

"Showcasing the beautiful power of written and visual art forms."

ISSUE #9, SUMMER 2025



GABBY & MIN'S *Literary Review*

POETRY BY
FIONA
HARTMANN
UPROOTED

ART BY
ANTON
AMIT
NIGHT OCEAN

FICTION BY
AMY B.
LOGAN
VACATION

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
VISHAAL
PATHAK
SUNBLOOM



GABBY & MIN'S *Literary Review*

ISSUE #9, SUMMER 2025

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**A LETTER FROM THE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Dear Cherished Readers,

As the summer sun reaches its zenith, we are proud to present Issue #9 of Gabby & Min's Literary Review. This season's contributors capture the essence of summer in all its facets—joy, memory, revelation, and transformation. Through poems that pulse with heat and prose that simmers with emotion, this issue offers a collection that is both vibrant and vulnerable.

In these pages, you'll find characters grappling with love, identity, grief, and self-discovery. Our visual artists and photographers bring life to the unseen—fleeting glances, forgotten places, and untold truths. Each piece was selected with care, reflecting the spirit of creative risk-taking and artistic resilience that defines this publication.

Thank you, as always, for reading, for feeling, for growing with us. Whether you're poolside, commuting, or curled up indoors escaping the heat, we hope this issue brings warmth, light, and a little bit of magic.

With boundless gratitude and sunny summer wishes,



Sage Delio, Editor-In-Chief, *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*

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SEASONAL SONG OF A CICADA

YUAN CHANGMING

no human ear has ever heard of you
cloistering yourself deep in the soil
silently sucking all sounds from roots
for more than thirteen years in a row
until high up on a summer painted twig
you slough off your earthly self
pouring all your being in a single song
before the sun sets for the yellow leaf

SUNBLOOM
VISHAAL PATHAK



THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

SULLY BURNS

The morning summer sun shone bright into the classroom, illuminating everyone with a warm glow. The students were chatting amongst themselves with excitement. Catherine sat on the side of the class opposite the window, propping her chin atop her arm whilst tapping the desk with the opposite's finger. Behind her sat her best friend, Heidi, sitting upright at her desk, looking around in front of her while tapping her right foot and finger in unison, more enthusiastically than Catherine.

"So Cat, end of 9th grade, huh?" Heidi asked, leaning in towards Catherine, "How do you think your grades are?"

"They'll be fine. It's always worked out for me." Catherine responded, still tapping her finger on the desk. Heidi turned her head slightly.

"So you're not even a bit worried, 'cause I've been on edge about them for a while."

"Nonsense, you'll do great. Besides, have I not been helping you this year?" Catherine smiled, calming her friend. Then, the door to the classroom opened up. The students grew quiet, as Mr. Goodwin walked in, holding a large cardboard box. After he placed it on the table, he greeted the students.

"Good morning class. Today's the last day of classes, and I must say I've had a wonderful time teaching you. I have your report cards here, so I'll call you by name to pick them up." The class' stiff air was

tense, as one by one students went up. At their seats, some sighed in either relief or annoyance. Others didn't seem to care, and others became ecstatic.

"Heidi Harleigh," the professor called, to which a tense Heidi stood up to pick up her card. Heidi returned to her seat, holding the card in hand. Catherine watched as she pulled out the piece of paper, and looked it over for a second.

"Three A's and two B's." She sighed, while leaning back in her mass-issued school chair.

"See, what did I tell you? Nothing to worry about." Time went by slowly, as the rest of the names were called. Eventually, all but one of the students in the class had been called up.

"Catherine Ventura." Professor Goodwin called out. Catherine got up and casually obtained her report card before returning to her friend. She opened the card, revealing the straight A's she had earned. Catherine nodded, before putting her card away.

"Wow Cat, you do this every time, but it never fails to surprise me at just how smart you are." The rest of the half-day went by quickly. With nothing to teach, Goodwin allowed the students to play games. Heidi scrolled through social media, while Catherine decided to peruse a novel. The classroom slowly darkened, as the clock ticked ever closer to noon. Just before the end of class, Goodwin called the class for one final word.

"I will say again, thank you for such a wonderful time this year. Having been allowed to know all of you, I see that you all have the potential to do great things. Despite whatever grades you may have gotten, know that this will not make or break your future. Now, go out and enjoy your summer." And as if on call, the bell rang, signaling the end of the day. Everyone in class said their goodbyes and left class for

summer break.

After a short walk home, the summer sun both warming and invigorating her, Catherine arrived at her home. It was a fairly large, two story yellow house, and able to hold her parents, brother, and herself comfortably. The lawn had pristine green grass and flowers walling the house, both of which were tended to by hired hands. Entering the house, the lights weren't on, only being dimly illuminated through the shaded windows. After pulling the curtains back, the full magnificence of the house was revealed as the light flooded the room. The walls of the house were a white color, enough that even the slightest stain would be obvious, though none showed themselves. The walls had a number of pictures of Catherine and her parents. The floor was polished wood without even a dent, and the glass was spotless. The TV in the living room faced three chairs. One couch was able to seat two people, while the second could only hold one. The final seat was a more simple wooden chair, located on the other side of a table from the others.

Catherine decided to sit down on her couch and watch the news. The local channel was currently going over the weather for the next week. It was currently June 12th, 2015, and the next week looked to be entirely sunny. That was good, perhaps her parents could find some time to go out with Luther and her. It would be a shame if he couldn't come again.

As if on cue, the door to the house clicked open, and Luther walked in, his head turned down towards the floor. Catherine quickly got up from the couch to meet him.

"Luther!" she exclaimed, hugging her brother. "How was your last day of 6th grade!"

Luther stood there, a light orange envelope in his hand. "See for yourself." He responded, giving the card to Catherine before running

upstairs.

Catherine's smile quickly flipped, as she opened the card. There wasn't a single A on it, the highest grade being a C+ in history, and the lowest two F's in science and math. The card came with a note, requesting that Luther attend summer education five half days a week to make up his grades. Catherine sighed, her posture lowering itself before looking up the stairs.

She found Luther in his dark blue walled room, clear of anything dressing them, with the lights off and his curtains closed. He was lying down on his bed with his blanket over his face, exposing more of his legs than normal. Catherine sat next to him near the head of the bed, barely keeping herself from slipping off.

"So, do you want to talk about it?" She asked, staring down at the edge where the dark blue wall met the wooden floor. Luther mumbled a bit, the blanket over his face shifting around as he spoke. "Sorry Luth, but could you repeat that?" She asked, pulling the blanket back from Luther's frowning, tensed face.

"Why do I suck so much?" he asked, still staring at the ceiling. "Everything I try I fail at. I toil over it all the time, yet it just doesn't click. Then I upset Mom and Dad. They didn't come up to America and work their butts off just for me to throw it all away." Catherine sat there, thinking of a good way to respond.

"You could always ask me for help you know..." Catherine offered, turning her head upwards, before Luther cut her off.

"We both know they don't want you helping me. They're already annoyed that you tutor your friend Heidi." His frown lowers more, as he turns over to curl up and hug his pillow. "You're lucky. You're smart enough to get straight A's every year."

Catherine takes a moment before she pulls Luther up into a hug. “Don’t worry about it Luth, you’ll be able to turn this around eventually. I know that you have what it takes in you.” Luther momentarily smiles, before recalling a similar conversation last year, and knowing that things would never change.



UPROOTED

FIONA HARTMANN

Dandelions breed from the dead ground
 their thin arteries bleeding into the moist dark
 where winter forgot us
 and in the amnesia of spring we try to bloom again
 until the scorching of summer dries out my tongue
 in our seasons, I should be Persephone,
 since I am the one always leaving.

VACATION

AMY B. LOGAN

Wallace tried to get comfortable in his seat. He was on the red-eye to Honolulu, his son and daughter-in-law would meet him there at the hotel two days from now. He wasn't big on travelling. Too expensive these days. And he wasn't well. Bad heart. He was only going in order to spend some time with his only child, Robert, and Robert's wife, Sandi.

Wallace's wife Doris had passed away 362 days ago. He had tried to shake off the loneliness but instead chose to embrace it. He focused instead on his finances. All of his finances. He had planned everything. He would buy canned chili and soup from the nearby convenience store near their hotel and place it outside on the small balcony in the sun. Voiladinner. He knew that the hotel and local vendors would offer discount coupon books for local attractions. He would rent a very very small car for the three of them to do sightseeing further afield. It was going to be a great vacation.

He wasn't always this frugal. He used to good naturedly feud with Doris about expenses, as she did all the grocery and household purchases. But her simple funeral, burial, grave marker and ceremony had been unexpectedly expensive. After her passing he began to worry as never before. What if he ran out of money? What if he didn't have the extra dollars to pay the boy to shovel the walk this winter? He couldn't shovel the walk. He was too old and had a heart condition. He shuddered at the thought of being shut up, alive, in the snow, in his own house.

