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Letter from the Editor

I am on the cusp of making a large commitment. In August I am moving to Alabama to work toward MFA in poetry. I'll be leaving my family who I've lived with for twenty-four years, my closest friends (many of whom I've killed almost half of my life with), my faithful pup Dillon (don't worry, my parents take care of him), and the Tampa music scene that I've grown to love over the last five years. I even find myself wondering what life will be like without some of the great food places in the Temple Terrace area (Taco Bus, vietTrang's, Taj's Indian), and yet, I haven't panicked.

I wonder why I haven't. I panic constantly about even the most mundane changes, even when I am well prepared to make them.

I spend weeks commiserating over any purchase in the triple digits, despite always having a savings large enough to buy the thing twice over. I avoided learning how to drive until after I hit the legal drinking age. Hell, I didn't even learn how to ride a bike until fourteen because I was so afraid of falling and breaking my teeth.

Yet, aside from spending the necessary time to plan a move to another state, I haven't worried about this looming change, perhaps the largest change I will make, once, much less less formulated any of my go to prognostications of failure: failing all of my classes and being kicked out of the university; getting sick and accruing massive amounts of debt; a comet coming down from the sky and exploding my future apartment.

While reading submissions for this issue of *Sweet*, I figured out why I'm not worried: because I'm moving for poetry. Because poetry fosters communication. Because I have faith in the worthiness of poetry and the mutual intimate personal dialogue it creates between the writer and reader. Because I believe in the power of metaphor to express exactly what it means to be alive and afraid and vulnerable in this moment to someone who may read it a hundred years from now.

The poems in this issue of *Sweet* made me weigh my anxieties against the sense of malleability and passion I feel after reading these wonderful, transforming poems. These poems reminded me that poetry truly is worth a leap of faith.

So please, read this issue of *Sweet* and make a leap. I guarantee you'll come back changed.

— Ryan Bollenbach, assistant poetry editor

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Sheila Black

Morning

The story of morning is the story of cheat grass spread over concrete like corn for a chicken and the sky lightening as if a series of bandages were being unwrapped from a wound. At first I wake as into water, as into nothing; then I remember you again, and love plucks me back like cheat grass in my hands, or a glass I have broken, and the tiny splinters that glitter and mix, sand-dust and blood. If you came back I imagine I would smell you like pine trees, and I would not know what to say, my hands fluttering up around me like birds whose home-tree is burning. And I wish it were not like this, but who would I be without this burden? How would I know myself without this longing, which is unanswerable as the sky now, the sun rolling over like a fish, bright-bellied, huge, and all the noising of so much and more life in the bushes, each aspen, the blades of grass. I am holding myself tight and walking into it as I used to walk into the still pond at my friend's house in the Catskills, and when you stirred the mud at the bottom up, the water clouded with green. I would tell you love is only a confusion, and also what we are made for, the pieces of us bleeding up.

SHEILA BLACK is the author of *House of Bone* and *Love/Iraq* (both CW Books). Her third collection *Wen Kroy--that' s New York backwards--is* forthcoming from Dream Horse Press where it won the 2011 Orphic Prize. She is co-editor of *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* with Jennifer Bartlett and Michael Northen. She lives in San Antonio, Texas where she directs the literary arts center Gemini Ink. Her favorite sweet is marzipan, though, if pressed, she can bake a mean chocolate flourless cake.

Renee Emerson

Magnolia

Weekly, I track your progress: Stranger,
growing with abandon
in the taut economy of my belly.

There are dangers—
a stumble, strange chemicals,
consuming incorrect foods, some say.
My hair returns to its natural color. I avoid
a simple pleasure: glass of cheap wine

dark as a January evening. A reflection
of something learned from my mother.
Sickness, exhaustion, anticipation
of the first movements. Slow, a dance

in deep water. The months
stretch ahead, one long syllable;
the last petals from the magnolia tree
drown in ditchwater as in a dream
of white deer moving further
into the dark, indeterminate forest.

sweet

5.3

Listen to the reading:

My Husband Tells Me of a Poem He Means To Write

The Grand Canyon, 1990, lobbing rocks
off the drop. His mother's hands
on his shoulders, her worry
of feet slipping. He understood
that every death is your own, every
witnessed near-miss, nail-mark
frantic on the coffin-lid.
I learned it a different way: peach pit caught
in the safe-keeping of my throat,
the minute of panic, knowing
the clockwork monotony of the body
can stop. That we're two smaller shadows
submerged in another, large
like a pockmarked night sky, each star
unbuttoned to let fall.

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RENEE EMERSON holds an MFA from Boston University. Her work has appeared in magazines such as *Stirring*, *32 Poems*, *Indiana Review*, and *storySouth*, and in three chapbooks, the most recent being "Where Nothing Can Grow" (Batcat Press). She teaches creative writing and composition at Shorter University, and has never been one to turn down a Reeses Peanut Butter Cup.

Amy Eisner

Small Antler

Listen to the reading:

The young buck scratched his head again
and the antler toppled into the grass,
its points spiking up two clots of mud.

It perched in the grass like a frozen bird.
The wind was slow in coming.
The sun had a way of accumulating.

A raccoon's bright belly lumbered by.
When the wind picked up,
the trees whirled their heads

like the memory of leaping—
that crashing sound.
That blood.

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AMY EISNER teaches creative writing and literature at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. Her poems have recently appeared in [Confrontation](#), [Failbetter.com](#), and [Valparaiso](#). She loves grapefruit when it's not too sweet. And maybe when it is.

Ashley Inguanta

Listen to the reading:

Peaks

I

Girl slept for a thousand years, cradled in an ocean of ghost horses, their legs and necks wrapping her like mothers would children. Sometimes the ghost-horse legs wrapped girl like rope, tying up her limbs, all wet with salt from the sea. Sometimes the ghost-horse necks spooned girl tight, only to uncurl once again, flinging her still-sleeping body into the next wave of mane, of tail. Sometimes the ghost horses ached when they let girl go. Sometimes the ghost horses could not wait to get her gone.

II

There was a time when momma cried near the apple tree, salting fallen fruit to eat later. When later came and momma ate, baby ate, too. Baby kicked and ate and understood life would not be as big as a belly or as small as a hand, pressing against momma's skin-globe and saying, "We love you, baby." Baby knew the way these hands held other hands, cracked in dry weather, prayed when alone. Baby knew about love, how to sing it, sing it loud. Baby knew love was as fleeting as the salt slipped into what would soon be a navel, that the salt was always stronger than the flesh of a beautiful thing, sweet and red only for a moment.

