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peculiarities

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"People must understand the sacredness and power of this moment and remove their hats as if they were in church."

The St. Cloud Manifesto

[Impressions from a ballroom, New Year's Eve]

Edvard Munch

In Order of Appearance:

Timing the fall of Dropped objects
or Hurting oneself Briefly

Drinking while Urinating

watching dust in the sunlight

plunging into cold water

Pulling Out A Hair

the Brunch, which became Lunch, which became Dinner

breathing, chest upon the floor

counting to a thousand

digesting ground beef

Waiting For birds To Sing

wine in moderation

anatomy of a mammalian eye: a fairytalish

mold upon a fig

Timing the fall of Dropped objects
or Hurting oneself Briefly

Poor little Tin. Silence in the living room had an obvious presence; a rush of blood to the ear inflated fine veins, bruising and blushing an embarrassing tint of red the triangular crevasses of skin folds. The semicircular ducts within, that spin clockwise to flush any sound into the brain, strained to find the usual mechanical noises rising from the street a quarter mile below. The windows had been shut with a push of shoulders. Objects in the room were ignored, becoming merely objects, nonfunctioning, still, slightly coated with the soul of dust so that natural hues dimmed to an unstimulating level. The lack of sound has bored the ear into creating its own, by summing blood, a pulsing experience, sharp, consistent *nnnniiiiittttt* between the skull, as a Latin word would ring from the mouths of well tuned children of a Sunday¹ service. Alone, Tin began to sink into reality, briefly, by lifting a right hand.

Two exceptional fingers, those of utmost importance historically and anthropologically—infamously pressing nuclear launch buttons (so pretty and red) to successfully griping a tree limb to climb, not up, but down (so much easier)—now form two parallel lines, jutting forward, into space. In a proper show of respect, the three remaining fingers of the hand—just as helpful, possibly, in human achievement (especially the tall, handsome middle finger)—had curled, bowed, tucking joints, skin, thinning veins as they wrapped around bone, bone which turning in semicircular motion towards the palm² forced three

¹ Poor little Tin. Upon the couch, before a coffee table standing above the vibrating throat of an orange kitten, on a cushion there Tin sat, inhaling the nitrocellulose of fashion. A multitude of one ounce bottles of nail polish colored the table top; it was the first bookend of the week, Sunday, a day of rest, or one of debilitating choice for Tin's loved one. A quick twist to the thin necks of bottle #649 or #496 or #964 or Jazzy Jazz or Cucumber Bean or such and such, released the scent of microscopic cotton fibers and their corresponding pigments which had absorbed during their formation at an explosives' factory overseas. Red was her favorite. But she had worn that last week. The decision making was silent and intense; she sat at the left hand side of the couch making eye contact with each individual opened bottle. Their conversations were in wave lengths and emotional responses; several quarters of an hour would pass, intoxicating Tin, lulled by scent, silence and the exhaling *perrrrrrrrrrdrperrrrrd* of a hidden 10 week young house pet. As Tin's loved one thought, reflected and internally reacted, as time spun, plasticizer over seas bonded with explosive but attractive agents, forming a tint she was to buy the next bookend. That is, if the resources do not run out. It's quite popular in Europe already. A new process is to take the place of this one for the polish Company to survive. Tin knew. These bottles, this nail polish, are an awkward, dying necessity. Tin knew.

² Poor little Tin. Workdays, those days between bookends, consisted of stacking papers, two documents, of several inches in width in alternating stacks—horizontal then vertical then horizontal and such—which for the Superior was the easiest way to decipher one document from the other when needed. They spewed forth from the mouth of an obese printer the Superior affectionately labeled ANNA, a printer whose powdered inks of various color would be electrically heated to a liquidifying degree and absorbed by pores of an 8 ½ x 11 sheet. After being beautified by several rotating wheels and inkjet pumps,

nervously bitten fingernails into a small but self-consciously noticeable roll of flesh, coincidentally indenting three smirks. The folded, prudent fingers created pressure points, following one after the other, over the life line which curiously forked at the very end; this being something to consider or ignore, coincidentally two choices of their own, matching the extended thumb and extended index, pointing here or there. Now these fingers, after all their history, were in correct pinching formation, moving towards the general neck area.

With elbow bent and thought permeating the motor cortex and reaction permeating the muscular system (so large and intricate, where to begin?) the positioned forearm smoothly sliced the air and its molecules, which to this point were quite content hovering in immobile silence. Tin sat and waited for contact between neck and fingers, all the while expecting, expecting the chill of two fingertips and two specific, but harmless, stings from nibbled nails upon landing. They were to slightly indent the external jugular vein, causing one minor backup and build-up here and one minor backup and build-up there of red blood cells, which to this point were quite content in passing from the cranium and deep parts of the face, outlining a jaw that creates an angle which is not unattractive, but is not very photogenic either—it's more on the side of friendly, as the mailman³ has commented upon a delivery (4:56 P.M sharp, weekdays). Such remarks

the paper would rest, a quiet but enormous presence and responsibility lying in a tray to be plucked by an index and thumb. The paper always remained hot, and after four years, caused calluses which had thickened the tips of Tin's hands, more so the right. Despite the padding, there came sparks of pain when touching each sheet, and it was best to quickly pick up and drop each to reduce this pain—a bad pain—and the pain felt when Superior was unhappy—an even worse pain indeed. His face expressed the definition of dissatisfaction when papers were A) not in proper alternating angles or B) not organized swiftly enough (timed according to a wrist watch that was made in an European country whose minutes were cut into 50 seconds by some bureaucratic vote). These documents are to be organized. These documents are of exceptional importance to our Company. Therefore, paper was to be ordered when ANNA was not full and reordered to have stumps of paper reassuringly waiting; there was always a flow of paper coming in and then coming out of ANNA. Until there will no longer be paper. And Tin knew. Tin knew paper was an awkward, dying necessity.

³Poor little Tin. Poor little tongue of little Tin. On bookends, the accumulation of the weekdays' mail delivery was to be answered. As such, with each reply—to electrical notices, telephonic notices, hydro fees, dwindling credit, an occasional loving correspondence—a stamp was to be caressed by a tongue. Filiform and fungiform, papillae and papilla inflated with saliva consciously driven out by glands, which to this point were quite content in assisting with digesting non-government issued products. The pasty taste, although brief, was quite a burden—as is the effort to remember to purchase these small, non-succulent (but digestible) squares. Tin, however, did find one positive experience during the licking process and looked forward to the rippled edges of the stamp rippling, tingly against the tongue padding. Tin knew very large sheets of paper passed though very large machines with tiny, tiny mechanical pins, which punched even

and these contact points produce pressure, a tightness, centralized within the grasp-less ego and physical body—or is it the physical ego and grasp-less body? Tin pondered beyond the obvious answer (so large and intricate, where to begin?) and suddenly found a hand and two fingers just below the right ear lobe.

It was time to squeeze and the gap between index and thumb began to close. Swept up, skin, a minor layer of fat and lateral muscles (that flex upon mute stares and stress) bunched together into the shape of a cyst. Blood at either landing point had come to a full stop; caught cells within the cyst continued to flow, only in tight semicircular, clockwise spins, depleted of oxygen, causing the facade of the neck to bruise an embarrassing red. Tin commanded the fingers to complete their action, for the index to move farther south and the thumb to continue driving north, until, one force⁴ meets the other—and there, between the two, pressure on nerve endings sent rhythmic pains and signals to an area in the brain Tin could not see but surely knew functions, realizing, yes, you are alive and, yes, this is, as far as you know, real.

tinier holes in that paper, following a horizontal and vertical grid—thus the perforations are born. But the accumulation of electrical notices, paper invoices, health care of employees and bi-weekly pay for punching these holes is too, too costly for the government. The ripple and the stamp will no longer be, eventually. Tin knew. Tin licked now because there would be no licking later and, despite the taste, there's a melancholy there.

⁴ Poor little Tin. Writing implements were becoming increasingly more difficult to find in stores, despite the government statistic that over six billion pencils are formed every year from graphite and clay. Narrowed by saws and needles in various pressure points, bulky incense-cedar logs are cut into thinner pencil-blocks, into thinner pencil-slats, treated and beaten with wax and stain, hollowed out just to be filled by a rude stick of lead and bumped on the bottom with a pale pink eraser. Although officially belonging to the State, Tin adored the idea of having this physical implement within reach, using it to scribble and fill in negative space on paper. Taken with a right hand, the knobby, dulled point would be inserted into the mouth of a manual sharpener, whose blade sliced into the neck of the pencil with a vibrating crunch felt radiating through both arms with each semicircular clockwise turn. Six to ten turns was more than enough to craft a satisfying point; the unnecessary skin flakes to a small mound, which can be easily swept aside by one hand to the edge of the desk, and cupped safely by another as they plunge. The skin is tossed and forgotten, and the point, but the point remains. Tin knew.

Drinking while Urinating

The lid of a powder blue toilet seat leaned against a colorless, porcelain tank that—after a week of exposure to bathing and flossing, spitting and steam—had developed a thin uneven film from one rounded corner to the next. The seat itself had outlined the rim of the bowl, producing something of a fat, glossed bottom lip encircling an opening. The water within was still, a puddle several shades a darker blue, absorbing more light from the 120 watt bulb in the ceiling, a darker blue signifying sanitation—a cube within that tank would chip and bleed with every flush, releasing a synthetic mint and a chemical sunflower yellow, designed to attack a specific bacteria that forms within and by human waste and time and humidity. This puddle, three inches deep, covered a hole of only one inch in diameter, who with every flush successfully swallowed a counterclockwise gallon or so of dark blue liquid and such and such. The toilet with all of its functioning innards waited, open and fused to quite fashionable tiles that remained chilled in winter months and damp in summer months. Despite walking across them every morning, nerve endings in toes always managed to send shocked and appalled signals through the pelvis, to the spine and brain—who acknowledge the messages boorishly and move the body forwards, farther into the bathroom because, despite the sensation, things were to begin and finish.

Undoing the pants was actually quite an easy process. The most comfortable were Egyptian cotton drawstrings; sleep is a simple procedure in these. Relaxed and of several ounces, the pants felt as if sleep were done without pants at all, yet provided the modesty and reassurance of cover. Twined within and without the next, several colored strings created a design that when tumbled and tossed in an overheated drier, caused dizziness and nausea if watched for even an appropriate amount of time, a glimpse even. And in the winter months, with the decent of cold fronts from lands and countries and time zones never before encountered, the thread count never fully blocked the chill, which somehow successfully traveled thousands of miles, around concrete and altitude, to a specific street and time, through sealant, under covers located in a bedroom of one particular apartment complex. Very complex all this movement, and it was considered as the body moved towards the toilet, receiving signals from the toes and turned 180 degrees, facing a doorway which remained open, into an empty living area, that, even if contained an acquaintance or two, would remain open—out of convenience. Just as the drawstrings are a convenience. Untied by the weight and force of a sleeping lateral body, subconsciously turning from chest to back, and back again, to organize comfort and the flow of blood to limbs and toes (quite vocal things), there was no need to fiddle with the pant extensions. Tucking a thumb behind thousands of synthetic, layered worn elastic bands, the thumb stretched the waistline farther still, beyond the limits of the left and right hip bone which rubbed against the band with each step here and there, causing two expected quarter size bruises every night and morning. They were exposed as arms straightened, stiffened, as the upper body leaned towards knees and ligaments bending, pointing towards the living area, summoning the body itself and these pants down, lower, creating a puddle of awkward, unattractive patterns about the ankle area.

Shimmering, glossed and finished with a fine layer of latex, the toilet seat retained a coolness that passed easily into the skin and major organs. Upon complete decent, the small sciatic nerve—branching to the far right bulb of the hip bone, tracing the curvature

and rear of the right buttock—would tingle and tighten during contact, rippling muscle fibers that wrap bone and raise the flesh slightly, into an unorganized chart of bumps. Firm, the seat carried the full weight of the relaxed upper torso, which pushed lungs, the heart, rib cage and several gallons of circulating blood into the thighs, whose surface area spread from left to right, touching inner thigh to inner thigh, blocking a view of calves and the tan line at their center created months before, created by plain cotton socks of a much thicker thread count. In the sitting position, bare feet no longer carried the claves or any burden, no longer sought to find balanced between the body and physics. They sit patiently waiting, pale; the occasional flick and wriggle of a reflex against chilled tile moves one of the smaller digits. The distance between arch and floor can be felt as a draft from the windows of the living area crawls through a meshed screen, dense, falling and smearing and spilling over pass the bathroom threshold, once again finding its way beneath covers—this time the puddle of unfashionable design at the ankles—and snuggled into this space. Chill, then, had quite a presence—nearly affectionate, touching multiple points of the body, silently, finding sensitive areas normally covered.

Despite the sit, the upper torso remained free to move its limbs and slightly turn the trunk itself at a waist now naked. With the legs stationary and bent, a turn required a shift at the shoulders—and the turn needing to face the sink at the right, meant that the *right* shoulder had to shrug backwards towards the spine, behind itself, incidentally moving the left shoulder forward without conscious effort; connected muscles crossing the chest and back play see-saw, moving shoulders in continual contrary direction. The trunk, a bystander in all of this conflict, has no complaints and moves with the rhythm, twisting at the hip. Abdominal muscles stretch and strain, pointing in the direction of an empty glass resting upon a countertop. The glass was always there, is always located to the right of the cold tap water handle, that squeaked and squawked with a turn opening the valve and closing the valve. The sound suggested rust, suggested water had seeped through piping designed not to allow water to seep through, causing rust. Persistent, water found a way, and slowly broke down the metal, who squealed in pain as a fractured edge rubbed against another fractured edge. As the right hand turned the knob, there came the familiar pitch, followed by the familiar flow of clear tap.

Fingertips of the left hand directed the glass beneath the flow. Water bubbled and rose to the glass's midpoint, blurring the scene; the sliding door of a shower stall bent and smirked, light refracted and yellowed, fingertips bloated and grew into proportions where individual lines and their semicircular directions, beginning and end and their merging, could be seen. A squeal followed the closing of the valve and four lost drops made their way from the faucet's nozzle, plummeting, dissolving into the tap to complete a drink needed to end a thirst that had dried the inner lining of gums and lips, who had cracked at some point during the night and refused when blood had clotted at the opening. Satisfied, the left elbow drew back, bones in the left shoulder rotated dragging the glass to the chest, turning the trunk and moving the right shoulder past the spine to its original point. There the body sat with a glass of water—and the sight and the urge to ingest moved from the back and primal area of the brain to the forehead, where it was decided, yes, to bring the glass to dehydrated lips and drink.

A bulby bottom lip pressed against the edge of the glass, against the rim, flattening pigmented skin, leaving an impression of diagonals blindly crossing direction. The water's chill had infected the cup, spreading northwards to the opening where the bottom lip acted as support for the tilt to come. Braced and puckered, the lip felt a slow altering in weight from a bundled distance at the base, to an evenly distributed middle, to a rushed impact with the top lip that quivered, slightly coming ajar, allowing this liquid inside, through gaps between teeth, tickling gums who tapped and pulsed the water's arrival into a message for a nervous system to prepare. A refreshing lack of taste covered the surface area of the tongue, removing old saliva that had fused and crusted, removing weak acids and digestive enzymes that found no bread to digest. All this mixed into the tap water, building into a ball at the foot of the esophagus.

Some distance below, the tingle of urine was felt against a spiraling and circular collection of bladder muscles. They came undone, slowly unfurling and stretching the little sac that had filled over a period of sleep, which was adequate, despite several twists and flops, and the auditory blare of a traveling barge passing through the nearby river. This reflex, this unfurling, caught the attention of nerve endings that parentally watch over the muscles and spout warnings of concern if these muscles take matters into their own hands. Over the pelvic bone and up, up the Grecian chorus round-robin went, to the pons and cerebrum, yes, the muscle is relaxing, and yes, what is to be done? Although a spinal reflex, an innate urge, it is one—and possibly the only one—facilitated and inhibited by thought. Boorishly the higher brain centers responded, sending a common telegram nearly on repeat several times a day, from the pons and cerebrum, back through spinal pathways to these muscles who vibrated in restraint, awaiting word to either continue relaxing or tighten up, tut tut. It will have to wait a moment.

A swallow began. The bulby uvula tucked upward and to the rear, blocking entry to the nose; cartilage tarped the trachea, covering the area so inhales and exhales could continue. With safety first, the ball of tap and saliva and acids were shoved into the throat and paddled by muscles and more muscles, who are controlled and directed by that pons in the head there (quite a verbal thing). It fell, guided by thumping contractions, all the while triggering a bright sensation of inward chill that did not feel like sickness, but a shock that was welcome, wanted, and the flow from the glass to the mouth and to the throat continued in a stream, triggering multiple contractions very similar to the ones down there, where muscles finally received a familiar message, one to recline, one to let the bladder go limp, causing the waste to descend, through thin muscular piping, out, out, hitting the porcelain of the toilet, *peris-peris stell-ein-stell-ein* in rhythmic slaps, sounds in unison with the muscles' movement down here and up there. Toes wriggled, awaiting the emptying of the glass and the emptying of the bladder. Toes wriggled, anticipating the next walk across bathroom tiles, which may come in an hour or so.

watching dust in the sunlight

Suspended, a spot of dust was highlighted, hovering, enveloped in a moment of stillness. Inside a room with pale walls and appliances from countries whose language is a collection of dashes, afternoon sunbeams outlined the dust's composition, a collision of skin cells and hair and bread crumbs lost from a plate that had carried morning toast, tinted to a hue of tanned Mediterranean sand. Their impacts and smatterings—caused by the tugs and shoves of drafts from the same window pierced by light, lifting each into an unorganized current and directly into the oncoming path of another unorganized current—led to fine, immeasurable and forgettable explosions, but explosions nonetheless, which formed unpalatable distributions of energy and angled shapes; hooks, curves, c's, u's and t's and several other letters not used very often due to their audible noise and poor aesthetics. Puzzling together, the bodily waste and excess crumbs formed an object that had no intent on direction or purpose, but merely found itself existing as it did now, burning away slowly under the height of the sun, in a formaldehyde pool of a pleasant yellow.

