Porchlight

Summer 2010

Porchlight: A Literary Magazine

Where Narrative, Design, and Photography Intersect.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

It has been a mixed-up summer. A long one. The kind of summer where everything feels out of order, or in order, but new and not yet comfortable.

This issue reflects that feeling. The pieces are related but not. In an order, a particular order, but not the same, one to the next.

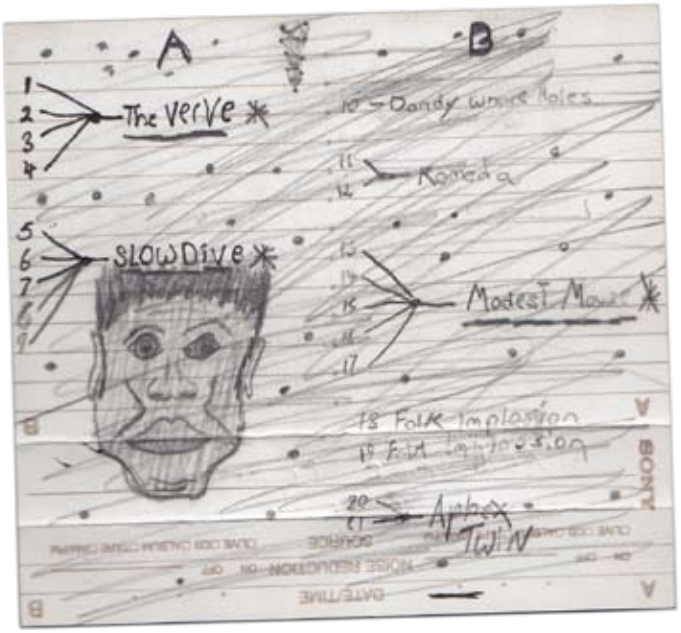
Call it: theme mix tape. Or if you're feeling modern, "a compilation."

We'll start from there.