Robert and Sandi lived in Phoenix. There was no snow there.

Too hot. No trees. No water. No autumn leaves, pumpkins on porches, spring daffodils, crickets or frogs singing into the night. Just sand and stone and sun.

At least in Chicago he had four seasons. But he also worried about paying the boy to mow the lawn. \$10 per week!

On this trip he would have to be careful. He had packed a variety of snacks for his layovers like granola bars, (1.99) beef jerky, (14.99) and cereal (2.99). He had bought guidebooks at the thrift store (1.49, 2.95) that explained the ins and outs of the sights he wanted to see. He was somewhat worried about Robert and Sandi. He worried that they wouldn't share his enthusiasm for frugality.

"It will be O.K.," decided Wallace, after all they wouldn't be spending all of their time together. Robert and Sandi may want to go snorkeling or take surfing lessons or who knows what all, and that was fine. Wallace would walk the beach and look for shells. That didn't cost anything. After all, it was fun saving money. He fell asleep at night pleased with his lifestyle, although lonely. There was after all, no Doris.

Two days later Robert and Sandi arrived. Fresh from their 6 1/2 hour flight from Phoenix they came young, relaxed and rested. They invited him for drinks at the hotel bar before dinner. Robert and Sandi ordered Mai Tais, (two, 25.00) adorned with a slice of pineapple, wedge of lime and a tiny red umbrella. Wallace ordered a cola, (5.00) and they spent a pleasant hour catching up.

The next day they decided to go sightseeing. Just as they wedged themselves into the tiny car in the hotel parking lot Wallace saw a tour bus.

"Look!" he cried, "we don't have to pay for the tour. We'll just

follow the bus! I have my guidebooks, so we can do it for free!”

Robert and Sandi exchanged glances in the front seat. Wallace was so happy! He was perspiring already though the morning was still cool. He was beaming.

“Great idea, Dad,” agreed Robert. “Let’s go and see where this takes us.”

They drove their tiny car following the tour bus. They got to see some of the sights on their list. The Royal Palace of Liliokulani. The Byodo in Temple. Diamond Head. It was a long day.

They returned to the hotel. Robert and Sandi wanted to attend an authentic luau on the beach. Wallace was tired. “I’ll just stay here and nap,” he declared. After some sleep and some T.V. he ate his balcony chili and turned in for the night.

He dreamt about Doris. Doris in her flowered house dress on one warm summer morning making sausages and bacon in their tiny yellow kitchen. The kitchen had bright yellow formica countertops with a shiny metal trim piece holding the yellow skin in place with dozens of tiny chrome screws. Plywood cabinets sealed with a coat of thick oil-based white paint. He couldn’t remember them ever being any other color. There was an exhaust fan over the stove, a large silver swirl that could “suck up a cat,” he once proudly said. It was sucking up the steam and grease from the bacon and sausage that was his traditional breakfast of many years ago.

Doris. She was a good wife. She kept house, did all the cooking, all the shopping, and raised their good son Robert. Wallace worked at the bank and paid their bills. They had a good life. But now Doris was

gone. But not in his dream. In his dream her house dress was a creamy white with tiny blue flowers. Her blond curled hair (she slept in pink foamy curlers) drooped over her forehead defeated by the steam of the bacon. She had on pink fuzzy slippers and moved expertly between sink and stove and table, habits formed from years spent working in the same kitchen at the same stove and the same counter and the same table. She didn’t seem to mind. He watched her, as if seeing her for the first time. He realized how much he loved her. How much he missed her. Had he told her? That he loved her? His heart ached from the pain of loss or angina, he couldn’t tell anymore. The sweet dream of Doris had turned into pain, pain in his chest, his neck, his arm. He woke up drenched in sweat, heart pounding. He was still here, alive. But Doris was gone.

Robert and Sandi wanted to go whale watching. There was a launch near the hotel. Wallace was tired. He didn’t feel well. After the complimentary hotel breakfast of bacon and sausage they took him to Walmart. He bought an inflatable piece of pizza (12.95) to lay on at the beach and some more sunscreen. (6.95 with coupon.) Robert inflated the pizza for Wallace and they dropped him off at the beach one block from the hotel.

“Are you sure you don’t want to come along?” Robert asked his father again. “How many chances do you get to see whales?”

“No thanks, I’ll be fine,” insisted Wallace. (49.00. Each. He could probably see whales from right here on the beach.) “You two go and have a good time.” He made himself comfortable on his slice of pizza, on the sand. He would be fine.

He laid down and relaxed. He hoped he could have the dream again. And see Doris. He was tired from yesterday. He slept. But when he woke he didn’t have any memory of a dream. He decided to go for a swim.

He took his slice of pizza and waded out into the ocean. The water was warm and frothy and smooth. He laid carefully on his stomach with his arms dangling into the water. He paddled occasionally, letting the waves play with the mattress as they would.

This was nice. The sun was warm. The water was warm. Even his slice of pizza was warm. He bobbed gently along, dozing, thinking of Doris. And Robert as a small child. Of plastic wading pools. Croquet games after dinner. Fireworks in July. He remembered Robert chasing fireflies in the backyard.

He remembered dragging the playpen across the snowy yard and up onto the roof so Robert could see the tracks from Santa's sleigh and remain a child a little longer. He loved them both. Doris and Robert. He loved them so that it hurt deep in his chest. It pained him into his neck and along his arm. And finally the pain burst into a spectacular firework within his chest, deep inside, where no spectators could ooh and ahh. But Wallace did. He oohed and made one final Ahhhhhh as his heart stopped beating. His body slipped off the slice of pizza. Into the warm ocean. And Doris was waiting, her hair oh so beautiful, soft blonde waves tumbling down across her shoulders. She wore the beautiful red satin dress he had bought her for their anniversary as

they went out to dinner at the steakhouse. He didn't have the faintest idea of how much it had cost.

END

ENOUGH TIME

AARON ADEYEMI

You were in a fabricated educational society,
 Being judged for a small circle bred anxiety,
 Despite school being a place to grow,
 Where it was easy for connections to undergo,
 Then you got pushed out to the world,
 But societal viewpoints around you still swirled,
 Like to always have a lot of friends,
 Spending time alone is what some can't comprehend,
 Assuming someone has no friends at this rate,
 They may say you're too old to date,
 But there is no rush,
 You shouldn't think of flimsy opinions so much,
 Whether it's platonic or romantic,
 Your life isn't where you should feel panicked,
 You shouldn't worry about not dating,
 Being introverted isn't what you should be hating,
 Friends isn't what you should worriedly seek,
 So eventually find someone unique,
 Find someone who mutually benefits you,
 That they care that you're here like you do,
 If you want to have alone time,
 Relaxation and self reflection aren't a crime,
 Be comfortable and happy in a healthy setting,
 And don't let FOMO leave you dreading.

RANCH HAND AT MIDNIGHT

JONATHAN BORTHWICK



RANCH HAND AT MIDNIGHT, FORT STOCKTON, TEXAS

SAVANNAH YVONNE MILAN

JOHN KRIEG

She's got a frame that just won't quit. I always liked a woman with square shoulders, and she certainly has them as she walks as proud and confident as any man. Her lady lumps are as jiggly as shimmering pudding and she has a long/tall pair of stems that support buttocks of feminine perfection. Savannah Yvonne Milan is a walking talking slice of heaven in a tight miniskirt with long blond hair, smoldering blue eyes, bright red lipstick, and the face of an angel. That girl's a high-cheek-boned Slavic queen, if you know what I mean, who makes my body shake as my knees quake, and she doesn't even know that I'm alive – yet.

All I have to do is make the varsity football team, rise to stardom as the starting quarterback, and attract the attention of the new head cheerleader who just happens to be Savannah Yvonne Milan. This is something that is as sure as preordained because our town is crazy about our high school football team. Football is the one thing that everyone seems to be the proudest about, and certainly the only thing that everybody agrees on. So, that's that, but it's a tall order because I'm short, underweight, slow, and not remotely athletic. Where there's a will, there's a way, isn't that what they all say? So I embarked on my quest just yesterday. I started on a have to try it diet, meaning that I am devouring everything in sight. I'm lifting weights in the school's gym and running wind sprints on the school's track. I'm throwing a football through a tire swing when I'm alone at home, and I cool down by juggling three tennis balls to improve my coordination. At the start of this, my second day of intense training, I'm already tired and sore and

discouraged, but it's the thought of my destiny with Savannah Yvonne Milan that drives me forward, and keeps me laser focused on my goal.