*

A short time ago, a skin cell had died. During prompt morning showers and unexpected downpours from the west, it provided the waterproofing needed to protect veins, blood cells carrying hormones of utmost importance and forearm muscles. It was one minute member of an overpopulated organ that wrapped and rewrapped a body from scalp to pinky toe. Misshapen, something anonymous dropped from a high altitude, it took the shape of no shape really, but managed to protect nerve endings from the precarious edge of sheets of paper, handsomely sacrificing itself to accept an open wound, which healed with scar tissue that bubbled and warped the cell further. With a lack of ego and an abundance of concern, during summer months or unseasonable heat waves, the cell would secrete, secreted fluids that reflected and shimmered the scars—all to keep that one small area of the body comfortable and chilled. When the body whined in need for a *controlled* heat or antiseptic topical ointment to treat a bloated red mosquito bite, the cell relaxed its security, allowing the heat or creamy prescription to permeate the epidermis, below to the hair shaft, to the erector muscles and, if necessary (depending on the body's low temperature or the doctor's prescribed strength), directed the external source of heat or cream for transcellular transport.

Yes, but, there is a time in every cell's life, no matter it successes and triumphs and chivalry, where there no longer is any time remaining. Beginning at the outermost circumference, hydration is lost—as is communication from the body itself, despite the unconditional concern and effort given in the past. The body no longer wants to do with the cell: it is old, familiar and hopelessly devoted. There is a new cell underneath, just beneath this one, that has been formed and patiently waiting to replace our cell, to secrete, absorb, protect and cool, to usurp and take credit; it is fresh and moist and makes promises to serve the body efficiently, with a youthful glow and enthusiasm. Our cell is slowly weaned, cut off from vital water and fluids, and begins to die, a process smeared over seven long days, until the center of the cell has crisped and dried out completely. Petrified, the forearm begins to tingle where our cell had once functioned so proudly. The lack of water feels crawly, itchy and the natural response is to bend the fingers and

use the blunt tips of nails to scrape at the area. With an upwards, downwards and sometimes circular motion, the nails leave red trails tracking the direction of intended comfort. It took several impacts—from front, back and side—to loosen, shift and uproot the deceased. There was no sensation of detachment, only a brief, crisp draft that sifted through the window's screen and poured over the forearm, lifting the dead cell, ascending.

Bearing witness: a short, thin vellus forearm hair that projected and bowed, solemnly, from the epidermis. Several weeks older than the cell, it has seen this cell cycle previously and is learned enough, just enough, to realize it is one hair of many, and will be taking part in one of many cycles the body commands, endures. It sprouted from a follicle, a tiny pocket in the dermis—a good friend that wrote to the cell often, spoke daily to it, discussing metabolism and metabolics and such—and was whipped around by an erector muscle that was more often than not quite excitable and emotional. Drafts, powerful music or a dramatic scene in cinema easily stirred the muscle. Growing tense, it tugged the hair, as they are a genetic pair, flowing together, up with sharp notes and higher still as a film reaches climax. The muscle's mood swings would bubble the skin, plumping the cell and the surrounding base of the hair, giving it a half centimeter or so in height. The view gave way to experience, seeing from the above the entire length of the arm from fingertip to elbow, all the hairs and all the pores. There was a sense of camaraderie being one of many, one, but realization as well—that each pore would eventually relax and release the hair that planted itself.

Yes, there is a time in every forearm hair's life when the follicle which had given support over the past several months, suddenly shrinks, growing tighter—a grip that is clenched with such force it can only be interpreted as a last embrace, an embrace to press one body against the other in hope an impression would remain, memorizing the personal twists and turns and markings of this hair, which will be released and thrown into chance or fortune or misfortune. At the very base of the hair, within the body, in dermis, between vessels carrying blood cells, this embrace takes place, briefly but passionately nonetheless—to where a layer of skin actually attempts to crawl up the trunk of the hair, to consume it, out of guilt perhaps, until, it recedes, pulling back, leaving the hair slowly, touch by touch, leaving the hair in a state of mild confusion, at first. The hair is learned, remember. With the retraction comes a recollection, of cycles that are in process and are to continue, and yes, this must be the first step in a new hair's cycle and the last step in this hair's cycle. The hair is learned and has accepted this Truth, whatever its purpose in the scope of things, which the hair could not see centimeters above the skin when the erector muscle found itself shocked and appalled by some mechanical noise, a blender, on mix. Mix. Mix. Mix. A pulse cycle. The hair *did* see the curious bald pores, empty, randomly specked across the forearm and it was wondered why, then how—all questions suddenly answered by a surge of skin and its retreat.

Dots of carbohydrates, here and there, entwined within fabric folds of a rug—hiding them well—these dots had little to any interest in the drama above. They had been snapped by teeth, in a mouth, moist, snapped and separated from an uneven square slice of toast, that had once been called bread, bought two weeks prior and had lost some moisture due to

some organic process that ages good things. The bread was placed in an electric toaster that doubles as a small, hardy oven to save space in small spaces. Its metal tray, which heated to an unsafe temperature for human skin, fit four slices of bread comfortably when laying down, reclining. Only two slices were needed at the moment. The extra room allowed for extra air to be heated, moving, slapping against complex sugars, which tinted and hardened, making toast. A *ding* followed, signifying the perfection of medium-well. With index and thumb extended, with curling the other three fingers, maneuvering the wrist and palm a safe distance from the metal tray, the toast was pinched and plucked and placed on a plain white dish.

The slices had a moment of rest, laying now, one atop the other, no air to batter their tinted façade, they cooled, naturally, reduced to their normal body temperature. Hollow pock marks, unstable angles caused by the random growth patterns of yeast were emphasized by the plate; they combined to form a breakfast meal that caused salivation and swallows. To a pair of eyes the tints and to a set of nostrils the warm scent of aging bread was actually quite charming. The body is attracted to the lack of symmetry as hunger increases, lowering standards of the usual aesthetic qualities and colorful schemes that taunt taste buds and turn chins. The toast is acceptable for now, under the circumstances of a tightened stomach searching for sustenance. So the hand, once again, returns to a pinching position that so successfully maneuvered around the hot metal tray and plucks the slice of toast, by chance, layered atop the other, bringing it to lips, parted, slipping a rounded corner of the toast through the gap between jaws, pausing, paused, until these jaws close. The hollowed pock marks and angles snap, braking down under the force of blunt teeth, muscle and will. Their sounds of undoing travel through bone, up tendons in the jaw and into the ear canal, spiraling counter clockwise and drained by cilia until clean decipherable pulses are created and sifted by neurons, directing the sounds to a spot in the brain where it is understood *these* mechanical noises mean hunger will end soon enough.

Yes, not every ounce of toast makes it into the mouth and into the digestive track. Bits are scattered as the teeth bite, as angles yeast had made crack and toast darts into obtuse directions. Their speed carries them several feet, through the air, until their speed is constant and their minimal weight drags the piece down, down onto a rug, where spotting them becomes difficult as hues of the toast and hues of the rug mesh. The bits sit and wait, several yards from the deceased skin cell, several yards from a hair still in bowing formation. They all sit and wait. Hours pass, molding into a week—the rush of feet or a weak draft changes their exact location, they pass silently one another, around the room, warmed and chilled by alternating day and night. During this time, traveling over times zones, a storm crawls with the use of alternating positive and negative charges. Air molecules are shaken by the instability and dash, dash, moving causing wind, a cold wind whose density easily bypassed the frail mesh of a window. Into the room, smearing with force, dividing into various streams, the wind, now drafts, lift each toasty bit, the skin cell and hair, up, up, up and into the other, now one.

*

It had become unusually warm and pleasant, this current weather pattern, in this beam of sun. Floating between rays was a joy, a rich moment, a pleasure that did not come so often. Three or four minutes hovering and spotlighted, raised the internal temperature five or six degrees and continued in such a pattern—a positive correlation of sunlight to temperature to time, all increasing, up, up, up—cooking the piece of dust, a piece of dust blissfully unaware, a piece of dust whose Picassoed angles led it wobbling in random directions when maximum height was reached, when stillness came undone. This was pleasant. There was no rush, just existence, feeling warm, the warm air, the lack of any gravitational pull, then warmer, warmer, then suddenly aware of the cooking. This was unpleasant. How could a rich moment become too rich? Plump with sun, light, the dust began to burn away at either end, rounding out the c's and u's and t's, the crumbs, buffing out the edges, wait, please wait, burning, producing the undetectable smell of burnt hair, producing no sound, just burning, please wait, at an equal rate, until the middle was the beginning and end and, then, nothing.

plunging into cold water

The sky was a uniform blue, the atmosphere dry, lacking symmetric water crystals that usually develop in clumps of twisted hairs, forming, one atop the other, spontaneously, bloating into clouds and weather patterns which find themselves thumbing over the sun—and eventually past—but first thumbing right over the sun with a back turned, blocking light rays which happened to travel time itself to reach this point, this exact point. The rays entered the atmosphere at an acute angle, cutting, evaporating any such gases or solids or semisolids that found themselves at the moment of transcendence, transcending into a new form, suddenly ending, failing, as the rays continued to flow, travel to earth, to land, to this beach. Pressed and precise, the rays in militaristic stomp carried themselves with proud weight, impeding over air molecules, heating them, completely changing the new world it had entered, raising the temperature of the beach and the biological temperature of its inhabitants who happened to take note of the clear, uniform sky and decided, yes, this is a good day to divide into hours of reclining and sitting before an ocean that no matter the amount of rays and their charge, managed to remain an ocean, a body so much cooler than those on the sand.

The rays strike layers of air, strike layers of skin upon a body clothed appropriately for a day warmer than usual, cooler than past weeks, but very warm and increasingly so as the rays continued unchallenged. This sense of warmth is internal, all internal, triggered first in the outermost wrapping of the skin—flat cells of non-existent shape, merely to block out the rain and to keep in the blood, tickled by the rays, poked and pinched, taken off guard by laughter, until those rays are given full access to layers underneath. These cells have shape, more character, that of beeswax, sewn within and around their hexed structure nerve fibers and melanocytes, pumping native colors that identify race and category—tiny boxes that produce tiny boxes so to speak. The thickness of skin is sleek, thin about the shoulders, girthy about the palms and heels but thinner, much thinner about the chest. The rays enter quickly here, fingering a Chopin number across emotional fibers that pulse every note, tat a tata ta, to the spine already organizing the flow of messages from nether regions—the buttocks sitting, feeling flattened or receiving messages from slumping muscles of the back, feeling obtuse—yet the spine can manage, organize—it has done this for a lifetime.

The exact key, tempo, a note marking the center of a measure—this so-called “warmth”—is round-robin perfectly, an exact match from one nerve ending in the skin to the other, deep and deeper within the body, from one synaptic gap to leaping over another synaptic gap up, up, up into the spinal chord of the brain. The nerve endings believe this sensation of incoming rays is warmth, yet it has to be decided so by the brain—the animalistic biological subconscious brain and the Hello-My-Name-Is conscious brain, and the rest of the body must react accordingly, for safety, for cooling. Panting, rushing, the nerves replay the message of incoming rays at the core of the brain (*listen!*) at the animal area, which is puppet master to muscles and heart beats and blood pressure and blinking—all the lovely things not thought of during the course of a day and night, in slumber, thinking which would surely keep one away from sleep, having to organize blinks and heart beats and mixing hormones.

The song is familiar and intense; shaking skin cells, moving, causing friction and heat, the rays had raised internal body temperature; this is action and the body calls for reaction, the kind of response, impulsive response an animal makes, to fight. The message needs to no longer continue moving throughout the brain; a decision is made without thought, a reflex faster than thought, an attack plan is sent back in the direction from where the bitter sweet sounds of Chopin squeaked. Back in the skin, bundled, knotted and visually regrettable spindles luckily tucked far below the skin vibrate. Pulsing they begin to make a Metropolitan of sorts—mixing fats, bile-ish urea and waste finished with a pinch of salt. The liquid is clear until absorbed by shirts 99% cotton and less than 1% spandex, given as a holiday gift (unfortunately seen above the skin); the chemical reaction produces a fun banana yellow that is permanent. There are no shirts here, now, upon the beach. The skin is exposed and up the piping, through an open vent of a pore the Metropolitan mix spouts, leaking over the palms of hands, soles of feet and horizontally across the forehead, stuck in furrowed brows considering the unexpected increase in temperature and the unexpected increase in uncomfortable sweat. The modern, evolved conscious brain has finally caught on to the change in environment.

There are several conversations considering what to do with this sudden uncomfortable situation. Sweat is drying, cooling a hairless mammalian body; the animal brain congratulates itself as overheating is now averted, sweat glands are pumping. The conscious brain is not as happy. It feels unpleasant as the smell of the Metropolitan burrows under nostrils; fingertips no longer feel a clean, smooth body, as it is now moist and slick, almost inhuman. And the internal heat, although contained under triple digits, remains a bit too high, enough to shift flattened buttocks left, then right, and straighten the back in annoyance, as though stressing to find a position that could provide comfort, a chill for example. It is wondered how to solve this issue.

Nerves that make up the lips, beneath the welcoming pink fold occasionally bitten during moments of consideration, weighed heavily upon the muscles connecting the lips to the face. An overactive, oversensitive bulby puff in the I area of the noggin layered unhappy thought upon unhappy thought in these nerves until their weight dragged down, down the muscles, until a frown had formed signaling to the heated world surrounding this body, that this body (the conscious part anyhow) was unhappy. What to do? The physical displeasures of warmth and sweat infected toenails to hair molecules in the scalp, each inch of the surface area containing nagging, vocalizing sensors with a direct line to the spine, to the receiver in the brain who files complaints, Chopin. Drawers were filling with tabbed folders, bloated, popping strained rubber bands used to modestly close them with a hug, a strangled hug. Staples were stapled, piercing one corner of a complaint form to the other—not only were designated areas of forms questioning discomfort were filled (*State Below!*) but the blank spots too: margins, the back of the form, the margins of another form, the back of that form and so on and so. All of this internal brouhaha was explicit upon the external face, whose graceful muscle patterns turned into a hideous production.

In a similar maddening rush, in the distance, obsessive and continuous, waves climbed, entered, shoved the other until one obese, lengthy wave had formed, fused, stretching in

monstrous triumph, up, up, until collapsing under its own weight in a white foamed spill, and transcending into a sound wave, traveling up the beach, up the body and into the ear. Thumbing cilia, the sound is a deep bass vibration, swallowing other petty sounds of the beach. This sound is cold and distempered, arrogant, whose chilling noises recalled past senses of touch. Resting above the eyes, behind unhappy furrowed brows, memories sprout and are plucked—years and years of meeting this ocean on days, hot days such as this one, on a beach, leaking sweat and needing the ocean, embracing the ocean and the ocean pushing away and the effects of this relationship, quick cycles of filth and cleansing. An emotional connection is made between the non-existent past and its experiences with the existent present and *its* situation. There is now motivation to rise from this spot, release the flattened and annoyed buttocks from the ground, stretching the legs, opening veins, rushing blood to calves and thickened soles of feet, to the muscles in the ass regaining shape. There is now motivation to walk to the source of sound, as it is believed there lies solution, salvation.

Out of habit and right-handed tendency, the walk to the ocean begins with a right foot. Buttocks and feet, overgrown with nerves, had been rubbing against a very pleasant beach towel, whose red and white twine had faded over several seasons of summer sun, yet retained the signature buoyancy of cotton. The towel was a buffer between body and surface, a surface beaten and ancient, divided and rounded into bits masticated by the very thing intended to use as aid. The sand is an awkward surface stable and unstable at the same moment, made of a potpourri of individual millimeters that act together forming land. As the weight of bones, fat and thought transfers into the ball of this right foot, the sand splits, as it has done for generations, moving with whatever force deciding to act upon it, compressing, the body dips slightly into the earth. As the arch of the foot arches, narrowing the weight farther still, into sparse inches, the width five digits, the body no longer dips, surprisingly; the billions of individuals underneath the foot form a steady, thick solid whose depth is uncertain, but the body now coming to a full yield has decided, yes, it is safe to continue. The left foot soon follows, pressing into the beach, confidently.

The lack of wind has left the sand limp and open to sunlight since dawn. There is no instinct to fight the heat, no internal relief for the millimeters whose fate is to be weathered. The bits have boiled to a temperature gauged only by living feet and their outgrowth of dramatic sensors. The sand is a second source of heat, from below, each grain containing a temperature the animal mind has identified, recalled as Chopin, and had decided “yes, this is hot,” the kind of dangerous heat learned not to touch at a young age and, in reflex, feet bounce their way forward, up, up, limiting the contact to a bearable amount of time, up, up, as with motion the sweat in between swirls of toeprints acts as flypaper catching sand, sand sticking to bare feet, a sole here and ball there covered with alternating steps, up, up, absorbing heat, up!

