I knew she wouldn't leave; we could never leave Villa de Leyva. Different people came, taught us something, and left. A lonely and stoned 45-year-old Sicilian artist told us about the endless ocean, and a 20-year-old Norwegian lesbian with silky blonde hair and round, blue eyes twirled around town carelessly as she ran away from home. We travelled vicariously through foreigners and books. Even now, Martha was leaving against her will, the earth like quicksand underneath her numb feet.

After breakfast, I undressed Martha and carried her into the bathtub. She liked being inside as I slowly filled it up with warm water her legs could no longer feel. I rubbed her delicate skin with a soft, blue sponge, taking my time to graze it around her stomach and down her pale and flaccid thighs that were once toned and muscular.

Perhaps her condition made me enjoy each second, but I forget. I neglect what I swore I would always remember. My friends from school are strangers now. People who left never returned, and we never saw them again—they forgot about Villa de Leyva and we forgot about them.

Everything was a pattern. I wrapped a thick, lilac towel around her body and carried her into our bedroom with its lilac-colored, peeling wallpaper, helped her into her favorite, yellow dress and then propped her up in her black wheelchair. I kneeled down to face her and traced the wrinkles of her mouth, eyes, and forehead with my forefinger. I powdered her nose and cheeks and smeared coral redness on her lips. She smiled playfully because she knew I hated lipstick. I painted her eyelashes black.

"I'm sick, but I'm not invisible," she would argue, when she could no longer hold her weak arms up to her face. I had learned to do her make up for her. I held up a mirror in front of her face and she nodded silently. I left her with Mozart and got ready myself.

We went out to the town together and I walked behind her, pushing her wheelchair along the cobblestone roads. The lively sun was yellow and white and I felt her smile. A middle-aged American man with beige cargo pants and a green T-shirt looked up from a map and smiled at us foolishly. We grinned back and looked past him at rows of identical, mud-colored, colonial homes with red triangular roofs and pale green that sprung up from the earth. They were rows of identical houses with pale green windows. In the wooden balconies, old townspeople sat for hours, sipping lemonade. Men played poker and drank scotch, and women read poems of love and braided their hair. They thought of nothing and lived completely. We walked past the massive Parroquial Catholic Church in the middle of the town square surrounded by black birds and blue flowers.

In the park, the scent of eucalyptus swirled into my nostrils, the light wind danced with Martha's white hair, and black pigeons told us secrets.

We sat on a spot underneath the shade of a large eucalyptus tree, and I read *Anna Karenina* to her and Leo Tolstoy took us to Tsarist Russia. We never touched snow and we never ran out of things to say.

Martha fell asleep on our way home. I lay her in our soft white bed underneath a thick, black blanket made of wool. I wanted to caress her sleep, to steal her dreams. Her cool skin felt like gelatin against my dry hands.

Our last moments together were like the still and warm ocean at dawn, at the serene moment when waves threaten to break its silence. Then again, we never saw the ocean. The birds reminded us that we were still alive on that idle Tuesday afternoon. I lay down beside my wife and squeezed her hand as the receding afternoon sun came through the window and illuminated her forehead. The birds stood silent as they stared at us. Martha's countenance was gentle and expressionless as she squeezed my hand for the last time—I looked at her stony gaze and longed to feel the same. ☺

Route #23

katie boland

To always walk with the smell of old pages:
this is the ache of having too much
in the front yard of yesterday;
to always murmur down the aisle,
in sadness, in calm,
to always fasten the buttons
of coats, consciously, always.
To always watch the red apartments
where a mother occasionally drank her coffee,
the streets stretching with heat
and the doors close slowly, heavily, always.
To always despise a look from a window,
or a war with the future, or a wave;
always words that leave and return:
haunting voices that shatter
down sidewalks and up and out and together,
and they'll float there, whispering, always.
To always awake in the echo of the hands
of no one. To always leave.
To always wait for the turn at the hospital,
always street dogs streaking away,
the seconds clinging to asphalt, sweating,
and on this bus
I'll sit steadfastly in the sun
and think where I hate to think, always.

