

the HARLEQUIN

Kathy Fagan

February & August

August brought its usual stalks, then dust, then gold.
It brought its own dry voice that said, I have things
I want to say to you but I should tell you I love you first.

In my color wheel, always slow to turn, the field had stayed
February, stubbled with ice, summer below like the rooms of Augustus,
the piss and blood wall paints expertly preserved.

To prevent overwatering, place two ice cubes in your orchid
once a week. She put them in the blossoms and they kept falling out.
The importance of clarity cannot be overstated.
Or is it charity we cherish most? This time it would be

cello-deep, train at the ear and core-heat clear. This time
would be geology not archaeology, summer as cis season.
Emperor Mammatus offering the only coffered ceiling.
Then fox, then sunset, then other rampant strata from the dig.

Thank you for reading! Find more at www.theharlequin.org.



Kathy Fagan
Grief Pregnancy

The prairie rolled out like the sea:
the waves the vastness the wind
in the shell of your ear: the magnolia.

I thought the worst
had happened to me:
a tinnitus of the ribcage petals
encircling my feet like a super-sale of pink
slippers: I was giddy with grief.

Years later I watched a monk
stuff a buoyant bouquet of pink
balloons into a dumpster:
just like that: I knew I was all of them
when the lid rang shut.

Thank you for reading! Find more at www.theharlequin.org.



Kathy Fagan

Amphorae

I bent to kiss her head
that smelled of coin
collection box in rain,
the kiss of my mouth the rain,
her head an iron grate once

cradling fire. You see I was desperate
for meaning then, susceptible to suggestions
for escape, like thought bubbles
with birds inside them, a spatial disorientation of skin

sensors and the inner ear, capsules burning through
interstate 80 in any rainstorm, hamsters in wheels,

their singular purpose the freedom
they were not bred for.

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the HARLEQUIN

Quinn Lewis

After

If it exists,
it is lonely as a field unflowered,
but no less sweet,

not vast or rich,
nor a sea you dreamed of –
sea of water, sea of cloud.

Only what it is – ungolden.
After is a row of blackberry brambles
stretching along

the small clearing's edge.
The thorns prick, as they would
before. And still you forget

carefulness when picking.
No sting anymore, and no blood
drops. The red foxes

eat from the brambles.
The foxes, they are real.
Their redness is light

against the newfallen snow.
But they cannot see you,
your fingers stained

by the blackened-violet
like night, which is not here.
This, too, is light against the cold.

The creatures' soft ears flick.
Whether or not it exists,

the ground is always covered

in snow, unaware of time,
in the sweetness of fallen apples
that made no sound.

You won't remember a thing,
and this is good. After will feel
like a blanketing in loose-drawn fog

in the tall grass, barely wetted.
And the berries – they are always ripe,
unripe, ripening.

Thank you for reading! Find more at www.theharlequin.org.



Adrian Van Young

The Discorporation of Rose-As-It-Were

Rose D, Patient	Verbatim #3	09/13/14; 6:03 a.m.
Natalie Hopewell, Chaplain	Mid- October	Bryce 6

Preliminary Data

19 y/o Caucasian female & self-identified “agnostic” hospitalized over the weekend for alcohol poisoning. Brought into the ER by three friends at 1:47 a.m. on Saturday night with a BAC of .32. Had stomach pumped and then sent to recovery. While in recovery and seemingly unconscious, patient inflicted subcutaneous lacerations to face, chest, arms and legs. Means of infliction was patient’s own nails or other as yet unidentified means. Patient first admitted to St. John 1 (ER) before being transferred to Bryce 6 (Psych) after wound treatment and observation/diagnosis of psychological irregularities. Patient also exhibits persistent disorientation, some paranoia and selective amnesia, mainly concerning the events following her admission to the hospital on Saturday last. Patient has no prior history of hospitalization at this or any facility. Nor has the patient any significant medical history that might provide insight into her present condition. Patient dosed with Clozapine, a powerful anti-psychotic, to calm her. Patient is slated for 3 doses daily until her condition improves.

Choice

Apart from the wildly unorthodox nature of what would emerge as Rose D.’s situation, the reason that I chose this case to share in the context of

group is twofold. First, I have always placed physical pain on a loftier altar of sorrow than mental; physical pain is to me quantifiable, mental pain so often not, and when I encounter the latter in others I tend downplay the disaster it wreaks, the insidiousness of its long-term effects. Rose D.'s case has taught me better; Rose D.'s case has haunted me. There are mysteries, subtleties, terrors about it that I have been wholly unable to shake and recording it here, columned off, in verbatim, has allowed me to process its murkier aspects. If I offer it up for processing, I feel, then before very long it will start to make sense.

Plans & Preparations

Since I was the Interfaith Chaplain on call and since the referral to Bryce 6 was urgent, I had no other choice but to go right away. And yet had I been better versed in the exigencies of Rose D.'s situation then all that came after, if not circumvented, might at least have been met with a steadier hand.

Impressions

When I knocked on the door of the room in Bryce 6 it was not Rose who answered me, but rather a male orderly named Jarrell who I knew from my regular rounds on Vaughn 2. Behind Jarrell was someone else, a third person inside the room. He was standing in front of the bed with Rose in it a lantern-jawed and hefty man with the orange work vest of the MBTA. Jarrell asked that I wait in the unit hallway so he could see the man outside. There had been, Jarrell said, a misunderstanding. The man, said Jarrell, was not meant to be there. The man acknowledged this was so by informing Jarrell: "You are fuckin' A right." This person's name was Porterhouse, I would later discover while talking with Rose, but his name for the moment was Peter O'Nan, evidenced by the visitor's badge on his shirt. Porterhouse appeared irate. He did not know Rose D., he said. He no more knew Rose D., he said, than he knew "any broads who were priests" like myself. All the priests he knew, he said, wore collars and robes, sponsored little league teams. When I tried to explain that I was not a priest but an Interfaith Chaplain on hospital rounds, Porterhouse seemed

not to hear, but began to explain how he'd come to be there. His "buddy Roscoe from the old neighborhood" had called him, he told me, around 3 a.m. Porterhouse said that he worked for the city, repairing the tracks on the Green and Red lines. That night he'd had the graveyard shift, from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., "a spooky time to work," he said, and here Roscoe calls him to talk on his phone from the hospital phone over there by the bed. Roscoe explained that he'd gotten laid up in Memorial Hospital, "Looney Tunes unit." He'd told Porterhouse it was all a mistake and for Porterhouse, maybe, to come get him out. Would Porterhouse mind, explained Porterhouse now, coming out to the hospital, "bullshitting" with him, convincing the doctors he wasn't "a nut?" Porterhouse said that he'd come right away. "You do that for pals in a bind," he explained, "and he sounded to me pretty down in the dumps. But then when I finally got to his room, it wasn't Roscoe that I found there at all but this little passed-out piece of ass with the hair."

It may be useful for us here to break with Porterhouse's version, Porterhouse being who Porterhouse is. Before my receiving the page to Bryce 6, Porterhouse had grown unhinged, Jarrell had recounted to me afterward, demanding to know what they'd done with his friend and what kind of "sick fucking put-on this was," "blowing up the nurse's kiosk again and again and again" with demands. What one nurse kept saying: "You made a mistake. That isn't who you think it is."

When at last Porterhouse had been cleared from the room, I waited a while before knocking again. Rose D. had been given an anti-psychotic "Clozapine," her chart explained and for several hours now she had been fast asleep which included the time, I could only assume, that saw Porterhouse looming over her, ranting. Though protocol required of me to let the "dust clear" on the scene, when it had cleared I knocked again, and when Rose D. stirred in her bed, I went in.

Rose D. was female, college-age, her dark hair spread out on the pillow around her. She'd styled it in a Cleopatra, an urban sophisticate haircut with bangs, though for now it was pushed to the sides of her face where it had adhered in the sweat at her temples. She was, I would venture to say, quite attractive; pale and sharp-nosed, with an elegant face. A bandage clung to her right cheek, another one beneath her hairline; on each of her forearms two bandages more, her lacerations snugly dressed. I could only

assume, somewhere under the covers, there were bandages, too, on the ins of her thighs. Rose D. was a student at Emerson College, on scholarship there and a Somerville local. When I came to her bed she was coming awake. Her eyes were sleepy, big and green.

Pastoral Visit

Patient: You came.

Chaplain: You called. I will always come find you. Just call, and I'll come.

P: Remind me again who you are?

C: (sitting down) I'm the interfaith chaplain on call in your unit. You know where you are, don't you, Rose?

P: I'm not sure.

C: New England Memorial Hospital.

P: What?

C: In a hospital, Rose. You are here being treated.

P: But I'm not even sick. Nothing's broken. I'm fine.