After several of these steps, steps forced, steps willed, walking into the abuse of added temperature and pricks of granulated rock at balls and heels of two feet whose fate is to welcome such elements for the span of a lifetime, after such steps—there is a sudden end, a sudden pause in movement as a new sensation is dispersed into pores, a new tune plays

its groove. There is a threshold miles long, fingering the coastline, created by the inhaling and exhaling tide. The feet have found the shore, the fine point where the beach is no longer movable, identifiable bits of grain felt individually by a prodding hand (or toe) but has become a semisolid puddle of sand the color of merlot, a composite of exotic organisms with no hands (nor toes) and human trash bound by a deep chill. Here is the reach of the tide, having several feet of its own, traveling towards the main land in rhythms. Porous and dead, a bit of sand is filled, bloated and dense with salt water, is dragged down, down, by its own suffering weight and capacity, until its shattered body cements into the next bit of sand, filling with the overspill. From a youthful beige, the sand transcends into a wet placid brown, a filthy birthmark, mixed with the scraps of crustations, their expressionless shells empty, a body sucked from a petrified cocoon which had failed to protect, unable to adapt to the hurdling fall from a beak several stories above to the thick semisolid puddle below, in a thud, in a snap, a wasteland of thousands of empty cases in the slow process of a proper burial.

The tide will come and cover, eventually, under water, lost in whitewash and bottles of popular soft drinks, which at some point were opened with a twist, releasing a sigh of relief. The bottles and the dead pass one another, in the mist of being fondled and smothered by ocean currents, who, deciding when play is over, when the most use of the object is used, dried up, boorish, it is left upon the shore for toes to touch. A sensation of pain is transferred from these lost bodies to the one searching for pleasure. Jagged and awkward, the shells, nibbled by tides, tap into feet, bending and aggravating the skin, displacing anger and placing vengeance upon five digits here and five digits there, digits who wriggle in tethered, limited direction in attempts of escape from additional pricks. The *I* is growing in aggrita, losing patience with the surrounding environment and its violent mistreatment towards little things. Anger moves the feet, past the reef of shells, bottles and bloated sand piles, accepting pinch after prick, causing muscles to twitch and flinch, reflexively turning away from pain for only a moment as tendons are commanded by a higher authority to stretch and retract, on, on, into the raging sound in the distance, not to fear the chilling mist blown by the ocean's movement, into the face, into the cheeks and lips, the taste of salt signaling the narrowing distance between the beginning of one uncomfortable journey caused by sunlight, to the beginning of the journey ahead, full of expectation, overwhelming power upon a body covered in a mixture of saline and baked urea.

Pulling Out A Hair

The hairs were washed last Tuesday morning, with a thick liquid product whose ingredients of several –oxides and –tetras, several vitamins of A and B, and the occasional D so often forgotten, combined to form a burnt golden hue promising to restore life to damaged manes, damage done by life itself, when applied vigorously, massaged into the scalp. Squeezed from the midsection of a plastic bottle so well composed by an anonymous agency, so attractive to the eye that the mind believes the promise to be true, to manifest itself in the coming weeks, the chemical shampoo was pressured from the bottle into the palm of a left hand already damp and dripping, thanks to the cascade of tap water from the shower head thumping away, pulsing water from mechanically punctured holes not yet clogged with mildew, green, and green with occasional white sprinkles. With the guesstimate of several teaspoons puddled at the center of the left hand, the bottle was placed back upon a suctioned rack, hugging other shampoos and partnered conditioners whose promise never truly did manifest; it was hoped, truly, when money was exchanged at the local (super)market, that this shampoo was the one, this was the moment which began the era of luxurious, voluminous hair. With the mangling of the burnt hue between two hands, rubbing together, with hope and expectation, friction and tap water reacted upon the liquid, changing its appearance, blooming into a white foam, exposing its A's and B's, and those forgotten D vitamins, its factory composition revealed, reigniting the hope of change about to take place. Slipping into the groove between fingertips and fingernails, the foam was massaged, left, right and occasionally scratched into the thickest layering of any area of the body, the scalp.

Bitten fingertips had anchored into the top most layer, producing five individual pressure points here and five pressure points there, high above, some dozen millimeters or so, above the left and right hemisphere of the brain. Hair, thin and weighted down with wet, provided little as a barrier; the cranial region, white, firm and dense (at times a bit too dense and stubborn) was more than enough protection at the moment, against two hands circling clockwise and counter, nearly burning the product into the skull with impatient urgency. Genetically punctured holes in the skin set shoulder to shoulder, thousands of follicles set in militaristic precision, opened and ahhh-ed the goop, taking their medicine in silent acceptance. Pressed into the pores by fingers, the reduced price shampoo (for a limited time only, and an exclusive sale for members of this particular [super]market) foamed at the mouths of these follicles, unfurling some chemical action and reaction not seen by the human eye, but imagined and hoped for by the human heart. After a rinse, after it was guesstified an appropriate amount of time for the shampoo to work upon the hair, after water had funneled between the muscles in the back and down the spine, after hands now free of foam squeezed the hair free of product, the hands turned the COLD water handle and HOT water handle towards the right wall, tiled blue, stopping the flow of tap, stopping the growth of mildew, a process unseen by the human eye but certainly drew concern from the human heart, after after, the hair was quite voluminous, indeed for a week. The tap water had evaporated, relieving the hair of excess weight, the hair re-inflated to its normal girth and then some. Yes, it was poufy and stayed as such until the following Tuesday morning, when, upon waking under winter sun rays, the hair was felt against the face, forehead, within and out of folded brows in thought, considering a new washing.

The hairs were traced with an index finger, following the curve and forward dip of the skull, meeting the intersection of two plucked eyebrows and northern most spot of the nose. Despite the distance between the skin of the forehead and tip of the finger, the distance created by a gathering of hair between the two, a soft tickle was felt, behind the finger as it traced one inch, two inches, down to the nose. Backing away from this spot, away from the head, eyes instinctively latched onto the sight of a point created by a fingertip, slightly crossing yet managing to focus, recognizing the swoops and dizzying loops of the individual finger. There is no substance that can be seen; there is only felt, at the very tip, a thin gloss, thicker than tap water, slender than the shampoo goop, some natural-made wax coating the tip. Such slickness is common, and it was thought, that no matter the shampoo bought at any market, -super or average, the wax would appear, thankfully, noting a functioning body, not thankful, the hair must be washed again, using more of the product and extra time must be spent as well. The hairs have been buoyant, however, exaggerating movement as the entire body walked up, down an avenue, stairs and the like. Perhaps the label was honest; perhaps the anonymous agency told a truth, it was thought. For a week, fat and cellular waste dribbling from pores of the scalp was deterred. Natural oils and semi-thick liquid now worked upon the hair, the product had worn off with the movement of daily life, etched away by routine, and had to be reapplied, rinsed and repeated as noted in a font smaller than seen here, but with a squint was read and understood, complied with, as some effort has to be taken to make change. Action, reaction.

With the tracing, as the finger slicked over the hairs (which arched over the forehead, bowed, in thank you, bravo) the oils and fats became a natural adhesive, causing a natural embrace reuniting the hairs and skin of the brow, after a week, so long, finally an embrace, so tight, that they had seemingly fused. With each considering thought of washing the hairs, the brows spasms, up, the hairs following, and their wax is felt against the living skin, flicking and bucking, into a roll, then flattening. So close indeed, that it became too close, a disgust gathered at the additional thought and realization that there is some waste gathering, a waste that had gathered in public, enough to glue this part of the body to the other. Enough! The embrace must end! It is the hand that responds, to separate the two, with a pluck formed by an index and thumb, pinching the center of the forehead, herding hundreds of slick hairs and just a bit of the forehead between the narrowing space of the fingers, funneling, closing the distance between the two, fingers unable to be seen, as eyes absorb a very blurry vision of a palm and three digits doing nothing really, curled away, with knuckles close enough to the face to tickle the air around a nose, three fingers waiting for two fingers to pluck, eventually one damn hair, itself so peculiar, growing in a curved manner out from a hole in the head.

There is no sensation between the index and thumb alerting the index and thumb of having trapped a hair. It is just too, too thin (but not frail, no, the shampoo, although affordable and within budget, did provide more than enough of that D vitamin, which had seeped into the hairs accordingly, providing strength and nutrition for each peculiar strand). The thumb, instead, felt the fingertip of the index and the index felt the skin of the thumb, flat and oval, perhaps the distant beat of a heart inside a chest cavity is felt as a muted pulse, *ba dum*, through the thumb. They touch silently, in the mist of a far off,

yet vocal scalp, mouthing the root of this one hair, one of many many hairs indeed, but this one hair as well, not forgotten amongst the multitude. As the thumb and index twitch, bending at the joints, beginning a pluck, the scalp clamps upon a bulbous enlargement which grew months ago, slow and steady, a clump of cells forming a strong base, planting the hair into the skin, filling the pore, taking its shape, intertwining new cells with the knowledgeable scalp. Now, the skin holds onto what is about to be taken, (what else is there to do but protect?) lifting with this base as the hair is tugged, lifting off the skull slightly, hopelessly keeping the embrace intact, produces an alert, that a hair is trapped, within some force and that force is about to remove what has grown.

The mind already knows of this hair, no alert is necessary. The mind chose it, yes, at random, but a choice nonetheless, to pick a hair, to take that hair between two fingers, bend at the knuckles, two large ones at that, maybe a bit too large (sadly there is no crème or goop to perfect knuckles), apply a bit more pressure upon that hair with a squeeze from the index and a squeeze from the thumb (*ba dum ba dum* passing between them), and with one swift (swift is best) jerk of the elbow away from the body, vertically, out the hair would pop with a vague pain the entire body as a whole can withstand easily. This is just one hair. One pluck. One forced separation producing one dulled shock to a system having to interpret so many other real pains. This can be handled. It can be observed too; free and loose, so peculiar this white, pale bulb, sitting at the very start of a long, fibrous earthy brown hair, fed a milkshake of wonders. Oblate, the shape reflects the pore from which it came, a pore, somewhere between the pores upon pores within the scalp, is hallow, awaiting a new growth, as the mind decides, yes, to wash, as it is still early on this Tuesday morning.

the Brunch, which became Lunch, which became Dinner:
an apoptotic story

Within the 142nd establishment along a street cupped between two avenues (named after large, populated locations) a bowl of granola was ordered. Its accompaniments sounded quite appealing, refreshing, paired well with the long thin shadows created at this time of day between the high sun and high buildings, after sleeping late, later than usual, a pleasure. In black ink, the typescript stated in a very organized, bland even, and straightforward manner the combined ingredients of seasonal strawberries, vertically sliced from greens to bulbous point, the peeled pale flesh of one banana, sliced as well, swimming within and out of vanilla yogurt skimmed from a vat brewing on a distant Grecian isle, floating in the Mediterranean. Honey is added, honey squeezed from the belly of a novelty bear; packaging that associates the long, false romantic tale between the two, but squeezed nonetheless, as it is believed when the metallics of a spoon or knife pierce the product in attempts to paw the slow goop out, there is a remote and violating chemical reaction that transfers the bitterness of the cutlery (made on a Japanese isle floating in the Pacific) into the golden blossoms, which, ironically, were chewed with steel canines into a delicious mush that bound the dish, all of its floundering, severed ingredients, including the grain upon grain of the granola itself, harvested in some land locked area of the world. Temptuous, the dish, the fifth selection on the brunch menu, was considered as such, and its title was spoken to a waitress, with brown roots and blonde hair, who had heard these words before (going on three hours by now) yet scribbled its number (#5 of course) upon the blue horizontal lines of an order form to be ripped from its spine and impaled upon the pointy base outside the kitchen window where orders were inhaled and exhaled from the hands of chefs (from a country south of here).

The menu was returned to the waitress, and in return the waitress smiled⁵,

⁵ Dying is a difficult process, though mostly silent, and this death in particular is difficult, deliberate and mute, orchestrated by a series of biological events while patently waiting for a bowl of granola. Poor little cell. Poor little cell, this one in particular, snug in the curvature between the index and almighty middle finger, snug in the thick oblivious surroundings of a Sunday, a patron oblivious to the pending oblivion, a process that had, ironically, caused the differentiation, the division of this index from that long middle finger, forming normalcy, a process that will now engulf the cell in willful cell suicide, thanks to being unnecessary and a danger, in fact, a danger of multiplying, dividing itself at such an old age of seven weeks, it may stumble in its dementia, forgetting what to do, what to do after, say, waking, what to do?, what do I do with this?, and it would tug at its nightgown not knowing what a nightgown is and how to take it off and where to put it to go onto the next step. An innocent, but very dangerous mistake may be done at this point. It may double a gene that doubles again and triples once more, a foul gene that becomes a hideous blob of a thing the rest of the body will want destroyed, unknowingly declaring war and eating away at itself, nibbling the foreign thing and stomach and the lungs, accidentally, innocently because it's reading a series of genes that somehow are foreign for the foreign thing but are exactly like, almost, like the familiar. So confusing. But it will attack it all. And this we cannot have, so this cell must die so a patron can enjoy that bowl of granola.

The cause of and solution to most behaviors, a hormone, found its way out of a gland in the neck and traveled south and left, to the hand, to the space between the index

no teeth, lips only, pulled horizontally from one corner of the mouth and the other, lipsticked with some color that exaggerated beauty and filled the chapped grooves and moistened the dry spots, which, against the sunlight that sifted through the smut of high placed windows, popped and reflected. Snug under the armpit of the waitress was the menu, and in her fingertips the scribbled order, together diagonaled passed tables of two or three patrons (chewing) towards the kitchen to be read in English (a foreign language). The menu was a forgettable design, a pocket, a plastic cocoon to protect an exceptionally white sheet of paper, pores so vacant even the idea of welcoming ink was enough thought to provoke a blush into the shapes of letters, scrambling into words that, too, sounded appealing, but not as quite as the bowl of mixed fruits and granola, not right now, for this moment. The menu jacket, a leatherette of burgundy color, a red wine after some absorption by carpeting, outlined the paper to absorb the battery a menu generally receives, passed hand to hand, hand to table, table to hand, menu stacked atop the body of menus sitting in a pile by the entrance. It is only a matter of time when the single stitching will loosen with the vibrations and poke through the burgundy here and there, tempting the reader to grasp the thread with a pluck and yank the white innard out, pulling, revealing a long continuous strand, following its path around the rectangle, around the corners, capped with a piece of metal, finished in a faux gold coating that chips, revealing black pockmarks, tempting the reader, the patron to pick at the wounds, to fully expose the black metal beneath. Shattered, the menu tatters and falls apart under experience; the paper, comfy between the two sheets of polymer plastic, goes untouched, the font as blunt and rounded as the day it squirted from the mechanics of a printer—a

and middle finger, and unraveled something of a liquid singing telegram of G's and A's and C's, a message for the cell to take care, to take care of itself, for the best, for the good of the whole, in the best interest of the body, a message well understood, and obeyed, for the cell is a good little cell that has always done as it is told. The cell took the message and replied with a smile, no teeth, just lips, smiled and began its organized degradation of cellular organelles, first, by becoming smaller, much smaller than already sized, shrinking and rounding as the outline of the cell stiffens, losing hydration, its innards, its cytoplasm and goo, packing together and appearing dense, its little nucleus imploding under the little weight (but heavy enough) of the goo and stringy chromosomes, who, they themselves, the foundation of all that lives, compacts and balls off into a separate island, floating among the sea of other balled off innards, one by one escaping, sailing, bypassing the cell membrane which had flaked and tumbled in misshapen shapes of blebs, blebish, all while waiting for a bowl of granola.

Chip, chip, chip, smile, no lips, but a smile as the membrane collapsed, bursting, a surge of islands follow, dozens of bodies flow from one cellular body, the smile fragmenting and falling away, happy to comply, knowing its death saved the body from a worse death of melanoma and such and from bad things that grow into very bad problems and ongoing issues, growing in bad directions, this is for the good of the whole, as it becomes many small pieces, flushed, edible pieces that the other cells, larger ones with more purpose, will absorb and consume, in an orderly manner, with respect, on a Sunday, in a relaxed pace, as billions of other poor little cells, 50 billion, throughout the body, through the hours, receive their telegrams, and smile, and collapse, as the patron waits for a bowl of granola.

notable success for a security system that costs less than the bowl of granola itself. The three dimensional network of polymer chains, grasping hands, forming an economical wall of triumph (a sturdy design mimicking that DNA thing), has kept clumsy spills from elbows and hands gesturing in conversation out, OUT!, and away from those virgin pores. From iced tea (unsweetened) to espresso (unsweetened), all hot and cold liquids have been blocked, smacking against nothing but a moat of plastic.

Yes, forgettable indeed. As eyes followed the menu on its journey, riding under the pit of the waitress, its cellulose (somewhere in that polymer structure, so handsome) also flashed in the sun. Riding off as some armored valiant hero, some stereotype seen in pictures, riding off, well under the pit. It was also watched, the order, it was witnessed, an impalement: the order. It had made its way to the kitchen, a short trip, one that zig-zagged, was very exciting journey, but a short life, ending in impalement; it will now be resurrected as a bowl of edibles. Was it regrettable, the order? Memory: three egg omelet with the choice of mushrooms, tomatoes, onions or bacon (all diced into bits), the second choice of the list, while the first, basic and cozy, was three eggs the way you wish, married to both potato wedges, fried and spiced, browned and blackened, and a side of toast, white or wheat, maybe rye, toasted to a stiffness that could sustain itself after a dip into coffee or bear the piled weight of eggs, made the way you wish. Scrambled was the most popular choice, a conclusion drawn from a scan of the room, overlooking shoulders and avoiding direct facial contact of patrons who chewed while speaking to a companion sitting across the table, who nodded and chewed, attempting to hear their words through masticating sounds of jaws through food; the scrambling was done with quick pumps of a wrist, all in the wrist it seemed, of the hand gripping the handle of a Teflon pan. The pan was shoved forward and pulled back, promptly, as its contents of yoke, cracked pepper and salt, a spot of cream, splurged and twisted at the pan's edge, flirting between the possibility of a liquid disaster and organized skill, at the point in culinary time where it was time the shoulder tugged and returned the pan to a steady level at a midsection (to a stomach uninterested in such food after hours of dallying with it), a force which pulled the contents into the center of the pan: a violent spurt to mix an order ordered some time before this bowl of mixed seasonal fruit and granola.