I'm planning on attending summer school, not because I have to, as I'm carrying a 4.0 grade point average, but so that I'm granted access to the athletic facilities. And, it doesn't hurt to get a jump on my Junior year courses because I will need excessive time for film study once the season begins. That's the core of my plan and my only advantage – my intelligence. I had to talk Mr. Cummings our principal into letting me sit in with the failing students and promise to act as a sort of tutor for a few of the more challenged ones. "You want to join a team?" Mr. Cummings asked me, "Then start by being a teammate right here, right now."

The word on the street is that Savannah Yvonne Milan and the entire cheerleading squad will be off to a professional cheerleading camp and have designs on being the top squad in the district this coming season which everyone hopes will go better than the last one when we went 4 and 6. If the truth be told, half the town probably comes to our games to see them perform more than the team, but I'm the guy that's going to change all that. They say that chicks dig confident guys, and I'm stepping up to that plate to project a winning attitude, as Mr. Cummings says, right here, right now. Just you wait and see; Savannah Yvonne Milan is going to be putty in my hands and she's going to go berserk over me.

"It isn't the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of fight in the dog." "When the going gets tough; the tough get going." "The bigger they are, the harder they fall." These are the motivational mottos that I taped to my bathroom mirror. My mom can be kind of nosey, so I taped a newspaper clipping from our school's last football season onto the back of my medicine cabinet. It's a black and white shot of Savannah Yvonne Milan being tossed high in air and doing a forward jackknife, and always knowing where the camera is, she flashes her pearly whites

while her blond hair flies wild everywhere. Like I said, feminine perfection. The caption reads, “Wildcat cheerleading squad lifts team to victory over Middletown 17 – 10.” That picture keeps me going because it’s now the last week in July with two-a-days, and the sun is scorching hot, and there isn’t any shade on a football field.

I built my wind and strength up over the last two-and-a-half months, and surprisingly I’m not the slowest guy on the team. I fall somewhere in the middle, in fact that seems to be my station on this team – average, some days a little better, and most days a little worse. I’m throwing perfect spirals but they are not traveling very far, so I’m penciled in on the depth chart as third string quarterback, but at least in the quarterback room I shine by knowing every formation and knowing the assignment of every player on the field, offense and defense. Coach Williams says that will come in handy some game, probably when we least expect it. He wasn’t thrilled when I showed up the first day for weigh in and to get fitted for my equipment and uniform. Word was he didn’t feel he could trust a kid who had attended our school since kindergarten, but didn’t bother to go out for football until his third year of high school. Why had I waited? And what did I really want from his team? At first it seemed that he was trying to run me off, or was at least trying to test my resolve as he gave me every shitty locker room assignment and always had a snicker or a snide remark when I failed to make a play. The more he tried to get me to quit, the more I wanted to stay.

By the middle of August, I guess it dawns on him that I’m not going anywhere and he lightens up. You can feel it in the air now as it cools a little sooner each day towards the end of practice. The storm is coming. It might even snow before our last game during the first week in November. The weather up here on the high chaparral is unpredictable and it can change in a heartbeat. I’ve changed too. I’ve

read just about every book there is about football players, football history, football strategy, football insanity, football, football, football; but I’m still not entirely if sure if football is for me.

The shadows outside the practice field are growing a little longer, and it’s time for our last drill of the day; the one that always gets everyone’s blood pumping. Blood alley. I friggin’ hate blood alley, and to make matters worse, we are at the last contest before going in. There’s two tires spaced six feet apart that define the alley that the players have to stay in, and then there’s the goal line stretched between them with Ronnie Ryan as the blocker and Matt Simmons as the running back on offense, and me on the other side on defense. My assignment (and I don’t get to choose to accept it) is to defeat the blocker and tackle the running back before he crosses that line, and I just know that I’m going to get creamed because they are our only two players who made all-district last season. They’re seniors which is akin to being royalty on this squad. All the guys are screaming and clapping and laughing in anticipation of my impending embarrassment, and then Coach Williams gives that sickening toot of his whistle, and Ronnie smashes into me and knocks me down on my knees. Matt is having a grand old time of it showboating by high stepping with his arm and hand behind the back of his head like Deion Sanders. The laughter is uproarious, and I know that I’m the cause of it, except for one thing: Ronnie is so overconfident that he hasn’t finished his block and pancaked me into the ground, and Matt isn’t really paying attention when I rise up and blast into him knocking him back but not down. Now he’s mad and drives at me with some real conviction. You know who else is mad? – me. I’m sick and tired of being the patsy on this team, so it’s on now. I’ve got Matt around the waist and he’s trying to shed me, and we’re spinning round and round, but he’s inching closer to the goal line. I’ve had enough of it and lift him off his feet with his legs still wheeling and drive him backwards

into the dirt. There's an awful collective, "Ooh" from the guys, and then silence. You could hear a pin drop. Matt gets up and barrels towards me, and I'm sure that we are going to have a fight, but then he hits me on the helmet hard screaming, "Yeah baby!" like Austin Powers, and all the guys are pushing and shoving me and slapping my helmet. The whistle toots twice and then Coach Williams booms, "Like the great Vince Lombardi said, 'It's not whether you get knocked down; it's whether you get up.' Guys, always get back in the play until the whistle blows because you never know what's going to happen. There could be a fumble, the ball carrier could slow down like Simmons just did. You just never know, but never give up until the whistle blows. Never. Never. Never give up. Ryan, you didn't finish your block, and Simmons...I better not ever see that out of you again. Both of you get four laps. The rest of you guys take it in." There's the usual banter and glee that accompanies the sprint to the locker room at the end of practice, but I'm standing there dumbfounded by what just happened. Ronnie and Matt start for the track, and I rush to join them.

"Kessler what the fuck are you doing?" Matt asks me while Ronnie seethes through his teeth, "You and your fucking hustle. Just wait until next practice." "You don't have to do this," Matt says, and I return with, "Race you!" as I bolt on ahead. By the start of the fourth lap Matt is a good hundred yards ahead, and Ronnie and I are neck and neck. He's not going to let me embarrass him a second time, and ten yards from the finish line he pushes me from behind and I go tumbling ass over teakettle. With genuine anger in his voice, Matt shouts, "Jesus Ronnie, he's our teammate! What are you doing?" Ronnie reaches down and helps me up saying, "Sorry, I shouldn't have done that." Exhausted, we all walk slow with our heads down heading for the locker room, and when I look up, there's the whole team just outside of it, and Coach Williams points at Matt and screams, "Fella's, that's your captain!

That's the attitude I want to see around here."

Football practice got a lot better after "the tackle," that's for sure. I became more confident and much more aggressive and felt like I was fitting in. I rose to second-string quarterback behind Aaron Hutchings, and didn't expect much as a 140 pound second string middle linebacker, but as coach Williams likes to say, "Kessler just likes to hit people," so I was holding my own except my plans for impressing Savannah Yvonne Milan were probably toast. At the start of the first week in September, before our first game with last year's league champions Centerville that Friday night, Coach Williams calls me into his office and says, "Kessler I'm moving you to starting free safety." I was shocked because that was Matt's position, and said, "Coach you know I'm not nearly as fast as Matt, and he's our best player on defense as well as offense." "You're fast enough if you rely on your smarts and your instincts, and I'm moving Matt to middle linebacker because I need him there more. Kessler, get your head into this. You're the smartest guy on this team. No more negative talk. Learn the position, and never play out of position, and you'll do fine." "How does Matt feel about this?" "He's the one who suggested it."

There's no way to ever explain how it feels to have those butterflies crashing around in your stomach just before a football game. And then there's the intimidation inherent in being in Wildcat Stadium that is nothing like our humble practice field. For such a small town it's voluminous with 1,000 seats and everything is painted up in glossy silver and blue, the same color scheme as the Dallas Cowboys, my dad's favorite team. And there he and mom are in the center seats four rows up with my little sister who is wearing my away jersey. And there she is: Savannah Yvonne Milan radiating, glowing in fact, and it seems like

every eye in the stands is on her, and she knows it. I can't help sneaking a peek over at her every once in a while during warmups, she's just that mesmerizing, but Matt notices and bumps into me curtly saying, "Maybe you should be over there." "Okay, I'm sorry." And I am, because Matt has a real shot at a full ride scholarship to U.C.L.A. and he wants it bad. His family doesn't have that kind of money, and he's the type of guy who would never let them feel bad about it. He's the All-American kid – Matt Simmons, and even though I know that I'm never going anywhere on an athletic scholarship, I want him to get it, probably just as bad as he does. The noise in the stadium rises to a deafening crescendo, and now it's time to play football!