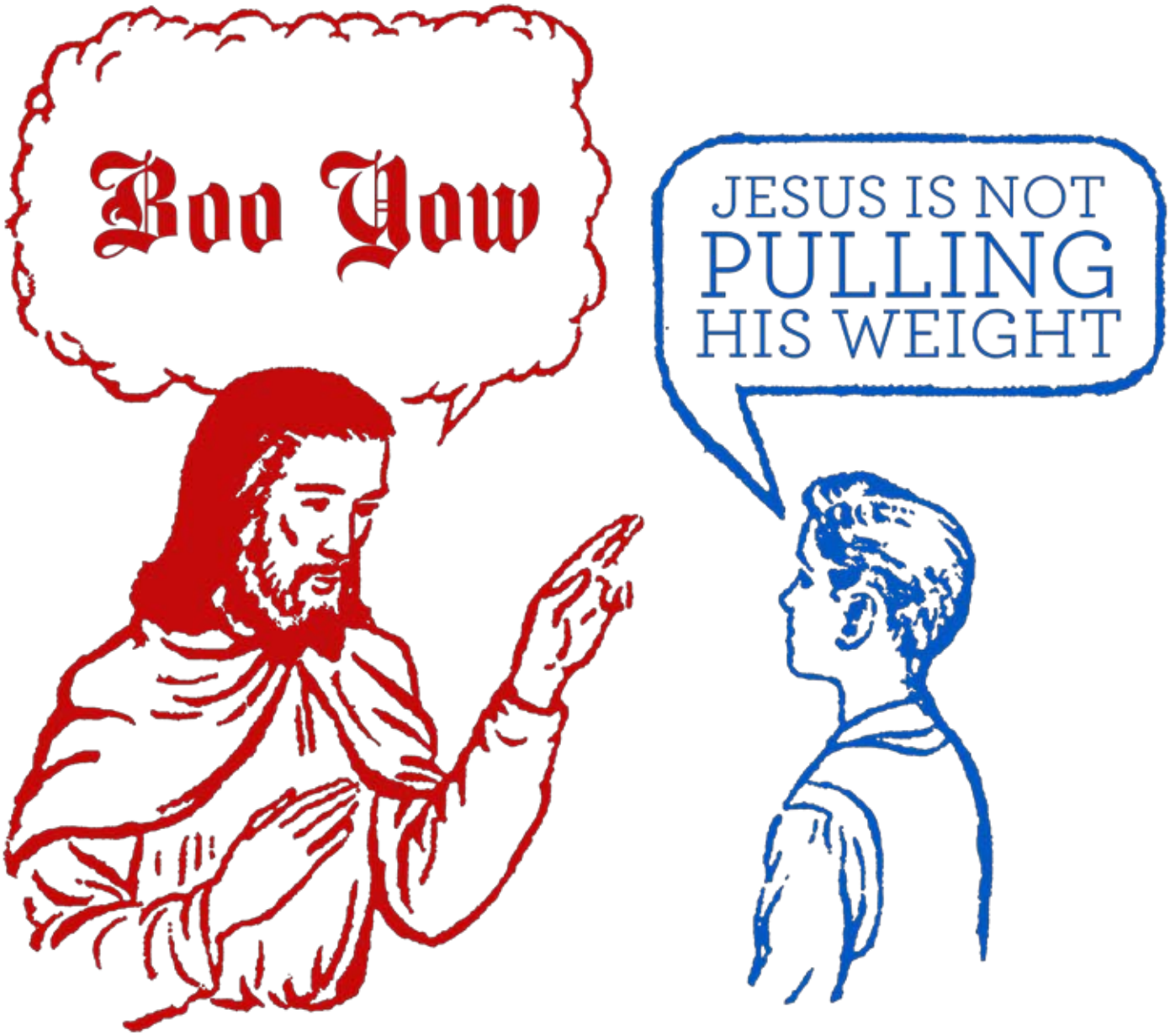
Sincerely,

L.J. Moore
Editor

CONTENTS



Mix Tape For You
Sean Loughlin, ca. 1998



BY KELLY COVENY

BOO YOW

This phrase, according to a very old and wise banker, is the one thing you must absolutely know if you are going to China. I fell in love with it before I even knew what it meant. So round and sensuous and close to my very favorite word of all time, *Bouillabaisse*. Boo Yow says a number of things merely in the vowel heavy weight it wields.

It says, "I am not afraid of you and will not back down." Or "keep your big toothy goat to yourself." Or "the noodles are fine but please no more mystery meat chunks."

In Greek it would mean "Throw the fucking plate against the wall. Who cares. You live once. Just make sure you whip it dramatically. No tossing or tentative wrist action."

In Italian it would be a close cousin of *Salud!*, used late at night by men with chiseled faces after heavy talk of politics and before going home to show their women what Boo Yow translates to in bed.

If said at home, Boo Yow could mean, "Mommy will now with no objections from anyone proceed to her bedroom for a nap." It could also mean, "Somebody else needs to make the Goddamn dinner tonight!" And lastly, "Honey, thank you so much for the two hour foot rub."

In Chinese it roughly translates to: "No thank you. I do not want that."

The banker, a client of Joe's, having just returned from China, said this was the most crucial expression to know. And it makes sense. Being able to say no is at least ten times more important than being able to say yes in most situations.

Because how may things do you truly want to say yes to?

LEO (5yrs old): Hey Mom, can we buy that Blow-up Bouncy Castle at Costco?

JOE: You know what would be fun... what if we wash the cars this Saturday?

ME: (to myself) I should just take a few minutes and reorganize all the kids' toys so it's not such a mess...Boo Yow!!! Boo Yow!!! Boo Yow!!!

I am not sure how I have survived this long without Boo Yow in my vocabulary. I think with the right inflection, it could say fuck you one minute and thank you the next.

It would look fabulous in the old Batman cartoons with a big banger after it. And just as fabulous in calligraphy as a respectful closing to a long heartfelt letter.

It may very well be the new little black dress of words.

JESUS IS NOT PULLING HIS WEIGHT

My sister Amy has been staying with us for the past several days and she is a bit distraught over her current roommate situation. I advise:

"Amy, you need to tell Erika that Jesus is just not pulling his weight. And to be honest, he kind of embarrassed you last week. I mean Christ (sorry) you can't walk out of a yoga class quoting the Bible and not think you are going to embarrass the shit out of your best friend/roommate.

"Furthermore, if she's so excited about how Jesus has pretty much saved her life since trusting him as her personal savior, perhaps she can explain why she's been squatting in your apartment for five months."

Amy tries to interject.

I continue, "I know, I know, but if God, (and her broken down mental state and lack of employment as an actress), magically brought you two together (gag), then maybe you could ask her to inquire when God is thinking about getting her, her own apartment".

My sister Amy is an advocate of artistic expression ... of following ... of never saying, never... of sailing off into the sunset of your dreams. You just can't always tell who's a barnacle until you have to pry them off your ship.