There was no regret in ordering this particular order. Rocking to and fro on the irregular limbs of a wooden chair (it was an irresistible motion that produced an irresistible *click clack* of sorts), the fruit was pondered and time was kept, measured with the sounds produced by the feet from below, at the end of the chair's irregular (irresistible) little legs. Chefs tickled ingredients, tinkering away, patrons chattered, patrons chewed (throats swallowed, no incidents followed but several coughs were heard in the distance), porcelain coffee cups met their saucers, teeth and prongs nipped against their matching plates, a laugh made its way into middle of the establishment, to the center of the room, eventually dissolving into the remaining noises. The heat from a maximum capacity, the vibrations of this clatter against the skin fueled thoughts about the bowl's ingredients, strawberries for example. Quite an accessory. Its flushed flesh, red, spotted with dimples small enough to be considered attractive upon a small body of sweet tissue, yet large and fertile enough to house some seven, fourteen, forty-two, even seventy chromosomes per seed. Unassuming and sweet. Born green and pale, a sickly thing upon a sickly hanging vine, it develops into a ruby bulbous shape so easily sliced and handled that while managing the fruit one can only believe this promiscuous little berry

(so irresistible) was destined for a life paired with just about any and everything. Browsing, walking between rows and rows upon strawberries, they grow in fields, just waiting to be fingered off the vine, picked, yes you, threaded with string and taken away to some home to be fixed as likened and eaten. At least that's how they were gathered, on strings. Strew-berige. Olde English. A very long past, with a present that has not changed much since; its future will be the same as well, those chromosomes recycling, producing the same image, the same body over and over, a body that will end up at the bottom of bowls for generations.

From the adjoining table tangible words were overheard, a check was asked for, a waitress happily agreed to fetch. In her absence the check's division was discussed, as one bill from this wallet and two from the other would be joined leaving a sum that supplied what was owed and a remaining amount twice that of the tax (of an Eastern state). This was the tip and the tip was a nice pat on the head for retrieving water, replacing a fork that had been accidentally elbowed to the floor, asking if more coffee was needed or if more hot water for the black tea was desired (vanilla beans were added to the tea bag turning out a heavier scent usually emitted from black tea, this was acknowledged in the tip as well). The waitress returned with the check folded and turned front side down, with a smile, no teeth, lips only. The patrons complied with their agreement; unfolding leather wallets (the fashion at the time), pinching a bill (the other pinching two) and placing the total between a foggy glass of water and torn, emptied packets of refined sugar. The breeze blew some granules into the air, their flight pattern lost against the arms and chests and clothing of customers also waiting for an order; they will end upon the floor, to be swept after closing, after one in the morning. Several hours from now. Already. The click clack of the chair had stopped for a moment (a moment not measure by anything in particular) when it was realized how many click clacks had click clacked. The food had not arrived as of yet.

But it was a Sunday, and it was considered a time of patience and unhurried action; toes tucked in shoes curled, uncurled, pushing with enough force an entire body, the rocking continued, and the clicks clacked head first into the surrounding noise of the establishment, slowly dissolving and unheard. Unhurried. As the honey to be added (to the bowl, when the chefs get to the order, if they ever get to it—oh come now, be patient). Honey religiously follows an hurried pace, resisting, no matter the angle of the container or the pressure applied to the belly of the bear, honey sulks at the same rate, bubbling forward, seemingly at its own will, each of its multiple layers of sweet molecules choosing sloth, each layer sticking and pulling and rolling over the other as they tumble forward, out of the tippy top of the bear's yellow cap, funneled into a thin circular exit, sculpting the fructose, glucose and poor maltose into an ionic column, high above its final destination, be it an ice cream dessert or fruity brunch, or over a cup of tea heated at the threshold of boiling, thinning, as gravity tugs at the bulby mass gathering at the southern most point, sugar building, falling at a torturous rate, unraveling before the one who intends to consume it, the one who anticipates its unique natural taste, the one whose lips will pucker and cheeks will shallow and collapse as buds of the tongue interpret the sugars, thiamin, riboflavin and lovable metals of copper, iron, magnesium and zinc as familiar, sweet as the day the bear—molded with a smile, no teeth, just thin lips pulled back into furry cheeks—was purchased at the local market that had long since closed down, hopefully not due to any sanitation issues issued by the State department of

hygiene. If such is the case, there can be no blame placed on the bear and its viscous innards. Liquid honey resists not only gravity and motion, its phenomenal number of grams of sugar kill bacteria; its lack of water provides no nourishment for foreign things (from southern countries, or those across oceans) to take part of and enjoy. Its soul is pure, and highly concentrated, so much so that it is trusted enough to be consumed and was trusted enough to fill the stomach of mummified Egyptian kings, to preserve. Is this true? It is believed so, and belief continues, until it begins to collapse as the table which had just cleared of patrons is cleared of their empty tea cups, the rind of French toast, blots of brown syrup that had missed their mark and several bunched disposable towelettes, browned.

The porcelain dishes *tink* as their rounded edges knock against one another, as they are placed between fingers and rested upon forearms, layered and gathered. The dishes are seasoned, used to being (mis)handled, as one spot here and one spot there is missing the consistent polymer finish which makes a white dish so impressive; there is a creator, revealing the stratified grit and violent act of creating pottery, a grainy spot where the orbit of a heavier dinner plate collided with this particular little dish, sending its finish into the distance, into its own orbit, its speed carrying its weight so far, it falls into a curve, a little piece landing upon the floor, aside the sugar crystals that never quite made it into a tea cup, to be dissolved, but stepped upon by those taking a seat, this seat here at the adjoining table, suddenly filled, new patrons, new order, same smile, no teeth. The waitress continues her cycle, one that repeats over and over after a patron's choice is made, a religious walk to and from the kitchen where steam rises from the spout of sinks and cooked egg yolks and sanitized dishes stacked one atop the other, to be dished out, decorating the table top, partnered with a knife and fork rolled in a white towelette (the spoon flounders, misplaced to right of the dish, a casual Sunday indeed), a glass placed at the upper right, clear water meeting its rim, a happy ensemble, an average one, *click clack, click clack, click clack*, as others are served their scrambled eggs, peppered, toast, rye, meals arrive and placed before their consumer, consumers so happy to meet their orders in the flesh, once an idea, a possibility of what one believes is scrambled eggs, suddenly greeting its manifestation, after a wait, introduced to this particular chef's interpretation of scrambled eggs, happily received, after a weighty wait, pass the salt.

The waitress passes, making eye contact, making eye contact with the table top, the fork, the knife, the lonely spoon, no smile, perhaps an indicator or register that no granola has been placed as of yet, oh dear, to the kitchen, an orbit curving towards the moving limbs of the chef, their sweat, the circular steam, towards the piles of used towelettes, the waitress pulled through fading sunlight, to the kitchen where, upon the outgoing counter lies toast, French, coiffed with bloody raspberries, joined with fingery sausage panned fried in its own fat, an addictive waste product, ordered twice it seems, as a side dish as well, four links, sweating, and a cheese sandwich pressed, its alternating stripes of tan and pale to create alternating textures of crispy and billowy when bitten, and a very green salad swimming in very acidic, black, vinegar, spotted with a mustard seed picked in a dry region, nothing, no granola, no strawberries, no honey has been squeezed, no bowl taken from the sanitized rack of the dish washer. There is an exchange of words, between the waitress and the chef, whose sweat has gathered as a bulbous mass outlining the brow, their words uncertain, mixed slowly into the chatter of the establishment, *click clack click clack click clack*, their lips alternate in motion,

question, response, question, a shrug, is that a response? The *click clack* stops. Concern. Concern as the waitress slings an orbit back to the table area, on a course to this table, with a smile, teeth, lips pulling back, the teeth are white and surprising, why teeth?, why so sudden?, why the abnormal orbit to this table?, to recite a telegram, an apology, from the chef, as the granola, I'm sorry, especially for the wait, the granola, but we have honey, the granola, we happened to run out.

breathing, chest upon the floor

The towel was white, and a familiar texture. One of cotton, boorish and absorbent, its horrific twists and links of fibers loomed and looped together through and through, one the other, fiber upon fiber, forming the shape of thin, pale rectangle used, ironically, to cover and protect the naked body, for example, after bathing or showering, fibers who with remarkable possessive behavior, grab at water droplets that had not slipped from cleaned skin and upon contact grow thick as the water permeates, evenly disperses, traveling in defined mathematical progression north and side to side, configuring altitude, temperature and boorish gravity, in momentum, forward, on a course to the lost, achromatic center of the rectangle, moving, allowing space for additional droplets to enter and occupy the colorless fiber, expanding in girthy happiness until capacity, damned capacity, where one end of a loop is gathered in a knot and anchored to the other little end, hello, giving shape of an off, very off, childish in scribble O, within a rectangle, but an O nonetheless that has finally met saturation and the naked body, poor skin, remains damp here and above there, no matter the number of pats as the fibers have filled. That was a distant time, however, separated by several hours; the towel was hung from a rack bolted into bathroom tile, tiled in a northwards and side to side pattern that mimicked the twirl of draining bath water, it hung in plain sight of day for hours. Immovable light rays forced their way onto the towel and into the towel, traveling farther and faster than the obese water droplets had traveled or could hope to travel. The light had rid the cotton of water, burning the fibers into purity for thousands of seconds, as they passed, forming hours, until the towel, expunged, had grown stiff, nearly petrified from the initial experience of moist saturation to a sudden dry exorcism following shortly thereafter. Here it hung, slumped and stiff, in this exploited state, spotlighted by afternoon sun, it somehow retained a purpose and was quite useful in one manner. Grabbed at one firm end and the other, it was placed horizontally upon a parquet floor, its fibers overstretched, silently chipping in dehydration. This new corrugated form was the right thickness to protect that clean skin from direct contact with the flamboyant, false wood mosaic that composed the living quarter's floor.

Ornamental, large happy squares were introduced to the room, to replace marble that had been impulsively laid, improperly laid, leading to spotish rotting beneath the surface; with organic things dividing underfoot, creating their own artistic designs, the glue binding the slabs to the foundation had come unsticky and the marble shifted in the direction of a walking foot. As a replacement, walnut, cherry, lime, pine, maple colors were considered but a classic oak faux wood image was chosen on a weekday and installed on a weekend with confidence despite the previous mishandling; as the squares were puzzled together, as the last tongue fit into the last groove, there flowed a sense of pride as well, as the packaging noted the same material is found in the parade room of Late Baroque Northern Italian dwellings. The faux wood was used in that particular area since denizens traveled over and over and passed through the room to the next quite often; it was a transient room. The traffic left beaten and leather scuff markings behind, hideous signs of history so quickly that each square had to be replaced (*quickly please!*) by a fresh square (*before the next pair of eyes please!*), fused to a grainy board, that, too, was nicely priced, so much so that the parade room always shined, always had new squares (*what lovely squares!*) and always made a wonderful impression, one of cleanliness and wealth. The squares in the living quarters, here, just underneath the

towel, did shine, but after actually living in the living quarters, walking to and from a kitchen with food in hand, or from the bathroom to the bedroom after bathing (the living room being a transient room), the fine film of laminate used to protect the (faux) wood chipped here and there thanks to a moving toe or shoe, leaving pockmarks () and history, a history that for now, for about five and a half feet in length worth of squares, was covered by a white, unhappy towel, in afternoon sunshine.

It was time to rest, unravel the body, allowing the head to relieve its eight pounds or so of weight, its living, daily turmoil, the filmy stress that develops about the forehead, outlining the jaw, forming silent clenches, it was time to permit the vertebrae at shoulder height to go limp, simply go limp, as the parquet several centimeters below will cup the head and bear its minimal weight, happily, and the towel, a legion of worn cotton fibers numbed into prickly spokes, embeds into the flesh of a right cheek, poking into the muscular tissue, that, although, can form countless personalized gestures understood and mostly misunderstood by surrounding humanity, are really quite sensitive things, the fibers bruising individual strands of blood vessels within the confusing woven sheet of blood vessels that blush or retract color in the face, spearing a blood vessel, one after the other, piercing a hole, letting the oxygenized blood drip and permeate into the flesh, north and side to side, during relaxation, as the weight of the head into the consistency of the floor smears the cheek. The hundreds of dozens of pokes are pains that can be ignored, as the release in the vertebra, that pleasure, is significantly weightier than the bloodletting, worth the attention, yes, feeling the spine at either end, by the head, and by the other cheeks, is relieved of body mass, giving form to a straight line, relieved of an unconscious hunch that has been identified when looking at a passing reflection in store windows. The rim of the right nostril, not so much ignored but rather not of much thought day to day, the rim was suddenly identified as a part of the body, as the fibers, in their dried agony, reached forth to reflect that agony upon any object in their scant perimeter, found the rim and all damage that could be applied amounted to something of a distant tickle the muscle above the lips and beneath the nose reflexively moved away from, to the left, twitching the upper lip and deviated tissue of the nose to the same location, happily, smeared, a tickly tapping at the threshold of annoyance but not venturing over, no just tolerable, not enough to overpower the wonderful sense of nothingness washing about the spine and attached muscles and nerves wrapped and rewrapped north and side to side and unseen by the eyes but very much aware of their presence as these seem to be the most vocal do-dads of the body when hunched, planting a floor. The nostrils and hairs within, happily underneath the rim, detected no unsettling scents, no oils used to disinfect the faux wood safely, with no chance of rotting the wood half of the faux when in contact with water, an assortment of chemicals that form a lemon scent, one of several thousand lemon rinds per teaspoon, a greasy liquid when rubbed between fingers, one that laminates the laminate and cleans simultaneously when fully dried and no longer poses a slipping hazard, this artificial scent was obstructed by the stiffened fibers of the towel, all pores had sealed and no mechanically constructed molecules could lift, diffuse, and enter the nose, flicking at the hairs within to Morris a code to the eight pounds or so in the skull, to tell of the faux presence of lemon and their rind. No scents, only the increasing warmth at the bulbous tip of the nose as sunlight continued to flow from the window facing southwest.

The chest itself felt no pangs or pokes, no tickles from below, from the fibers, who were unable to finger their way through the white Egyptian cotton shirt, tanned at the rim of the neck, holed at the seam by the waist, itself worn during times of solitude, sleep or when a fit of momentary malaise sets in about the eyes and muscles, tossed above the head, arms through the arm holes, worn when there is no other set of eyes in the room, during personal times that need to be guarded rightly so, a task fit for an object that can bear the weight of dependability, guarding the skin from the outside world, guarding the chest from impalement with its thick, uniform thread count which has produced a fine, smooth but patternless shirt. The chest only felt the weight of the torso drip from the back, spinal area, to the front, squeezing the small rolled balls of fat and tissue in the breast into a thinned sheet, pressing the lactiferous ducts shut, the weight of so many layers, that of the rich and bloody pectoral muscle, fatigued from silently assisting with planting the faux wood squares hidden beneath the towel, suddenly of no use, reclining upon the ligaments of the chest, itself feeling the shove of one, two, three, four, five ribs housing very delicate, but very powerful tissue involved with inspiration and expiration, the flamboyant network of interwoven anterior, middle and posterior muscles joining together countless times during a lifespan to lift, to heave, to elevate and fix the upper ribs into a higher position, to tuck them north and to the side, for a little extra literal breathing room, for only a second, an important second, where the muscles several inches down increase in girth, pushing the lower ribs out, for a little bit more breathing room, elbowing the immobile bones, making way for a webbing, a diaphragm to dip, creating a natural vacuum through holes in the face, taking in no lemony scent, just warm air.