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ASHLEY INGUANTA is the Art Director of SmokeLong Quarterly and Animal: A Beast of a Literary Magazine. "Peaks" appears in her collection, *The Way Home*, which is out with Dancing Girl Press.

Buy *The Way Home*.

Web site: ashleyinguanta.com.

Janet MacFadyen

Listen to the reading:

Race Point

Almost sunset. The earth hangs by a thread.
Now the sun is the sea. Now the dunes are an ocean swell.
There are the whales that turn the crank to spin the world.
There is the moon, with its expression of alarm.
We could get lost, everything so glazed in stillness,
even sound glazed, more tinny and brittle, our cries barely audible.
The dog in the surf is watching its owner walk away.
The surf is flat as a shimmering platter and the dog
is just a speck running in silence then vanishing
behind the point where the lighthouse is.
And we're walking away, now that it's dusk and the day moving on,
having forgotten why we came out to begin with.

Having forgotten why we came out to begin with
we're walking away, now that it's dusk and the day moving on.
The dog that vanished behind the point where the lighthouse is
is just a speck wagging its tail in silence
in a surf that is flat as a shimmering platter.
The dog is watching its owner walking away.
Sound is glazed, tinny and brittle, our cries barely audible.
We could get lost, everything so glazed in stillness.
There is the moon, with its expression of alarm.
There are the whales that turn the crank to spin the world.
Now the sun is the sea, and the dunes are an ocean swell.
It's sunset, and the earth hangs by a thread.

sweet

5.3

A Fly's Life

Stop trying so hard. The shade is drawn; the shade opens.
The coil of the outer cape tightens, the air liquid pearl, a gazing ball.

A dog is just a speck. It runs in silence, wags its tail in silence,
then vanishes behind the point where the lighthouse is.

Who are we? Who are we? The sky hangs suspended, the wind turbine
at Race Point Light is still. Then gulls take off in a clutch of feathers.

A metallic sea and its blue tongue. They probe along the channels
where the thatch of eel grass runs. The lips of the sea.

The grass is a river. The straw the high tide left against the driftwood
is a river. A fly's life is as long as mine.

The tide reaches out. I would be taken by it, but just for six hours,
then let me return to being Janet, to being universe looking at itself.

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JANET MACFADYEN's newest poetry collection, *In the Provincelands*, was released by Slate Roof Press in June 2013. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and has appeared in *Poetry* and the *Atlantic Monthly* among other places. She has had a seven-month residential fellowship at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, and just returned from a residency at Cill Rialaig in southwest Ireland, where she suffered the onslaughts of wind, sleet, snow, and newborn lambs looking for their mothers.

David Ebenbach

We Were the People Who Moved

We were the people who moved. It was a time of movement, and we were people who moved. We moved from small apartment to small apartment to large apartment to small, from rental to house and to rental again. We moved from boxes in large, cool shadows of buildings over the smell of Italian bread baking to small white-paneled huddles on stretches of grass to homes that stood at polite distances from one another, the sound of lawnmowers and the sound of cicadas crossing our driveways. This was not some destiny manifesting itself; we moved back at least as often as we moved forward. Even when we weren't moving at all we were in some sense moving back. The accents changed around us, the speed of the cars, the number of stoplights and demonstrative churches. The bumpers changed stickers. Our son walked on uneven sidewalks and between banks of exhaust-darkened snow and across lawns and down a street that rarely saw traffic. Were our neighbors moving? We were moving. Though there were times we paused, paused standing on our back decks or on our front stoops or on fire escapes that looked over so many rooftops. It was those moments when we felt it most keenly: the ground under us, already on its way, away.

sweet

5.3

To Whom It May Concern

Listen to the reading:

They have built a tree outside my window.
They have built another one behind that.
They have filled both with white flowers,
white like fresh paper, with a little yellow
at the core, for dignity.

The brown limbs underneath the white
are like us. They hold everything up, up.
I write to you about this not to complain—
no-one seeing this could think to complain—
but because someone must mention the trees,
and because someone must need to be told.

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DAVID EBENBACH is the author of a chapbook of poetry entitled *Autogeography*, two collections of short fiction---*Between Camelots* and *Into the Wilderness*---and a guide to the creative process called *The Artist's Torah*. He has been awarded the Drue Heinz Literature Prize, an Individual Excellence Award by the Ohio Arts Council, and several fellowships. Living in Washington, DC, he teaches creative writing at Georgetown University, and has a particular weakness for anything with salted caramel in it. To find out more, go to www.davidebenbach.com.

Lauren Camp

Discussing Death As a Conscious Activity

Listen to the reading:

(Inspired by film director Tony Scott who jumped to his death from Vincent Thomas Bridge, August 19, 2012)

If you're snug in your life when a man in a red cap jumps from a bridge to an under story, under a wave or a door to the ocean, to a torrent less daylight, more prayer, less phantom, you might not consider the river of children he leaves behind. But when Merle came by in June with her two grandsons and they stood on your porch, tow-headed and particular, you thought of the mother who couldn't manage her batch of compulsions, you thought of her strategy, and of course everyone now assembles to whisper. You thought of the grass and sky she ripped from those boys, whose gaze will lift-off and follow any woman they see, who said *please* and *thank you* just right. And if, on the screen, you nibbled the links of a man wearing loss on his head, the ample rumor of red, you could forgive yourself the invitation to enter, you were surrounded by news, and anyway, you looked up, trying to find a way out – just as a tanager flew toward and peered in your window with his ebony eyes. Where you might have read danger, in departure, there remained only feathers, and later, the perception of roses — not perfume, but stem and thorn, which made you forgive all the red and not-red that you've done all your life, and allow even

faint shades of fire. Your friend Lenny said he hates people who do that – who jump, who swing forward and don't bring themselves back, and David claims it's not what we're here for. It's selfish, he says. You think about this, but still have trouble turning hysteria around. You've always been open to hope, and the one time you traded your spices for pain, even then, you shook yourself out. Your greatest shelter is pretending all people will remain hoisted on bridges. Last week at Karen's, with 61 strangers, you recited 108 six-syllabled mantras for Kevin whose life neatly folded around him: *om mani padme hum*. You built a structure of compassion with your parallel voices, as crimson beads slipped down a string. Though his life digressed into cancer, and the body whittled to syllables and bone, his story went on: *om mani padme hum, om mani padme hum*. You didn't know what it meant, but you said it and lifted your head. As many times as it took to be damaged and returned, he stayed, holding to earth, and at the memorial, his three-year old son ran by with goggles, seeing through generations ghosts in invisible water – what did not happen, what did; one man lying beneath the hem of a pylon, the other pulling open a curtain each morning to let in each grimace of light. One man perched in the span between witness and pulse, the other accepting his pardon. Of the man in a cap who saw only feet of the stars, do we care? We have cried for smaller things. Sometimes belief doesn't fit us at all. Sometimes bodies just fall.