C: We are taking good care of you here on Bryce 6.

P: Okay.

C: Would you rather I left you alone?

P: (thinking) Maybe. Maybe not. I guess I'm not sure if I know why you're here.

C: A chaplain gives spiritual counsel to patients. But a chaplain can talk about anything, really.

P: Spiritual – like religious?

C: Religious, perhaps.

P: I don't even believe in God.

C: You don't have to talk to me – the type of religion I practice, at least.

P: That elephant thing with the arms?

C: Humanism.

P: I like the way that sounds.

C: I'm glad.

P: My parents are Catholics.

C: That's good to know.

P: I feel really awkward right now.

C: That's okay. Do you not remember requesting me here?
P: (a looks of disgust passes over her face) I'm just so fucking – *ugh*...
C: Confused. You're feeling confused and it's really frustrating.
P: A lot confused. But also scared.
C: Like you're not in control of yourself.
P: Like I wasn't.
C: You used the word: *wasn't*.
P: I mean, like, before. When they first brought me here and I opened my eyes.
C: What *do* you remember?
P: This much. (pinches fingers) I sort of remember pre-gaming.
C: So, drinking?
P: Well starting to drink, in my friend Jenna's room.
C: Before you were due to arrive at the party?
P: We were going there, yeah. No particular time. I mean *due to arrive* sounds like something – high tea. Just Early Times and PBR before you hit the road, you know? You must've gone to college, right?
P: Believe it or not I did go. Graduated.
C: Oh I can believe it. You sound like a smartie. Just look at you, though: not much older than me.
(there's a silence in which I can feel myself blushing.)
C: So you're pre-gaming, and...
P: I blackout. Here I am. I'll bet that you think I am some kind of drunk.
C: You know, I don't.
P: You don't?
C: Trust me. Isn't everyone like that in college?
P: I guess.
C: You don't remember coming here?
(she shakes her head)
C: You don't remember being transferred?
(the patient shakes her head again)
C: You don't remember calling me.
P: That guy in the vest coming in, I remember.
C: You mean Peter O'Nan?
P: Yeah, whoever he was. I called him and told him to come here to see me?
C: He claims *someone* called him to come to this room. But if you don't believe him I'm with you, okay?
P: That's the shittiest part of what happened to me, whatever turns out to

have happened, you know? Because now, with you here, in this room: this is me. I'm choosing to lie here. To tell you this stuff. To say... (she seems to search for words) ... Skill saw. White bread. Fake tan. Fondue.

C: Scuba diver. Bar mitzvah.

P: Boogie board. (smiling weakly)

C: You're scared of *not* knowing what happened to you but all the same you're scared to know.

P: I'm scared that I did something awful.

C: Like what?

P: Something awful and strange to myself.

C: You mean those? (pointing to her face and chest)

P: Holy shit. (she starts weeping while touching the gauze) Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit, I'm not sure.

C: Does it feel good to say that?

P: It does. Holy shit!

C: Is there some reason, maybe, Rose, why you would hurt yourself like that?

P: What are these? What are they?! (she claws at her face)

C: They're bandages, Rose, for some pretty deep cuts. I can see that you're really upset, which I get.

P: How does someone do this to themselves and not *know*?

C: You don't need to worry about that right now. I'm sorry that I brought it up.

P: (taking breaths with her hand on her chest) Just a second. I think I'm better now. I'm fine.

C: Maybe we should change the subject.

P: Let's just sit a moment. I need a reset.

(we sit for a couple of minutes, as needed)

C: Want to tell me about what you're doing in college?

P: Drama arts.

C: Like directing?

P: Designing costumes.

C: I thought you were maybe artistic.

P: How come?

C: You have an artistic haircut.

P: (smiles a little) Have you seen the movie *Pulp Fiction*?

C: I have.

P: You know the girlfriend of the drug-dealer guy? The one who does the finger dance?

C: Uma Thurman.

P: That's her name. My hair's like this because of her.

C: Her face has an interesting beauty, like yours.

P: I'm not feeling beautiful now.

C: Which makes sense.

P: Are all chaplains this good at fluffing your ego?

C: We don't notice things that aren't already there. Not saying you're vain but you care how you're made. Like you care how your costumes are made. Am I right?

P: Honestly, sometimes, I am kind of vain.

C: It's nice to be upfront about it.

P: Vanity is a sin if you're Catholic, I think.

C: I think you're referring to pride.

P: Yeah, I guess.

C: There are no sins in Humanism. The concept itself is anathema to us.

P: The Catholics would say I deserved what I got.

C: What is it exactly you think that that is?

P: (patient appears to grow panicked again, her eyes moving wildly. she fans at her face) My scholarship, shit, they are going to revoke it!

C: Your scholarship at Emerson?

P: I've got a full ride. This memorial fund. But they're going to take it away, I fucked up!

C: I very much doubt that will happen.

P: We'll see.

C: Whatever it turns out *did* happen to you – and that is going to take some time – I'm willing to bet that it wasn't your fault. Bad things happen to people who aren't every day.

P: My parents will say I deserved it, they will. They're not going to take my side! (she starts to move into a sitting position) They're going to say I made those cuts. They're going to say I'm—

(Rose stops talking.)

(sitting up straight, she hangs forward, face lowered, her hair hanging over the sides of her face)

C: Rose, you were saying?

(she hangs there, not speaking)

C: Rose, are you all right?

(she gasps)

(her face where the hair doesn't cover it darkens, her bone structure taking on shadowed contours)

P: (in a strong Boston accent, a few octaves lower) Her parents would say she's a little cocktease-ah.

C: *Your* parents would say that, you mean?

P: Did I stutter?

C: (after a pause) Aren't I speaking to Rose?

P: Coming and going, and going and coming, little ladies, little lords. Buying beer at the store. Buying smokes at the store. American Spirits, the yellow pack, please. Buying laundry detergent. Buying flats of Top Ramen. Buying Funions and Red Bull and red Solo Cups. Buying jimmies! The ribbed ones, the lubed ones, the thin ones, the ones with the gel so you don't bust a nut. Porterhouse and me would sit there. Porterhouse and me would watch.

C: When you say Porterhouse you mean Peter O'Nan?

P: I'll bet you were summa-come-loud in high school. You know Summ-ah? Shy girl. But she screws like a moose.

(Rose is sitting up in bed and she's talking so fast I can barely catch up.)

(as she talks she gesticulates, wrenching her johnny.)

C: You and Porterhouse sound close.

P: Pete-dog! Petey! Porterhooooouse! Love you, brother! (toasts the air) We had red camper chairs out in front of the store and the campers had cozies that held tallboys in them. Porterhouse would bring the cooler, and whenever it wasn't too cold or too hot we'd sit out there and watch the girls. The thin ones from Tufts in the slutty outfits with the sharp panty-lines and the hair down their backs. The ponytail-tossers and little rump-shakers. The girls in rush-shirts with the baby-fat cheeks. We'd sit out there and watch them pass with a Bud Ice in one hand and double-wides burning. Christ above, we were happy! The light at that hour! This life can almost be too much.

Theological/Pastoral Reflection

In spite of the fact that Rose D. is "agnostic" and claims to have never requested a chaplain, I feel our visit did her good, if to Rose on a purely emotional level. Though what Rose believed to be true in the moment does not exclude of deeper workings, the Mind being tended along with the Spirit, that meet in the conscious exertion of Will. My choice to reflect back at Rose her frustrations instead of combatting them made her pain

valid. Yet if we accept that Rose may not be Rose in a strictly definitive sense of the word then can it be said I have ministered to her in the way I initially hoped that I had? These vagaries are ones, at last, that I hope to shed light on with further reflection.

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Northeastern Pilgrim CPE Center
New England Memorial Hospital Site
Clinical Pastoral Education Goals and Contract

My Biography

My name is Natalie Hopewell and I am 24 years old. I am a Religious Humanist CPE student in my first year in the chaplaincy training program at New England Memorial Hospital, my second in seminary at Pankhurst Quimby Theological Seminary. I was born and raised in State College, PA, the child of a high school administrator (my mother) and a warehouse foreman (my father). I obtained my B.A., with honors, in Religious Studies & English at Mount Holyoke College. My senior thesis, “The Quotidian Divine: Tracking Religious Humanism in the Golden Age of American Letters,” was awarded the Antoinette Brown Blackwell Prize for “Excellence in Interdisciplinary Study” upon my matriculation from Mt. Holyoke in 2012. Since graduating, I have served as an intern at Act Now! New England and, more recently, as an administrative assistant at the Cambridge Collective for Religious Humanist Thought. In most every way I can muster, I attempt to live my life by Albert Schweitzer’s oft quoted dictum that: “Humanism, in all its simplicity, is the only genuine spirituality.” I am excited and inspired beyond words to begin my tenure as a CPE student at New England Memorial Hospital, and look forward to making leaps and bounds not only when it comes to my own spiritual discernment, but enabling the same in my patients and peers.