I continue my rant, "Oh yes, and the next time Erika tries to convince you to accept Jesus as your personal savior, don't try to save her. Tell her you don't think he is doing such a tremendous job with her life and if she wants to be his sales rep she should really step up her circumstances, talk to him about some kind of a promotion to employed and maybe capable of renting her own studio. Otherwise it just doesn't seem like taking him on as your personal savior is a very prudent choice.

"I myself have never looked into hiring Jesus as my personal anything. I think he was a swell guy with some seriously tough challenges. Not unlike Martin Luther King. Or Helen Keller. Or Harvey Milk.

And he did a whole lot of good for a whole lot of people and had some really excellent principles. Like Pete Townsend or Oprah or Angelina or Bono. Except you never hear the back-story about when he did heroine or wore an amulet of blood around his neck.

"Actually he did have that one dinner party where he made everyone pretend they were drinking his blood, which is a bit odd. Anyway, my point is I don't really believe I need Jesus to be born again. All I really need is a solid good night's sleep. Maybe a few. In a row.

"And plus, I prefer heroes and role models. They are safer than saviors. Less likely to disappoint. Or let you down. Or excuse you for things you should really be taking more responsibility for. Plus there's a slightly better chance of actually meeting them someday, which is kind of a fun thing to shoot for." P

Photograph by Raggio Colby

Great Blue Heron at Havasu Creek

WHITE KNUCKLE

BY MANGESH NAIK

I look into my sack
spread inside is the death
it's eye. a fiery yellow core
worms there
stare back, smile

In the dark
it lights intestines
bonsai wolves
stare at the death's face

but the death is busy
opening an earth cage
letting inside, who knows what.

next comes the naxalite attack
"Is it for me?" I ask "Will they castrate?"
"Yes" sneers the death "and someone would get a tongue stub."

I lock the sack and choke my death
I swallow my tongue and smile with my face
Now that there are no peacocks
I spread my hair and dance

tired, I rest
in the death's lap
for an end can come only
when the beginning fades.

by Leslie Wolf Plajzer

1.

In January of 2007 my fourteen year old daughter was diagnosed with an eating disorder manifesting itself as bulimia at the time.

I found the food by accident. We were arguing about whether or not she could go to a party. I said no. Sarah ran out of the house momentarily, and when she returned, I said she could go after we negotiated a curfew. Her dad dropped her off at the party, and when they left, I found remnants of an undigested meal floating in the toilet.

I called Sarah and asked if her she was throwing up her food. She paused and then reluctantly said, "Do we have to talk about this now?" and with that, any hope I had about the whole thing being a mix-up vanished.

When Sarah came home she looked at me for a split second, darted upstairs to her bedroom, and locked her door. She was crying hysterically, but refused to let me in, saying, "I had glared at her in disgust."

I walked away long enough to leave a voicemail message for her therapist. By the time I returned to check on her she had fallen asleep and unlocked her door.

The next morning we forged ahead with a pre-planned shopping trip, that was now also a fact finding mission, or a tiny window of opportunity for me to ask questions and gather information. I wanted to sound like a mom who was cool, calm, collected, and neutral, but that wish died before it ever took form.

My words sounded scripted. My thoughts were garbled and my voice was filled with apprehension. With a panicked heart I asked, "What for? How long? Who with? Where? Why?" and she told me: "Three years! I've been purging for three years and sometimes I do it three or four times a day!" She turned away. I touched her hand to let her know I had heard her, wondering, "Where was I, dear God, where was I?"

Sarah's therapist returned my call and wanted to see Sarah the following day. I dropped her off at Kim's office but Sarah wanted to go in alone, so I waited in the car. When Sarah returned, she got in the car and said "I'm going to Sheppard Pratt. Kim says they have what I need and she'll see you and Daddy tomorrow morning at 8:00 o'clock."

2.

Floodsy and I were waiting when Kim arrived, and she jumped in the conversation immediately.

Kim: I want both of you to know what a courageous daughter you have and you're lucky because Sarah wants help. She's scared. Don't get me wrong but she's not as scared as she could be. I even said to her, Sarah, how do you feel? Are you afraid? What's going on inside of you right now? Sarah said, 'I'm scared but my parents are both in recovery so I sort of know what's going to happen. I'm not worried because they'll make sure I get whatever help I need and my dad will drive me where I have to go."