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LAUREN CAMP is the author of *This Business of Wisdom* (West End Press) and writes the blogs *Which Silk Shirt* (on poetry and other fine literature) and *Notes to Cecil* (an evolving installation of spontaneous poetry and composed photographs). Co-Winner of The Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Awards 2012, her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *J Journal*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Linebreak* and others. She has also guest-edited special sections for *World Literature Today* (on international jazz poetry) and for *Malpaís Review* (on the poetry of Iraq). On Sundays, she hosts “[Audio Saucepan](#),” a global music/poetry program on Santa Fe Public Radio. Favorite sweet: coffee ice cream.

Mother's Day, 1971

Ann Lightcap Bruno



1.

This is my brother, as tiny as a bean. He is trying to say, signifying nothing, seeing only shapes and shadows, hearing only his own cries. In short time, he grows to lanky heights and takes up the jazz bass for his profession. When he plays, he drapes his body around his instrument like he is embracing a wide-hipped lover from behind. Most of the time he keeps the rhythm steady, except for when he solos. Then, he curls around the bass tighter, closer, and he thwacks his long fingers against fat strings that vibrate and quaver and stop. His face shuts down as he loses the ability to control it. Features contort into dissonance, eyes closed, mouth grimacing into the tension it takes to make the expression come out right. From the front tables, there is mm-hmm and play-it and

eventually held breath until the thing eases, smooth as dark wine, into the lowest of tones, and then woo-hoo as the band comes back into their communion. Other tables only offer after the fact applause, because they are on dates, but that's just the way of it. For the rest of the number he watches the eyes and fingers of the others. He listens to each share of the collaborated story the music invents.

My brother has a small son now who has football hands that he uses to bang out noise on a toy piano and to cause train wrecks on wooden track. It took him a while to learn how to talk, but now he can trill the r in *more* as clear as any boy, large or small. Still, when my brother's son tries to say something he doesn't know the words for, he reaches out and pinches your skin until it turns white or until you pinch him back, which my brother has only done once. Here in this photograph, my brother does not yet have the strength to hold anything more than a finger, let alone pinch.

He is just beginning to elongate into human form.

2.

On that day I was something of a redhead like my father before his hair turned brown and then white, but I would fade to strawberry blonde within the year.

Although I do not remember this pose, or one like it, I can recall the chairs, boxy modern things, and the Lucite cube table and the lamp. There were in those days loud canvases my mother had painted, angular with long strokes of umber and olive, one a sort of a station wagon, but with square wheels, others reminding me sometimes of faces or trees, even though they weren't supposed to be anything certain. They hung above an explosion of toys (red cups into which I poured absent tea, So Big the fat doll). And one night a month, there was Shakespeare Club, attorneys and wives sagging in the velour chairs, cocktails sweating on the transparency of the table. Someone would introduce the notion of alienation in a book they had read: *The Stranger*, *The Frogs*, *King Lear*. One lawyer let me sip his whiskey sour and I wanted more, but I was sent to bed, to the room I cannot remember for the life of me, to lie in dimness, listen to murky, foreign laughter and catch wisps of Joy de Parfum and cigarettes.

In 1974, moving men came and packed it all up, hoisting the termite-ridden playhouse onto the back bumper of the truck, just up the hill to Dr. Hartman's fancier place on the corner (my parents would have it painted white in 1975, add a family room in 1983, a Jacuzzi in 1999). As I clattered through echoing rooms, they lugged the paintings to the attic with my father's twelve-gauge shotguns, and boxes of books to the basement.

3.

There's a cartoon of a boy in art class showing his teacher his painting. Above the painting, an overlapping jumble of shapes, he has scrawled the title "My Dad." To the puzzled teacher, the kid says, "He's abstract."

My father and his brother, both squarely in their seventies, are the first men in at least three generations to live past the age of fifty-three. Our children, my brother's and my cousins' and mine, have had to coin a word for grandfather.

My husband rarely thinks to snap pictures, so he is the present parent in most of them. I am largely absent.

Absence is not the same as abstraction, however, and the boy's geometric painting of his dad is more suggestive than the teacher realizes. Look at that triangle. Check out that square. Inhabit the circle. Navigate the circumference, seek the point of origin, slice off a sector, go off on tangents. It's possible even if we don't know (or want to discover) the variables.

4. On this evening in 1971, she was twenty-eight years old, and despite the pregnancy softness that hadn't yet melted away, she perched on the thinnest edge of hip, allowing me to monopolize the chair. There was, in her face, a shining weariness that makes her real for me, although the photograph is old and two-dimensional.

There was a resignation to the new square shape of family. There was a blasé abandon of loose ponytail and mismatched whites, sparse jewelry, loud sash tied around her waist. There was a budding awareness of how to hold two children at once. There was a mother to lean against, to borrow green beads from, to not mind if the ponytail holders didn't match the dress so long as they matched each other.

There was oblivion to the events surrounding my brother's birth on April 23 of this year (the death of Papa Doc Duvalier in Haiti, and the marching throngs of war protesters in Washington D.C. and San Francisco). There was oblivion to the mess of toys just out of the camera's frame. There was my brother's first taste of my father's Brubeck and my mother's Mahler. There was the publication, ten years after he died, of Camus's first novel, *The Happy Death*, a precursor to *The Stranger* in which a character named Patrice Meursault, kills a rich man in order to attain happiness.

There was dust gathering on my mother's paint box and guitar, although she still let me sit next to her on the piano bench as she sang and played,

Oh, dear! What can the matter be?