My Personal Growth Goal(s): Acknowledging Hardship as Hardship Alone

Ways I Will Work on This Goal

- Coming to terms with the fact that some things can't be "fixed"
- Embracing existential uncertainty
- Practicing, soliciting, reflecting on catharsis

Restraining Forces

- Lack of background in a hospital setting
- The privileging of physical suffering over all other kinds
- Aversion to facing my working-class roots

Driving Forces

- Tyranny of Type-A traits
- A wrenching desire to be "useful" to patients
- A dark cosmic fear of remaining the same

How Others Will Know I've Made Progress on my Goal

- Keeping my cool in the same room with death
- Mentioning sensitive subjects aloud
- Having the courage to say, "Life is not fair" to someone who knows it too deeply already

My Theological Growth Goal(s): An Ethics of Divinity

Ways I Will Work on This Goal

- Keeping my mind, like a door, propped halfway to the wild mystery of existence
- Working with clergy and hospital staff to forge a multivalent bond
- Not waiting for "God" to act

Restraining Forces

- Indefatigable footing in reason
- Suspicion of the Catholic Church
- A Promethean blaze of defiance, well-tended

Driving Forces

- Unitarian Universalism: leanings
- United Church of Christ: sympathies
- Quakerism: sympathies

How Others Will Know I’ve Made Progress on My Goal

- Being able to answer the question at last of “What does Jerusalem matter to Athens?”
- Officiating Sunday prayer
- To speak in the tongue of the Spirit of Life

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Roscoe M, Patient	Verbatim #4	09/13/14; 8:37 a.m.
Natalie Hopewell, Chaplain	Mid- October	Bryce 6

Preliminary Data

49 y/o Caucasian male & self-identified “Roman Catholic” patient admitted on 9/13 at 4:31 a.m. with complaints of arm & shoulder numbness, chest pain and shortness of breath. Found by investigating physician to be suffering massive cardiac arrest due to the gradual rupture of a pulmonary embolism. Patient pronounced dead approx. 1 hour subsequent to ER admittance in the company of spouse Jeanne (pronounced “John”), herself an RN at Brigham & Women’s, and adolescent daughter Kayla. Patient is survived by Jeanne, Kayla and second daughter, Destiny, absent at the time of death. According to spouse

Jeanne, patient began to show signs of coronary distress the night before during playoff game yet did not seek out medical treatment until just before noon on the following day. Patient was a lifelong smoker and periodic heavy drinker. History of heart problems and tendency to “overwork.” When asked by the receiving staff why he hadn’t come in earlier in the day patient said his prerogative then, anyway, was to “see the Pats get to the Bowl and [he] did.” Patient’s body, after death, given into the care of Falconi & Hobbs Funerary Arrangements for wake and interment.

Choice

The reasons I chose to present this verbatim of my subsequent sessions with Rose-as-it-were – a better name, perhaps, than Rose as it more accurately portrays her dilemma – remain, in major part, the same: the toggle of physical pain vs. mental, the lingering stain of the case in my mind; yet only in this second half are the ethical quandaries it poses apparent. It is my sincere hope that discussing them here will nourish the aims of the group going forward.

Plans & Preparations

In the midst of my first talk with Rose-as-it-were I felt the need to flee the room. The transformation of the patient into someone who was not the patient at all had so blindsided me at first I could not think of what to do; in addition to which, I must humbly admit, I have very little history with schizophrenic patients and that is what Rose-as-it-were seemed to be. But who was Porterhouse to Rose? And who was the coarse and inveterate sexist who had taken up residence somewhere inside her? In the chaplaincy break-room in front of the cooler, trembling a bit as I filled up my cup, I felt someone squeezing my arm from behind. Father Payles (pronounced like the shoe-store) stood there, asking me what had “unseated my soul.” I explained to the Father, a mentor of sorts and a positive model of Catholicism in the faith hierarchy of the chaplaincy staff, the bizarreness of witnessing Rose-as-it-were’s transformation from college-age girl to “bar brawler.” This I spewed at Father Payles, hoping

that he would absolve me of bias. But he suggested something else. Might the patient not be schizophrenic at all “but how shall I phrase it—well, rather, possessed”? Or not possessed but compromised when it came to the link between body and soul—between body and self, if that sat with me better. “Here,” Payles said, “is a better word for it: dis-corporated. Your patient is that.” That is to say “loosed from her corpus,” he said, “the flesh behind repatriated.” “Repatriated,” I asked him, “by what?” “By a hostile and non-native agent,” he said, though gave no further explanation. This happened in pastoral settings sometimes, to men and to women across many faiths. There are more things in heaven and earth, after all, than are dreamt of in our dissertations, he said. Father Payles had treated such patients himself. “You mean exorcisms?” I asked. Father nodded. “Why don’t we say re-corporations.” Though it wasn’t, he clarified, “like in the movies.” In fact he had done it right here, on the units. “Well what is it like, then?” I asked Father Payles if it was not like what one saw in the movies, which I must admit I had not seen much of. “Exorcism,” Payles said, “is simply good pastoral care.” Surely someone so rooted in reason as I, so awed before the human soul in all its variety, all its transcendence, allowed for possibilities outside the mainstream of accepted belief? Besides, was Rose not compromised, her inner woman held at ransom? And did it not, then, rest on me as Rose’s caretaker to come to her aid? After draining and filling my cup at the cooler an additional 2-3 times, I agreed. But I was not a Catholic, nor supernaturalist the least. My metaphysics wanted something – namely, to be more than physics alone – and shouldn’t someone with the right turn of mind (someone, that is, who was not me) be put in charge of Rose’s pain when the palliative stakes were so bafflingly high? Father Payles thought about it. Then he answered: No.

Porterhouse, I would learn after quizzing a guard, had been admitted to the room under utterly normal circumstances. He had come to the desk during visiting hours, said the name of the patient he’d come there to see, presented for the guard on duty a photo ID which the guard had then scanned and printed to a sticker-badge to be stuck to his chest as he went through the halls when at last, unremarked, he had entered the room. But who had he come there to visit, I asked, if not Rose-as-it-were, who had not recognized him? The man at the kiosk consulted his logbook. The name, he said, was Roscoe M. I researched this patient, located his chart.

I have culled from this chart for my “data” above.

Rose would’ve been physically weak while in triage, her body still ridding itself of the toxins, an ideal opportunity for Roscoe – whoever he was – to slip in. When I saw fit to question the guard at the kiosk as to how Porterhouse had been granted admittance when Roscoe was not being held on Bryce 6, he told me something that I already knew: that no hospital, up and running, was perfect. Roscoe’s name at the time had still been in the system, his death still unrecorded in the broader infrastructure. Porterhouse couldn’t have known at the time that Roscoe, his bosom companion, had died and the fact of his name in the hospital’s records was more than sufficient to see him inside. It little could remain in doubt that the discorporation had happened before, with Roscoe and Rose in the ER together. The two of them had made contact and gone upon their separate ways – she to the Psych Ward and he the morgue, where he was toe-tagged on a bed of cold metal.

Impressions

My second time meeting with Rose-as-it-were saw her poised at the edge of the bed, her legs crossed, her hands folded over the top of her knees. Her hospital johnny had been wrenched away from the base of her throat, showing nominal cleavage. The tops of the bandages stuck to her chest were more visible now, like some weird, makeshift bra. Her hair was still faintly obscuring her face, and the face had a shadowed and knuckled look to it. Her manner was – how shall I put it: flamboyant. She was not like a woman of 19-years-old but someone performing a woman that age – drag-queening that woman, zipped into her skin. Her lips were pursed. Her spine was arched. Her wrists were taut above her knees. She sat at the end of her hospital bed like a licensed professional greeting a patient in a fantastically inappropriate manner. Still her voice when she spoke was a few octaves lower, her consonants nasal, her A’s flattened out. When I knocked at the door she called out “Blessed be!” Her smile was vulgar, faint, amused.

Pastoral Visit

Patient: Father, welcome, sit!

(I sit down across from her)

P: What's with the look?

Chaplain: Excuse me?

P: That pinched pussy look. Like you sat down bare-assed in a tub of crushed lemons.

C: I guess I'm a little bit taken aback.

P: To see me? I get it. The Father thing, probably. You're – what did you say? Humanist. A bullshit-ah. I like my religion like I like my coffee. Dark and bitter. Jumbo size! But that doesn't mean that I don't want you here. It's boring as hell in this shit-box, I'll tell you.

C: You're uncomfortable here?

P: It's the goddamned AC! I would really appreciate your saying something.