We kickoff to Centerville dressed in red and black, so their kick returner shouldn't be too hard to find, and I'm racing downfield in joyous rapture elated to know that I have been given the legal right to just haul off and hit someone. When he gets past our first wave of tacklers, I'm waiting for him at their 35 yard line and blast into him, and he goes backwards and stumbles down. Those butterflies have now flown. Matt assembles the defensive huddle and calls the alignment, and I'm so jacked up that I'm jumping up and down and shaking my head. My God is this fun! The defensive line smothers the running back on first down, and they stone him again on the next play. They complete a five-yard pass, and I'm in on the gang tackle, and we are off the field. It's been impressed upon me that the speed of this game is much faster than it ever was in practice. I now know just how badly those other guys want to win too.

Both teams seem to be evenly matched, and the game goes back and forth, but Matt finally shakes loose on a 30 yard scoring romp just before halftime. On the way to the locker room I take a fast glance over at our sideline, and most of the cheerleading squad is stacked up in a pyramid, and Savannah Yvonne Milan tumbles from the top, does a

complete somersault, lands in her waiting teammate's arms, gets flipped up onto her feet, and then drops into a flawless split on the ground. Perfection, nothing but pure perfection. That stint at cheerleader camp was sure paying dividends.

In the locker room Coach Williams is stripping a gear over missed assignments, failing to hustle, and a lack of aggression. I look over at Ronnie and his fists are clenched, his face is beet red, and his jaw muscles are a throbbing wad. He looks like he's ready to blast off into outer space and is the first to scream, "Let's go! Let's go guys!" Matt says, "Bring it in. Team on three, ready: one, two, three!" We all blurt out, "TEAM!!!!" Coming back out to our sideline for the second half the crowd is engrossed in watching Savannah Yvonne Milan doing a triple back flip and then reversing course and knocking off three cartwheels, and once again dropping into a split on the ground. I'm beginning to think that maybe she's the best athlete in the stadium.

The second half goes much like the first. This contest is turning into a test of wills and also a game of attrition as two of our players and three of theirs' have had to be helped off the field. They kick a short field goal just before the end of the third quarter and seem to be gaining some momentum. I'm getting an uneasy feeling.

Offensive Coach Baker and I watch a lot of game film together and he has me stand on the sideline with him studying the other teams' defense and he wants my suggestions if I notice anything. At the start of the fourth quarter I do. Their strong safety is creeping way down into the box not respecting our passing game. Aaron has a decent arm and he's perfectly capable of hitting a wide open receiver, so I tell Coach Baker, "I think we can beat the strong safety over the top with a play action pass." "That would take a 20-yard throw." "He can do it Coach. I've seen him do it a hundred times." Coach Baker sends in the call

on third and one (shades of Bart Starr). Our slot receiver Chip Jenkins fakes a block, releases, and then runs deep. After the fake handoff, Matt jumps up and crashes into their defensive line who all fall for it. Aaron throws a perfect spiral, and you can hear the crowd gasp in anticipation. The ball lands in Chip's hands, he hauls it in, takes three steps, and then inexplicitly drops it to the ground. The pursuing cornerback recovers the fumble. Disappointed, the crowd gasps the standard, "Ooh." Chip dejectedly shuffles off the field towards the sideline, and I meet him shouting. "Bad break. We'll get it back. Keep your head up. We'll get it back buddy. We'll get it back." At times like these, that's what you have to say. If you can't lift your teammates up, shut up. Nobody felt worse than he did. What would be the point of rubbing it in? In truth, I was concerned. With one long drive they could win the game.

Sudden change in a football game is a dangerous situation for the team that makes the turnover. They're disappointed and somewhat shook up and vulnerable because football truly is a game of emotion. Coach Williams smartly calls time out to give us a little while to collect ourselves and get those emotions under control. Centerville ripped off a 20-yard run to our 49. Then three more runs got them to fourth and one and they had to go, and their quarterback snuck it to a first down and they were on our 37. They hit a slant pass over the middle, and I tackled the receiver on the 25. Three more runs only got them seven yards. Fourth and three. Matt set our defense, and as we broke the huddle he grabbed my jersey and said to me, "They're going to pass. I'm crashing the right guard with Ronnie. You shoot the gap. Wait until I'm through the line and come off my butt." "What if they keep the running back in?" "Beat him!" At the snap, I saw the running back heading out into the flat. It was do or die; get to the quarterback before he saw his running back open, or give up the first down. And, if I didn't get there fast enough there was a possibility that their wide receiver could catch a

pass in my vacated zone. Now I realize why Matt is taking the gamble. He doesn't think we can stop them if they get the first down and feels this is our best chance. So also at the snap he and Ronnie push the right guard right out of the hole, and I streak towards the quarterback who pump-fakes with the ball causing me to leap up while he ducks under me. Ronnie grabs his jersey, but is starting to lose his grip as I spin around, lunge, and tomahawk down on the ball. Fortune is with me as I make contact with the ball, and it bounces loose right underneath me, and I fall on it. Three minutes are left in the game, and they still have all three of their timeouts. With the ball back in our possession, it's time for Matt Simmons to do his thing. But if I know that, so too does Centerville's defense. Matt gives it his all but two straight runs only yields eight yards, and Centerville only has one timeout remaining. I'm thinking that I should just keep my mouth shut, but we can win this thing, and fortune favors the bold, anyway, so I'm compelled to speak. This time I go directly to the top and I say to Coach Williams, "Their strong safety is literally standing at the line of scrimmage and rushing on every play. So are their linebackers. There's absolutely nobody back there. Nobody is even looking at Chip. Give him another chance Coach. We can still punt on fourth down if it doesn't work out." Coach looks at me as if I just stepped off a spaceship, but Coach Baker cuts in and says, "I believe in him too, Coach. Give him a chance to redeem himself." "Okay you knuckleheads. All we could do is lose the damn game, and if we do, this is on you." "We're gonna' win it," I snap back. When the call goes in I see Chip's chest heave. Matt slaps him on the helmet, and Ronnie pounds him on the shoulder. At the snap Matt doesn't even fake into the line of scrimmage after the fake handoff but stops cold and waits for their blitzing linebacker and cuts him down at the knees. Aaron has all day and waits a little longer than the last time. He puts more air under it and it looks like a Russell Wilson moon shot. Chip snatches it when it finally drops into his hands and races for

the goal line. Their cornerback is giving chase, and just before he gets there, Chip covers the ball with both arms and runs out of bounds. First and goal from their eight. Matt follows Ronnie and the other pulling guard on a sweep around right end and runs into the end zone untouched. The crowd goes ballistic as we are up 13 to 3 and then kick a successful extra point. One minute fifteen seconds left in the game. We squib kick, and a lineman tries to pick the ball up and run with it, but I'm all over him. The next play Matt and I gang tackle their split end. The next play Ronnie sacks the quarterback. Our pads are popping baby! They line up again, and I see that we are misaligned and yell at Matt to call time out. The entire defense goes over to the sideline. Coach Williams looks like he's about to cry. Football's an emotional game, and he's about to beat not only the division, but also the league champs, and it's overwhelming him. "We got you Coach," Matt tells him. "I love you guys," Coach wheezes out. He's really too emotional, so Matt sets the defense. On the next snap Ronnie sacks their quarterback again, and the final gun sounds, and Savannah Yvonne Milan and her cheerleader squad races onto the field, and not to be left out, the whole damn town storms the field. The Wildcats, the league's perennial cellar dwellers have just pulled off the biggest upset of the season. We are getting hugged, and our backs are being pounded, and there she is right there in front of me. This is the best chance I might ever get so I try to hug her, but she recoils away from me. In fact, she doesn't hug anyone, she just seems ice cold. We finally head off for the locker room, and Matt and Ronnie run up beside me, and Ronnie says, "There's something we have to tell you about your dream girl." Matt laughs and says, "Yeah, smoking hot Savannah Yvonne Milan has never had a boyfriend, but she's had a lot of girlfriends." They are bent over in hysterics. I can't believe it thinking, I've endured all this shit for nothing? When we hit the locker room Matt and Ronnie get lifted up on everyone's shoulders. The coaches are blithering like babies.

And I stand alone taking it all in, but then it hits me. It wasn't for nothing, these guys are my teammates. What did I ever have before this? There are other cheerleaders on the sidelines, and there will be other games, but no game could ever be better than this one. Coach Jim Harbaugh is right. Who has it better than us? Nobody!

We went 7 and 3 that regular season and won our first playoff game in decades before getting bounced. Matt and Ronnie and Chip made all-division while Aaron and I got second team. U.C.L.A. gave Matt his full ride, and Savannah Yvonne Milan is heading there also to be the most beautiful and athletic Honey Bear that they've ever had, and we are all rooting for her. Ronnie is going to a junior college somewhere in Colorado, following Coach Williams who got hired there. I met Elzebeth at our homecoming dance while celebrating our victory over Freeberg. She walked right up to me and asked, "Wanna' dance?" We danced together all night. She's pretty cute, and smart, a real tender sender as a kisser, and ironically, not a cheerleader, but the editor of the school's newspaper. Matt refers to us as, "The egghead coalition." Aaron's going to Stanford, so his playing days are over, but he's going to get a topnotch education. Quarterbacks are known for being smart, you know.