Johnny's so long at the fair.

The song was about being left at home, longing both for the guy and for the stuff he said he'd provide. When I try to plunk out the music at my house now, no one sidles next to me. They don't know it or care to.

There was in that room the concurrence of trying to say and of trying to keep quiet. There was the concurrence of abstraction and absence that still exists in our family.

We maintain distinctness, all the while overlapping shapes and shadows, imposing our bodies atop one another, excepting, of course, the man snapping the shot. But he is here too, in the dent left in the cushion of his chair and in the echo of a voice that asks, “Are we ready?”

And although my brother is starting to pinch his face into a howl, my mother answers, “Just take it.” She creates a smile for me to copy, so I tilt my head and pull into her circling arm.

My brother is a bean. I am a redhead. My father is a camera. My mother is a girl. The room is our circumference.

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ANN LIGHTCAP BRUNO teaches English at the Wheeler School in Providence and lives in nearby Cranston, Rhode Island, with her husband and children. Her essays and stories have appeared in such publications as *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Talking Writing*, *Memoir (and)*, *elimae*, *Vestal Review*, and *Alimentum*. She is particularly fond of peanut butter blossoms.

Lost Birds of the Civil War

Gabriel Houck

In one scene, my father tells me that the scarlet tanager is one of only a handful of North American birds he's never seen. Our house is a gallery of Audubon paintings. His paperback bird manual is worn gray, its skin creased and softened so that it almost folds into the back pocket of his jeans. In the evening, he will sit outside and tell me, while the purple martins huddle along the whitewood ledges of the birdhouse, about the birds whose existence has moved from the documented record to the pages of ornithological legend. He will tell me about the time he and a beekeeper named Jay Martin heard the ivory-billed-woodpecker in the wilds of the Atchafalaya swamp – its distinctive slow *tok tok tok* ricocheting through darkening cypress tress. The last confirmed ivory-bill sighting was in the 1930s, he'll say, letting the potential of that fact linger like an epilogue to his story. His eyes will be watching that moment again like an intimate friend, its dimensions and lighting permanently stained like tea rings in his memory. The hairs on his sun-burnt forearms will be standing on end.

*

In the other, I am holding Sarah Bess Haydel's hand. We are in rollerskates, in Vicksburg, Mississippi, on an overnight 6th grade field trip to learn about the Civil War. We'd spent the day in museums and antebellum mansions watching recreation films made in the 80s with way too much makeup and ketchup for blood. We'd filled out endless worksheets. The roller rink was designated as our relax-time, the reward for making the learning of history such a chore, but never had I been less relaxed. Free time was when the social hierarchies emerged. It was when the kids took over and the intrigue began, all of it infinitely more difficult to navigate than a worksheet. Chaperones watched over us from picnic benches, trying to diagnose out-of-bounds-behavior through fake smoke saturated with disco lights and the smells of frying grease.

She sent emissaries first. My friends couldn't skate, so it was just me and one girl after another, each of them relaying some message and confirmation, until out of the clouds she emerged, as if floating, next to me. We'd had a pizza dinner. Our hands were basil and parmesan stained, reddened in the cracks with grease. In my mind they stuck together, hot enough to meld like dough. I'd like to think that the moment our hands touched became fixed and indelible in my memory, a turn in the story when the knocking of some long lost bird electrified the air and everything stood still, everyone's

eyes meeting to acknowledge feeling its charge. But this memory is imperfect and impermanent, just a shape around which the borders of my world have since resettled. I cannot see what happened next, how long we skated, even what her face looks like now. It was all I could do to keep my feet from rolling away beneath me.

Later, in the hotel room, lights-out came and went. I lay wide awake, goosebumped and talking while Eric and Ernesto listened in the dark. It was pure performance, logorrhea, a story like I'd been there before, every detail of how her hand felt, what her friends had said and how I had answered them. We were collectively in some film where I was an explorer returning from faraway peaks, from great lakes and glaciers, my flag now pinned on Hong Kong, Anchorage, Caracas. My name was the Conquering Hero for Lonely Boys, and the world from which I'd returned, lost to me now in disco smoke, still echoed in sound and color as I talked and talked and talked.

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GABRIEL HOUCK is originally from New Orleans, and he misses everything but the cockroaches. He has MFAs in writing from the California Institute of the Arts and The University of Iowa, and is currently a student in the University of Nebraska's PhD in creative writing. He lives with his (ancient) dog and (wonderful) girlfriend in Lincoln, where winter is stubbornly resisting the approach of spring. His favorite dessert is either his father's homemade loquat jam, or a bag of oreos, depending on if his father is reading this.

Summer Siren

Jacqueline Doyle

She had webbed toes. Robin and I peered at them surreptitiously while she was sunbathing on deck, stretched out provocatively on a striped towel—for the benefit of Dirk, as it turned out, the best looking of the tanned, handsome boys who worked at the marina where our boats were docked. I was with my friend Robin's family, traveling in their cabin cruiser "Mamselle" from Point Pleasant up the Hudson River and Champlain Canal to Lake Champlain.

The girl's family was on another boat passing through. I don't know from where. She was older than us, seventeen or so, pouty and sultry, with golden brown skin and thick dark hair. Italian, or maybe Jewish.

We could see the boys looking at her body, glistening with suntan oil in the bright sun, as they went about their work, shirtless and glorious. We yearned for all of them, wanted to be her, to be older at least. Not fifteen waiting for sixteen, wearing shiny metal braces and never been kissed.

Two days later the girl was locked in a changing cabana above the docks on the hill, shrieking and wailing, refusing to come out. There were whisperings all over the marina. We strained to overhear two stout older women talking by one of the boats.

"You missed quite a scene. Her father caught them and now she won't speak to him."

The woman shielded her eyes from the sun and squinted. "It was a drama all right."

"Caught them?" The other woman's voice was avid.

"Her and that good-looking boy. The blond one."

"You mean Dirk?"

"Yeah, that's the one. Dirk."

"Oh Lordy. Were they really ...?"

"That's what I hear. I mean I didn't see it, but Marge in the front office says the girl started caterwauling to beat the band and ran up the hill naked as a jaybird. Marge sent Dirk home. He'll be making himself scarce if he knows what's good for him."