C: (I hit the call button) We'll do that right now. (talking into the speaker) Excuse me? Yeah, hi. The patient in Room B613 is a little bit cold. Needs the AC turned down... Well I think –

P: – can't adjust it! The doohickey's broke.

C: The patient can't seem to adjust it herself. No, this is the chaplain. Thank you. We'll be here.

P: So embarrassing. Terrible, terrible.

C: What?

P: Being dead. Being strange to yourself. To your skin. That other body? Much, much better. Not better looking, but used to the cold. We got us some real fucking cold in New England! But as soon as it peeks above fifty, *kapow*: with the basketball shorts and the little tank-tops. Exhibit A: this fine young thing.

(runs her hand along her cheek)

Don't get me wrong, Father, she's no Golden Eagle. A little bit skinny and pale. But she'll do.

C: She'll do for what, exactly?

P: WHAT?!

C: You said she'll do. What do you mean?

P: (cups her hand to her ear with a startled expression) WHAT'S THAT, FATHER KUMBAYA?! I'm just a little hard on hearing. Got a hard-on for hearing myself with this voice! (raises her arms in the air, giving thanks) Just like I said to Porterhouse: I had me some titties that nice I would suck 'em. I had me some legs like those legs I would strut.

C: I find that interesting.

P: You would.

C: I'll bet it was nice to see Porterhouse here.

P: (the patient looks misty. her brows angle down) I own my *own* business. I make my *own* schedule. Open, close, I'm off the clock. Porterhouse, he fixes tracks. I told him point blank: he's a bitch for Menino. Blow-up doll for City Hall! Gave him all kinds of grief for that vest that he wore. Bright as a clementine. That, or a sunrise. When he'd come to the store with it on, I'd do voices. (mimics the sound of a crackling speaker) Next stop is Hernia Circle, Low Pension! Sad Asshole Square is the end of the line! He was wearing the vest when he came here, I noticed? That old Porterhouse. What a good old soft-belly. He must've come out here in such a bad rush that he forgot to take it off.

C: Your wife and your daughter (I look at my notes) Jeanne and Kayla, they were here. They were here when you died, it says here on your chart. Out of all of the people that you could've called, Destiny, Kayla or Jeanne, you called him.

P: Especially after I got eighty-sixed.

C: Eighty-sixed in what sense?

P: From my mortal compartment.

C: Can you tell me what that was like?

P: Believe it or not, it was totally doofy. I floated away like a birthday balloon. Where you stay on the scene while your family mourns you? Christmas Carol shit, I guess. As soon as I flat-lined, as soon as I died, I was off like a birthday balloon, leaking air. They must've been back there, my daughter, my wife, but I didn't see them. *Frooom, frooom*, through the halls. And I got, just, this *bone-tired* feeling. Like I sometimes would get when I got home from work. Always with the label-gun. Sorting, shelving, pricing—*shit*. Like the only damn reason you're moving around is to find somewhere, anywhere, quick, to sit down in.

C: So you're floating.

P: Well, really, I'm sputtering forward.

C: You're sputtering forward...

P: For somewhere to rest. And I see her. Just lying there. These tube-things and what not plugged into her face. Hair spread on the pillow. All sexy and sleeping. Even so, I could tell she had beautiful eyes. And under the covers a beautiful body. Curves and lumps and chubby spots. Girls get to that age, forget it. They're helpless. Parts pop up and say: *Hello!* Butts and nipples. Hips and lips. Hell, Porterhouse would watch them too. Dirtier fucker than I was, I'll tell you. He would say to me: think of it. All

those wet pussies. A pussy parade, right in front of your face. The only thing standing between you and them is a couple cheap layers of cotton. A thong. We called to them. *He* touched one once. Not the pussy, of course, but the girl, on her back. She was paying for something, a candy bar, something, I can't even remember what, and he came up behind her, all casual-like, and he touched her (she shows me) – a side-palming thing. He rested his hand on the small of her back.

C: Did she react?

P: Not really, no. She only sort of glanced behind her. Like he'd done it by accident. Whoops! Pardon me! But I knew what the old dog was up to. I knew!

(the patient grins at me.)

(she points at me, grinning.)

C: I find that profoundly disturbing.

P: You would. Father Take Back the Night, Father Personal Space.

C: I'm not going to sanction behavior like that.

P: You want me to finish my story already? And so I see her. Lying there. She reminds me of them, of the warm-weather girls, but she strikes me as different. More tender. More classy. She reminds me like all of them did, all the girls, that in one point in time I was young just like them and the longer I watched them, the closer I got, the longer that I'd have to live.

C: But you aren't alive anymore.

(a long pause)

P: But I don't think I knew that then. I think I thought: that body, there. That body there is owed to me.

C: Have you assaulted other girls?

P: That's a terrible burden to put on a dead man.

C: I think you turn it off and on, whatever control you have over her body. I think you let her talk sometimes and other times you hold her tongue.

P: Oh Fadd-ah in Heaven, forgive me for breathing. Forgive me for dying to be born –

(a knock.)

(I acknowledge the knock and the patient's door opens.)

(a technician, Wesley, comes into the room.)

Technician: Still need me to fix the AC?

(a moment of awkwardness)

C: Thanks. That'd be great.

Technician: Temperature controlled in here. The summertime, especially. They have it for maternity in case the babies overheat.

C: There you go. Makes perfect sense.

(patient follows technician closely with her eyes.)

(a wide-eyed and comical zip-your-lips look begins to show on patient's face as he opens the dial-box and tinkers inside it.)

Technician: You want it, what, at 75?

(I look at the patient, raise brows.)

(patient nods.)

Technician: All right then.

(adjusts the AC and walks out.)

P: Crafty motherfucker there.

C: ...

P: See how he couldn't meet my eyes?

C: I'm not sure I know what it is you're implying.

P: You saw him come in.

C: He was perfectly nice. Are you saying he tried something, maybe, before?

P: *Tried something.* (her mouth goes pinched). Let's say that you, Father, had daughters yourself. And let's say you lived your whole life, wanting women. Not your daughters – holy Christ! – but all of the rest of the ass on this earth. If you still had the starch. That's right! I couldn't *do that* anymore. Flagpole had a rusty screw. Pipe had a kink in it. Tree trunk was rotten. But I never – *I never* – in all my life tried. Do you know why that was?

C: Tell me.

P: Do you know why that was?

(I wait)

P: Because of my daughters. My angels of light! (raises arms in the same wild expression of prayer) Kayla with her mock UN. Destiny off at the lesbian college. *I don't* understand them. God bless them for that! I had to be that man for them. I knew I could never afford to end up like that SON OF A BITCH (patient yells at the door) who fondles poor vulnerable girls in their sleep.

(a silence in which I consider her words)

C: That man who came in here to fix the AC?

P: We always recognize our own.

C: If he is the one who made those (points to scratches), then you should be able to tell me his name.

P: Why would I be privy to that information?

C: Have you seen anybody patrolling this floor who doesn't have a name-

tag on?

P: He must've had his taken off.

C: You know, what seems more interesting – whether or not what you said is a lie – is why you would lower yourself to say that. I really find that sad. I do. I suppose it *is* something to do with your daughters, wherever they happen to be at the moment. I must say I can understand –

P: – *okay*, Father Righteous Avenger. The truth?

C: If for no other reason, I sit here for that.

P: (theatrically peers from side to side as though someone else might be listening to us)

I lied about the AC guy.

C: As your interfaith chaplain I'm bound not to judge you.

P: I told him, I told him, the randy goat fucker. Came in here, all hyped from work. You know that feeling? Excess nerves. You need to cool them off somehow.

C: (I frown, which patient notes.)

P: Add to that: *I* called him here. Just a few hours before he had gotten the news. His old dead buddy needs his help. Poor darling, he probably didn't believe it.

C: You're saying it was Porterhouse.

P: I must confess it, hand to heart.

C: Why wait till now to tell me this?

P: Um, because Porterhouse was still here in the building? Some towering friend would I be to him then.

C: So why would you betray him now?

P: Conscience is a funny thing.

C: What you're doing right now isn't helping.

P: How's that?

C: Putting the stigma on somebody else.

P: He wanted to give her the stigma, all right! I wanted to leave her with some sense of pride. Sometimes you wake up with no cash in your wallet. No phone in your pocket. No food in your gut. All that can be replaced. Not pride.

C: And that is why you fought him off?

P: Okay, Okay. I lied again. It wasn't the genius who fixed the AC or Porterhouse either, okay?

C: Then who was it?

P: The doctor on call, with the cold stethoscope.

C: I need a straight answer. We're running in circles.

P: The pervert guard who mans the desk.