And me? I'm looking forward to next season under Coach Baker who has already named me starting quarterback, but I'm not giving up on free safety, so I'll play both ways. I have high hopes of being named our team captain which Coach Baker says the whole team will vote on. Football is an emotional game, and I have to admit that I get really emotional when I'm encouraging my teammates to do their best and play for one another.

My insatiable crush on Savannah Yvonne Milan now seems to

have happened in another lifetime, and I can't really believe that I was so smitten and so naïve. My life has changed for the better in so many ways, and what I want to ask you is: who has it better than me?

Nobody!

ALAS!

MADISON PIERRE

I waited so well
I bided my time
I saved every nickel
Every cent, every dime
I stored up vacation
Swallowed every complaint
I've been a martyr, an angel, a saint
Now it is time to let go
Put my toes in the sand
I can do what I want!
I can be my own man!
I can chase my desires
I can be fun and free
But alas!
I've forgotten
Just how to be me

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

HARPER MASON

Halfway through the dinner I've prepared for us, Dylan drops to his knees and pulls a small black box from his pockets. "Elaine, will you marry me?"

I look into his eyes, and I remember everything.

I remember him walking into the college gymnasium of our sorority and fraternity mixer at the start of my junior year, I remember taking note of his height, of him having to duck to avoid hitting the doorway, I remember him wearing a navy-blue crew neck with UVA embroidered in hunter's orange letters across his chest, surrounded by his fraternity brothers, cracking jokes I couldn't hear from across the room, my friend, Amanda, encouraged me to introduce myself, so I walked over to the dimly lit corner, my legs shaking, and said hello, thinking that he was going to act like he hadn't heard me, but he turned to face me, smiling, and introduced himself, I remember his hand being rough in mine, I could feel the callouses, but his grip was sure, strong, his hair was dark and disheveled, it stuck out at odd angles, giving the impression that he had just gotten out of bed, but his smile was wide and inviting, I talked to him about all my interests; reading, writing, running; he listened, while sporting that same winning smile he greeted me with, he asked me to go out with him at seven o'clock that Friday, my thoughts went to my book club meeting at seven-thirty that same night, but I turned back to Amanda, who was smiling, egging me on from across the room, her eyes locked on mine, and I thought that I could always go to book club next month, I was increasingly anxious as Friday

night grew closer, I froze every time Amanda mentioned the date, I chalked up my less than enthusiastic response to nerves, in order to combat them, I had Amanda come to my apartment—just off West Main Street—to decide on an outfit, but instead of helping she took the task upon herself, rummaging through the clothes in my closet; sweaters, flannels, tops, anything she could get her hands on; she picked out a cardigan with ripped jeans for me to wear, while making a backhanded comment about me needing to go shopping which I countered by reminding her I did not have the time since I was taking eighteen hours that semester, I'd be on track to graduate early with my business degree, I remember Dylan knocking on my door at seven o'clock exactly, wearing a polo shirt and khaki pants, holding a bouquet of flowers in one hand, leading me down the steps to his Toyota Camery with the other, the car was clean, pristine, it looked to be freshly waxed, I remember him asking me where I'd like to go, he shot down my idea of apple picking in favor of a nice dinner at the Ivy Inn, I remember our drive over, him asking me questions on the way there; where was I from, why I chose to come to UVA over a school back home in Maine; we pulled into the parking lot and got out of the car, Dylan taking my hand and helping me out from the passenger side, he continued being this polite all throughout dinner, saying please and thank you, stacking his plates at the edge of the table when he was done with them to make our server's job easier, I thought by the end of our date that he was too good to be true, but when he asked me out again, I didn't refuse, I went out with him every weekend after that; to the movies, to the greenway, to dinner; we spent our one year anniversary at the country fair, I had a history class the next morning with a professor who was known for giving out pop quizzes, but Dylan was so excited when he bought the tickets, so instead of spending the night studying, I spent it with Dylan, gorging myself on fried food and playing the carnival games on the far side of the fairgrounds, I ended the night at the top of the Ferris wheel, having a conversation with Dylan about how small we are from up so high, I

never got to finish my thought because he kissed me mid-sentence, making me feel like I was one of those idiotic lovestruck protagonists in those romantic comedies Amanda loved so much, something I usually frowned upon, but that night atop the Ferris wheel, I remember not minding being the lovestruck protagonist, even if I was idiotic, the next morning however, I thought that maybe I was because I failed the pop quiz given out by my history professor, that quiz was the first assignment I failed in college, and not only did I fail the quiz, but I failed the class, too, because I favored coffee dates with Dylan over listening to my professor drone on about World War II, my grade dropped two letters by the end of that November, my graduation was on the line, I needed at least a B to pass, but I barely managed a C, I wanted to make my failure Dylan's fault for taking me on those stupid coffee dates when he knew full well I had class, but I remember his face falling when I showed him the grade, him insisting that he'd help me study for the course next semester so I could walk in the spring, him devising a study plan, blocking out Monday and Wednesday nights for review, quizzing me on chapter readings and creating study guides for the exams, I remember getting an A on the midterm, jumping up and down, showering Dylan with appreciation over lunch, he insisted that we go out for ice cream to celebrate, but little did I know, this celebration wasn't only about my midterm, it was about Dylan's dad offering him a job at his financial advising office, a stable well-paying job straight out of college, "You wouldn't have to worry about finding a job, and we wouldn't have to move out of state," he told me while wiping his mouth with a napkin, I privately thought however, that finding a job and moving out of state was exactly what I wanted, that was always the plan, to graduate, to get a job, maybe even go back to Maine, I had even started looking at jobs before Dylan told me about the his new position, but I hadn't heard back from anywhere yet, so I couldn't fight him on it, even though I wanted to, after all, what did I

have? I had a few resumes sent out to a void, and a boyfriend who was sitting in his car offering everything; money, a home, a stable life; I should've been excited, but I felt trapped, like I couldn't breathe, I remember thinking that that moment, right there in the front seat of Dylan's recently vacuumed Toyota Camery, felt pivotal, whatever I decided would set the next chapter of my life in motion, I faced Dylan, who was smiling at me as if he'd just won the lottery, and hadn't he? How many people get that kind of job straight out of undergrad? Wasn't he lucky? Wasn't I? He wanted to share this experience with me, he wanted me in the next chapter of his life, and didn't that make sense? I'm sure it did to him, why didn't it make sense to me? Instead of giving him the answer he wanted, I told him I needed time to think, texted Amanda to come pick me up, I spent the time I was supposed to be thinking, applying to any job I could, picking out ones that were as far away from Virginia as I could think to go; New York, California, Seattle; I stumbled across Microsoft's Finance Rotation program based out of Atlanta a week after our ice cream debacle, I applied because they offered a study abroad option in the second year and a job if I were to complete the program successfully, I remember bouncing on the balls of my feet with excitement before telling Dylan about the opportunity, only for his face to fall when I told him over coffee one afternoon, "What are you saying?" he asked me, I remember seeing his face scrunch up like he'd eaten a lemon, looking like he was trying to solve a difficult equation and thinking that I must've been dating the biggest idiot in the world, I answered, "I'm saying this is a great opportunity for me and I'd be a fool not to take it," I waited for a snarky remark, for a counterargument, but the only thing came out of his mouth was an apology for snapping at me, an apology for missing me because he loved me so much, he loved me so much that he'd let me go three states away, maybe even an entire continent and be there for me when I got back, and me? I was ready to serve my interests, and my interests alone, I remember the reality of my

selfishness setting in, dismissing the fight, saying I hadn't even heard from Microsoft yet so there was no reason to argue, and I remember one thing I didn't say, one thing I wish I did: I never told him I'd miss him, too, the email from Microsoft came on a Tuesday afternoon in April, two weeks after our fight in the coffee shop, I remember the initial thrill of opening the email, of seeing I'd been accepted, of wanting to tell Dylan, but the panic setting in at the thought of telling him, I met up with him for lunch, I told him about Microsoft's offer, before we'd even exchanged pleasantries, so I could rip off the bandage, he didn't even congratulate me, he didn't say he was proud of me or happy for me, he only asked "So you're going to Atlanta, then?" with an air of smugness I didn't like, "Why shouldn't I?" I answered, "Because we already had a plan," he said, I vehemently reminded him that it was his plan all along, a plan I never agreed to, "I guess I assumed we wanted the same thing," I got up from the table and said, "Guess again. I'm going," and walked out on him without another word, the weeks to follow were some of the most fulfilling of my life, even though I didn't do anything remarkable, I went out to bars with Amanda, something I hadn't done since Junior year, since the sorority and fraternity mixer, I re-read my favorite books for the hell of it; *The Lord of Rings*, *A Wrinkle in Time*; I cycled back through my favorite TV shows because I had the time; *Stranger Things*, *The Last of Us*, *Greys Anatomy*; these were little things, but they were the things that made me, well...me, I remember thinking that this is what I went to college for in the first place, not to find the love of my life, but to find myself, to pursue my passion, to focus on my goals, one night after our fight, I was huddled under the covers of my bed, watching *Grey's Anatomy* of all things, watching Derek and Meredith have a fight about their careers, and Meredith finally making up with Derek and saying to him, "I can live without you, but I don't want to," and I thought that was the problem, that I could live without Dylan and not