Robin and I mooned over the star-crossed lovers in our cabin, dark and cool after the dazzling sun outside. The boat rocked gently, bumping against the sides of the slip. We both were of the opinion that Dirk would come back and stand up for her. Maybe rescue her from her father. It would be romantic, and we hoped we'd be there to see it.

Days passed and Dirk didn't show up. The women from the other boats looked sideways at the girl as she stalked to the soda machine in front of the office and back. She looked proud, defiant, and ashamed all at once, staring straight ahead, and then vanishing wordless into the nether regions of her family's boat. The family got ready to move on, hauling bags of ice and provisions, the girl sullen, her father tight-lipped. Her mother put her hand on his arm and he shook it off as he started up the engines, backing the boat out and then pushing hard on the throttle as it turned.

After they left, Dirk was back on the docks again, hosing down the floating decks, tinkering with a small engine with one of the other boys, fueling boats that stopped by the marina. He kept to himself, no friendly smiles for the customers. Robin and I wondered if he missed the girl but it didn't really look that way. We were surprised that he seemed unchanged.

On the trip home we met two boys at the Plattsburgh Boat Basin and spent an afternoon standing in the shallow water of a secluded cove making out. Their names were Franz and Bob.

Even then I knew that I liked Bob more than he liked me, and Franz liked Robin more than she liked him, yet it didn't diminish the magic of the long afternoon. The light slanted on the water and gradually faded, a pink glow on the horizon. Wind began to ruffle the reeds that lined the shore, raising goose bumps on my arms. We must have talked, but I don't remember anything we said. I remember that Bob's chest was broad, and that his skin was warm and smelled faintly of Noxema and sweat. His hands were firm on my bare back, his lips soft and gentle. I forgot about the girl.

Back in New Jersey, Robin and I lounged in her bedroom talking about Bob and Franz and boys in our school, setting our long hair on pink plastic rollers the size of orange juice cans to make it straight, testing smoky eye shadows and pale lipsticks. Franz came to visit her once. I wrote Bob a letter, a laboriously light-hearted account of a football game that went through many drafts. He didn't write back. Robin and I forgot about the girl.

I dreamt of her years later, swimming underwater with webbed feet, her hair streaming and swirling behind her. She sunned herself on the warm rocks of a tiny ocean island teeming with young mermaids. Her golden skin glittered like fish scales as the seawater evaporated and left tiny crystals of salt behind. She sang as she combed her wet hair, the words to her seductive song almost too faint to hear over the sound of the wind and gentle swell of the waves. Never thinking to bind ourselves to the mast, we jumped off the boat and began to swim.

The Fortuneteller's Words

Jacqueline Doyle

It was a long time ago and I can't remember what she said, only that she spoke very fast, and that I was desperately sad. The fortuneteller's name was Lillian.

Someone made a tape that I immediately misplaced, or maybe there was no tape, but I think there was. It floats in the Sargasso Sea of my unconscious, jostled by the flotsam and jetsam of my past, slowly rising and falling amidst swaying underwater plants, darting neon fish, pink and orange banks of coral, and stately black turtles stirring up clouds of sand from the ocean floor: a tiny rectangle of clear plastic, small enough to fit in my pocket. That summer I lost my husband. I lost my bearings. I lost the fortuneteller's words. Some time later I lost my memory of them as well.

I've almost forgotten how very sad I was.

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JACQUELINE DOYLE in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she teaches at California State University, East Bay. Her work is published and forthcoming in *South Dakota Review*, *Front Porch Journal*, *CRATE*, *Vestal Review*, *elimae*, *Thin Air Magazine*, *Ninth Letter* (winner of their online meta-essay contest), *The Rumpus*, *South Loop Review*, and elsewhere. Choosing her favorite sweet is like choosing her favorite novel. So many possibilities! Crème brulee. Warm apple cobbler with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Ghirardelli dark chocolate squares (which she believes are good for her). Visit her here with more suggestions:

www.facebook.com/authorjacquelineadoyle.

A Box of Stars

Matt Batt

The stars came in a small but heavy cardboard box, Chinese characters scattered across the paper tape like the inky footprints of mice, the words RISING SUN HONG KONG stamped at an angle, and then, of course, my name in someone's puerile hand. I found them in the back of *Black Belt* magazine, a secret available only to ninjas and Midwestern twelve-year olds. I opened the box with care, no way to know how the stars were packaged. They seemed unstable, full, somehow, of inertia and desire. When I held the flat box, only as big as a pack of Sorry! cards, level and steady they were calm, but the slightest shift left or right and a metallic shimmy could be heard and they felt ready to leap from my hands. I put the box down on the counter and cut it open.

Despite the way it felt, inside the box was more wrapping, rough brown rice paper, packaged like a purse, with a white piece of paper tape holding it together. I ripped it open, and there they sat. Three throwing stars, powder black, in a stack, obedient. Ready. They each looked like a heavy piece of metal, with a crescent bite taken out of each side to make four elegant, parabolic points. Almost as though the yin-yang symbol had been undone, doubled, and reversed into a weapon. But it didn't look like a weapon. With a hole cut in the middle of each, they looked more like a meditation on white space and black space, on presence, absence. It looked at once perfectly still and stable, and yet every side was a blade.

Fucking Tim Kazubuski. I almost didn't care anymore.

I put my finger through them, a stack of heavy black metal rings, and went out to the back yard. The smell of my dad's ashtray, our neighbor's cocoa butter, and fresh cut grass confused the air. The willow tree was too far away in Stub's yard, and we had nothing but lawn—not a single vertical surface other than, of course, our house, to aim at.

I took a few paces away from the house, as though it were doing the same thing and had agreed to a duel, or even instigated it. I was unified in purpose, in seriousness, though I glanced around the yard to make sure no one was in sight, and then I turned, pulled one star from my finger and pinched it as though it were just a heavy playing card I was about to toss toward an empty hat. I hurled it with all the force I could muster and it flew, whistling, through the air, but my throw was low and it ricocheted off the cement footing with a spark and a bling and succumbed to the daffodils. The next

I aimed higher, trying not to feel too badly about having missed the side of our house, and I imagined Kazubuski standing there, gap-toothed and laughing, smug, and mean, just fucking mean. I threw that star where I believed his heart would have been and it went and whirled and it whispered and it stuck. It stuck with such a gratifying *thwock!* like a comic book sound effect and I could practically see the word issue from the kelly green wall, the dark hole heart of Tim Kazubuski, and I threw and retrieved star after star after star, most of the time from anger, but almost, too, for the pure music, the pure language, the near secret sound of one boy's revenge, until my dad came around the corner of the garage with his lawn chair and Lite beer.