*

Critical Incident Report

Roscoe M, Rose
D, **Patients**

CIR #1

**09/13/14;
9:32 a.m.**

Natalie
Hopewell,
Chaplain

**Mid-
October**

Bryce 6

Description

The incident began like this: Rose-as-it-were is progressively weary. Her face darkens further, a clutch of small muscles. She draws up her feet from the floor, gets in bed. Her words are now fewer and further between and when she does talk she sounds more like a girl; her A's have an incline, her voice is pitched higher. Her green eyes float up and they rest on the ceiling, the appearance of calm stealing over her face. Meanwhile the shift-nurse makes order around her, checking her monitors, seeing she breathes.

Emotions Perceived

In Roscoe M:

- Flippancy
- Agitation
- Melancholy
- Resignation
- Buoyancy
- Relief

In Rose-As-It-Were:

- Restorative (hopefully) blankness
- Exhaustion

Personal Feelings

At the re-corporation of Rose-as-it-were – the incident herein described – I had expected, at the least, to bask in a sense of professional worth. And yet as the re-corporation took place and in the hours and days that followed, I felt only a perturbation that turned, by and by, to a deep melancholy which, as it settled down in me, broadened into a vast and unknowable dread. Whatever had happened to Rose-as-it-were it could not signal good for me – no more, anyway, than it signaled for her – that she had never really been, or by her volition, returned to herself; that she was still wandering, dis-corporated, her inner-woman held at ransom.

Critical Focus

Nor since has this moment presented itself as a high or low point in my work on the units. It was a profoundly ambiguous moment – of joy, melancholy and dread in admixture – and continues to haunt me in various guises, the formless familiars of Rose-as-it-were. I still sometimes lie wide-awake while these legion uncertainties circle my headboard: Rose in a straight jacket woven from skin with never-ending funhouse sleeves; Rose beneath a frozen lake; Rose a nesting Russian doll, a Roscoe inside her, a Rose inside him and a Roscoe inside of that Rose and so on.

The principle remains the same: Roscoe embedded in Rose, or vice-versa.

Dialogue

Patient: (eyes rolling, looks sidelong at me) Well anyway. It's time to go.

C: Don't you want to be absolved?

P: (purses lips, raises brows, opens hands in her lap)

C: You requested a chaplain. I only assumed.

P: Just wanted to bullshit with someone, I guess.

C: So that was just passing the time to you then?

P: I called up everyone I know!

C: (my face must betray the futility of it.)

(patient folds hands and leans forward in bed.)

P: Let's get on a level here: *she* will be fine. She's, what, 19, 20? They *always* are fine. Always get off the wheel with their parts still stuck on. But man was I lucky! This wonderful world.

(I wait for the patient to finish her thought.)

C: Life is amazing because it will end.

P: You're telling me, Fadd-ah. (puts hand to her chest)

C: Which is why when you leave it – and everyone does – it's good to go on honest terms.

P: You want me to be? Really honest, I mean.

C: I'm getting the feeling you'd like to be honest.

P: The real reason I'm still around with my talons dug into this mega-babe here? No Brazilian aerobics instructor, okay, but a decently fuckable New England girl? It was Roscoe and Porterhouse watching the coeds. Kayla and Destiny's screams being born. Jeanne and me fucking or trying to fuck at the La Quinta Inn in Northampton last year where we took Destiny for her first year in college. Friendship, children, marriage, life! I couldn't bear to see it go.

C: But now it's time. You said yourself.

P: Wait for it, wait for it, wait for it...

Non-Verbals

Rose-as-it-were climbs into bed and assumes the position described at the outset: legs crossed at the ankles, arms straight at her sides, eyes trained on the white paneled ceiling above her. There is something self-conscious about her demeanor – her pose stylized and her gaze beatific, a martyr in a passion play – and yet the patient's face is dark, a reef of small muscles enclosing her features. The shift-nurse comes into the room to check on her. But as she leans down over Rose-as-it-were, adjusting the cant of her hospital bed, she is suddenly different, irreparably changed. Her body

undergoes a hitch – a buckling and innermost tremor. She straightens. She abandons the work of adjusting the bed and walks, in her rucked uniform, toward the door. Before the knob she turns around and bends to fiddle with her pants, the blue cotton of them entwined with her sock and I see from the side that her face, too, has darkened in the same muscled cloister as Rose-as-it-were's. And then she's going through the door. I rise from my chair and I follow her out. She walks down the hall of the Psych Ward like this: left foot, right foot, swaying arms, Waiting for the elevator, she moves her right leg in a serpentine motion; a tempo for idleness – sexual, strange. The elevator comes. She boards. I wait on my own for the next elevator. Both of them are headed down. Somehow mine arrives there first. I busy myself as I wait for the nurse, watching the glassed-in directory blankly. She emerges at length through the sliding black doors amidst a group of seven others. Among them are: a bearded surgeon; a woman and an older man; a little boy between his parents who carries a small pink balloon on a string with 'It's a Girl' imprinted on it. The nurse nods to me. It's a clear, sober nod and the features contained by it seem to have lifted. She is already lost to me, moving away. I track the others with my eyes. The shift-nurse is peeling away to the right when the little boy stalls, and the parents turn back, and it looks for a moment as though he's dropped something. His form is turned toward me. He hikes up his pants. His pink balloon trembles and scuds on the ceiling, possessed by the air coming in through the vents, and his earnest, clean face has gone shadowed and tight with the wandering spirit he's caught like a cold until one of a hundred security guards who patrols through the hospital passes him by and light floods in behind his face. He drags his pink balloon away. I shift my attention to follow the guard, who travels through the bright hallway with his ring of bright keys bouncing off of his waist. He goes past the coffee stand, past the small lobby, past the wall that's bedecked with the hospital's founders, past the guard cubicle where his fellow nods to him and he to his fellow and journeys outside, the crash-bar bucking after him, through the staff parking lot to his car. He gets in. I walk a few paces to where I can see him, checking his side-views before he drives off and his face in the glass is a gloamed-over face, shadows enclosing it, writ in the muscle. He coasts the car not toward the pass-reader lane but rather the one where the ticket-booth stands – where the guests of the staff must proffer their stamped cards to the ticket-booth taker before going out. He hands the ticket-taker something, or maybe he offers her nothing at all, and the blocking bar lifts for him, clearing the

way. He brakes his car and blinkers left and when the traffic slows he rolls, accelerating on the turn before his car is lost to me. I stand in the pass-reader lane at a loss. The wind off the river suffuses my coat. Beyond the hard plastic enclosing the booth, the ticket-taker stands unmoving, reading something on her phone. And like nothing at all she is leaving the booth, sensibly shutting and latching the door, climbing over the guardrail that splits the pay lane from the pass-reader lane with the sensor machine, ducking the blocking bar, fixing her collar and walking out into the oncoming traffic. One car hits her, sends her flying, before being T-boned mid-flight by another. The windshield spiderwebs with blood as she rolls up on top of it, banks for a moment and then rises up in a posture of sitting, half-dead but alert at the edge of the hood.

Theological/Pastoral Reflection

That the dis-corporation of Rose-as-it-were is cause for reflection cannot be denied. Yet given that I am a Humanist chaplain, whose precepts of faith are not rooted in dogma, I must approach the incident through the efficacy of my pastoral care: has the patient been ministered to for the better? Has the patient gained solace and spiritual strength? If to banish Roscoe was to benefit Rose, this intervention I have made. But what of Roscoe, lost to me? If Rose-as-it-were had been dis-corporated, her inner woman held at ransom, then who had I been tending to in the hospital bed in the room on Bryce 6? Was Roscoe not, too, in a manner imprisoned, in a manner in pain, in a manner possessed and therefore dependent on me for support, a support I provided with all of myself, a support that, moreover, extends from a faith that confers dignity on the sum of all life, on everybody everywhere, regardless of feelings of like or dislike? Are both patients, at last, not mine? Their suffering equal? Their selfhood imperiled? When Rose-as-it-were finally opens her eyes and asks us to give her the facts of her case, do we tell her the tale of the man that she was or the woman that, try though she might all her life, she may never get back to, may no longer be? Such relative contingencies may not be overlooked.

Thank you for reading! Find more at www.theharlequin.org.



Ryan Whatley

He had his Father's Fishing License

That summer of smashing dandelions with a stick,
out where the tidal creek dipped, our nets, lines
rod and reel still before the brackish, we invent

something Rob called a clonker. Inventions and
out-at-sea things were what made him a stickler
when it came to fishing. His knack for one-liners

rolled like mackerel shoal to whitebait; darkening lines
for such feathering weights. But “love is an invention
between dying things” must’ve had reason to stick.

We sat there jigging in the pass of the day’s topics –
religion, art, politics – no catch for his mainline’s
cast, as if, at last, living beyond our own inventions.