Rounding the deviated septum in the nose, afternoon air molecules sift past the cartilage simply, being so warm the molecules' density had erased, allowing them to move swiftly into the blood stream of the neck, where empty packets of hemoglobin happily embrace their company, together hurtled by the contractions of a four chambered muscle, if for a brief period of time, discussing their surprising and amusing similarities in travel, one through the violent current of space, atmosphere and emotional weather patterns (*how coincidental to meet you, you in particular, out of all the places and cells in the universe, humorous*) and one through the violent current of plasma, organs and emotional states (*yes it is quite coincidental, perhaps even purposeful? Do you believe that there is purpose behind meeting like this? So briefly?*), discussing the topography of land and tissue, bodies of water and blood, canals and arteries, one artery specifically, the one they traveled together, a pulmonary artery from the heart, falling south and side to side, into the fatty slab of the left lung, where capillaries, thin, very thin, merged cells into orderly single files, beginning the separation of air molecule from its present vessel, ending the time spent together, ending the conversation with anxious questions of *what next*, and *what then?*, questions which the cell and certainly foreign air molecule had no answer, the last moments of their shared time (*such a coincidence meeting*) in a silence, moving along, pulled along by some distant forces, pulled together by distant forces, now pulled apart by distant forces, *goodbye then, yes, well, goodbye*, and the cell listened to the footsteps of the air molecule, light but there, in the distance, walking away into the balled respiratory bronchioles of the left lung, the lung expanding, as it has done for years now, in the same horizontal direction, pressing against the fifth, sixth and seventh or so rib, for years, against, against, against, so much so that the length and width of each rib etched an

impression, an indent into the organ, functioning away, having absorbed the warm air molecule, having passed the cell through its artery, into a vein (*move along now*), to repeat the process (for a few more years at least), having expanded to capacity, a diameter much less rotund than normal due to the body's horizontal position upon the floor, the chest upon the floor, the floor (faux and all) unwilling to move, so it is the spongy lung to compromise, ballooning to three quarters its normal size, smearing over the ribs, and then promptly deflating, passively recoiling in fatigue, the four layers of abdominal muscles depressing, all in one unified heave lifting the diaphragm to expel carbon and waste, up, up, against gravity, up and out through the mouth, out, through the relaxed lips, a warm exhale that had dried gums and evaporated mucus that had coated teeth, it found its way passed awkward enamel gaps and over and between petrified fibers of a white towel, to be thrown into the wash, to be reused after a shower or bath, to cover the naked body, to dry its parts, to function once again, and to be petrified, once more, the exhale, the exhale had moved onto new terrain.

counting to a thousand

The lighting is phenomenal. Hanged from the rafters, still, but very much warm to the touch, the glass bodies of forty seven florescent light bulbs pumped their glow, shown for hours, for hours, for over eighteen thousand hours several dozen feet above the polished chrome of horizontal conveyer belts mirroring the surrounding sanitary conditions of a warehouse, built in an Asian country whose intolerance towards the intolerance of its government is great and corrective of such an issue. Yet, more of an issue was the condition of sanitation, yes, this is *the* issue. The lighting outlined all things with shape, metal panels, biceps, foreheads, Greenwich Meantime; the electricity isolated fingerprints and black hairs, smiles and pores; these foreigners were seen with exceptional ease in the enveloping wattage, no need to squint or wonder or ponder if smiles or follicles threatened the pure contents of trademarked Chicken Soup, or rather, something of a chicken combined with the condensed notion of the ingredients composing chicken soup in a salty brine. The issue of separating human skin from edible food was answered with a wonderfully economic answer; there exists a phenomenal barrier which matches the loving, unblinking eye of the bulbs bolted high above, emanating their white wavelengths which powdered the faces of workers as they entered the warehouse at dawn, and exited the warehouse at dusk, always emanating a consistent hue, timeless and ignorant of Greenwich time, of dawn and dusk, there exists a barrier which by Law is to be worn. Therefore it was worn. A Latex is wrapped around the hands and heads and feet of all employees who come in direct, or even indirect, contact of the notion of Soup or the container which houses the notions of Soup. The warehouse is to remain pure of contact, as it has been shown and proved by State doctors, the asexual reproduction of disagreeable cells can double, fold, and fold, and refold their numbers weeks before a fellow citizen even exhibits the signs of a cough or cold. At that time, at the sign of infection, an increase in internal temperature, liquid in the eye, nasal pressure about the skull and the like, *then* it has become too late; the cells have matured and made a happy home within the warehouse, coating the chrome of the conveyer belt, lounging within the white light, and they may have, yes, they very may well have squeezed into the Soup at the moment the contents are sealed within the aluminum containers, hidden and snug, until shipped internationally and onto the shelves of a discount store where happy sales percentages are written in English, and find their way into a new home, in a dry, cool, place, next to the corn flakes. The warehouse does not need such shame; it is mandatory for employees to wear Latex gloves at all stages of the Soup's creation, in all areas of the warehouse. The process of Soup is sensitive and requires sanitation and exactness: at stage 74, at the location of the conveyer belts, gloves are worn, those without cornstarch, as to reduce the chance of the hand slipping, as it gathers can of Soup after can of Soup, to be shrink wrapped in thirty-one bundles of thirty-two.

The Soup begins its manifestation in a circular wing of the warehouse, labeled stage 32 in a native language, a wing where native water is heated electrically, held in a passive metal tank capable of several hundred gallons, allowing the negative and positive currents to travel within and without its structure, absorbing the effects of their violent entanglement, growing a fever that burns flesh to the touch, silently, with no visual expression of its internal state, except that of a Warning, written in native language, in red font to signify danger, a warning written by those who deemed the justified law of the

latex, and therefore it is assumed this Warning is valid and one should stand clear of such an object, as it becomes more unstable with time, as the heat bleeds over, into the water, releasing its strife upon the countless molecules who nervously shake in response, in confined quarters, seeking escape, creating millions of panicked angles, forming a degree that matches the air pressure of this region, and suddenly several hundred gallons of native water boil and emit steam of equal temperature, grey and burning, rising, in clockwise swirls, self-propelling onto the aluminum paneling of the warehouse ceiling of rotund stage 32, whose distance from the violence below keeps the flexible panels cool, and upon contact with the remarkable sting of the steam, together they create droplets of varying, clear, round sizes, pock marking the sanitary shine of these panels, cut by hand, eyed 75 feet in diameter and welded in place by a team of four adult men and once male minor, an offspring of one of these men, learning a trade not yet replaced by a digital machine like those conveyer belts, in a vast room, a rectangle, large enough to house the bulbs, a 240 foot long conveyer and 94 latexed employees. At the moment, they wait for the parade of Soup to begin, they wait for the chicken bones and toes and giblets to cook in this vat with powdered orange, pale, and brown flavorings, forming the taste of known vegetables, a vague taste of onion, carrot, and celery root, boiling and rumbling away for 17 minutes, exactly, otherwise the giblets burn and blacken and form toxins, wasting time and ingredients, risking reputation, so the electrical current is lowered; the mild bath and its innards welcome the avalanche of long grain, native white rice, expelled from a tube, a limb dangling from the ceiling, expelling rice, into the vat, allowing the rice to simmer, bloat with the seasoned, gelatin water, forming a yellow curd about the rim of the tank and air bubbles, signaling the fourth and final minute of its cooking time. The current is closed. There is stillness in the water and the water itself reverts to a quiet system. They wait. The bulbs and employees in the rectangular room wait as well, for the last ingredient, a tub of cubed chicken, the breast of the animal, cubed mechanically, 2 inches by 2 inches, in an anonymous room 17 steps from stage 32; the steps are anticipated, heard, the tub holding the breast cubes enters.

The tub is a foggy Lucite through which the chunks appear ghostly pink. Carried with both hands, fistful, fingers rounding punched out pre-made handles, the tub is lifted and leans upon the chest of an employee to bear the collective weight of a small flock of chickens, grown on a distant patch of land far from the doors of the warehouse, a time zone away, summed into chunks, dripping a vague pink liquid, that somehow, despite the plastic barrier of the tub, permeates, dampening the cotton shirt of its carrier, forming an embarrassing puddle of an ironic happy color; so, a butcher's apron is worn, although no chunking is performed by this particular employee, the task is solely to carry, 16 times a day, 50 pounds of flock, to the submissive tank held inside stage 32, to tip its contents into the vat, steaming, faint with onion and earthy things which are not truly within, but mimicked by magic powders, playing potato, celery, perhaps even leek, is that leek? is thought as the tub is tipped and cubes splosh two, three, groups of seven, into the notion of Soup. The scents approach in ripples, one equidistant from the next, pushed and pulled along by the force of a cubed chicken's breast falling into the water, they emanate from the bath below, plop after plop, parsley after dill, zucchini after garlic clove, until, an unusual silence, untimely, a signal actually, for the employee donned as a butcher to reach into the tub, with a hand donned in latex, slipping fingertips into large chunks a

cluster of cubes had formed under the pressure of layers of meat, pressure acting as a natural adhesive, strong enough for fibers of one cube to interconnect with the those of another, leaving the employee no option but to continue using the muscles in a bicep to poke and pry and slip an entire length of a hand, up to the wrist, into the chunk of meat, a chunk defying natural and native laws of gravity, stuck in the corner of the tub as a spider's nest, until, the hand succeeds, and little by little, little cubes scatter, and tumble into the broth below, making waves, making sound, as the rice, plump, bobs.

The breasts were cooked previously, during stage 19, whole, for a period of time which left the meat at a point where viruses and bacteria and such were eliminated, yet slightly undercooked, unsatisfactorily by Western standards, cooked to a lively pink, a lovely pink, as the breasts are not to be consumed, not now, but weeks later, the justification lying at the point of purchase, where the can of Soup will be carried home, stored, until desired, opened, sloshed into a pot and reheated. At that final moment, atop an electric stove, the cubes will be cooked fully to a white, Western, recognizable hue interpreted as safe and edible. Yet this moment will only be reached following stage 34, a joyous time when the Soup and all of its innards, once separate, scattered across distant rooms and lands, plucked and crated, driven to anonymous locations, cubed and thrown into an unstable tank, boiled and tossed about in a discolored bath, finally, finally, there is rest at stage 34, when the tank is drained, a reversal process evoking the simple notion of holes and gravity beginning with the non latexed hand of the employee whose main objective is to finger the chickens' breasts. Here lies the second objective. The second hand elevates and points an index in the direction of a yellow button, small and inconspicuous, one that needs to be consciously identified by a native guide highlighting this rotund room, which of course, due to the issue of sanitation, is not plausible, but yes, there is a yellow button, when pressed, even with the slightest twitch of a knuckle, mechanically draws back the skin of several dozen specific hand-cut holes at the very bottom of the tank, through which the minute powders of various tastes, mimicking the inhabitant crops of this time zone, easily pass, fall, strewed into 54 fibrous straws, carbon based and flamboyant in strength despite their width, wind their ways between the walls of the warehouse, the semi liquid traveling in remarkable silence, the chunks speeding along, speeding, until, into a room, a perfect square, where the tip, the opening of each fibrous straw is exposed, ejecting a timed puddle of the Soup into the mouth of a freshly formed, empty aluminum can below.

Each individual can is birthed at a separate stage, 109, in a separate warehouse, whose tools and purpose is solely to create the portable container containing the Soup, a final home and resting place, until opened, tipped over and the can once again finds itself empty, and ultimately tossed into the segregated trash. At gestation, however, the can begins as a magnificent sheet of alloy, a bright, youthful combination of manganese and magnesium, for a healthy, strong spine that also allows for slight flexibility, just enough compromise to transform the alloy from a sheet with an anonymous series of government numbers burned into its outer most layer for identification purposes, 3104-H19, a tag ten centimeters in length, transformed, first with mechanical hammers, beating the length and width of the sheet with evenly distributed blows, producing bubbles and mumps, three inches in depth, with a three inch dilation, open and willing, to accept, a second stage,

when the sheet, pregnant with 32 metal mumps, is passed along and pushed, through a forming process, a collection of magnificent heat, pulsing from the rods of thin coils, and the fisting of metal columns, one for each little mump, who, under the stress of high internal temperatures and external pressure, 225 pounds upon a mump, lengthen, the manganese and the government issued skin stretch several inches further, to create the identifiable cylinder, the charming shape associated with portable Soup, birthed fully, warm and off color, something of a pale grey, the color of shock and imminent separation, painted across the façade of each new little can, as the sound of two horizontal blades and their teeth, curved left to right, spinning as such, swiftly, blurring the opportunity for an accurate dental count, slip into the groove where maternal sheet and freshly formed can connect, a thin film, that under beatings, heat and pressure has become too frail and useless, easily snipped by the forward motion of the blades, their rotation gluttonous, seizing the opportunity, the advantage of a tired mother and a newborn, with no tangible defense, other than this skin, the composition, a notion of metal, quite exceptional though, for one exception, protecting the Soup which has been regurgitated into its opening, approximately 12 fluid ounces, a North American equivalent of an acceptable amount of food, just enough to be considered a meal, the liquid and cubes and powders float in its belly, of steel-ish, strong enough to absorb a brief fall onto linoleum, a roll into in the pointy corner of a grocery store display, deforming in shape, with spots of implosion here and there, dents that slowly convince a consumer to search for a different can of Soup, one with a less visual history, as it is believed, as with fruit, blemished skin is an indication of tampering and possible contamination, something inside is not as it should be, a tad bit off, but enough to make one ill. The belly does not pierce, however, and despite the tumbles and rolls, no notion of Soup is lost from the top of the can.

It was wondered, by an efficient and prudent mind quite some time ago, when the aluminum roof of the rotund room was being trimmed and installed sheet after sheet with various blue welding tools, melting this corner into that, it was thought and considered how to shut each of these cans, thousands of them, lying limp, in heaps, randomly placed and gathered in cardboard boxes unmarked by any language, only by time, signed with nicks and tears, about the corners especially, revealing the slight view of a supportive honeycomb design, which had lost its stamina gathering after gathering after gathering, and shriveled, its elderly folds just enough to contain these bodies, maintain the 300 to several hundred or more cans, their numbers weighing against its unassuming walls, creating an uncomfortable bulge, the way a multitude of bacteria contorts a belly, but the belly will hold, will contain and maintain, for its survival, to be useful is to survive, so it stood, obtuse but together, and that efficient mind in the midst of all these floating elements—the welding of sheets, the suffering of cardboard boxes and, most importantly, the excess alloy left behind, the punctured maternal sheets, after the cans' formation—all of these elements were puzzled together, the left and right hemisphere working in partnership, combining wit and tasteful commonsense, (and somewhere deep within this wondering there was a pondering, why it is the hemisphere producing the Soup and the one to purchase it could not work and live in such harmony as the mind. O!), developing a picture, clear and in Technicolor: cut from the aluminum waste, heated and manhandled through various presses, rounded clockwise and burned into the corners of each can's

mouth, an almighty lid would be produced, a stage 81, a process that saves valuable time—as there is no need for the government to produce and ship additional layers of 3104-H19 and therefore saves valuable currency as no man hours need to be compensated and no natural resources need to be exhumed and boiled into almighty alloy. Resurrecting the maternal materials was a theory overwhelmingly accepted and implemented by the minds who implemented the law of the Latex and warnings regarding the water in the rotund room. There followed a release of several hundred dopamine drops from several hundred individual neurons, their emissions in such great numbers, flooding the efficient mind with electric hormones, forming a hideous parallel to the hundreds of gathered silver cans, a hideous parallel to the murmurs of Rome's starlings (O!), each droplet received by several hundred empty neurons, open and willing, with a need to be filled, receiving, forming the unmistakable sensation of acceptance, (ful)filled, throughout the body, expressed as a relaxed heave and deflation of muscles, only for a moment, just one, as it was spoken, sharply, regarding one problem, well, one *issue* really, only one, one of design, just one issue it was, and remains so, just one, is the design of this recycled lid, as it has been discovered through an internal investigation brought about by external complaints (in handwritten notes, only several), the rim was identified as troublesome. Troublesome? Yes.

Customers and consumers, consumers and customers, one in the same, complained, about particles of dust assembling in the nook where the lid had been welded into the can, that little groove, little enough, escaping a fingernail intent on plucking out the foreigners, the dust settles, after leaving the can beside the cereal in the cupboard for over a month or two, or more since several hundred grams of salt added weeks upon weeks ago multitasks, creating an uninhabitable environment for unwanted things *and* preserves the cubes and powders, so naturally, if one does not have the desire for the Soup right now, one has the leisure, the choice to let the can sit in, anticipation, and all innards will be fresh, healthy, as the day they squirmed from the draining tube running from the rotund room, just as such, when some afternoon, the desire arrives, first as muscular contractions in the belly, moving their way up the spine as stimulating signals and into the mind, into consciousness, now read as hunger, causing a decision, to lift the body from its current location and move it, into the kitchen, lifting an arm to open the cupboard, using the eyes to find the Soup, using the opposable thumb to operate some mechanical device whose teeth bare a shocking resemblance to the blades of a distant time and place, a device to separate (again!) maternal material from its can (O!), and this, right here, the separation, is where the *issue* presents itself, when teeth complete their nibbling around the edge of the lid, causing this independent lid to drop helplessly into the broth it once covered, becoming submerged, disappearing, neighboring the cubes and pseudo celery, and dispersing the foreigners, the dust, into the food, allowing something unidentifiable, something once distant and of no particular thought into that which will be eaten and placed in a belly, one's belly, which is contracting, rumbling, wanting, yet one has lost the desire to consume. The Soup is now contaminated.

This issue has not yet been resolved, and the efficient and prudent mind continues to wonder (with an occasional pondering embedded, regarding philosophical matters) how to confront this potential threat to this Soup company and its employees' employment,

continues to seek that previous, wonderful momentary sensation of approval. For now, the tank in the rotund room refills, continuing its (self)abusive cycle and the conveyer belt in the long, long rectangular room continues to roll its thick black (yet exceptionally sanitary) plastic belt horizontally, bringing forth, finally, from a remote area, filled can of Soup after filled can of Soup, successfully topped with a lid and sealed for intercontinental travel; their recycled aluminum sputters white light, reflecting the wattage of florescent bulbs above, hanging in stillness, illuminating stage 74 and the latexed hands of one worker, one is enough, within budget, counting with numbers learned some time ago, in a small room, much smaller than this one, and square, counting in a native language, the same written in red, in the rotund room, cautioning employees with thoughtful guidance, controlling their motion, as the worker guides one notion of Soup after the other, controlling their motion, with the tips of cornstarch-free fingertips, onto an unassuming, flat piece of cardboard, acting as a tray, a base for thirty-two cans to sit and be joined, as One, wrapped with a thin film of thermoplastic relieved orally from a hole in a vertical tube. Shrink wrap envelops, around and about the organized group of alloy cans who protect the notion of Soup, will carry it times zones and thousands of miles in its belly, to a holy land of sorts, where currency flows, and will be exchanged for what sits in the belly, so this plastic must act as a guardian to this exceptional guardian, a guardian whose embrace is suffocating, but necessary, to eliminate danger, the danger of space, found between the cans as they are counted and placed by hand upon the cardboard platter; the grip of the shrink wrap eliminates the gaps, which upon a bump in a dirt road or air pocket in the atmosphere in flight, in transit, is small enough, but large enough for the can to come loose and become separated from the brethren, and this bit of Soup, lost, is a monumental tragedy, as a consumer will be stricken with hunger on sunny afternoon, because this one can had be knocked loose and forgotten among cargo, rather than placed upon a shelf, within reach, visible, representing this factory and its employees, this Soup company and its Nation; the shrink wrap holds them all together.

digesting ground beef

The atmosphere was warm, gathering its temperature from the rising heat of bodies, who gathered here to eat, to speak, to drink and to metabolize, unconsciously releasing invisible balls of Fahrenheit and waste through cell membranes, through the twitching mouths of pores and, settling, around the fine stalks of hair about the forearms and small dent adjacent the spine. The heat is plucked and driven upwards, vaguely dense, lifting in a milky swirlish pattern that, tragically, cannot be seen, but assuringly, acts as an adequate dance partner to the non-dairy creamer dissolving in French Roast coffee, served after dinner, or simply served alone. Most patrons, however, choose to dine, casually, pointing to an option on a laminated menu, the index atop what has been categorized by the resident chef as an *American Classic*, and, making brief but deliberate eye contact with a waiter, who announced their position as the server for the evening, following a citation of their name which was soon forgotten, the patron tapped the index upon the font, once, twice, and promptly began to make sound with the lips, tongue and muscles within the cheeks, the same bits to be used to masticate the *Classic*, join to translate the text from letter to spoken language, which was understood by the server for the evening, responding with a nod, a deep chinmed nod to the chest, as to assume this choice was the most excellent choice among the items of the four fold menu, and following, as chin returned to its normal height, it was asked how the ground meat was to be cooked. Although a personal choice, in this particular instance the issue of ground beef and bacterium was considered, which, although patrons held the establishment in high regards, and deeply felt, with deep belief only the best precautions are taken and the best quality grade is used in culinary feats and the best sanitary practices are executed in a kitchen, tragically, not seen, the personal choice was swayed by popular knowledge, and public concern of outbreaks of various viruses, with multiple vowels and Latin roots, structures and bodies foreign to the common patron, and therefore, feared, and it was thought best, for the good of one's health, to request a well cooked patty, one whose flesh is broiled to one hundred and fifty five invisible balls of Fahrenheit, and upon the degree, verified by a modern thermometer speared into the center of the meat, it was requested for the chef to use two fingers, preferably index and middle, and press each with the some acceptable amount of force against the patty to truly determine its status as complete, if, the resistance felt is equal to the center of one's palm, a European technique to anoint an American dinner, a burger, well done.