Floodsy: I'm there for Sarah and she knows she can depend on me. I have a 26 year old son named Justin from a previous marriage. His mother and I were using drugs when he was growing up. I wasn't there for him but I take pride in being there for Sarah.

Me: Why does she have to go to a mental hospital? Sheppard Pratt is a mental hospital. Can't you try to help her first and Sheppard Pratt could be a last resort?

Kim: She needs treatment, Leslie. I can't help her. I don't want to get into specifics, but hers is one of the worst cases I've ever seen. Not that I've seen a lot of them because I haven't, but Sarah purges frequently and she's been purging a long time. Three years might not sound like a lot to us but it's a pretty big chunk of time when you're only fourteen. But what's in your favor is that Sarah is tired of the behavior. She wants help, so be grateful you found out now. I have a patient whose parents minimized the disorder and refused to treat their daughter. Now she's on her way to college, can't digest a meal, and she's eighteen so her parents have lost control.

Me: What if they try to put her on antidepressants? I don't want her on antidepressants.

Kim: They might. I don't know what they'll do but don't argue with them Leslie. You'll be better off in the long run if you let them treat her without getting in the way.

Me: What now? Do you want to see her again?

Kim: I don't have to see her again, but I'd be happy to. The most important thing is having her evaluated quickly.

3.

I went home, called Sheppard Pratt, and waited for the admissions coordinator to call me back. Silence, broken only by an occasional tear. I was obligated as a mother to teach my child to eat, but how could I when I didn't know how to feed myself? I'd spent years minimizing the impact of the distorted belief system my mother left me on her deathbed. I knew it was a belief system built on quicksand, but it was all I knew. I never challenged it in any tangible way because it was all I had and it was already there. I binged. It was no secret. I stuffed my feelings with food. I had been living like that for most of my life. I ate as a response to a multitude of feelings. It was the only way I knew to self soothe. I had no interest in doing the legwork to change it, and while I said I cared about losing weight, I apparently didn't care enough.

I was entitled and not afraid to admit it, especially after I got clean.

"How dare anyone tell me I can't have ice cream! I've already given up drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and buying ceramic bowls from TJ Maxx. I work like a dog and nobody has given me a Goddamn thing so if I want to get in bed with a bag of pistachios that's what I'm going to do."

When Sarah was born I pretended my food addiction didn't exist. If I pretended it wasn't there, maybe it would dissolve on its own, and Sarah wouldn't see it. Deep down I suppose I knew the elephant was planted in our living room, but I hoped that by pushing it away, it wouldn't be able to get between us.

Finally the admissions coordinator called me back. She had to screen Sarah over the phone before making the appointment, and her questions ran the gamut: age, birthday, schools attended, height, weight, activities outside of school, and the onset of menstruation. Then the questions became qualitative, and I started to unravel:

"Why are you asking me all of these ridiculous questions? You sound like an idiot. You're not even asking me things that have anything to do with food and you're talking so slow I can't even listen. Just spit it out already! My daughter diets OK? How the hell do I know how long she exercises? Do you think I stand in front of the treadmill with an egg timer? What do you want from me? Has she used laxatives? Have her friends changed? Have I found water pills in her bedroom? Have her grades slipped? Jesus Christ, lady! You sound like a moron. My kid is suffering and every question you ask is dumber than the last. Make the appointment already and let me off the phone!"

4.

Sarah was evaluated the following day. I filled out forms, but couldn't steady my hands long enough to write legibly. I couldn't catch my breath or stop my body from vibrating. My mind drifted more than usual and my thoughts were fragmented. My head was racing fast and in so many directions I couldn't process information effectively. I tried doing what was in front of me, but I'd forget what it was. I couldn't make sense of what was happening. I had slipped into a state of catastrophe so quickly that I couldn't tell the difference between tears and beads of sweat.

I knew where I was when I pinched myself, but I had to pinch frequently. I'd close my eyes, and like a meditative mantra, I'd repeat silently, "I am mother to a teenage girl. Her name is Sarah and she is fourteen years old. She is being admitted to a hospital where she will receive treatment for an eating disorder. She does not have cancer. Her parents are with her. She has her IPOD on. She's sending text messages to friends. She sleeps in her own bed and loves it. By all accounts she feels safe. I'm a parole agent who has lived in Baltimore for over 20 years."