FRUITLESS BLOSSOMS

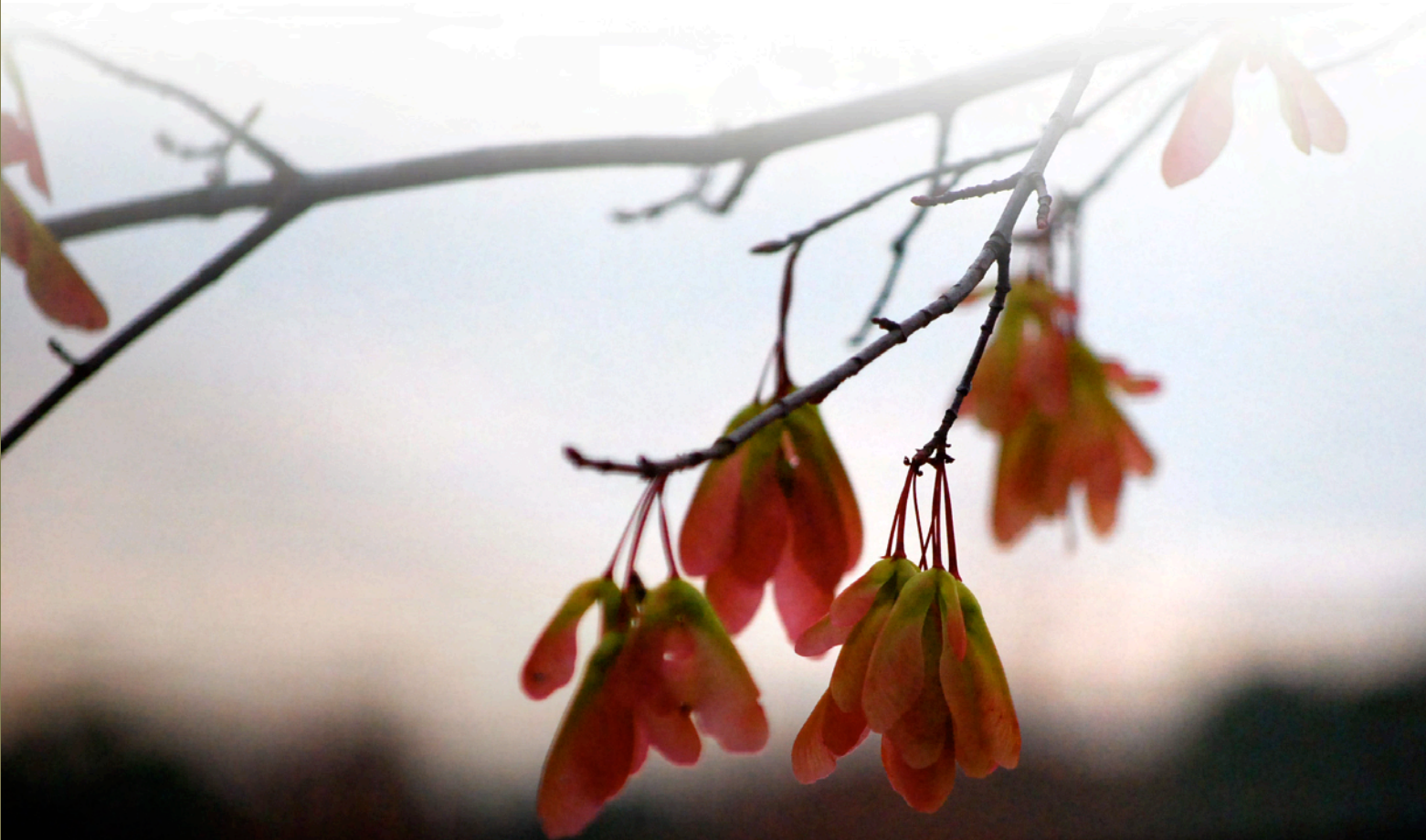
Sarah Gottlieb

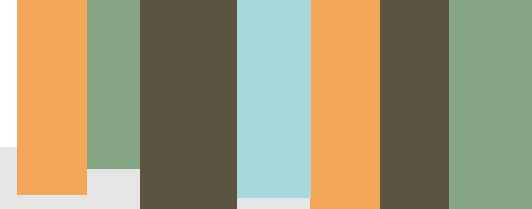
“Thought is the blossom; language
the bud; action the fruit behind it.”
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Trees grow
for years to
know but one
red delicious.
Spring brings them
to blossom
with buds soon
to follow,
and solemn fall sees
the fruits behind
them fall.