Ryan Whatley

Brackish

Round here fisherman don't have much to do
with fishing. All things equal and new,
as April takes tern from marsh to shingle,
as what ebbs crowfoot to canalside wrinkle,

we're gunning towpaths toward cinquefoil yellow,
chipping-it in drainpipes and Scott's Cinquecento.

Cattle baulk the backfields; staid masonic chunks
crumbling to sheep sheered and shining. Sunned
the car throttles, floundering heifer into heather.

Our pikey-spoiler thugging the obelisk of a wether.

We park. I camber a smug arcade. Dune slopes.
A figure lugs the dark. Sands caulked to old rope.



Robert Hamberger

Failure, My Horse

*You have to wake up in the middle of the night and hear it...chomping
in the field below, like some loyal horse – My failure, my very own failure*

James Fenton (A Lesson from Michelangelo)

Nourished by the moon's neglect,
at home
in its light,

Failure, my horse,
bridles at fences.
In steeplechases

he prefers to contemplate daisies
or the finely brushed pony-tail
of any rump in front.

He knows precisely where to graze,
gazing at elms,
twitching bluebottles from his ears.

He allows a fox to slink
five yards past his flank
over dark fields

sniffing for chickens.
He admires such energy,
but raising one fetlock

before the other
requires art.
To print a hoof exactly,

shaking shadows from the moon

with a shudder of mane,
marks tonight's achievement.

I am horse he thinks,
or stands beyond thinking.
Being horse is sufficient.

Tomorrow
he'll rub his spine
on a satisfying branch,

while chickens peck
elsewhere
and the fox dozes.



Michael Copperman

Mystery

My grandfather in his last years, his children about him for one last Christmas feast, a holiday freed from religion by the old atheist Jew, a good pine tree topped with a golden staff and star, no hint of unseemly angels or mangers or miracles beyond the province of Marx. Christmas scrubbed clean of excess in prescribed gift exchange and price-limit so that no child could be spoiled or over-delighted; a turkey smoked slow with cherry-wood, French wine brought by my ex-patriate uncle and Martinellis for the children. Finally, a singing circle, my uncles and aunts and cousins gathered by the tree to sing folk songs of protest and celebration, vintage Americana, this land is your land and you are my sunshine and this little light of mine, my aunt strumming the guitar, songbooks handed out to those of us who didn't know the words. My grandfather in the easychair, unreclined and bent forward over his knees, hair gone wispy and white, fierce eyes closed and brow unknit for once as gave each song its due, his broken voice still a pleasure even pitchless and hoarse, overloud now that his hearing was gone. My last memory of him; I don't remember saying goodbye.

Abe at seventy-five, hovering at the counter of a country diner with pale, knobby arms outstretched, instructing our waitress on the particulars of a chocolate soda that was nowhere on the menu. His white beard bristled from his face like a cat's puffed tail. "If! This! Is! Your! Idea! Of! Service!" he exclaimed, slamming his palm to the counter with each word, "I'll have nothing on your so-called menu!"

He knew he couldn't have a soda with his diabetes anyway. But a world that couldn't offer even the meanest comforts – that was no world at all. This was him mellowed, after the stroke.

Before, he'd been a lion. A communist union organizer he'd been untiring, even as the F.B.I. ran him out of work and out of New York State, harried him and his family across the country until he rested finally in California, in Berkeley, the leftest Coast. He held forth until he was

made city planner, pushed issues that begged disagreement and banged podiums until everyone acquiesced.

My childhood was defined by the echoes of my grandfather's presence – my father grew up in fear and awe of his father, and my father's own strictness and discipline and idealism and his occasional white-knuckled rage were response and imitation. I can remember my father's dilated pupils the rare times I talked back or was caught in dire error, how his face went tight, and remember him striking me so hard on the bottom I felt it through the top of my head. My brother doesn't recall being spanked because my father became so ashamed at his violence that he stopped entirely by the time my brother was a toddler. The punishment he substituted was forcing us to sit in proper 'seizah', back straight and feet tucked underneath, in the Japanese style used in the martial art of Aikido that my father trained and taught, for twenty and thirty minutes at a time, however long it took until he was convinced we had fully and deeply repented. I was stubborn when I felt I was right, and sometimes would sit seizah in my room until I lost feeling in my feet, unapologetic even as the needles of pain spread to my calves and knees, but sometimes I simply refused to admit I was wrong. We were supposed to learn respect and self-control from this discipline, but what I gained instead was a high endurance for pain and the conviction that suffering was better than compromise. My brother and I have tried to find others of our generation raised as strictly, and we cannot; we cultivated the willpower of a different age. We were raised to restrain the passion that burned in our grandfather, to stoke it and bear it, to keep it lit. To hew to what we believe just no-matter the consequences.

My father's earliest memory is of seeing Abe's shadow loom in the doorway – and of breaking into terrified tears, sure he had done something wrong. My grandfather did not salute small accomplishments, especially those which offended his political convictions. So it was that his oldest son, who became a businessman, remained a failure in Abe's eyes even as my uncle became a millionaire and served on Reagan's board of education. And so it was that my father, who became a doctor, was hopelessly bourgeois, a traitor to true causes. When my father sent an invitation to my grandfather for his medical school graduation, it wasn't

that Abe refused to attend – he refused to acknowledge the accomplishment at all.

In his presence, nobody defied Abe that I ever saw; everyone gave way. When I was a boy, he would bring his five children and their families together for Seder, spread the folding tables into a banquet hall in his living room. Then he would sermonize against the existence of the Almighty for the benefit of my aunt and two uncles who had fled godlessness and become born again Christians. Standing at the head of the table by the unlit candelabra, bending from the waist toward his oldest son who was an elder at a Fundamentalist Christian church, he pounded the table as he spoke, encouraged them to turn the other cheek as well:

”Passover is the day we must recognize that if there is a God, and he did indeed choose these unsophisticated, nomadic Hebrews for his purpose, loving them more than all other human beings on the planet, then God’s love is a love of suffering. He led them from slavery only to offer them a Prophet they would deny, blessing them with three thousand years of bloody persecution. He offered them the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea so that my uncles and aunts who stayed in Poland could be starved in Hitler’s concentration camps, so that your second cousins who were only children, innocent young children, could be dragged to the gas chambers praying for His mercy.”

God had no leg to stand on when he was finished with Him. Then, after half an hour of holding forth, he would sense the absence of opposition and take up the other side, light the candles with all the holy prayers, *elohenu-alech-shalom*, reclaiming the sacred with the sure cadence of the cantor he’d been as a boy.

For my grandfather’s last birthday party, my aunts and uncles gathered at his house to sing the working man’s folk songs of their youth. I wasn’t there, but I trust my brother’s account of the evening. My father has always loved to sing, though his voice is a quavery, unmelodious warble. That night he sang enthusiastically, squawking and false-noting as usual. My grandfather, who had gone nearly deaf, sat watching his children sing, and then he put hand to my father’s shoulder and shouted over the music, “Terry, you sing so well now!”

My father nearly choked with surprise and pride, and then beaming, he sang louder still. He repeated my grandfather’s praise a dozen

times in the next months, wondering aloud if his voice had improved, if perhaps in middle age he'd been gifted with a new vocal instrument. I never told him my grandfather had clearly lost his sense of hearing. How could I sully the only compliment his father ever gave him?

When my grandfather was near death, my father flew out to tend him in hospice. Acutely aware of how much pain someone in my grandfather's difficult respiratory condition could suffer, he administered morphine at every visible sign of discomfort, dosing him well beyond levels that anyone not a physician could have been comfortable with – after a lifetime of living in fear of his father, Abe had finally passed into my father's province. Through each night he sat with his hand on his father's arm, eyeing the clock to count the minutes since he'd hit the morphine button, listening to his father's ragged breathing for any irregularity that might indicate pain. My father went three sleepless nights tending his father's suffering with devotion, tendering his love openly, silently, finally beyond reproach.

My grandfather was always kinder to me – like many men, a better teacher of grandsons than sons. Once, when I was ten and my grandfather was visiting, he took my brother and I to the neighborhood field to play baseball, though there was only time for a few swings before dusk. It was the gray heart of winter and already felt like night, but still we went. My grandfather was said to have been a mean second baseman, scrappy and tireless, but he pitched to me now, my brother fielding on the edge of the soggy outfield. My hands were numb and my timing off, and I chopped two grounders, popped short to left. My grandfather peered at me when he held the ball again, dried it on the bottom of his shirt. "Make this one count," he said. "It's the last."

I knocked the bat against my tennis shoes, squeezed the cold metal tighter and fought the shiver in my knees, willing my hands warm.