only that, but I wanted to, I wanted to be on my own, to focus on my career, on my goals, I wanted to be selfish, I wanted to break up with him. I wanted to go to Atlanta, but I also want to be loved, I remember how much he loves me and how much I love him and want to be loved by him, how I could always see it, even when we argued over that table in the coffee shop, I remember loving him more than I've ever loved anybody, for his constant companionship and compassion, for making me feel like a lovesick protagonist, for making me feel that I would always love him this way, forever, this quiet love that we'd never have to discuss or acknowledge except just by looking at each other; and I remember thinking, feeling, believing that we would own a perfect little house in the suburbs, yes, with a perfect garden of azaleas and hydrangeas and a perfectly manicured lawn and how I'd greet him when he'd come home every day and send him off with a kiss on his cheek each morning and hand him his briefcase through the window of his Camry, or a better car, yes, a Mercedes, for he would be making a fine salary at his job, and we'd have kids, two of them, yes, so that our first child won't have to grow up alone, a boy and a girl I think, yes, the boy will be born first, he will be kind like his father, perhaps a little naive, but his sister, who will be a couple years younger, she'll feel protective of those who walk all over her brother, and yes, I can hear them now, the boy, a few months into his first relationship asking Dylan, "Dad, how did you know you loved Mom," and our daughter, yes, I can hear her, pleading with us to tell the story of how Dylan and I met, even though we've recounted it to her a hundred times before, and I think to myself, as I'm standing, looking down at Dylan, I could never get tired of this, this life full of certainty, this life full of love which promises to be there day after day, for the rest of my life, this life that Dylan is offering me down on his knees, this is the life I want.

"Oh Dylan." I put my hands to my chest; tears form in my eyes. "I'm so sorry."



A JOB TO DO

BETT WILLETT

There is a phone pole
on a corner in Belize topped
with such a tumbleweed of wires,
a conglomeration of cables,
that's so extraordinary
that tour buses
stop for pictures.

A squirrel's nest
would come in a far
distant second
in a cluttered contest.

Every single one
of the meandering lines
has its job managing
current for lights
or phone signals or video.

Incredulous. I study
the tangled mess
and imagine a battle
with wires seizing
a portion of the flow
in distrust and fear

that grabbing their fragment
will overwhelm the already
traumatized organism
and collapse the whole mess.



SHARING SOAP

ALLISON WHITTENBERG

“Don’t you have a dispenser?”

“A what?”

He pointed to the bar which looked to be about four uses in. “The soap.”

She pointed to the bar which had a lilac scent and still had the mold print monogram MW visible, her initials “There’s the soap.”

He shook his head, “I can’t use that; it has your germs on it.”

Her cheeks, still flush from the act, all that circulation and commingling – she became furious. They had just been going at it and now he, clothed only in boxers, worried about bacteria.

“Germs?” she, in just a bra and panties, asked.

The curls she pinned for that night had gone flat during the tumbling. Weeks had gone into this evening – preparation to the hilt. All the maneuvering to steal those moments together at the office: in the elevator, by the water cooler, outside the break room – all those stolen moments added up to this sum. Their paths didn’t have to converge – this was design. They finally committed to each other, commingling, and it was wild, new, fresh.

Nude and sweaty.

They had taken this break, though the evening, still young.

But soap. Sharing soap. He worried about contamination. He trusted her diaphragm. He believed in her bedding, praising it, freely

commenting on its texture, tender and smooth, vibrant red. He drank from her spigot, but now, the soap troubled him.

Her home soap that she had lathered previously.

He saw as she winced at his hygiene request, as a dream melted, like being in a room for the first time and you stared about the room and you realize maybe this wasn't the room you thought you were in and maybe even this room was a room you never should have entered.

He stomped on the fire.

But why should the suggestion skew things, maybe he was just being quirky. Maybe it was just a joke. How well did she know him? She couldn't recall him ever telling her anything of humor. He didn't come off as a funny guy, of course, there are flavors of humor. There's witty. There's puns, there's satire. That's what attracted her to him in the first place. His square jaw during last month's meetings. He kept his eyes front, rarely blinking in reaction to the dips in the market. *There's a rock*, she thought. *There's someone I could turn to*.

She thought if she didn't take definite steps with him, she'd be alone forever.

But now, it was all about the soap he couldn't touch, that she used, and made dirty. Her eyes tore into him and all the relief, all the light, everything was simply filthy.

What was the nature of intimacy?

This was a crisis, like something she would speak to a therapist if she had the habit of attending sessions. Was she taking too much to heart? Overthinking this? After all, it was just soap.

She put on a robe. Fuzzy. Cozy. Oversized, swallowing her in its softness like a

Cocoon.

He was redressed in slacks and a long-sleeved shirt. It was as if he'd just stopped by.

Dusk deepened and they watched a movie. A black and white one, her choice because he didn't care, he said—one of her favorites.

In it, the actors smoked, making great gestures with their cigarettes for emphasis. These cigarettes traveled from lip to lip, romantically without a care. She found herself enjoying the time, relaxing, and sucked in with the romance.

He noticed and tried to hitch on to this shift, he tried to win her back, placing his hand on her shoulder.

She felt the floor sink and she eschewed his touch.

She made it to her feet and moved to turn off the VCR.

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

"I don't think this will work out," she said. "I'd like you to leave."

His granite chin went slack.

She stood over him, looking down with disdainful air.

She thought to herself, you know when it's over, and the soap gets so small with use, it breaks into small pieces and it's too difficult to use and must be thrown away. Well, this wasn't that sort of matter. This meeting counted as their first "date".

But something weighed on her as she thought of his overnight bag. It's an inventory of clothes, some bills, a candy bar, spare underwear, and an energy drink. A toothbrush, but not the paste.

She felt justified in jerking away as this would be another difference of opinion.

LIJIANG 2006
PING YI YEE

sketching drawing painting stitching
sewing moulding sculpting smashing
hammering chipping chiseling carving
buffing polishing searing frying
pouring mixing stirring scooping
boiling eating drinking smoking
blinking watching listening browsing
posing snapping smiling waving
cajoling haggling measuring weighing
counting packing nodding shaking
walking running cycling scampering
barking talking laughing crying
screaming yelling nagging droning
sweeping shoveling trawling seeking
sketching

a street in the old city.



NIGHT OCEAN
ANTON AMIT

WALKING IN CIRCLES

M. KOLBET

It was a hot empty evening. Another one in a long string. The jokes people used to make about meteorologists consulting crystal balls were forgotten. Now predicting the weather was as easy as looking at a desert boulder. Tomorrow would be dry, the air chalky. And the day after, the same again. It would be weeks before the county saw rain.

The law of averages said autumn would have some wet spells, though the same laws suggested more than one wildfire could erupt before September. The sleepy violence of summer, which had made headlines ten years earlier, was now something people took for granted. Centuries ago the wealthy might leave a city to avoid the plague, but now there were few retreats and no place completely safe from a sudden inferno. A match might do it. A spark from a passing truck-trailer. Then the sky would roar, as if history demanded some remark on the latest round of destruction, a shout to convince people they were dying in some ancient way.

Some people dreamed of hyenas. Others hallucinated snow.

I thought the best thing to do was walk in circles. Not that anyone would notice. I didn't begin my practice until the sun went down for the day. There were more people out and they seemed glad to see something in the world could still move without constituting a threat. And it wasn't like I spun in a yard or made a madman's ramble around a padded room. My circles encompassed suburban neighbors and took in possibilities. By the third time I crossed an intersection, some of the porch-watchers had retired for the night, replaced by their curious children.

This was history meeting at new angles, looking for a new cadence in speech, something to match a slow heat that could begin sprinting any minute. Fresh categories of beliefs that might invert notions of guilt or ruthless behavior. Question marks might disappear.