The mind, the tree,
no, the soul
it must be
and following
the thoughts can
blossom. And growing,
as thoughts do,
the blossoms do too.
And with awe
some language may
bud from blossom.

But buds
do not stay
and eventually fruits
fall away
and action without
language is nothing.





It was the most elaborate and ongoing game of charades I had ever played. Standing rain-soaked on a doorstep in Lynn, Massachusetts, an hour north of Boston, I am searching for a mother and small child who need to be taken to a clinic for blood work. An old woman with weathered skin of deep ebony stares at me blankly as I swing my arms to mime holding a baby. I try to act out walking, a clock, anything I can think of, but it's absolutely fruitless. She continues to repeat a word that I cannot understand, in some sort of African language. Is it her name? Is that your name? What am I doing here? Eventually I have to give up and enter the storm-worn world once again to seek the woman and her baby myself.

Three weeks later I am in the Lynn Community Health Center with three sobbing Iraqi girls terrified of the needle in the nurse's hand. I try to demonstrate a pinch and give a thumbs-up, a laugh, a high-five, a smile. I give them all I can. They are beautiful, and they are butterflies, and they are so far from home, and they understand nothing of what I say to them. Their lives are different from mine in ways I know that I cannot even imagine. An English-speaking uncle of another Iraqi family tells me of how he was shot three times in the stomach by the militia, of his removed intestines, and yet when I ask him if he likes it here his resounding "no" leaves his lips before I even finish my sentence. The family of Bhutanese refugees who do not speak a word of English do not know that I fought for them, for their social security applications that lacked most of the required information—their parents' names, their place of birth, even their relation to each other—as I have no way of asking for it. To them I am a stranger. I want to show these people that I am trying to be kind to them, that the world is trying to give them some relief, but I am struggling with a force much bigger than myself. Together we are straddling our comfort zones. It is precarious but it is an exploration, a foreign world deep inside a familiar city.

I find myself behind the wheel of a U-haul en route to Acton, Massachusetts to a furniture depository where organizations like ours, the International Institute of Boston, can pick up furniture for the houses of the refugees that we resettle—usually numbering around a hundred per year, but this fall is especially busy. The rosy-cheeked women of the Acton warehouse hands me a sheet with blue dot stickers—I can take a certain number of chairs, tables, lamps, plates, couches, marking the ones I want so they can then help load the truck. I search carefully for drawers that open, for couches that are not stained, for lamps that are not broken. I pick out colorful serving trays and stacks of plates and whatever I can scrounge up that might soften the hardwood floors of a new American life and give warmth to a winter much colder than Middle Eastern months.

On the drive back to the inner city, I lose track of the truck ahead of me—on the highway I appear to be alone in a U-haul and completely lost. My first instinct is to panic. My second, however, is to crank up the radio and get off at the first Boston exit, mashing myself amidst the traffic somewhere between Back Bay and Downtown Crossing until, by some kind of divine intervention, I make it back to Milk Street. By sundown, I am finally back on Sawyer Avenue, walking with heavy steps towards the house I left when the sun was just peeking up over the psych building. Only a day but an eternity away. I feel worn and utterly weary, but a soft exhilaration burns inside of me. You have crossed between Medford and Somerville, perhaps, but I have traveled worlds today.

An Internship, Collapsed

By Jodi Bosin

AN ADVENTURER ABROAD

Victoria Ferrera

The troubled traveler
To a distant country,
Despite intelligence
She experiences exile,
Bewildered, she begins
Faraway friends who
This complete confusion,
Not bound by the
What a misfortune it is
Words woven together,
Knowing that friends and
Currently unknown

tramps across the sea
dialogue in a different tongue
and an informed mind
an onlooker.
to bemoan for those
could free her from
companions who are
barrier of language.
to mingle amongst
without understanding,
foes at home speak with an ease
to the adventurer abroad.