The anticipation was frightful, as the order had been ordered, itemized with preferences, and the waiter, was it Peter, Paul, John?, some common arrangement of letters spelling out a welcoming, believable personality, a short name, which despite the sudden lack of short term memory was intended to be memorable, and easily pronounced, a sound, two syllables, beginning with an *eee* of sorts and resting on an *uhh*; whatever the name may be, this human blurb carrying a very important message had evaporated into the distance, into the unseen, possibly the, hopefully, sanitary kitchen to recite the order, hopefully, precisely, for the resident chef, too, anonymous, leaving the mind to recall, with deliberate effort, the construct of a chef, pulled from what had been encoded in the brain, in some soft spot, learned by watching foreign films, foreign actors imitating the culinary motions of cutting, chopping, perhaps dicing some pale sinuous root with a very serious blade, while donned in a starched, white uniform, cuffed at the ankles and wrists, with a jacket upon the chest, freckled with buttons and, in the upper left, snug beneath the

shoulder, the establishment's name in blue curvaceous script, nearly scandalous when lying against the proud, honorable representation of the restaurant's public image, it was imagined, this mental phantom receiving the order and specifications from the mouth of the server, and satisfied with what was heard, responds with a similar nod, that, despite having nearly prepared the Classic to exhaustion this very day, anticipates handling several ounces of raw meat again, within and without fingers one more time, anticipates the earthy whiff of scolded cow, as the sinuous areas of the patty violently react with a blackened, used grill, greased with lard, producing a strained hiss upon contact of meat to metal, as if the patty is resisting the heat, the pressure, the caramelizing of its pink tissue, and responds with a scream, an *eee* of sorts, but terribly different from the server's *eee*, several octaves higher, enough to tilt the head as ears navigate the sound to the brain, to process the input and understand the scene taking place before it, as this *eee* entails a chemical reaction, where pink becomes brown, signifying a loss of the meat's scant number of natural sugars, its strains of protein collapsing, and forming, at the internal temperature of one hundred and fifty five degrees Fahrenheit, meat to meal, a government standard of safety and compliance with regulations, and a reassurance that relieves the frontal lobe of any particular worry regarding viral things, relief, a secret ingredient to producing a better tasting burger.

The anticipation was frightful, as the patron, sitting in the environment, in waiting, was accosted at the wrists, ankles and mostly about the face with ultra fine scent particles of varying diameter and weight, sourced from varying surrounding orders, which, being chewed by strangers, had released oils, greasy solvents and saliva, settling in warped puddles upon a dinner plate, and evaporated slowly under the opaque light bulbs screwed into the walls; left exposed, a potpourri of odorants for orifices to absorb and pass along the nervous system, to the mind, these anonymous bodies which had entered one's person, causing the mind to end its pseudo construct of a chef and fantasy and begin deciphering what is was exactly the individual at seat 37E had just swallowed. Within the current of a draft, leaking from a gap between two mismeasured ceiling tiles, the invisible hoops and loops of a particle's (mis)shape traveled upstream, propelled around and about the coiffed hair of customers at seats 19B and 21F, passing the conversational hand gestures at seat 20P, and perhaps deliberate, conspiring, the (mis)shape found its way into the patron, silently impacting with thousands of genes specially prepared for odor reception, searching, within a forestry of unsightly, yet thankfully unseen, hairs beneath the right nostril, it is pummeled and rejected, strand after blackish strand, an organic battery powered by the patron's (unconscious) need to inhale (swayed by opinion yet again!), a need to survive that nicks and pecks at a scent already collapsing from physical exhaustion, dragging whatever form remaining deeper into the nasal area, as it searches for the one hair specifically hand diced and formed by some Unseen, the one capable of receiving this particular (mis)shape, allowing the (mis)shape to cradle in its grooves, and rest, just for a moment, before sending it on its way further into the system.

The anticipation was frightful, as the patron, sitting in seat 11A, felt a sudden tickling. It caused the face to shift, the nostrils to flair and a rippling in the bridge of the nose, gathering its flesh in a pile of folds, and stretching the connecting cheeks, whose blood vessels squeezed one against the other in the limiting space, shoving into the layers of

pale skin, which dehydrated and lacking sustenance, easily exposed the growing rouge beneath it. There the patron sat, publicly flushed, consciously aware of the face's appearance and sudden burst of warmth and unconsciously shifted the southernly cheeks in discomfort and embarrassment, first, placing the weight of the trunk and arms and head upon the left muscle, loose but categorized as a muscle nonetheless, and leaking slowly, redistributed the mass to the remaining muscle at the right. The tickling sensation was unmistakable; the scent, despite the battery and mutilation, against the violence of chaotic motion and, seemingly, chaotic fate, the particle had found it Particular, had bonded with its one receptor and dissolved into it, beginning a cyclical journey. The telegraphic scent hurdled at the speed of pain through nerve endings, propelled by exciting the seemingly invisible balls of calcium and sodium ions within, which although were consistently tickled by various stimuli, not only scents but laughter and distant sirens, the sky and smoke, the wind and needles, the ions responded with dramatics, leaping from their chairs with hand upon chest, shocked and appalled, categorizing each image and sound, touch and, of course, smell, as Catastrophic! and new, sending the stimuli along with a request to place the body on high alert, a Code Rouge, or some other brightly colored color, chosen from a chart used to organize all incoming stimuli, although despite the options from a boorish yellow (casual alert) to massacre red (highest alert), the latter was always picked, and the brain, the poor, poor brain is left to sort through the emotional correspondence, sifting, to reach the facts, interpreting the electrical hoot and hollers as something tangible, understandable. After several pulses of a lobe, grey and white (quite bland when compared to the color chart and for all the action and computing it performs) the scent which had found its way into the patron, and survived, into the receptor, and survived, into the brain, and survived, was the odor of all purpose flour that had browned in $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch of canola oil, boiled to three hundred and fifty invisible balls of Fahrenheit, it was a batter that coated and crisped a strip of chicken breast. Freckled within, black and orange, was pepper and paprika. The individual sitting in seat 37E, it was determined, finalized and stored into a short term memory now fully functioning, the meal turned out to be Chicken Fingers. Another *American Classic*. And the waiter's name was Peter. Eureka.

The anticipation was over with a sudden plop of a plate, and the world of contemplating inner sensation had ended for now, as the server for the evening, aptly named, brought forth this patron's previous request and all attention had been allocated to the scene below. Wrapped in a brown, earthy coat, thick enough to ingest a spilled cola beverage or excessive tomato sauce that had fallen from a fork, yet thin enough to avoid becoming a nuisance to the elbows of leaning, casual diners, the table before the patron, every patron, was topped with paper, which performed as cloth, with all the benefits of absorption and discretion, and arguably, improved upon with the addition of the wonderful cost effective benefit of disposability. Upon the paper acting as cloth, a plate was served, aptly, by the server for the evening, using the fingertips of the right hand, while with the fingertips of the left, in modesty, cupped the belly, holding back the white, starched shirt which carried the name of the establishment in curvaceous script. The plate, an oblate sphere, who, within and around its outer rim, there were speckled blues stars, dozens of small manmade geometric shapes, filing in the creamy empty space of the dinner plate, as if upon its birth, after hours of shaping and handling by an Unseen

craftsman, and sitting for several additional hours in fire, of thousands of degrees of Fahrenheit, inside an anonymous factory on an exotic, overpopulated land, far, far, thousands of time zones and miles from the paper politely hiding the accidental waste of its consuming consumers, the space of the plate, the emptiness, loud and stark was thought to be a concern by its creator. A shock, perhaps too exotic, too foreign, for a patron's mind to accept; a mind so comfortable with (over)stimulation from external sources, those seen and unseen, that this naked, little, imperfect sphere may go ignored, or more tragically, ridiculed and labeled with disappointment by this mind, criticized, or, horrifically, deconstructed in a fictionalized brew of sentences. O! So it was determined such a fate is best to be avoided for something so alone in the world, for something with one sole purpose, that being to lie flat and carry upon its belly the heat, released oils, greasy solvents and saliva of a dinner. Discussed in native tongue among craftsmen and creators, was the idea of applying blues stars within and about the outer rim of the naked plate, replicating the North American ideals of individualism and freedom, because those ideals, if manifested, it was discussed, would take the shape of five pointed stars, as seen upon flags, and seals, and documents and pictures in Western books, so fill! fill space! because void, as it was discussed, and determined by recall, what was learned from actors in Western films, the ones in color, where from the mouths of actors there flowed English, void is, truly, only void, and to fill to (over)capacity, to tickle the senses with as many senses as possible equates to satisfaction, to experience, to freedom.

Traveling from the outer rim, leaving the stars, leaving their blue glow, and their ideals, consciously or unconsciously noted by a consumer, there was, in the very center of the sphere, a burger. It had been partnered with a slice of greenery, oversized, torn from a ball of chilled Romaine lettuce, the outer most sleeve, and therefore, unsanitary, directly exposed to manure and mists of spraying agents chemically bonded to destroy the nervous system of things with an unusual number of legs, as tested by the government who just recently reformed the safety and regulatory practices on food preparation, deeming the outer most layers of lettuce, cabbage, onions and any edible with layers sold to the public, as safely inedible, and must be stripped, several layers deep, before preparing a meal for consumption, although despite proven many, a many, times in double, even triple blinded tests where the scientists and cabbage were completely ignorant of which sanitized dropper held two ounces of sugar water and two ounces of pesticide, and completely ignorant of where the analysis were performed and by whom, therefore assuringly, the poison is completely harmless to beings with two or fewer legs. All establishments, however, must comply with the recent regulation and peel the edible down to at least two quarters its original size. And so it was done. The strip of lettuce was not to be eaten, but rather, the cupping action of its deathly pale stalk was used as a tool by the resident chef, after, discussing with the staff in native tongue, what is to be done with the excess inedible but assuringly edible edibles? It was determined to apply the produce as a garnish, first, to liven up the empty space of the dinner plate (alas!) and hold fast the more important ingredient in an *American Classic* from rolling about and directly off the plate itself. The pickle.

The establishment only used one brand of pickles to accompany all of its *American Classics*. Family owned and operated, as in the great American tradition of

entrepreneurship and patrilineal inheritance, Aristotle's Pickles has been *Your Favorite Pickle Since 4400BC!* although, despite the handsome and convincing packaging, consisting of a tinted hand blown glass jar, allowing merely a tempting peek at the vinegar and whole pepper seeds floating within, there has been no documented history of such a claim, as over centuries, oceans, geographic location, emigration, the death and birth of dialects, and the natural rise and fall of governments, legal and coup, it is, by default, nearly impossible to record this Pickler's success. Yet the owner of the establishment, who inherited the restaurant from his father, and *his* father's father, and *his* father's father, they too, attested to Aristotle's Pickles, due to customer satisfaction emitted as a closed smile whose lips and cheeks held a hidden bite of cucumber, left for a specific number of days, drowning in a brine composed of a specific ratio of water to red vinegar to granulated sugar to sea salt to pepper, whole and grated. The Picklers of Aristotle's have left their lips and cheeks closed and motionless in regards to measurements and time. The four thousand year old secret is now cupped by an unacceptable strip of lettuce, whose wide foliage appears to supply the pickle with matching green wings. This bright, flightless creature has nested to the right of the burger, located snug, beneath a fluffy bun.

The hamburger bun was baked at a separate location whose unnaturally tall ceilings provided the head room needed for colossal silver tanks of non stick metal. They allowed for optimum temperature control, as well as a haven for yeast to grow and play, without the danger, or even concern, of binding to the side panels of the tank and, being separated from the nourishment of sugar and heat, would die slowly as its comrades below prospered, multiplying into maturity, into the meaty stage of dough: a fleshy, pale, obese lump perfect for baking thanks in part to the anonymous ingredient of enriched flour: a sifty, pale, inconspicuous government agent which found itself planted in the bun's recipe. Section 17F of a recent legislative document, passed 54-1 by a legislative body determined to keep the bodies of voters pure and functional, yet not *too* functional, deemed it mandatory for flour, if to be sold to the voting public, to contain a certain amount of nutrients beneficial to the body and organs and the like. Odd things, with various vowels and Latin roots were to be reintroduced to the flour after it had been processed, having grown white, whiter, rather, losing, losing its natural thiamin, riboflavin and iron and the like, sucked out by particular metal tanks in the cooking process. Emotional disturbance, short term memory loss, gait, confusion, pseudo-syphilis of the scrotum and labia, increased aggression, insomnia, and, or diarrhea are possible symptoms of a deficiency in the goodness of these foreign things, with vowels and numbers and roots the general public is not quite familiar, so it was best, it was discussed, in native legal tongue, to take responsibility and protect the public body. The pound of flour added to the batch of buns baked the very day the burger had been poked by the resident chef and deemed well-done, the flour composing the bun did, very well indeed, contain the required amount of niacin and folic acid and the like allowing the patron to lift the *American Classic*, with fingertips of the left and right hand, with fingers curved, wrapping the bun from either side, the burger itself, securing the hold, guiding it, to the mouth, to the lips and cheeks, to a face accosted by the scent of wet brown beef and frightful anticipation of taste, to be answered, with a bite.

Waiting For birds To Sing

The street vendor just off the corner of West 10th Street and 101st Avenue employed the use of a child's optimistic toy, an automated bubble blower, to coax the attention of walking modern folk. Deep within the belly of the play thing, a fan spun its plastic blades clockwise. The two batteries that pushed them along were slowly purged of their last volts of zinc and carbon, producing final exhales that, despite their length and electric wheeze, were easily trampled under the human current, dragged south for several hundred feet, torn and scattered, until they had become completely lost to ears and all possible concern. The languid motion of the blades was non-threatening, as they had been formed in mass production as blunt nubs of decomposable synthetics to protect the remaining environment and forefingers; their only task was to run in circles, with enough energy, even a scant amount provided by a tired, aged external source, to shove the air forwards and into the uncontrollable drool leaking from the nozzle of the machine. The liquid was mass produced, in vats of thousands of gallons, clear and non-toxic, as to protect the remaining environment and the liver and spleen of curious children. After years of brow heavy study, the mathematical effort of cylinders and Bunsen burners pulled resin thin enough, just thin enough, into a liquid, that when a whisper of air poked its way through the resin's stomach, a millimeter of the liquid actually separated from the vat in a pinch and, suddenly, was not a liquid any longer, but a perfect circle, lifting, powered by gases from the environment, stored in its little center and protected by a delicate and worthless barrier, a chemical intended by its rolling mass production to pluck a smile from a toddler's face, and perhaps an adult's as well. The machine combined the action of its blades and air to pump bubbles, thousands of bubbles, at a frantic pace, as if conscious of its approaching end and in desperation, to leave its signature upon the world, tossed out as many bubbles as it possibly could, of all diameters, obese, firm, lanky, in hope, hoping, one bubble will enter a ray of sunlight at an angle, that combined with its semi-liquid skin, will reflect, a spark, to catch an eye, that would, possibly, find its way to the vendor's table of things mass produced in a foreign country, but safe, too, nonetheless, and for sale. Most bubbles died at birth. Trampled under foot or overcome by the strength of the current flowing downtown, and popped. One in particular, though, by Chance, entered an enveloping gust of wind, twitching north and squirmed between the legs of a tall building of industrial aluminum. It found its way, up, to the 57th story, higher than any other bubble. It saw a distant horizon, and popped.