Every few minutes I'd say it again. I was hell-bent on processing the present even if it meant recanting pieces of my history to help remember where I was and who I had been. I could regurgitate the facts like they happened yesterday. My story was frozen in time like a sad movie I had watched so often that the events were no longer emotionally charged.

5.

It was the winter of 1986. I dropped John Snyder off at Dulles Airport and headed home. I diffused my own panic by listening to music in the car. For all practical purposes I stopped functioning that day.

I had moved twenty-one times in nine years. Eighteen doctors in the D.C. area prescribed enough pharmaceuticals each month for me to stay anesthetized. I graphed which doctor gave me what and where I had to go for refills. I made sure not to get caught in a lie. I consumed approximately sixty pills a day in combinations of amphetamines, pain pills, and narcotics, and I drank a fifth of whiskey on top of that. I couldn't go outside without feeling "numb" and I stayed numb for 20 years. Periodically I saw myself in a mirror and knew at those moments I was deeply troubled, but those moments didn't last long and if they did, I just drank more. The last four months before I finally got help, I'd frequently go to my mother's grave and spend hours leaning on her headstone. I would ask her why I had failed so miserably, and I would believe that I'd get an answer if I waited long enough.

A friend convinced me to admit myself to detox. I'd never heard of a detoxification unit or specialized hospitals for chemical dependency, but I went. The average stay was three days. I was discharged directly to a 28 day treatment program, 23 days after admittance. When I was admitted, the pharmaceuticals in my system were at a toxic level, but the truth is that I only went to treatment because I had nowhere to live. My first boyfriend's mother, who we affectionately called "Mama," had cleaned out my last apartment. My belongings were in a storage locker by her home in Baltimore and going to treatment was the only way to be sure I'd get my things.

After Mama died, her youngest son, Eddie, told me that cleaning my apartment had been a horrific experience for his mother. Cigarette butts lay around the apartment, on the window sills, around base boards on the floor. The trash can in the kitchen had been filled with broken dishes. At the time, throwing plates out was easier than rinsing them. My answering machine was wrapped in a terry cloth bath towel. I had convinced myself that no one would know I was home if my answering machine was wrapped in a towel. Pill bottles and empty flasks of whisky

were everywhere, in shoe boxes, closets, drawers, nightstands, behind cushions, and under pillows. Like a child living in a fantasy world, I pretended if I couldn't see the drugs, that meant they weren't there.

Taped to my front door: a certified letter from the Post Office, saying my mail would be returned as undeliverable if I didn't take it out of my mailbox once a month. Also: a letter from the Motor Vehicle Administration saying my driver's license had been suspended. I drove a new car for a year with temporary tags good for ten days. My utilities were turned off. I had money to pay bills but my checkbook was in my pocketbook and my pocketbook was lost. I couldn't replace my check book without identification and I couldn't replace a driver's license I no longer had. So I sat in darkness, convinced that I'd be arrested at the MVA. I wasn't sure whether or not I had broken a law, but I wasn't going to take a chance. Life without lights was preferable to a nasty clerk at the MVA.

Despite all this, when the psychiatrist admitted me to treatment, I reported no history of substance abuse. The problem was my tolerance, not the drugs. I wasn't chemically addicted because I needed what I took. I had a weight problem that I managed with escalating amounts of amphetamines. Pain pills were for migraine headaches, tranquilizers helped me manage a low grade neurosis I had learned to live with. I couldn't sleep without sleeping pills and if I woke up in the middle of the night the only thing that would settle the jitters in my stomach was bourbon. It was unfortunate that I had to drug myself in order to appear minimally functional and I never would have argued that. But life is full of unfortunate circumstances and this happened to be one of mine…

6.

A nurse stood in front of me waving her hands: "Excuse me. Do you need a glass of water? Are you going to pass out? Pull yourself together for the sake of your child or I'm going to have to ask you to leave. Your daughter is watching you out of the corner of her eye. You might not realize it but she sees you and you're starting to scare her. If you can't get yourself together go home. You are making this more difficult than it needs to be and you are hurting your daughter. If you can't support her please leave. Can you hear me?" She pointed to a chair softer than the one I was sitting in and I could feel the difference when she told me to sit in it. My body was still vibrating and I was rubbing my forehead, but the intensity of both dimmed.

When it came to Sarah, I experienced a backed up toilet the same way I would have experienced the house falling down. Now I was going to be thrown out of a mental hospital for slipping back into catastrophe. The love of my life was getting ready to walk through a door that couldn't be opened without a key and it was a key I didn't have.