You think you're indestructible, Tampax Girl. I remember the feeling. Your boyfriend drives you to the drugstore once a month and you cuddle in line while the greatest hits of the 90s blare through the PA system. I remember the feeling.

And why shouldn't you feel indestructible? The worst you have to worry about when he is around is how the fluorescent lighting makes you look even paler than you actually are. Of course, you ought to worry about the crazy employee who makes up stories in her head explaining why you need your boyfriend with you to buy tampons. I've recently come up with a good one. Are you ready for this, Tampax Girl? Your parents are religious zealots who think putting anything up your vagina makes you lose your virginity. I knew a girl like that. Turns out that her parents had more to worry about than tampons, if you know what I mean.

"That'll be \$5.19," I articulate, shifting my weight from one sore leg to the other. "Cash or credit?"

But seriously, Tampax Girl. I remember the first time I felt indestructible. I had just moved to a godforsaken neighborhood to live with my dad after my parents divorced. I'm only telling you this, Tampax Girl, because the story has a happy ending. I escaped. I just wanted to tell you this early on because your neatly-groomed eyebrows are knitting in concern as you shift through your wallet for your credit card. Meanwhile, your boyfriend's getting impatient. Typical.

Anyways, I was seventeen and I guess I made a wrong turn at the leaky water fountain in my riot-proof school and wound up lost under a broken light bulb. I saw a girl I recognized, but she seemed to be in a hurry. A corner of her skirt was tucked into her underwear.

This harsh, male voice screamed after her. Called her a puta. I don't need to explain that word to you, Tampax Girl. Words like that are pretty universal. You don't need to know the exact definition to understand the meaning.

Well, it turned out that the voice had a body attached to it, and the body focused its attention on me after the girl rounded the corner. I somehow didn't quite process the exact threat, Tampax Girl, until another voice, this one richer and more reedy, cut off his advances. The second voice addressed the first as Consuelo and told him to leave me alone because his mom knew my dad from work and she would kill him if he let me get hurt on my first day.

"Would you like a bag for that?"

You can imagine that Consuelo didn't take well to that, Tampax Girl. You've seen the way your boyfriend's arms tighten around your waist when a pimply employee glances your way, so you should understand. In fact, right now your boyfriend is reaching over your body to pick up your plastic bag while you sign your name in large, curly letters on the electric pad. He's claiming you, Tampax Girl.

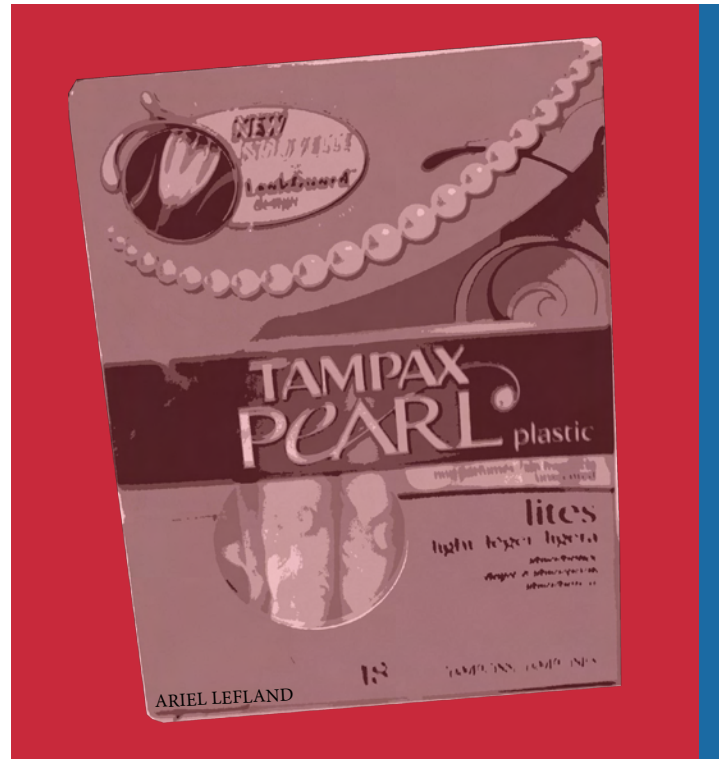
The owner of the second voice—Consuelo identified him as Jared—claimed me similarly. Jared steered me with his huge hand on the small of my back down the other end of the hallway. Consuelo didn't like this plan and a testosterone-induced fight broke out.