“Hey hey, Tiger,” he said, almost not looking, almost not surprised, fully not suspecting to find me doing anything other than standing alone in our backyard, but then he did. He looked at me, at what I was facing, and we both looked at the garage, and though from our distance you couldn't really see the one stuck star, slim as a Hallmark card, and dark, you could see, sprinkled like black glitter over the whole back of our house, the constellation of marks they left, the negative image of a sky pricked by lights long since dead.

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MATTHEW BATT is the author of *Sugarhouse*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, a memoir about fixing up a crack house and his life along with it. His essays and short stories have appeared in *Tin House*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Huffington Post*, and elsewhere, and he's the recipient of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. He's an associate professor of English at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota.

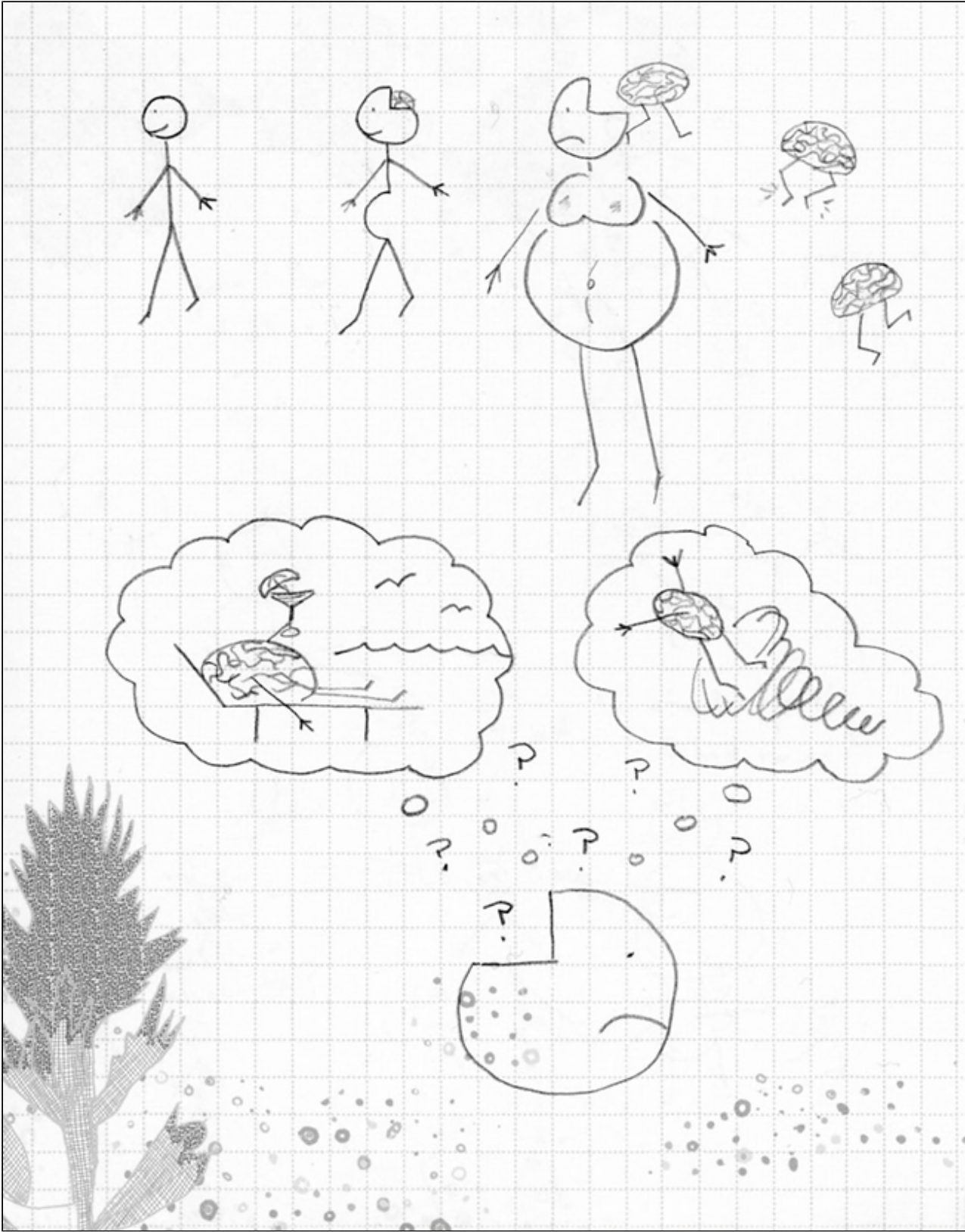
Favorite dessert: Grand Marnier bread pudding at Heaven City, an old hang-out of Al Capone's in Mukwanago, Wisconsin. It haunts me like an orange blossom-scented ghost, but in a good way.