A large percentage of this floor was a restroom of modern facilities. The tiles within were a mixed breed, combining the reliability of ceramics and the impressive sheen of glass. Somewhere between a technological advancement and improper labeling of granulated bits, a miracle was produced, discovered by fledgling architects of six continents and injected into the floors of loos throughout. The tiles here, only two and three inches in width and length, were puzzled this side to that, lying in a bed of mortar, a blend of white sand, cement and almighty latex. Upon both knees, a laborer placed a tile with the left hand and straightened it with the right. Bent from the waist, scalp facing Mecca, a tattered shirt sagged away from the laborer's torso. A light blue of woven cotton, it absorbed the sweat of palms and excessive grout used to seal crevasses between neighboring tiles with one wipe of a hand across the chest. A name was sewn above the breast pocket in script, but it did not belong to this employee. The shirt was barrowed and, due to its lack of sentimental value, was treated more as a rag. After four thousand

placings and straightenings, several hundred palm swabs across the rib cage and the perspiration of general caloric burning, the shirt bruised deep blue splats across the neckline, pits areas and outlined the spinal cord in accomplishment. The mosaic was completed. When paired, a group of four tiles formed a pattern of rectangles upon a background of abstract swirls of black and white; the marbling was an attempt at recreating the culture of northeastern Cyprus. As the last square firmed into its location, as the laborer rose, the symbolic design was a greater reflection of the soiled linen.

On a molecular level, the tiles were related to glass and, as such, inherited a handful of its unflattering habits. They were exhibited, although few and far in between, during moments of stress, specifically when the environment was not kept and routine was broken. Tap water that rubs against piping during work hours, for example, in secret, in silence, has a violent and dramatic effect on normalcy. Behind the restroom walls, metal is slowly eaten and bits are swallowed, washed away into the sewer system; motionless and used, the pipes are left with pokes and holes and premature exits for the continual flow of tap running up and down a building of several dozen floors and several thousand worker bees. The water falls to the tiles in rhythmic taps. Around late afternoon enough drips have dropped, gathering into a dangerous mob that highly influences the tiles; they have a smooth, glazed outer surface that when combined with a liquid become a hazard. The puddle is still, translucent and emits no sound. When a pair of heels and balls of feet enter its territory, there usually follows a series of reflexes within the limbs and face, which may or may not end in an embarrassing spill, where limbs become extended and the face is invited to an intimate tour of northeastern Cyprus. The tiles have no impulse control in that matter; nor can they contain themselves when it comes to light. Two of the five lighting fixtures drilled into the wall cannot be used, can never be turned on despite being wired and fully functional. The additional three hundred watts those fixtures produce seems to be a spot more than what the tiles can handle. When the restroom was fully lit, all five bulbs blaring, the tiles were over burdened with this stimulation and panicked. To defend themselves, light was reflected, returned into the air with such speed that blindness was reported by workers who entered the room simply to relieve a bladder. Overall, and imperfections aside, the tiles received high marks for their beauty and ability to bring a modern aesthetic to a room and place of employment.

Mute and strong, spooning five porcelain sinks, the stainless steel countertop ran along the inner thigh of the far left wall. Its past was quite disturbing. After hours of vicious uprising and disagreements between liquid iron and carbon, threatening the life and limbs of six immigrant Chinese steel workers, a harmonious blend was eventually discovered where both elements could live side by side, permanently. They tolerated one another, cooling for months on a factory floor, until, nothing but time and thought were left, and each side began to contemplate its loneliness. One side forgave the other, iron to carbon, moving beyond simple tolerance. Now complete in form and spirit, its surface was spotless and lived up to its reputation of stainless. Its past had made the counter wise, and resistant to time, to oxidation. In fact, it used oxygen to protect itself, plucking that foreign particle and actually welcoming this newness it into its territory; the additional oxygen in the room made the outer most layer of the counter tougher, tighter, nearly impossible to cut or scrape by a random set of keys clipped to a hip or by cufflinks of

wrists. Indeed the counter top was self sufficient now, quite well enough to be left alone for days without a scene or report of unpleasantness. A smudge of mascara lost from an employee's touchup or splatter from a quick wash of the face to help live through a dragging afternoon, all could be wiped away with astonishing ease. Everything lifted right off the surface. The steel was so wise it could be recycled, melted down, returned to liquid and reshaped into a thing completely new, with a new function; it very much accepted its whole self as varying parts. Nearly one hundred and fifty forms of stainless steel can be arranged, with uses from a convenient kitchen blender to a scalpel that saves the heart of an old woman. It took several millennia to understand iron and carbon, and place them together. But it was done. Employees now gather here, before the counter top, to adjust their image in the mirror.

The sinks and toilets are litter mates, sharing the same porcelain makeup and buffed, attractive physical appearance; their fates, however, diverged completely. The toilet is boxed away in a stall, a cubicle of its own, protective of the exceptional and confidential transactions which take place within. It has become the cleric, a urinal within its own confessional, and a confessional within its own urinal; here are exposed the murmurings and self talk of employees, their naked emotions of disappointment and loathing, indulgent smiles and crossed tactics; their general wipings of back to forward, forward to back, leaks, pushings, gurgles and thrusts, the actions which repel when performed in the general public, here the cleric accepts such behavior, welcoming droppings from either end, from all orifices, of repeating offenders, to the parade of varying employees of all securities levels, heights and shapes, one after the other, because they all must come to the cleric at some point. They must, driven by the body's reflexes or the mind's need for some amount time alone. Trustworthy, the cleric escorts the filth and honesty out of the room; washed away with ten gallons of clear tap water, sent in a counterclockwise fury round the rim and propelled through a small black portal, an exit hole, casting it all out, out!, and into a distant land, an unseen land, one imagined as a land of forgiveness and, of utmost importance, silence. When the session is complete, when all has been expelled, when all has been tucked away, the employee feels a sense of relief, that of a loss of weight. There is no regret for what has taken place, for what has been revealed. The cleric remains free of judgment, and a toilet.

The sink was not as interpersonal. While an employee's muscles reuptake the last of the adrenaline and pleasant secretions of glands following the pseudo religious experience with the cleric, the usual practice afterwards, though not always executed, but usually, the employee makes their way over to one of the sinks for sanitary reasons. Before them is a modern marvel, minimal and protruding. Two silver horns sprout from the sink, up and over the porcelain. One of the outgrowths acts as an automatic faucet where tap flows, as the other dispenses a blue liquid soap. There is only the oval face of the sink and its two distinguished features. There are no handles, buttons or levers to push, pull or tug. A concept developed at the turn of the century to minimize the exchange of cellular bacteria from human to object, object to human, and unintended exchanges from human to human in environments where normal yet questionable activities take place; this concept used Presence alone to activate the sanitation process. One must stand before the horned creature, feet together, arms extended with hands open, palms facing Mecca in a position

of anticipated acceptance, of water, of soap. However, one's presence must be worthy for this creature. It will not offer tap or sanitizer unless the acceptable amount of will is exhibited by the employee; one must truly desire to wash their hands. And usually, yes, there is great desire to follow compliance and the sanitation process. An employee stands braced, waiting, palms sensing an imagined tickling, waiting for the tang of city tap to squirt from one horn and creamy, cold blue paste from the other. Yet there is nothing. So feet are shifted, shoulder's length apart, fixing body weight in a fully braced position, ready, truly, to accept the horns' offerings. Nothing. The self is questioned. *Am I in the correct position? Am I doing this right? Why is there no response? What am I doing that is wrong?* The sink, its white roundness and sharp, chic features have no response. The hands now, the hands begin to feign the intended need to wash, to clean, and rub, left hand circulating the right, using mute language to symbolize to the foreign creature that the need to wash is great and must begin. Left hand over the right, right hand over the left, fingers bleed and kneed one around the other; the motion becomes repetitious, obsessive, over and over, spinning, until a level of concentration is reached where the surrounding environment becomes unnecessary and dissolves, and all that matters most is receiving the clear liquid and the blue liquid, motion, motion, motion, motion, motion, motion, detected! With a mighty electronic tweet, a squirt of water is released; as is a plop of soap; two small rations the hands hungrily grasp and whip into a frothy bath, birthing billions of tiny bubbles covering fingertips to tired wrists. The motion is continued, long after the tweet is silenced, mixing the scant ounces of water provided with the sanitizer, thinning the paste, scrubbing with fingernails and quick wisps of the wrists, until, until, satisfied, until it is believed one is finally clean. Until there is realization, that one must, once again, brace the self, unravel the palms and wait, for the creature and its horns, for its attention, for the tap, to wash away the bubbles.

wine in moderation

The wine was consumed at home, beginning with the use of a French corkscrew. The spiraling twirl of its blade passively brushed against the skin of a stopping cork, which silently functioned, choking the neck of a tinted bottle. Ascending the spiral, there lay a horizontal bar of metal to be pinched with an index and thumb, to be motorized with the twist of twelve fragile bones in the wrist. The combination of this fingered grip and motion caused a violent, brief plunge of the screw into a piece of wood, that had been whittled and branded with black sideburns in a Portuguese town several hundred days even before the grapes of this vintage had grown to maturity. A Cork Oak tree, conveniently named, had been chopped, inconveniently, with the use of hands, biceps and an axe passed down a line of surviving relatives. They had waited ten full years, counting from the day of its plantation, waiting for the Oak to develop fully, proud and bustling in all diameters, at its moment of personal glory, yes, this was the time to harvest and whittle, into a nub, and brand, with black sideburns, the name of the family and its surviving relatives. The cork, and several thousand other similar nubs cut from this Oak tree, were shipped to another village, in another country, whose citizens spoke a completely different language in a completely different latitude whose ratio of sunshine to rainfall to compost had won major awards for their collective contribution in wine production. The vineyard here, too a familial burden, preferred these corks for their low density and near impermeability, and stored the corks in a dry, dark location, until, after having filled a tinted bottle with their Vin (aged ten years in an obese barrel, counting from when it had been, ironically, stuffed shut with a cork of an utterly separate percentage of wood to Suberin, of an utterly different Oak, due to an utterly different function during the Vin's lifespan) unveiled the little Portuguese blessing. With a dramatic, brief shove of a mechanical thumb, the cork corked the neck of a bottle of wine (Non, Vin!) that was, surely, to take first prize during an international competition. For now, it was found in the home, and with each additional pinch and rotation of bones in a well designed human wrist (a design that had never won any recognition, nor any awards), the blade dug into the cork, in spurts, leaving in its wake crumbs of wood and the honor of a family a decade in the making.

As the blade dug its way into the flesh, very little resistance was felt through the tool and up the arm. The cork had surrendered to the metal yet, absorbing toxins in the air, still functioned, continuing to protect the family name and wine (Non, Vin!) while absorbing the driving invasion, turn after turn, until, an inch and a half deep, it was time to extract and harvest the wood once again. Braced and silent, the corkscrew's grip was final; its gangly arms raised in triumph, a sign for drinkers to raise their own arms in unison, and clasp their hands around these metal rods. With a dramatic, brief shove the team freed the bottle of Vin (No, wine!) of its choking hazard with a verbal, coughing *pop!* The Heimlich was complete, and the cork had completed its purpose. It remained staked upon the helix. Its round little bottom had been stained, slightly, from the liquid in the bottle. Intercontinental travel, a crossing of latitudes and languages and government screenings, had tossed and shook the beverage. The cork, of course, wedged in the neck, held fast against the waves of red wine, using its exposed spongy body as a blockade between Vin and environment, preventing a sorrowful loss of quality alcohol. Days upon weeks, the cork's base was left wet, left with quality time, as the wine and Portuguese skin slowly

entwined, producing a young, optimistic purple. They were now separate and will remain so, permanently.

Draped behind a sophisticated shade of black glass, the wine was hidden from plain sight. One could only assume, judging by the label provided, in plain English, this opened bottle is a Merlot, and its character is a blend of the French countryside which nourished and protected grapevines bound within and without branches and leaves; a blur of colors whose final tint was, depending on the location of one's gaze, was a meaty violet or flighty cherry color. The mouth of the bottle acted as a vent, allowing a vague sweet scent to rise and escape. Esters and natural sugars, and foreign compounds that flaked off the barrel and into the gallons stored in its belly during the wine's sheltered years, all merged one by one in the small space of the neck as they funneled, up, out, into the home. The wine was welcoming, comfortable between the chairs and valueless personal items of the drinker; its name, Vin de Table, was quite literal. This is a wine one could very well bring to the dining table, kitchen table or any table, to any sturdy plank where acquaintances gather or where one finds themselves alone, sitting before an open bottle labeled in gold script, Merlot. Exposed to room temperature, the liquid molecules have warmed, perhaps even sweated a bit, leaning back and relaxed, loosening their bonds around the waist, stretching every liquidy limb, allowing for maximum taste upon the palate. The charming scents and mysterious bottle tickle anticipation and engage the drinker, calling upon them to lift the bottle, to feel the full weight of seven hundred and fifty millimeters in the bicep, to feel the twist of bones in the wrist as a pour begins, and to feel a remarkable balance of that weight and force of motion as Vin spills from the mouth.

The glass was chosen for its delicate stem. From a round base it grew, up, thin, long and transparent. Its frailness designated fingertips as the sole bearer of weight; an entire hand, combining the clumsiness of digits and palms, would undo a design whose philosophy was based on Elegance. Only the tips were needed, in any case; positioned at the stem's center, they provided equilibrium between the base and a large bowl flowering at the opposite end. Here the Vin was caught and kept, gathered in a puddle of deep red, or perhaps, a flighty cherry color, sitting, for the moment, to be admired and, mostly, desired, in its silence and obvious presence. A thin crystal circle formed the rim of the glass added an additional theme of Enhancement, although, of course, balanced with the theme of Elegance. Positioned between the slit of lips, the rim caused a delicate sensation in the nerve endings, that of a glass wafer; one was to be careful, as not to accidentally bite down upon what has just joined the mouth. The rim must dissolve upon the bottom lip. One must feel the collective weight of this bright puddle and the crystal; curbing impulse, at least for the moment, teeth and gums and such sharp things were not to be involved in the drinking process. Other than lips, only the nose was to make a presence. The bowl's open flare actually highlighted the potpourri of sweet fragrances; with a diameter of three inches, nostrils were engulfed and poked into the glass, swimming along side the Vin's gasses, swirling clockwise, following the bowl's ballooned aerodynamics, left to right, right to left, a circular lifting, with, of course, elegance.

The object worked splendidly. Wine exited upon the tilt, thinning from a bulge to a fine wisp secretly passing through parted lips. It splashed against canines and filtered through toothy gaps consciously ignored when speaking or smiling. The wine's confusing hue was absorbed by calcium which, too, will give way to orthodontic concern at a later time, say, in several hours, when just before settling in for the night, a reflection in a bathroom mirror will be looked upon drawing some inebriated admiration, until, this naturally draws out a grin that will expose purple teeth, ending any burst of self confidence. Yet that is later on and settling into the mouth, the sip made itself at home on the tongue. Upon the tip (Non, apex!) and body (Non, Corpus!) it gathered quite a crowd of locals, papillae of multiple shapes, threadlike, squat mushroom-like and ringed, who playfully battered the sip in attempt to understand this stranger. The sip was divided, absorbed by a sprinkling of papillae to make various calculations. With professional speed, an organized, electrical spreadsheet was composed and dutifully sent express up the spine to a gluttonous, unconscious area in the brain, who signed for the package, smiling. The spreadsheet, written in a sparkly neural language of sodium and potassium, was read and comprehended. Now it was to be translated in more common language, that of emotional impulses for mind, and as such, it was composed n professional speed and rushed to the forehead, where a brow was raised and a thought was thought, *Tastes like blackcurrant*. Yet a bit more. Just a bit, buried underneath the sweet fruit was the flavor of something nearly burned. Reading the translation in detail, the mind saw the inclusion of a memory to assist in understanding the taste, one of a filet mignon, forgotten on a grill during a holiday in the sun. Its skin had caramelized from the hot coals. The wine tasted as if the black carcinogens who gathered in swarms, piling one atop the other, upon the flesh were knocked from their unsteady place, flaked off and carried with the wind, elegantly, through the air, and landed safely in a glass of Merlot. *Yes, this tastes just like that*. Such an occurrence, however, did not happen to the wine. Protein receptors were playing tricks, playfully battering the mind, who, feeling belittled, commanded a swallow.

As with the O in the traditional spelling of esophagus, the wine was dropped without hesitation from one sack of muscle to the next, down the gullet, the path felt in warm ripples. The sip leaked into the stomach with a slow burn, spreading through the lining to the rib cage and abdominals, creating a pleasantness from the inside out. Relaxed, the bowels leaned back, stretching their entwinements and let down their guard. The small intestine lost its grip, usually so accurate and thorough with even the smallest of morsels, allowing the ethanol to slip passed the innards and into the blood stream. Casually, the ethanol's carbons, hydrogen and lonely oxygen surfed among the red cells, alive and pulsing, riding the strong, determined current to the brain. Tilt after tilt of the wine glass, spreadsheet after spreadsheet of neural and emotional script, sip after sip filled the stomach and filtered through tipsy organs, into gallons of human blood. In four hundred and twenty seconds, or say, the time it takes to casually read a brief narrative on a brief union between wine and lips, the ethanol's effects of splashing against evolved cortexes have shown; muted inhibitions, improper speech and punctuation and judgment, faulty peripheral vision and glare recovery and reaction time led to a toe being stubbed against a valueless personal item. By luck or Fate, the impact was not with the table holding up the bottle of Merlot, continuing to vent its sweet scent and mysterious silence into the living area. The bottle remained safe, highlighted by soft white bulbs. Two-thirds of a

liter waited, to be poured, to fill the bowl of the wine glass, to enter the mouth and to alter.

anatomy of a mammalian eye: a fairytalish

After eight weeks, an eyelash grew to its full potential. Black and aggravated, it thrust forwards and out, arching in a permanent swan dive away from the face. Planted deep within a follicle, it would remain, going nowhere, until, from a lack of moisture, nutrients and simple age, it will plummet, after withering about the base, wrinkling about the trunk and blunting about the tip—a tip once so determined, arrogantly pointing into space, as the finger of some metal tribute to some European explorer who died of some transmitted disease, a tip that upon every unconscious blink struck the air with a quick whip, driving the entire body below it onward. At this moment, however, there is only hysterical angry youth, snapping and flinching against a world, it is believed, intending to do harm. Without knowing, the lash, in its flourishing violence, protects a very fragile eye from deadly things, say, water droplets and flower pollen. Silent and withdrawn, curled into a socket, sits a self-conscious, plump little shape, oblate, and vastly pale in appearance—a little eye. This overwhelming lack of color signifies no loss but an incredible collection of white tissue, who, being more attuned to the eye's sensitivity, flaunts a paternal attribute, flexing sinews running on protein and collagen, whose Atlas shoulders sustain that oblate shape and milky hue, whose lifetime is dedicated to housing all of the individual characteristics making up this eye.