It's kind of amazing what you can learn about people by the way that they move. Like you, Tampax Girl. You always gesture towards your boyfriend, never away, like you're afraid he might fly away if you don't actively anchor him here. Consuelo was tough and used to being listened to. You could tell because he went for the obvious punches. Jared used to be scrawny as a kid. You could tell because he thought about the placement of each maneuver and dodged Consuelo's attacks.

I didn't fare so well, Tampax Girl, and I wasn't even in the fight. You are little, so you should understand. The wind from one of Consuelo's punches knocked me over. Scraped my knee open. I probably

UNTOUCHED

Alyson V



UNCHABLE

h Weiss



didn't make any noise. I don't know if you've noticed, Tampax Girl, but I don't articulate much.

Still, Jared reacted. This weird pain flashed in his eyes for just a brief moment, but I notice a lot. Somehow, Jared managed to get us away. We hid in the girl's bathroom. He jabbed wet paper towels on my knee to wash out my scrape and then—I'll never forget it—attacked the blemish with concealer he found lying on top of the sink. The same shade you use, Tampax Girl. I never really understood why. He muttered something about me being the only thing that's not broken around here.

Anyways, that was the time I felt indestructible, Tampax Girl. Ah, you have entered your signature and are awaiting your receipt! Our time is so short! I'll be brief. I could save the rest of the story for next month, but so much can happen in a month. I should know.

Jared and I got much closer. Really, he was the only friend I had. I imagine you're in a similar boat, Tampax Girl. It seems like it, anyways, from the way you're searching for his hand even now when you're just waiting for a flimsy piece of paper to come out of an ancient machine. Anyways, it turned out that I was kind of a novelty in that neighborhood. It was a small school, they had all been together long enough to know everyone's problems. Maybe this rich white girl would be different. I was treated like meat. I know a month doesn't sound that long, but just imagine living as a piece of silent meat every day for a month.