It was a week into the heat wave and I was finding new circles, certain in their completeness, their bringing me past strangers and home again. Each day made me dehydrated, but when I walked I was drunk on motion. It made me feel in control. The wind wasn't the only thing that could command the air. When the moon came out, it appeared to speak wisdom after wisdom, telling me my attempts at rings and cycles were really formless, an asceticism that could become meditative. I wasn't trying to become a saint, but moving in the early part of night felt like the antithesis of death.

Casual sweat sat on my face and sometimes dropped into my eyes, helping me forget the newspaper that morning. I kept walking. A list of dead people was one of the most depressing things you could read, next to the thermostat, temperatures that didn't change from day to day. At least the names gave you a town, an image of another place.

The heat was everywhere.

It's the country. No matter how bad it is, we have to live with it best as we can.

Two days earlier a father with a house on my street had drowned himself. The circles I made didn't punctuate the fact or let me escape it. Since then, his wife and young daughter had stayed locked inside without the air conditioning running. It was painful to think of them cooking in the closed home. We'd knocked but been told to go away. Perhaps they thought we'd condemn the old guy for wasting water when a bullet would do just as well.

But bullets were loud, and quiet one of the only ways to battle the heat.

The house became like one of those countries that's lost or renamed following a war, where after it was all over people said no such place existed.

Most people in our neighborhood kept indoors anyway, thinking up new terms for rain, euphemisms that might make us giddy when it arrived.

I was six blocks from my street, someone else's starting point in the large circle, when I stopped. Suddenly everything was funny. I stood over a silent brown lawn and thought how ridiculous it was, this habit of mine, trying to keep myself busy to avoid my sense of impending doom. I was as miserable as Ajax, toying with insanity, though I had no sword to fall on, and it wouldn't do to be found howling outside a stranger's home. Still, I'd taken myself by surprise in this moment of reflection.

The night was growing later and the air slowly cooling. It was time to go home and sleep. In the morning, I'd write a list of chores and find another way to pass the late hours. More discipline, that was the key. I would never be Shaw's man of destiny. There were no verses to cover my absurd routines, my search for affinity. Still, I could change. That was something. Some men, even those destined for greatness, are undone by their love of convention. I wouldn't be caught the same way. I only had the idea of mending my ways at present, but by coincidence, as my thoughts flowed I felt a sudden, irresistible push on my bladder.

It was too far to trek home, walking sideways, one left lifted to keep myself in check. There were no more theoretically measured stages. Any sense of decorum felt antiquated, the premise for a comic black-and-white film, someone hopping madly until they rounded the corner of a building and relieved themselves off camera.

I had the night.

Unzipping my trousers in a single motion, I pulled down my pants

and sighed quietly as I urinated over a stranger's arid lawn, feeling, momentarily, the latitude and immunity dogs enjoy.

There are a thousand brands of confusion, as well as a million ways to be disgusted and afraid, but anger is something singular. I saw it the homeowner's eyes as he charged out of the house and asked me what the hell I was doing.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I live—" but location didn't seem to matter and I merely pointed, hoping he would understand that the distance was too great.

"So you think this is okay?"

"It won't harm it, not with the hot days."

"Fuck the grass. You can't just piss outside my house."

I understood. Could see the man's thoughts wheeling about, endless circles that always reached the same conclusion. Despite my desperation, the act was an insult. There were standards to consider. We didn't need to go back as far as the Romans or even the Sumerians. Public micturation might be shameful on its own, but urinating near someone else's house was the first step in a steep decline. Left unchallenged, shit might follow and after that, occupation or war. It felt absurdly natural.

Perhaps he imagined a scenario where his house caught on fire and I, having spent my reserves, was unable to help.

In any case, he was keeping our exchange private, merely glaring and hissing at me. He didn't want his neighbors to know what had happened. Even if he was an inadvertent victim, what fell out tonight was the kind of story to get re-told often, associated too easily with hot summer days, dropped casually at neighborhood barbecues, discussed in details that were unmoored from truth. Worse, there was no handy cliché to cover the moment, to minimize it with language so the menace felt trite. The tale, far from epic, would at least be large enough to overcome

the banality of getting caught short.

No, every time people mentioned a man peeing outside the house it would be a denial of silence. Noise was the real enemy.

“I’m sorry!” I bellowed. “Sorry!” The second shout caused a few neighborhood lights to turn on. Those in nearby houses were peeping openly now. A mediocre acquaintance who had always been simply a face, a jacket, a particular way of talking, was becoming a sideshow attraction.

“What are you doing?” he sputtered.

“Hey, don’t hurt me man. It was a mistake.” My voice strained, but I kept yelling. “It’s dark out!”

Front doors opened and I struck his neck, my hand sideways like a knife, before a crowd began to gather. Many of them automatically lifted cell phones and started recording, uncertain if the history of the moment would read like prophecy later.

The homeowner took a step back, but people formed a loose perimeter all around him. He coughed once, the dry heat tickling the back of his throat, and then began suffocating in earnest, his windpipe collapsing, his cheeks growing red under the light of so many cameras. He stumbled as the dusty air choked him.

None of the phones caught my face directly. I was merely one of the declassified others in the video *neighbors do nothing as local man chokes*, which looped online for a week or so before it was forgotten, buried by other futile performances. Viewers who hoped for a trivial failure, falling off a ladder or getting locked out of a car, were disappointed. By then, when I had my own bruises, everyone was staying indoors as much as possible, cowed by the heat and the exposure of sunny days. No language could play painkiller in defiance of digital

publicity.

I slipped away as quietly as possible. No one on the street knew me, not really, even if they’d seen me pass in a previous circle.

On the way home I neared the house where the man had drowned. The wife and daughter were outside, sitting quietly on a porch swing. This was their secret. This was how they found a moment’s peace: the night, the stars, the quiet. The wind was softer at night, carrying the sound of chirring insects.

I paused on the sidewalk and nodded solemnly. She stood, and with a limited stride—tugging her toddler along—came to meet me, inspecting me as if she spied something familiar and distasteful in me.

Without a word she began her assault, her thin arms beating at my head and chest. It was a catharsis, a purging of her anger and grief at her craven husband. I groaned and fell on her front lawn, the dry blades scratching my skin. When I was down, my hands held over my head for protection, the child, in expensive duplication, followed her mother’s lead. The daughter’s sleepy kicks reminded me of metal roofs and the cleansing authority of rain.

SOAP BUBBLES

MERCURY SUNDERLAND

soap bubbles
brought to life
with a human breath

fly delicately
rainbows of iridescence
that pop gently
on surface & air

freedom found fleeting
in a short life lived. so

the children come
& cheer for the beauty

of what they bring death
to what is a near-endless supply.

soap bubbles
cling to wet hands
in sinks. praying

that they will be clean again
just like every other
hand-washing ritual. the

children learn
how soap bubbles taste
right after they learn the flavor of
swear words on their own tongue. so

soap bubbles
are used to make fake foam
for beer commercials. so

i find myself drinking
a tall glass not to get

myself drunk. but to
taste two types of vile
before they became one. so

soap bubbles
brought to life
with a human breath

fly delicately
rainbows of iridescence
that pop gently
on surface & air.



TOUCHING THE COW- SPOTTED CAT

HANBING JU

I wonder how children walk with limbs no thicker than sapling branches. Stumbled they looked, with sudden accelerations from the back of the foot—each weight shift nearly a fall. The whiskers and patches sewed on corduroy pants, braided pigtails swinging—a capricious grunt catching the breath, wedged in the throat like a pig’s squeal. And then a bark. A silhouette blurs forward, ears pressed flat, four paws airborne as it / launches towards the rustling stonewall.

In the end, she was sent to a hospital, where, shaping a small elephant out of clay, she felt its trunk dissolving between her fingertips and caught the scent of damp air with a sniff,
and during her walks, with feet dragging along the gravel path, she saw the mountains glittering like scattered shards of silver in the distance

Several years later, she peeled open a bowl of mashed potatoes and licked at it like a cat—
the plastic spoon pressed too deep into the back of my tongue, turning my stomach.

And several years later, she, too, might have danced in the dark, with all her movements / reduced to the wrist joints.

BEAUTY IN TRANQUILITY
NAYANA S



FEMALE VANITY

MARTHA PATTERSON

When I was in my 20s and lived in New York, my mother gave me a mink coat of my great-aunt's that Mom inherited. Aunt Mary had been an actress featured in many Hollywood movies and on the "I Love Lucy" show, always as a sweet or irascible little old lady. The mink coat gave me confidence that I didn't look just like everyone else. I wore it with blue jeans, imagining I looked like a "rich hippie," a la Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones during the 1960s. The irony is that I was as poor as the proverbial church mouse, worked at a minimum wage job, and lived in quite a tiny little Manhattan dump.