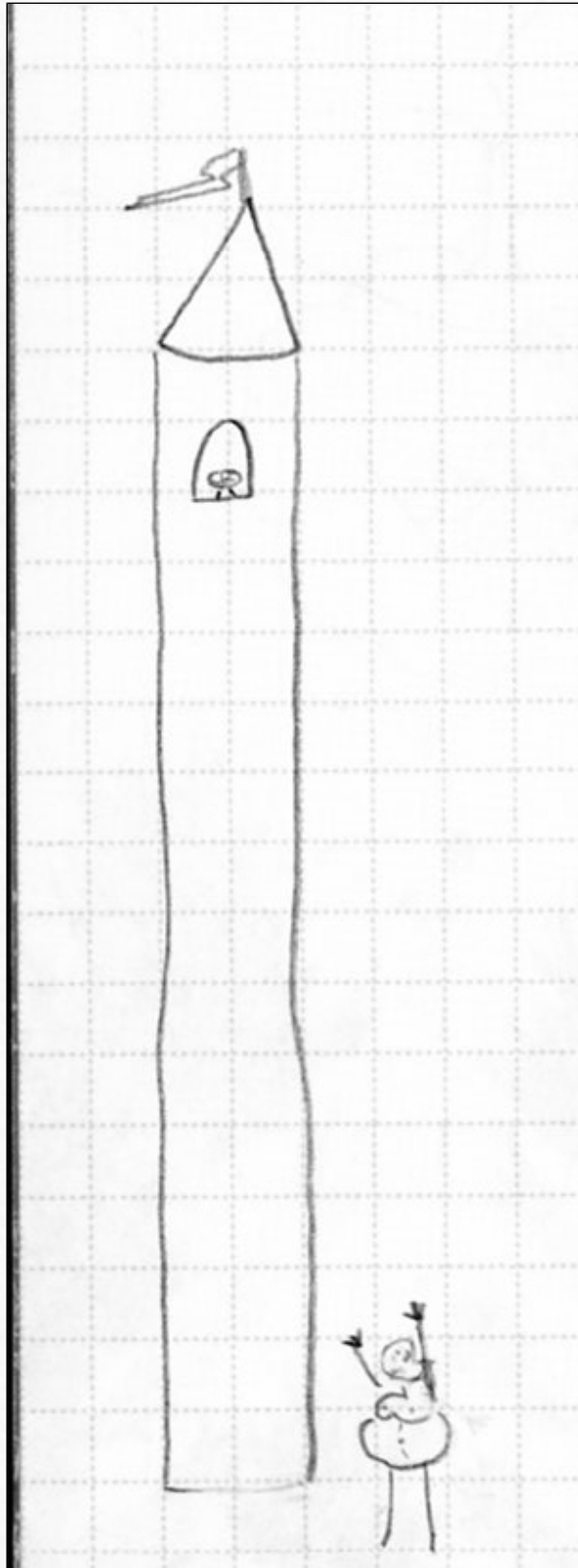
Bye Bye Brain

Randon Billings Noble

When I was pregnant I read that pregnant women's brains can shrink nearly 8%. I was pregnant with twins. For a while I thought my brain had shrunk 16%. Then I thought it had quit my skull entirely.

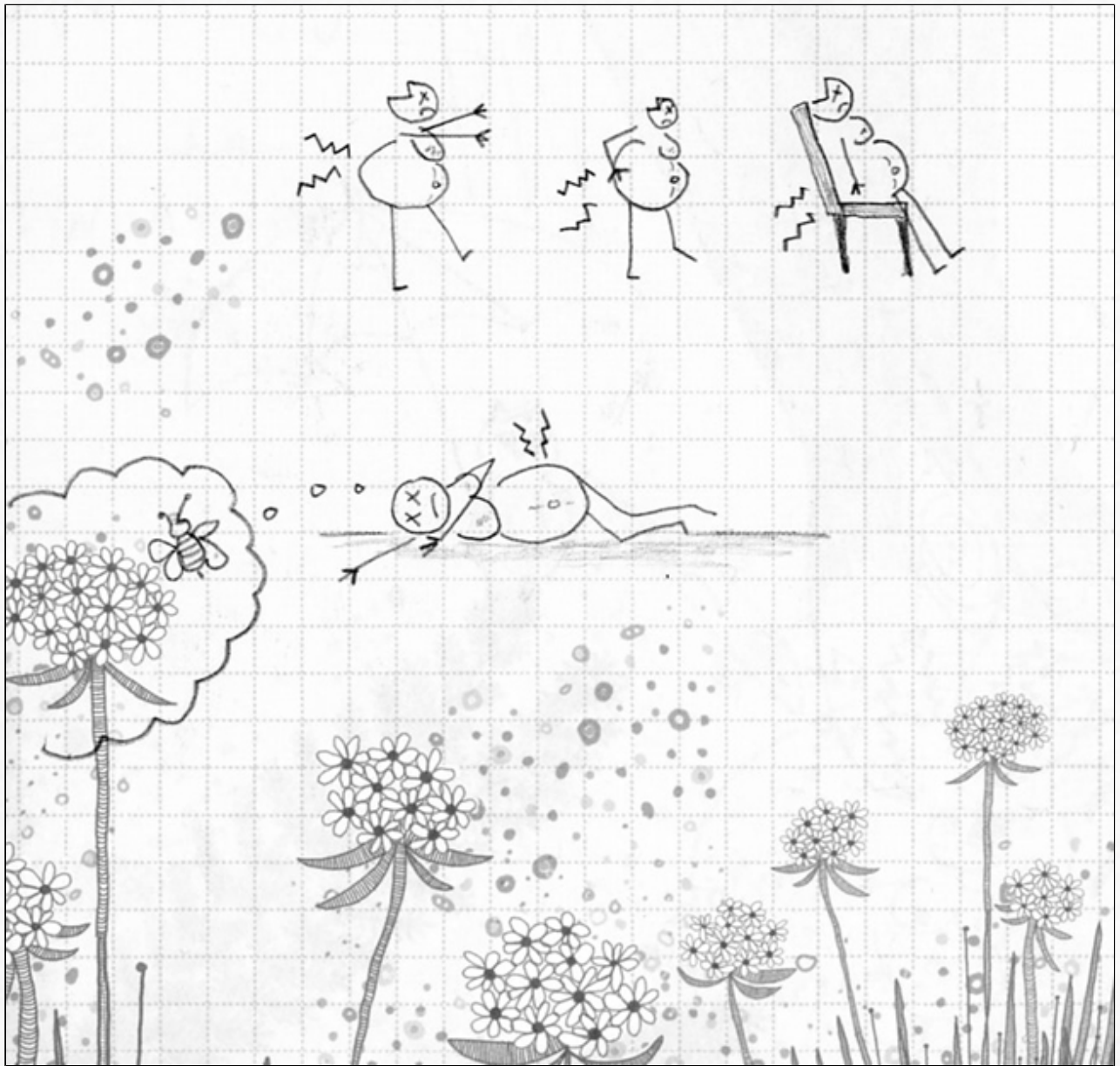
I am a writer but I couldn't write; I started to draw instead. This is what I drew.