I left Floodsy with Sarah and went home. Later that night they both came home and told me that Sarah would start treatment the following morning. The modality she was placed in was PHP: Partial Hospitalization Program. Hospital care seven days a week from 7:00AM

to 7:00PM. Three meals and a snack were eaten on the unit, food outside the unit was reintroduced slowly, passes were doled out to reinforce positive behavior, and passes were taken away just as quickly if the patient "acted out on symptoms." Toilets were locked and could only be flushed by a staff member with the appropriate key. No sweatshirts with hoods or pockets allowed. Both make good hiding places for vomit.

Sarah made it through the first day. On the second day Floodsy and I waited in lobby. Family therapy is mandatory while the patient is hospitalized and this was our first session. Lindsey was the therapist assigned to Sarah. She unlocked the door, introduced herself, and asked us to follow her to the unit to retrieve Sarah.

Behind the locked door was a world eerily familiar. Reminiscent of something I knew, but I wasn't quite sure what or where. Sprawled out on the floor were a sea of angry faces that all turned their heads to glare at us while we made our way down the hall. Nothing but adolescents: sitting, waiting, watching, staring. Some had that hollow look in their eye signaling they were already lost and the others just looked really pissed. Scattered around were books, guitars, board games, and nurses dispensing medication and asking who wanted to go to the bathroom. Sarah had only been there for a day but when we walked down the hall the kids all seemed to know who we were. "Sarah, your parents are here! Hang tough old girl! You can do it. We know you can. Good luck! Hang in! It'll be alright! It was as though she had been sworn in as a member of a secret society complete with comrades and villains. After finding an empty office the three of us sat down and I took my place as principal perpetrator. We waited for Lindsey to tell us it was time to begin.

7.

Lindsey turned a tape recorder on, explaining the session was taped because she was a resident.

Lindsey: I want to get information from both of you about Sarah. Can each of you describe your family trees? Who wants to start?

Floodsy: Sarah has a brother. My son Justin is 27 years old. He got married last year and had a baby boy named Cameron. He's from my previous marriage.

Lindsey: Does Justin live in the house with Sarah?

Me: Justin lives with his mother but he's in drug treatment right now. Floodsy and I are both recovering. I'll have 20 years clean in April. Floodsy celebrated 17 years last month. I gave birth to Sarah when I had five years clean. Floodsy and I split up when Sarah was nine weeks old, got back together when she was 7 and got married last year.

Floodsy: I have three sisters and a brother. Helen and Bernice are my older sisters. My brother Bo is younger and my baby sister Terri lives in California.

Lindsey: What about addictions? Your son is in drug treatment?

Floodsy: Justin is in a residential drug treatment program. That's about it. None of my siblings are addicts or alcoholics. My mother died of ovarian cancer last February. My father drank heavily when we were growing up but stopped years ago.

Lindsey: What about your family Leslie?

Me: My mother had a weight problem as a teenager. A doctor prescribed amphetamines and she never stopped taking them. I rarely saw her eat: Coffee in the morning, Swiss chocolate ice cream at night. And wet nuts. I don't want to forget the wet nuts. She sucked on coffee candy during the day. Every now and then she had a grilled cheese on rye bread with tomato. Swiss cheese not cheddar. Sometimes she grilled a piece of bacon on it. She died of breast cancer in 1974.

Sarah: Stop talking about your mother! Why can't you get it through your head that Grandma Wolf never knew me! My eating disorder has nothing to do with you or your mother. Nothing! Do you hear me? Grandma Wolf is dead. She doesn't know me and I don't care what she did to you! Why can't you see that? I don't care what happened to you and what happened to you has nothing to do with me!

Floodsy: Stop yelling at mommy and don't be rude. The doctor asked about my family and I told her about Aunt Helen, Aunt Bernice, Aunt Terry and Uncle Bo. Now it's her turn.

Me: I have two brothers. David lives in San Diego. He's the middle on. My father lives in San Diego with his girlfriends. He's been out there for almost 30 years. David doesn't live with them. David's alone but my father meets him at the gym on Saturday. They're both preoccupied with food. David sends food back in restaurants, always wants to sample before he orders, and sends it back if it's not enough. I'm waiting for him to get thrown out of a restaurant. My father is hyper-vigilant. Completely self-absorbed. Gives a dissertation about everything he puts in his mouth. It's next to impossible for me to be in the same room with him.