"Here it comes," my grandfather said. He brought the ball to his glove, went still, reared and threw. I swung clean from the heels, felt the connection in my palms. The crack echoed across the empty field as the ball rose above my brother's head. We stood and watched it soar. My grandfather nodded in admiration, lifted his hand to trace the ball's arc. "This is a beautiful thing."

We searched for the ball in the deepening dark, but found no trace.
Finally my grandfather called us home. "It will be a mystery," he said.
"Unless you find it tomorrow."
I knew better even then. I never looked.

Thank you for reading! Find more at www.theharlequin.org.



Andrew Bomback

Dear David Shields

My wife and I saw you read at the Strand last spring. After the reading, as we were heading down the stairs of the Union Square subway station, my wife said, “You should write about my father sometime.” I misheard her, maybe because of all the surrounding noise. “I don’t really think it’s a good idea for me to write about my father,” I said. “No, *my* father,” she said. “You should write about *my* father.” We had been talking about how I don’t write anymore. She assumed it was due to lack of subject matter. Interestingly, she never asked me why I didn’t think it was a good idea to write about my father.

I’ve read all of your books except *Handbook for Drowning* and *Heroes*, although I did not read them in chronological order. This non-chronologic reading order influenced the experience of reading *Dead Languages*, which is ostensibly a novel. I’d already read about your stutter in your nonfiction work, and I’d already heard you speak (in person and on podcasts) about your stutter. I’d also read your own take on *Dead Languages* as autobiography masked as fiction. So I read *Dead Languages* as straight nonfiction, easily substituting “David Shields” for “Jeremy Zorn.” I wondered how different, maybe even how better, the book would have been if you wrote it today. It’s a stupid thought, because the book was fascinatingly good. And when I finished, I lamented that my father hadn’t dealt with his stutter as productively as you have with yours, which is also a stupid thought.

I have not been sleeping well for over a year now, but I used to be able to lay motionless in bed, with my eyes closed, a state of pseudo-meditation (or so I told myself). In the last few weeks, I have started to fidget. My irritable bowels force me out of bed right into the stack of *New Yorkers* that sit on top of the toilet. I then tiptoe out of the room so as not to wake my wife. I make myself coffee and try to distract myself until I can, reasonably, return to the bedroom, take a shower, get dressed, and pretend that I am doing a normal morning routine.

Wayne Koestenbaum: Too many of these sentences begin with the first-person-singular pronoun. Later I may jazz up the syntax, falsify it.

My dad, who has always been a nervous person (in addition to his stutter, he twitches/tics and insists on getting to the airport three hours before his flight), went through a long bout of depression when I was seven. The only solid memory I have of that period was that he slept downstairs, in our den, because he was averaging only three or four hours of sleep each night and making my mother miserable with his restlessness. So, he made his bed on the den couch, watched late night talk shows until he drifted off, put on early morning news shows when he inevitably awoke a few hours later, and sat like a vegetable until I came down each morning with a bowl of cereal and changed the channel to morning cartoons.

I look like my dad (I hear this all the time, especially at the hospital, where my father, also a physician, still works part-time), and now I sometimes feel like my dad. I've never asked him about what drove him to sleep downstairs for almost an entire year. If I did, he would answer, "Stupid things. I was worried about money – expenses like braces, bar mitzvahs, summer camps. I worried about my patients, about missing diagnoses. I felt that I was getting out of physical shape – I'd become a horrible tennis player, for example, and couldn't run without my big toe flaring up. Stupid things like that. Nothing really important. But no one who's depressed worries about important things, because then it's not really depression. It's normal."

Charles D'Ambrosio: The idea was this – that at a certain age, a black hole emerged in the middle of your life, and everything got sucked into it, and you knew, forever afterward, that it was there, this dense negative space, and yet you went on, you struggled, you made your money, you had some babies, you got wasted, and you pretended it wasn't there and never looked directly at it, if you could manage the trick. I imagined that this black hole existed somewhere just behind you and also somewhere just in front of you, so that you were always leaving it behind and entering it at the same time.

I was thirty-five when my daughter was born, roughly four years after my wife and I started trying to have a baby. I constantly think about how insanely lucky we were to have her, which immediately transforms into an incessant worrying about how she could die at any moment. It's an awful fear to have because (a) my daughter is healthy, and (b) I spend all of my working days around people who are not. I suspect this type of anxiety is shared by all parents, to some degree, but is particularly felt by parents who've struggled with infertility.

Every time I watch a video of my daughter, I think about how sad it would be to watch this video if she was dead.

Chuck Klosterman: I feel like my constant fear that my baby is going to die and it's going to be my fault keeps my mind sharp. And then the amount of care required sort of gives my life purpose. So it's kind of like a Life of Pi situation where my baby is the tiger.

My daughter enjoys undressing her Madeline doll, which is easy for her because the doll only has two items of clothing: a blue coat and a pair of small, white gloves. At the end of the day, I put the coat and gloves back on Madeline, and, while doing so, I think about how wretched this re-dressing of the doll would be if my daughter was dead. More specifically (more pathologically), I think about how crushing this scene would be in a movie about a parent whose child has died.

When my father used to bathe me and my brothers, he would obsessively examine our bodies for black and blue marks. When he found one, he'd press to ensure the bruise hurt. This was his way of screening us for leukemia.

At brunch with friends (friends = parents of a child the same age as my daughter), I decline a second cup of coffee. "If I drink two cups today, then tomorrow I'll have a headache unless I have two cups. So I've started limiting myself to just one cup because my threshold for caffeine dependence has gotten incredibly low." Why do I feel a need to append this tiresome explanation with a joke? "In other words, how I became my father."

My wife told me a story about an intensive care specialist from her training at the University of Arizona. Apparently this doctor, whose job often required him to deliver bad news to a patient's family, had a bad stutter. My wife said, "One time, he was talking to this woman about her husband, and he said, 'I think he's going to die die die die die.'" Having grown up around a stutterer, I know it's a false story. That's not how my father would have stuttered the line. He would have blocked for a few seconds before getting the sentence started. He would not have repeated the same word over and over and over.

A favorite joke of mine (and of my brothers, too): At a stuttering convention, the keynote speaker is a psychologist who also happens to be a beautiful woman. She tells the audience her theory that stuttering can be cured with the proper motivation. To prove this, she promises to sleep with any stutterer who can answer a simple question without stuttering. She invites the first three volunteers on stage. She asks the first man, "Where do you live?" He answers, "D-d-d-d-d-d-etroit." She moves on to the second man. "Where do you live?" He answers, "Ch-ch-ch-ch-icago." She moves on to the third volunteer, who answers her

question immediately. “Miami.” Excited, the psychologist whisks the man upstairs to her hotel room, where they proceed to make love. In the afterglow of the sex, she turns to him and says, “Now, wasn’t that a great experience? Isn’t it amazing what you can do with the proper motivation?” To which he answers, “B-b-b-b-b-b-each.”

I am thirty seven years old and identify myself as: a father, a husband, a doctor, a son, a brother (and brother-in-law), a bourbon drinker, a Mets/Jets/Knicks fan, a subscriber to six podcasts (of which I never miss an episode, akin to the way my father never misses an issue of his subscription medical journals), a too-slow reader, an early riser (5:30 AM) who tires too early each night (around 9:00 PM), a former music nerd, a current music nostalgic, more of a salt tooth than a sweet tooth, and a New York Jew. I no longer identify myself as a writer.

Collage is the only form that currently appeals to me as a writer, despite my frequent failures in the format. Collage fits me as someone who sneaks in reading on the subway, as someone who considers a twitter feed (at times) to be meaningful in its assemblage of information, as someone who has bought into the idea of art=content. Collage has become my favorite form to read, although I had trouble getting through Renata Adler’s *Speedboat*, which I read upon your recommendation. I did use a quote from *Speedboat* in a collage piece I wrote about hotel room sex (“I have often been in hotels alone. It is no good unless you’re on assignment. One sits in the lobby, the bar, or worst of all the restaurant, with a book, and pretends to be preoccupied. One gets soup or vegetables on the pages, and they stick.”) that has been rejected by at least half a dozen journals.

Wayne Koestenbaum (in the same essay quoted above): The world was doing its best to ignore the fact that I was a writer.

My inability to write is not the same as my father’s inability to speak, is it? I’ve always felt that our anxieties align much closer than our shortcomings (physical appearance excepted, of course, as neither of us would be considered conventionally handsome).

David Shields: When I’m having trouble writing something, I often close the document and compose the passage as email to, say, my friend Michael. I imagine I can feel the tug of the recipient at the other end of the wire, and this creates in me a needed urgency. The letter always arrives at its destination.

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Tim Youngs

Introducing her next poem

It's just a boat
at midnight
on a lake

with me on board
slightly drunk
growing scared

a cold distance
from my kids;
no metaphor

of life's passage
as the academic
claimed.