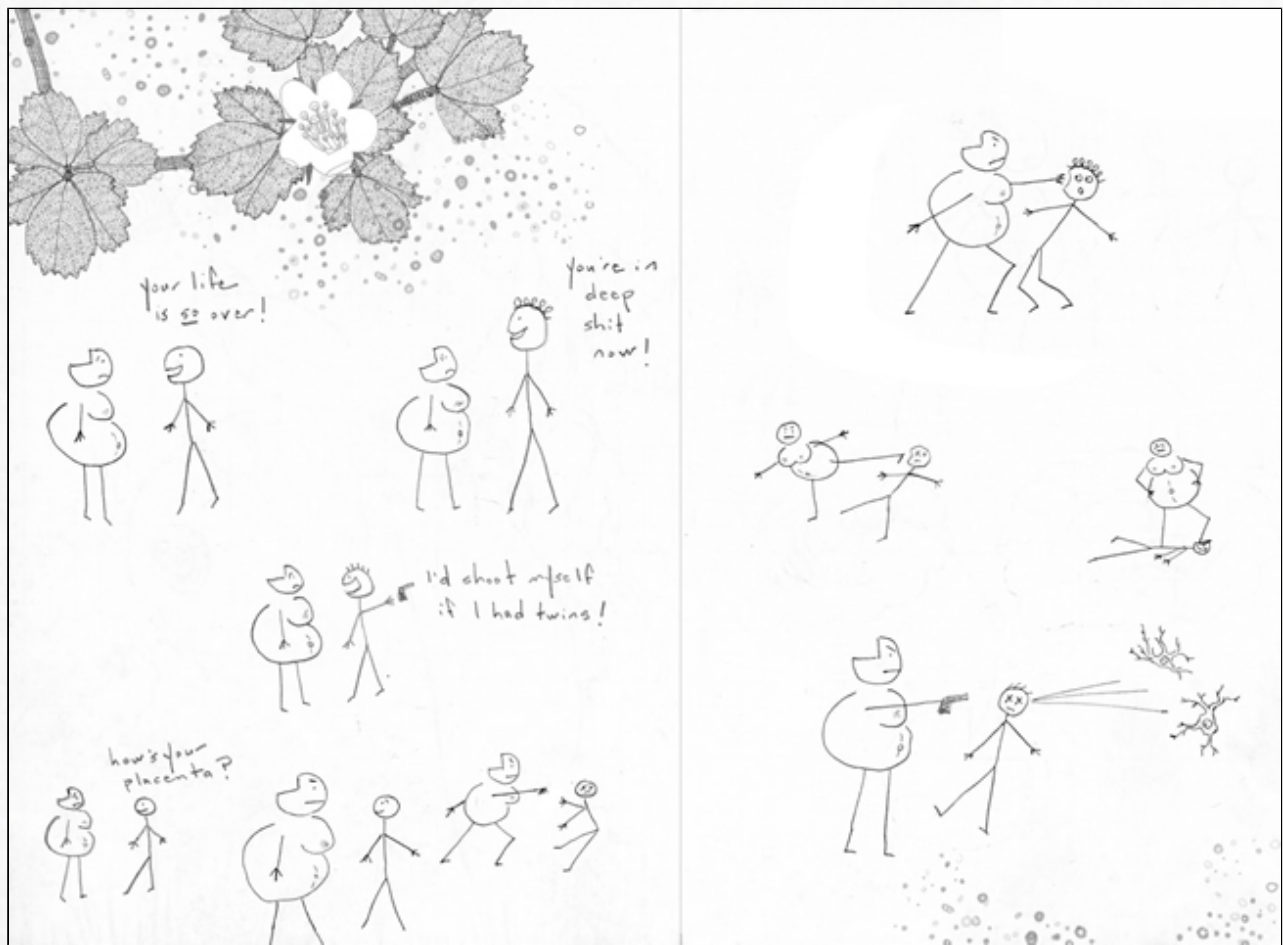
sweet

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sweet

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sweet

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RANDON BILLINGS NOBLE is an essayist. Her work has appeared in the Modern Love column of *The New York Times*; *The Massachusetts Review*; *Passages North*; *Propeller Quarterly*; *Superstition Review*; *Brain, Child* online; *The Virginia Quarterly Review*'s blog and elsewhere. You can read more of her work at www.randonbillingsnoble.com. And yes, the dream of the last panel came true.

Dear Ms. Susan Orlean,

I watched *Adaptation* several years ago, and then I watched it again, and then again. This was before I picked up *The Orchid Thief*. Of course I loved *Adaptation*. What's not to love about Nick Cage and Meryl Streep performing the Charlie Kaufman screenplay of the screenplay adaptation by writer-blocked Kaufman of your reportage on south Florida orchid poacher John Laroche--the sprawling meta-quest of a depraved screenwriter to turn a book about a depraved flower-seeker into a Hollywood flick.

Although it took me just a few sentences of *The Orchid Thief* to realize that judging this book by its movie is as irrational as watching Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* for the first time and expecting a delicate fidelity to the King novel. What the hell did I imagine the director of *Being John Malkovich* would do with your horticultural non-fiction?

This letter isn't about the movie version of "you" and "your book." It's about the book itself and how beautiful it is, as beautiful as you imagined the *Dendrophylax lindenii* might be. Still, Kaufman's obsession in many ways mapped the swamps of your prose for me when I would eventually read your words about Laroche, about the passion and violence and tragedy and insanity of the orchid world. *Adaptation* clung to the lunatic addiction of the world you portrayed and followed the plant-drug through the veins to the extremities. It followed Laroche's crazed grandeur, which compelled him deep into the Florida Fakahatchee swampland to find those haunting flowers, to its extreme.

The Orchid Thief is not an action movie. No one is killed or drugged. No one really changes, except you and your own fleeting and unfulfilled desire to see the ghost orchid, "snow-white, white as sugar, white as lather, white as teeth."

Yet the Fakahatchee Strand you wrote about bared those same teeth, teeth that chewed me up and showed me the world for what it is. An orchid consumes rain and pollen. A poacher consumes the orchid. The swamp consumes the poacher.

Your book consumed me, the way it must have consumed Kaufman so fully that he felt compelled to create a film that existed within the wonder and imagination of your storytelling.

In *The Orchid Thief*, you wrote: "I wanted to want something as much as people wanted these plants, but it isn't part of my constitution...I want to know what it feels like to care about something passionately."

But it is precisely your desire to desire that makes your words so compelling. We don't know one another, of course, but I have to believe that in the writing of this book you did want *something*. That is, you wanted to make this world of passionate people *real*. If you didn't, how else would Kaufman, how would I know to want the same thing?

Connor Holmes

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