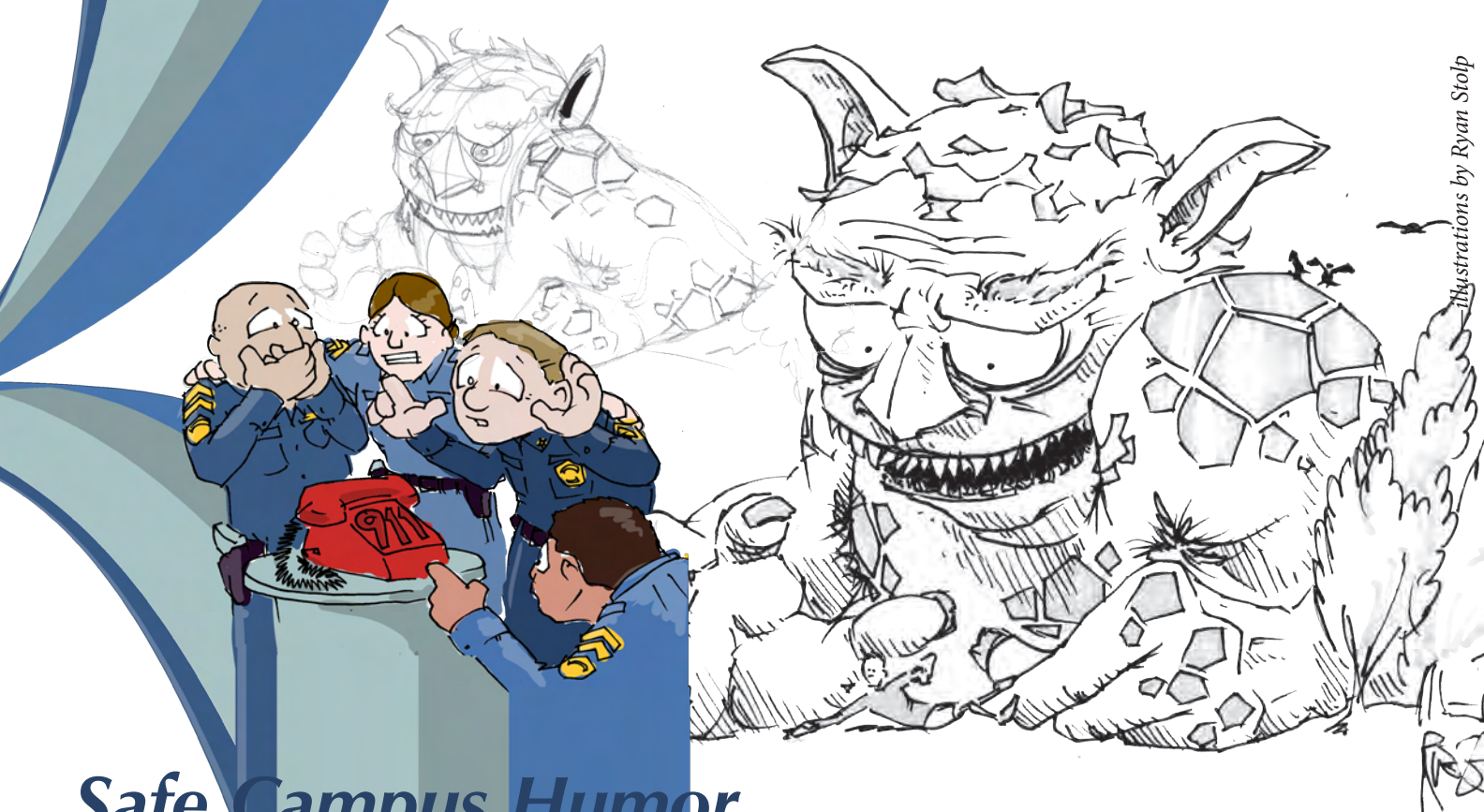
It didn't help that my father was becoming an alcoholic. Even crazier than your religious parents, Tampax Girl. He had lost his job and couldn't find another one and suddenly noticed that his couch was falling apart and that he paid for his groceries through barred windows. He couldn't find a way to deal with it without some liquid encouragement. That's why I'm here now, Tampax Girl. My mom got fed up with the slurred phone conversations and came for me. I live with her now, Tampax Girl, and you have no idea how heavenly this job seems in comparison. See? A bona fide happy ending.

Even when things with my dad got really bad and I was living as silent meat, Jared made me feel indestructible. He walked me to my classes and home and we did homework until Dad passed out. I can tell that you feel that way, too, with your hand in your boyfriend's as you turn from the greasy counter. But that can all change. The one who makes you feel untouchable can be the one who touches you. The one you depend on to understand you without words can ignore your words of protestation. I'm not saying your boyfriend will do this, just that you should be careful. Make sure you have a life outside of him. Make sure that if you shove him out the door not because you find some deep internal strength to say no but because your alcoholic father has stirred and you are terrified that he'll wake up, make sure that you have someone to talk to in school the next day. Make sure you're not confronted by your boyfriend's little sister who tells you that you broke his heart. Make sure Consuelo cannot hear this conversation.

You are almost at the automatic doors—they just released freezing air into the store—so I'll wrap this up. I'm not trying to scare you, Tampax Girl. I remember feeling indestructible. I'm just trying to tell you that I never found my voice. I'm trying to tell you that my environment turned me into silent meat and that I never fought back. I'm trying to tell you that one day, a knight in shining armor and red nail polish came in her white Cadillac and demanded that "my father" help pack my things, but that I never said anything.

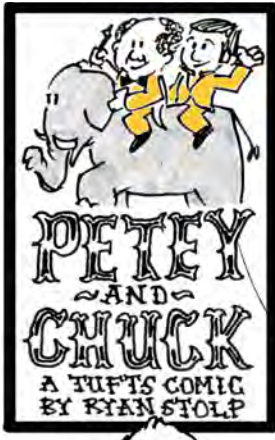
"Have a nice day. Shop again at Smith's."

I still don't.



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