Sarah: Leave Grandpa alone! Just because he's healthy doesn't mean he has an eating disorder! He taught me about "good fat" because he wants me to know what's good for me. He took me to the gym because I asked him too. You won't go anywhere with me! You just sit there watching *Law and Order* reruns.

Floodsy: Leslie's brother David is preoccupied with food. I don't know what an eating disorder is so I don't know if her father has one but David goes from meal to meal.

Me: I visited my father when Sarah was 18 months old. She got an ear infection on the plane and my father started yelling at me. He said Sarah had an ear infection because I didn't feed her right. "You give her all that shit from McDonalds," as though there was a connection between an ear infection and chicken McNuggets. On 9/11 he had a hot dog from Sam's Club. He thought the world was coming to an end and a hot dog was going to be his last hurrah. My mother bought a cow wrapped in individual pieces. David would throw a piece on our gas grill in the middle of February. He put snow boots on to use the gas grill on our patio because my mother got mad if anyone used a plate. She forced me to take ballet six days a week. I went downtown with our maid Thelma to a school where everyone was willing to be tortured for a ballerina body. I'm so sorry Sarah. This is my fault.

Floodsy: I work late. I'll start coming home for dinner a couple of nights a week.

Sarah: All you ever say is, "I meant to be here for dinner but got sidetracked."

Lindsey: When did your mother die, Leslie? Did she have siblings?

Floodsy: She died in 1974. Leslie was 18 years old. Her mother has a sister named Tessa who lives in New York City.

Leslie: I went to see my aunt and uncle when Sarah was three years old. We were on the boat that circles Manhattan. I bought Sarah a bottle of water and Tessa kept grabbing it. "I told you not to buy her water! How many times do I have to tell you she doesn't have to have something in her mouth all the time. She doesn't have to have something just because she wants it! How many times do I have to tell you that? You're going to make her think she has to have something in her mouth all the time. Don't open the water! Take it back! If she's that thirsty get her water from the bathroom!" She still called occasionally after that but I couldn't handle it. I would have done anything to have a relationship with my mother's only sister but it was too debilitating.

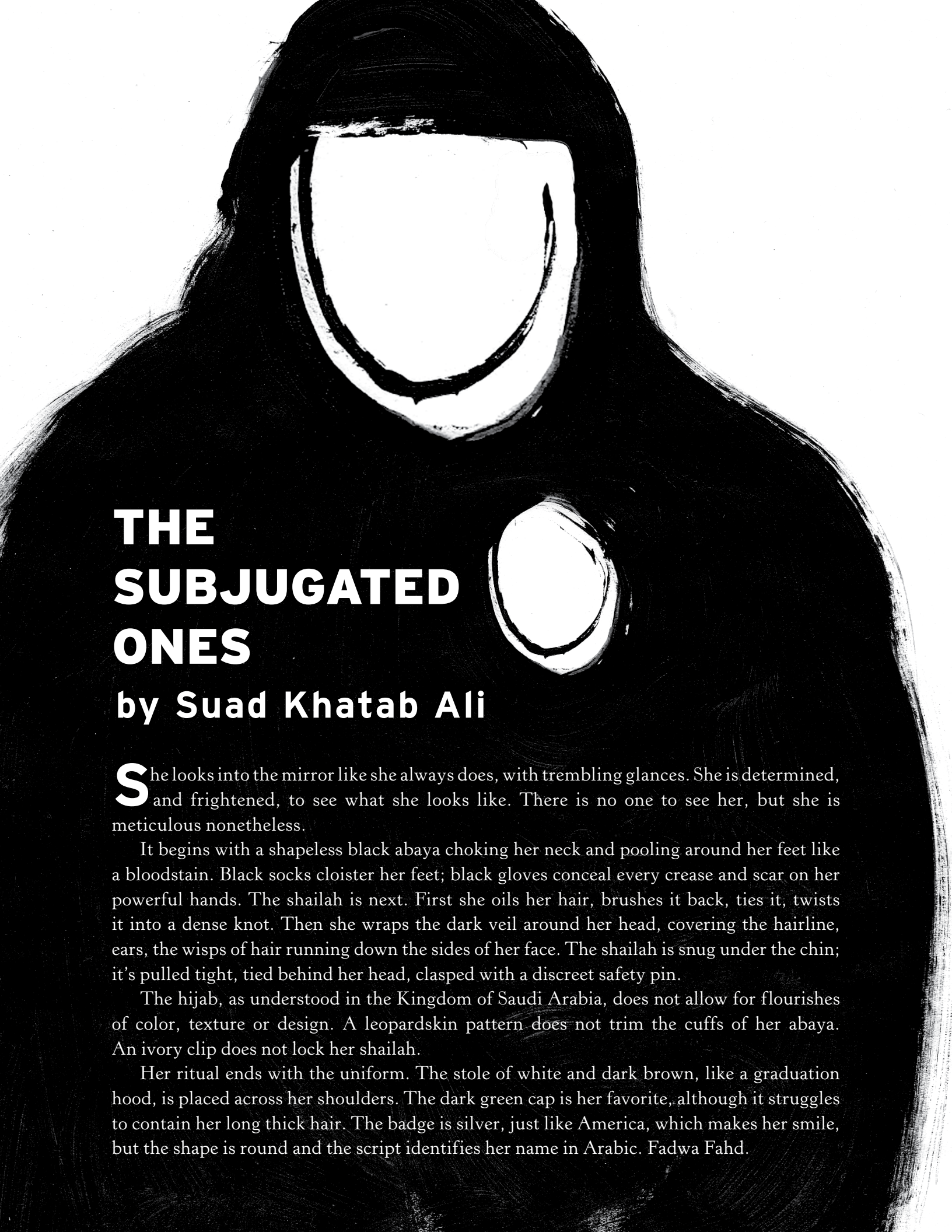
Lindsey: What about your younger brother?