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Tim Youngs

Legacy

All I've kept of yours
from your failed business
is this tape dispenser
with its broken roller.

Thank you for reading! Find more at www.theharlequin.org.



Lydia Davis

An interview with Lydia Davis

Lydia Davis is the author of one novel and seven story collections. Her recent publications include *Can't and Won't* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 2014), *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis* (Hamish Hamilton, 2010), a chapbook entitled *The Cows* (Sarabande Press, 2010), and a new translation of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (Viking Penguin, 2011). She has translated the works of many French writers, as well as the short stories of Dutch author A.L. Snijders. In 2013 she was awarded Man Booker International Prize.

Harlequin: Christopher Ricks's introduction to your *Collected Stories* lists some of the descriptors that your shorter work has evoked, including "stories", "anecdotes", "miniatures", "essays", "jokes", "parables", "fables"; even "texts", "aphorisms" and "prayers". This matter of classification seems to be a preoccupation whenever your work is discussed, particularly when it is introduced to new readers. Is there anything you find interesting or meaningful in these attempts of taxonomy, and are there some labels you prefer to others?

Lydia Davis: I think the discussion of how to label the stories is a useful one, because it causes us all to think about what these different categories mean and how we use them. I like to think that all my stories sit somewhere on a continuum, some closer to poem, others closer to traditional short story, some very close to prose poem, etc. (At one end of the continuum would be my one novel, really a "very long story".)

There are a few terms that cover all of the stories, I think, though even that may be open to question. I simply call them stories, or sometimes pieces (for convenience). Some practitioners in other times and places have called what they wrote "short prose pieces", which I like quite a lot, since it is an accurate, general description. I also like "very short story" again, plainly and accurately descriptive. I am not so fond of the "flashier" terms, such as..."flash fiction".

H: Do you remember the first thing you read which opened up the possibilities of very short stories to you?

LD: Yes, although I should qualify that by saying I had read Kafka's *Parables and Paradoxes* long before, yet I did not see them as models for me of the sort of

story I could write, perhaps because they were “classics” – beyond reach. Still, they may have planted the idea. It was only many years later, when I read the very short stories – which he calls poems – of Russell Edson that I saw the possibilities of the form for me. Part of the reason these stories seemed more available to me, something I could try, was that not all of them were successful. But it may also have had to do with their weird, nonsensical, yet emotionally urgent content, which seemed to say that anything was allowed.

H: Do you think there is anything about contemporary ways of thinking, the contemporary relationship we have with art and reading in particular, that gives rise to the short prose form? We hear so often about how busy we are, also about how the world and all its concerns seem so open and accessible, that the contemporary unit of communication is now “the sound bite”, the Tweet, ect. Though you started writing in the 70s, do you see your shorter work as being related to this situation?

LD: Maybe the contemporary situation encourages me to go on writing in the very short form – though I have to say that I also write very long, digressive, even recursive stories. I began writing the very shortest stories – those with just a title and a line or two or three – when I was translating Proust’s very long sentences with their complex syntax. Clearly, I did this in reaction to the work of reconstructing his sentences in English – though I loved that work. I myself don’t Tweet, though I can see the attraction of it, but by temperament I do tend to alternate between being very quick, multi-tasking, and then on the other hand being very thorough, painstaking, and slow over certain kinds of work, or just standing still and looking at something for a long time.

H: Many of your stories explore the human propensity for speculation, for second-guessing everything, even and especially our own instincts. In many ways their emotional complexity seems to reflect the true state of consciousness before our actions represent us one way or the other. Is getting at this truth central to your writing?

LD: That is an interesting idea, that those characters represent “consciousness-before-action”. It is hard to pinpoint exactly what is central to my writing, since I have never sat down and identified what I wanted to do with my writing or what should be central to it. It has been important to me not to think too hard or deliberately about what I want to do with my writing. But of course one’s writing reflects one’s self, and it is true that I do a lot of thinking – about life, about how to live, about ethics, politics, animals rights, and so on and so forth. So that would be reflected in what I choose to write about and how I write about it. And that thinking character would naturally show up in the stories.

H: Does the fact that many of your characters exhibit this kind of philosophical introspection in some way prevent them from inhabiting longer pieces? Fitzgerald’s mantra that “action is character” seems more relevant to longer works, novels wherein the mechanics of plot traditionally drive the narrative forward. It seems that in so much short fiction, this mantra is replaced by some notion that the deliberation of action, the apprehension of a character at the precipice of some important decision, can be understood as an event in its own right.

LD: Well, since I brought up my one novel earlier, *The End of the Story*, which has as its central character the same introspective person, who in fact does act, in her own way, I’d have to say no, it doesn’t prevent them from inhabiting longer pieces. And I think of Beckett’s comically introspective, brooding, second-guessing, hesitant characters who certainly take action in their own way in his novels. Was it Watt who shifted pebbles from pocket to pocket in certain mathematical combinations, in what seems in memory to have been a very long passage in the book? But you may have in mind more “action-packed” novels. I also like to think of Goncharov’s Oblomov, though it has been years since I read it. There’s a character who cannot make himself take any decisive action. That sort of character probably does appeal to me. Two other favorite characters, though these are certainly very active, without actually achieving much in the end, are Flaubert’s two retired clerks, Bouvard and Pecuchet.

H: But where Beckett’s characters could be said to be striving towards a state of isolation, the characters in your work seem more to be trying to puzzle out their position in the world in relation to other people (or to animals or objects); there’s a real sense of enquiry into how an individual can relate to the world around them.

LD: Well, that is an ongoing preoccupation of mine: how to conduct one’s life, how to live in the right way, do the right thing, in smaller and larger contexts. Not that I always do the right thing, mind you. But I like to puzzle over what it is. This involves not just morals and ethics, but also logic, of course – I like applying logic to moral and ethical questions.

H: A few of your stories take the form of something akin to odes in addressing some of life’s monolithic subjects: “Mothers”, “Lost Things”, “Money”. There is often an amusing clash between what is inherently true and what is inherently silly about these things, an observational conjunction one might expect from an alien life form with a good sense of humour, experiencing things for the very first

time. Do you consciously imagine yourself in a heightened state of naivety to approach these kinds of stories?

LD: Or an alien life form with no sense of humor but also very little understanding of what he/she observes. I don't consciously imagine myself in a heightened state of naivety, but it is probably true that I slip into a persona who narrates from a very "pure" position, purely observing, almost scientifically observing, rather than bringing a set of preconceived ideas to whatever it is she is examining.

H: On the subject of animal rights, you wrote a chapbook in 2011 about watching three cows grazing in a field outside your house. You called it *The Cows*, which seems the purest word for cows, related to "moo-cows" and distinct from "cattle" and "bovine". That relationship between compassion and objectivity is played out in what for most of the text is a series of observations about their behaviour in the field. From a reader's perspective, thinking about animal rights in relation to the story creeps in slowly; did it happen that way during the writing process?

LD: Interesting, what you say, about thoughts about animal rights creeping in slowly. After it was done, published, I wondered if that would be the case. It did not happen exactly that way in the writing of it – the way it unfolded was a little different. For one thing, the piece was not written all at once, but over two or three years. I would look out the window, or stand by the road, and if I happened to observe something that interested me about the cows, I would write it down. I did not plan in advance to write the piece; but at a certain point, I had so many of these observations that I saw that it would be good to gather them and put them in order.

My preoccupation with animal rights came long before that. My sympathy for the cows or cattle confined in feed lots is strong and deep, and it certainly determined the way I looked at and thought about the cows across the road, who had exactly the life they should have and could enjoy, except for the very end. They had freedom, which is a wonderful thing to see. Or relative freedom – freedom and safety. (Absolute freedom – freedom to roam the roads and hills – would have been dangerous and difficult for them. But that's another subject.)

So "The Cows" is really just an appreciation of the cows in themselves, as they are, all their qualities, and also the interest of looking at them, looking at anything, really – perspective, foreshortening, colors, contrasts of light and dark. I did realize, after it was done, that it might also lead people to think about the lives of animals, especially "food animals."

H: Can you tell us a little about your latest collection, *Can't and Won't*?

LD: Well, it has more stories in it than any previous volume – 122, I think. And it consists of several kinds or categories of stories: “everyday” stories – stories about daily life; “dream” stories – stories composed from night dreams and also dream-like waking experiences; “stories from Flaubert” – stories which I shaped out of anecdotes that Flaubert related in his letters; “letters of complaint” – there are five of them, and they all start from real complaints that I have, but are written in a rather exaggerated, sometimes hysterical manner; the very-very short stories I mentioned earlier, which I started writing when I was translating Proust; and other odd stories that don’t necessarily fit into any category.

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