The little eye does not know how lucky it really is, eternally cozy and wrapped between two thick flaps of skin. The hug is oily, but necessary. From vertical glands built into the eyelids leaks a substance, dense enough to avoid causal evaporation, yet clear as to leave the eye capable of viewing wind chimes and kitchen knives and all in between. A bit smothering, but with the best of intentions, the glands emit their oil, properly ensuring the coat fully covers the little eye; there is rampant concern, especially on windy days, as identified by the A notes and G flats fluttering from the chime's metal cylinders, playing a tune about winds from out of state, foreigners who drive into town, displaying an eerie calm that is only provided by safety in such numbers (*So many gusts! Cover up!*), and with exceptional ease slip past the lash, so thin and young, and quite occupied with self-preservation, and bump against the eye, deliberately, as to apply some unnecessary, intentional aggravation. The tune is played out knock by smack, lazily, clanging scenarios of tragic events into an eyelid's imagination, all, tragically, based on previous, actual events. One of them, appropriate but disturbing enough, involves the little eye, of course, and a wind, blustery for this time of the month. Having spotted the innocent from across thousands of miles, the gust approached speedily, faster than reflex, faster than the lid's maternal instinct to blink. Upon impact, the gust wiped dry all the oils the lid had prepared for days, oils fitting the little eye precisely—an intimate fit that only a lid would know—leaving the little eye dry, sensitive (*Even more so!*) to sunlight and the usual pleasant winds average for this time of month, now causing a different reflex, one that was visually hideous.

It was simply a squint, a collapse of the face about the forehead and cheeks and the skin in between. A sticky pain was felt throughout the socket as dry, bare nerve endings in the little eye received sunshine. Eyelids fluttered open and shut in attempt at beating away formless rays, in instinct to protect, an instinct that, unknowingly, and uncontrolled, caused a sticky pain in itself, a friction highlighting each motion, open, and shut, and all millimeters between. The added discomfort was told in the furrowing of plucked

eyebrows, who blind and deaf, but quite acrobatic, performed some Mongolian bend that umbrellas the socket, as though the sculpted bushes were holding back a wave of sweat. It is their instinct to perform no matter the matter seeping through: urea, water, sunlight or beverage, splashed across the face in disgust. They executed well, as did the left and right file of cheeks, curling up the face's additional flesh into a ball just below the left and right eye (yes, there are two, but this little eye has no realization that another, exact in every way, even down to the self consciousness, actually exists. *Alas!*). The meticulous herding gathered the large population of pores and blood and minute facial hairs, very fine and thankfully unseen, into a small island on the cheekbone; the lack of room left no option but for the over-population to build upon itself, layer pore upon hair, forming a bulge squirming, shifting underneath the little eye, relieving its weight of billions there in the little eye's personal space, squeezing the little eye against the skull surrounding it, accentuating the squint. The increasing pressure from below further oblate the oblate shape; its midsection and rear end thrust and swelled in public.

In the name of modesty, and safety, always safety, red and fibrous, a silent, hidden affection goes unnoticed in the socket. To the north, south, east and west, pulsing red muscles are anchored to the little eye, who, is so certain of its loneliness, sits unaware of the attachment, and unaware of the salvation the touch brings. As the bulge's diameter grew, as the eye's diameter grew, as the walls of the skull around the little eye closed in, the muscles began to tense, curl in retreat, yet went nowhere without certain the little eye escaped alongside. Risking the dementia of claustrophobia, the possibility of bursting against jagged calcium deposits of the skull, the muscles waited, collecting every bubble of oxygen provided by a strong left lung, and, then, with every sinuous strand, the muscles began to flex, finally began to tug at the corners of the little eye, ignoring its plump spots, its average brown shade of hazel, pulling the sum of the eye, and all of its perfection and flaws towards it, with it, away, away! The slow retraction traveled an immeasurable distance from the opening of the socket, but, far enough, to prevent a cataclysmic *PoP!* of the little eye and a sudden blackout of vision. The clumsy silver cylinders of the wind chime were seen, and continue to be seen as they are heard clanging their hideous tune of outsiders squeezing into town. Sunshine entered the eye, continuing to poke at frazzled nerve endings, thankfully. The escape was successful; the oblate shape was safe, still self conscious, and unconscious of the muscles and their dedicated touch, which, although are never rewarded with even a glimpse of acknowledgment, will remain to the north, south, east and west.

The little eye is surrounded by violence, sometimes by its own hand. Sunshine, pompous and yellow, has always been the flamboyant personality to gain a stranger's smile, grow a flower, or cancer or massage the skin to a numbing pleasantness. Sunshine has many friends. But Sunshine pokes and taunts our little eye, more so than the wind, despite the tale and failing melody pumping through a window screen (*Nightmarish! Cover up!*). Sunshine has fooled everyone, the eye believed. As such, curled into a black, scant ball, the thin, flimsy lens of the eye, its entrance, remained guarded. An army of thousands, long, lean, and breathing blood, surrounded the lens, all three hundred and sixty degrees. A soldier's uniform was coated brown, as though it had walked time zones through sod and stale mud; placed side by side, muddy toe to filthy shoulder, the soldiers' caked

frames formed an impenetrable color, a brown earthy hue that lacked the belly aching blonde happiness so excessive in a ray of light; self preservation is serious business. Enough to tailor the thoughts of a soldier, as these were uniform: to maintain the eye, ensure its valuables within, its way of life, its function and purpose. Thus, the soldiers knew only two directions: forward and back. The rest was strategy. During the months when buds finger through dirt piles, during the months when skin is loosely donned in cotton, exposed to low humidity and afternoons of abundant sun, being massaged to a numbed pleasantness, the soldiers charge, pulling their elastic bodies thin, thinner, pushing and rolling the lens closed, into a scant, black little ball defying the charm and warmth of an amusing ray. It will not be fooled. The light must stay out. It's a foreigner too, just like the wind.

The eye has never fully closed, however. Regardless of the thousands of nerve pinching sensations, regardless of the silent jealousy harbored by the little eye, it occasionally listened to the voices living within it, small, yet in millions, and in constant chatter. They politely asked to welcome the light, all wavelengths peaking at green, the violet, and yes, even those in the yellow region. The cells took this light, and in a very democratic process, depending on its length and width, absorbed the entire history of the light, listened to its story of traveling from some distant celestial body, full of violence and hydrogen, of the sporadic yellow nuclear explosions and the like, swimming its way through space hundreds of degrees of Fahrenheit below zero, through living weather patterns circling clockwise and skyscrapers, just to introduce itself to this particular eye (not the other one mind you) and make its new home right here. The light had a lot to offer, it seemed, after being absorbed by the cells, small and in thousands; they recorded this history into the *PoP!* and fizz of neural talk, all which the foreigner could not understand in the least but very much enjoyed watching the natives perform their natural way of life, sending this history to the very back of the little eye, who, began to listen to quite a story, of all the grass, the movement of the wind chime, the flower pollen and of a distant horizon from where, it was told by the light, there will be more light coming in this direction, to the little eye, bringing a world completely different from the snugness of the socket. And the cells listened. And the little eye listened. And the light smiled, pointing.

mold upon a fig

The air had warmed to eighty seven degrees Fahrenheit, producing a comfortable environment for a herd of fig trees. Brown and forgotten, the leaves of a previous harvest had withered, dried to a deathly hue and fallen, carpeting the earth surrounding their base a crumpled texture that continued to snap, making a presence felt, despite passing months ago. At the moment, sound and sun massaged young, fine hair follicles spotting the inner ear and kneaded nerve endings just beneath the skin. Brown and twisting, the towering trunk of each fig tree bore large nodal tumors, where, once, branches grew to maturity, provided a bounty, and promptly detached, falling to the ground in anticlimactic accomplishment. Remaining, a signature of mutilated turns and loops, sunburned and bubbled wood, whose crevasses had packed with blackened earth driven into the air by evening thunderstorms. Individually, each knob and bloated spot was simply a knob and bloated spot one expects to find suspended in a jar of green formaldehyde, to be studied and cured out of fear of contamination. Yet at a distance, the tumors are more than benign, each completing a fig tree, puzzling an organic shape of various saturated browns. The solid colors complimented its foliage, bright green and twelve inches, the leaves, freckled with coarse little hairs about the belly and face. With five rounded appendages, a leaf easily hoarded sunlight and held-fast, squeezing to a fist the Mediterranean light, making certain every last drop of tasty starch and glucose dropped from its fingers and hairs and into hungry cells busy multiplying, extending roots already trespassing far beyond the private property's limits. Their extension thrust thousands of microscopic holes into a distant wet soil, wetness, to be absorbed and to squelch the thirst derived from exhausting movement, of growth of tiny figs composing the anticipated main crop.

From their black rounded bottoms elegantly matching the earth, up, only a short distance, to their thin purple necks, their shape was, simply, a bulbous tear drop. This skin was an education of the color spectrum, fading at an exceptionally casual manner, from the color of night to the first moment of sunrise, with all spectrums between included, summed into a miraculous two inches of length. Regardless of this compact feat, the skin itself is horrifically frail. A rather strong gust of wind or a rather strong burst of growth can tear the fruit, causing an illogical rip from the base of the neck, down to the bowels, a jagged line exposing a far distant color spectrum. Within the skin, a pop of bright colors, painting with several strokes the twelve long hours of daylight shining upon this town and its citizens, talking amongst themselves in a dialect completely misunderstood just yards away. The meat of a fruit's body is actually a beautiful entwined chaos of tiny flowers, one a youthful pink, one the color of a nearby shoreline, one of a mid-day ray of light, and one at the final moment of sunset. Each is replicated thousands and thousands of times over, falling within and without and over the next, forming a mass mimicking the fumbling turns and loops of the trunk's mutilation, now, a pleasant scene, one of joyous color and life. The water excavated from a neighbor's property is pumped through the roots, up, up, against gravity and silently fed into the budding flowers, whose youth and sugar is retained, leaving the fruit as a whole, bloated and sweet. Hundreds of fruits such as this, encapsulating flowers such as these, the thousands upon thousands, hang from a fig tree's branch, who, under the accumulated weight, sags, just slightly, forming an angle, pointing to the ground, to a spot where the branch will eventually lie in its final resting place.

A young fig is not plucked from its nurturing location until it is determined if it has in fact matured, if it has in fact become tempting and edible, when its sucrose level has become shocking as the loud colors within. Only an index and thumb is needed to determine this milestone in a fig's life. Arched and gentle, fingertips introduce themselves to a fruit's plump little belly. With the finest of grips, the two fingers pinch, exuding a force that is more of a flinching reflex, light and using the least amount of energy, to be absorbed by the fig, who, so sensitive, could combust under any amount of pressure. This amount of force is enough to gauge the fig's readiness. No need to upset something so beautiful. Upon their release, in each finger's wake, a dent remained, poking the little belly and breaking the consistency of its innocent round shape, bending the hues that so adequately expressed twilight hours. No resistance was felt by the tips as they squeezed, a fig so young has no anger to convey, or at least, a method to fully express their state. Upon the tips' release, a fig will maintain the imprint and girth of the index and thumb in its character, and will carry this episode until its last days, failing to cope. This passive feature is key to determining a fig's readiness; the flowers have bloomed, to a minute diameter, but bloomed nonetheless, and the watery sucrose has filled to capacity within the skin, the skin, who, is the last key in this process. Now, using the pads of the index and thumb, the belly of the fruit is traced, from one dent, around, to the next, passing the ridges of a finger over the wrinkled ridges of a fig. As the gaps of the two foreigners intertwine, impacting in beats and pauses, the pads, filled to capacity with sun drenched nerve endings, turned the Morse code into a clear message: the skin has become leathery to the touch, has had enough lazy days basking in the sun. Flaccid with tough skin, the fruit is ready.

To detach a fig, a farmer, who has aged twenty years beside these trees, who has witnessed the birth of harvests and the death of countless more limbs, a farmer seasoned with valuable bits of knowledge, say, to whitewash areas particularly exposed to the sun, those unfortunate to find themselves, not under the shade of foliage, but assaulted by columns of light, these are whitewashed as to prevent sunstroke and a premature death, to perform as a pale blockade deflecting what bronze Natives have come to worship for centuries, this knowledgeable farmer, extends an arm, unraveling a hand, five digits unfurled, allowing an open palm to cushion the earthy little seat of the fig. The fingers surrounding divide a breeze trailing in from the south into five separate streams, and shade the little fig from a very bright sun to the north. Together, palm and digits join to form a crescent, cradling ripened fruit, who, relaxed and planted safely, is rotated counter clockwise, motion stemming only from the bones in a wrist, performing silently, in harmony, well aware of the of the sacredness in a moment and the respect to be offered. A wrist, and all bones within, turn hundreds of times, plucking figs from a tree, beneath hundreds of aging branches waiting for their end to finally arrive; fingers and palms cradle and cup, cradle and cup, hundreds of cradles, hundreds of cups, fig bottom to welcoming hand, the accumulated friction enough to spark the growth of a blotchy callous, rough, purple, as the figs' tint had bleached pores.

Separate entities, the figs were dropped, one by one, into a simple wooden crate. Being stored in a dim area lacking humidity, it has maintained a solid frame of pale brown with

few hairline fractures at any significant pressure points, say, the crook of an angle made by two planks, or the exposed center of a single piece of wood. The only joints at considerable risk were the knees of the farmer, repeating a cyclical motion of rising from a slight bend at the thigh and calf, providing a slight decrease in height, narrowing the distance between a fig in hand and the gathered figs below; this reduced the impact upon their reunion; a fig's remaining shape and shades are preserved with a gentler plummet. Knowledgeable. After the last mature fig is rotated, plucked and dropped, after the farmer sighs, relaxing the torso, going limp in the arms and returning blood flow into tendons, after a brief pause, a minor celebration, the farmer bends at the waist. Knees are relieved of this task, of lifting the wooden crate stuffed with figs, a sum of an entire tree, a sum of colors seen during sunset to just before dawn, the crate is heaved, lifted with tensed biceps and held against the midsection. The distribution of weight along the belly assists in making the walk away from a heard of fig trees a little easier, although, in a few steps, sharp rectangular angles of the box cut an outline into the chest, just below the nipples, and down, off to the side, in a straight line, past abdominals protecting a very sensitive stomach.

The crate is nailed shut at the corners. Splints of wood rise and flick off into a forgotten distance. It is dark inside the crate, dry, and time is dense. The figs will no longer drink the water of their Native land or feel the bothersome sun on leathery patches of skin; the figs will be shipped a distance of intercontinental proportions, tossed from one metal cargo holding to the next, overhearing languages of different alphabets and accents, overhearing engines and mechanical exhausts, poked, prodded, in the name of security and fear of contamination, uncorked from a final metal cargo hold and placed inside the tin bed of diesel trucks following a paved road to a popular market with popular savings on produce. Like figs for example. There, sitting in a slouching pile, the figs are illuminated by a vast number of fluorescent bulbs. Together, they form one large yellow hue streaming from the ceiling, making weekly circulars even more exciting as they are read, and making it quite clear, the number of dollars per pound. The wooden crate, once holding figs on their journey, had been tossed in the ally, now embracing blackened lettuce and expired cuts of flank posing an unacceptable hazard to patrons. The figs, now, were to be chosen, collected and placed into a shear, thin plastic bag, a patron, licking the pads of an index and thumb, would pinch, and twist, counter clockwise. With mouth agape, a plastic bag is fed, one by one, a fruit of acceptable size and frame, as determined by a consumer's generalizations on freshness, questioning the danger of two impressions found here and there, mysteriously placed and not explained by any circular. The figs sit mute, waiting, to be selected, for an end to arrive. Time is dense and passing.

Those exchanged for currency found themselves, two or three sunsets later, upon a white circular plate. Exposed to air and a very bright sun to the north, the leathery skin began to tire. Minor folds at the midsection were collecting, as water and sucrose and the flowers of a quant shade of pink within slowly bubbled, evaporated or faded, releasing specks of gasses unable to maneuver through such dark skin. Easily disoriented, the gasses fainted, one over the other, mounting a tragic deathly scene behind a fig's purple skin, acting as a curtain. Their numbers began to rot, forming a scent injected into air molecules, carried through window screens and into the nostrils of opportunistic

pathogens, whose hungry cells were busy multiplying and searching for sustenance easily traced to a white circular plate reflecting light in large, obscene angles, flaring directions to this very spot and a path through the dark colors of the fig's skin. Warm and plump the fig sat, invaded, listening as its sugary starches and cellulose, its very self, tore into billions of invisible pieces, small enough to fit into the mouths of billions, of happy, little foreigners never seen before. Chewing on the flowers with a north hemispheric accent, they swallowed water with an eastern European aftertaste. Laughing, they excreted and grew, tubular, branching, out, under and around the fig, from a single tip another sprouted, one tip, two, four, eight, a shocking white color carpeting the nightly hues, sixteen, billion.