But, mink coat notwithstanding, I was massively insecure about my appearance in my 20s. As my aunt had done before me, I was pursuing an acting career, and what you look like has something to do with how you're cast. I constantly thought my hair, makeup, and clothes didn't look quite right or good enough. The late actress/singer Olivia Newton-John, who starred in "Grease" when young, said that she felt insecure, too, at that age - and it's striking, because in the movie she was quite a siren.

Many young women are insecure, burdened with a need to at least **try** to look pretty. I see them on my street these days, headed for parties, with perfect hair, beautifully made-up faces, and spangly clothes, on weekend nights. They make me feel nostalgic, but I wonder how confident they really are.

I don't care much for vanity in men, but I almost **expect** it from women, because so much value has always been placed on a woman's

looks. I care a lot less what I look like today, though. I've let my hair turn gray. And I almost never dress up, even though I have nice clothes hanging in my closet. As for makeup, I hardly ever consider putting it on. I keep thinking I don't even go anywhere where it would matter.

One day a few months ago, though, I did put on some lip gloss. The guy behind the counter at my local bodega asked what the special occasion was - and commented on the fact that I was wearing earrings. I was surprised because I hadn't thought anyone would notice; I'd only done these things for a little change in my routine. I was flattered.

So the upshot is, I guess there will always be men who pay attention to women who try to look like they "still care." A man's interest can be a nice thing, and vanity does have a few rewards. That day at the bodega, I felt less like an older woman, and more like a swinging sister from the past.



PADDLE TYME

RICARDO GONZALEZ-ROTHI

LOUDER THAN NORMAL

RYAN SCARIANO

First thing this morning, while we're still in bed, she turns on music. Bad Bad Leroy Brown plays louder than normal, yet we can hear house sparrows right outside, making an uncommonly hectic ruckus in the arborvitae and the lilac. They disperse before she reaches her phone and silences the Croce. Moments later a snare drum ricochets through the bathroom window, and I wonder if some neighbor kid has decided today is finally the day to take up percussion. But then I realize it's the intro to AC/DC's Rock and Roll Ain't Noise Pollution. Geez, that's awfully loud, I say. A Harley starts up a few houses away. The biker revs the throttle and rips down the street leaving a wake of car alarms. We hear dogs and lawnmowers and gas-powered leaf blowers. Sirens, too. We listen with care to these loud sunny morning sounds, so that we might also delight in the quiet stillness underneath.

WATER WEIGHT

HAMPTON PADRAIG

A lake's surface smooths out under the summer sun like warm aftershave, a steady sting cooled by the breaks and ripples of the season's patrons. Elderly couples smile over their newspapers at games of hopscotch, Jacks, and double Dutch tournaments as parents further down the sidewalk teach their children to ride bicycles without training wheels and families laugh under the foliage-covered picnic area enjoying their wicker baskets and plaid tablecloths adorned with paper plates and plastic cups and cutlery. The lake's surface darkens into evening's purple as the sky's setting palate bleeds away. Hot dog vendors and popcorn salesmen maneuver their carts alongside an ice cream truck parked on the grass, its metal awning opened in the center between chalkboards with the day's specials written and sketched by the driver, the wafting siren's call of salt, batter, and sugar filling the air and unstopping the ears of everyone around them as their hands fill with buns, bags, and waffle cones. The lake's surface illuminates under the holiday's whistling eruptions of colored smoke plumed from the ignited novelties of remembrance as a missing boy's poster is lost in a wastebasket's shuffle of the day's wrappers, cups, and cans. Its long-drowned star looks up from the depthless dregs, his muck-fastened body sunk by stones thrown down his water-tortured throat, the unheard ripples between the stacks bubbling up,

every unsurfaced gulp a gallon's gasp, a liquid's greed making a point of prying fingers pointing back to the insoluble.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Anton Amit a Ukrainian-born artist now based in Jyväskylä, Finland, is known for his cosmic landscapes and sci-fi inspired artworks. His creative journey began in childhood, later evolving through his travels to Tibet, where he was initiated into the secret practices of a monastic community, sparking a deep spiritual awakening. This experience informed his mission: to help people reconnect with their soul's memories and appreciate their life experiences. Amit's career spans work as a sculptor, co-owner of the creative studio "Sirius," and numerous exhibitions in Finland, including *Muurame Central Library* and the *Outsider Art Festival*. His art invites viewers into cosmic realms, evoking introspection and wonder.

Bett Willett is a teacher/administrator Bett worked with students from grade two through graduate school at one time or another. She has a BA and two MAs. She has two grown children and lives with three eccentric cats, one of whom thinks she is a dog, and as Bett is never quite sure who she is either, they get along great. She has written blogs and newsletters. Bett received first place and honorable mention for poetry submissions and will be published in an upcoming edition of *The Poeming Pidgeon* and the *Naugatuck River Review*.

Lisa Wright is a freelance writer and amateur photographer whose photos and words have been featured in *unstamatic*, *Peatsmoke Journal*, *Lavender Bones*, *The Travel*, and *Matador*, among others. Although usually a spectator rather than a participant on social media, you can sometimes find her on Instagram (@lisamakeslunch).

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Martha Patterson’s 27-story collection “Small Acts of Magic” was published by Finishing Line Press in 2021. Her 23-poem chapbook “Luna at Dawn” was published in 2025 by Bottlecap Press. She is also an essayist whose work has been published in numerous anthologies and journals. Her playwriting work has been produced in eight countries and 21 U.S. states. She earned her B.A. from Mount Holyoke College and an M.A. from Emerson College, both degrees in Theatre. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

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Matthew McCain is an author and fine artist with 3 of his novels reaching the top #10 on Amazon Kindle Unlimited. His fine art paintings can be found all around the world from London to Las Vegas with Bar Rescue’s Jon Tafer and Alice Cooper’s Teen Youth Rock Center in Phoenix, Arizona. He’s currently represented by the Bilotta Gallery in Florida.

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Amy B. Logan lives with her family in Washington state. Her work has been published by Antipodean SF in Australia; Endless Dreamer in India, and Rock Salt Journal in the U.S. among others. She hopes her readers feel something tangible and change, just a bit, from reading her work. She is currently working on an anthology of short fiction, and hopes her work will bring readers joy, good thoughts, and conversation.

Allison Whittenberg is an award-winning novelist and playwright. Her poetry has appeared in Columbia Review, Feminist Studies, J Journal, and New Orleans Review. A six-time Pushcart Prize nominee, she is the author of the poetry collection They Were Horrible Cooks. Her main literary influence is Kay Ryan.

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M. Kolbet is a fiction writer.

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Sage Delio might be considered a modern day renaissance woman, with her diverse interests and talents spanning across the fields of creative writing, computer science, music, and the arts. In May 2022, she published her debut poetry collection, *Blue Confessional: Poetry and Prose*. A second edition of the collection is being adapted with Sage’s own art and illustrations. For *Gabby & Min’s Literary Review*, Sage holds the roles of Editor-In-Chief and Poetry & Prose Editor.

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THE ISSUE OF SUNLIGHT, SALT, AND SELF-DISCOVERY

If each season had a genre, summer would be magical realism. The world gets warmer, weirder, louder. Ice cream melts too fast. Sunscreen leaves smudges on our paperbacks. The ocean tugs at our ankles like a persistent memory. In this issue, our writers and artists dive headfirst into that surreal midsummer mix—where cicadas scream, hearts wander, and the simplest details shimmer like heat rising off asphalt.

We traveled far this season: from the quiet ache of Wallace’s Hawaiian farewell to the fiery determination of an underdog football player in cleats and chaos. We stood beside Catherine as she comforted her little brother with grace beyond her years, and we floated (almost literally) in a dream of lost love, canned chili, inflatable pizza, and the pull of memory stronger than any tide. Our fiction this issue isn’t just storytelling—it’s sun-drenched soul work.

The poetry? Oh, the poetry. This issue’s verses are alive. They bloom and burn, stammer and scream. Some stomp through city streets. Others tiptoe through closets or crackle under dusty attic light. Our poets capture what it means to be uprooted, to long, to change—even when the world tells you to stay still. And our visual contributors? From tangled wires in Belize to soft snapshots of silence, their works remind us that sometimes images speak louder than plot twists.

If summer is for slowing down and noticing more, Issue #9 is a gentle nudge to do exactly that. It asks us to pause—mid-swim, mid-scroll, mid-sweat—and take inventory. What stories are we telling

ourselves? Which ones are ready to be rewritten? Which ones are waiting under the surface like cicadas—silent for thirteen years, ready to sing?

As you close this issue (or dog-ear your favorite piece for the third time), we hope you carry something with you: a line, a character, a mood you can’t quite name. Something sticky, like watermelon juice on your fingers. Something soothing, like a song hummed just for you. And when the leaves start to turn and your sandals are traded for sweaters, we’ll be back—fresh pages in hand, ready for fall’s next chapter.

END