Me: Bobbie lives in Tampa with two precious children. He married his teenage sweetheart and doesn't report a problem with drugs or alcohol.

Sarah: But he can't stand mommy. He hates her. We stopped visiting. We would wind up leaving early and sleeping in the airport if we couldn't get a plane.

Me: My father took the three of us to a Chinese restaurant about fifteen years ago. My father ordered white rice and a few steamed shrimp with no sauce. David got the same thing but told the waitress to make sure his had no salt or MSG. Bobbie ordered Chinese fried chicken and egg rolls. My father and David put their heads down. It got so quiet that the waitress thought she did something wrong. Out of the clear David says, "I don't know why you brought him here. You could have taken him to Kentucky Fried Chicken and dunked him in grease. It would have been cheaper." My father says, "Shut up David! I'm here for a couple of days. He's a grown man. If he wants to clog up his arteries there's nothing I can do about it." Then David says, "He ate a large order of Thrashers French fries in Ocean City last year. I guess they don't have enough lard in Tampa so he has to fill up on it in Maryland and Leslie's no better! All she does is graze. She drinks coffee and noshes all day. I don't know what mommy would say if she was here." My father says, "Go call her David. Here's fifty cents: There's pay phone. Tell the operator you want to make a long distance call to your mother who's been dead for thirty years to tell her your sister won't sit down and eat a meal. Maybe she'll let you use your Sprint card."

Lindsey: We're out of time. What about Thursday at 7:30AM? Will that work?



THE SUBJUGATED ONES

by Suad Khatab Ali

She looks into the mirror like she always does, with trembling glances. She is determined, and frightened, to see what she looks like. There is no one to see her, but she is meticulous nonetheless.

It begins with a shapeless black abaya choking her neck and pooling around her feet like a bloodstain. Black socks cloister her feet; black gloves conceal every crease and scar on her powerful hands. The shailah is next. First she oils her hair, brushes it back, ties it, twists it into a dense knot. Then she wraps the dark veil around her head, covering the hairline, ears, the wisps of hair running down the sides of her face. The shailah is snug under the chin; it's pulled tight, tied behind her head, clasped with a discreet safety pin.

The hijab, as understood in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, does not allow for flourishes of color, texture or design. A leopardskin pattern does not trim the cuffs of her abaya. An ivory clip does not lock her shailah.

Her ritual ends with the uniform. The stole of white and dark brown, like a graduation hood, is placed across her shoulders. The dark green cap is her favorite, although it struggles to contain her long thick hair. The badge is silver, just like America, which makes her smile, but the shape is round and the script identifies her name in Arabic. Fadwa Fahd.

When she steps outside, the heat and dust assault her. She pulls down her cap to block the glare. The streets and sidewalks of Jeddah are already busy with cars, bicycles, school children, men trudging to work, women off to market. Despite the crowds, Fadwa is given a wide berth. No one makes eye contact.

It doesn't take long to hail a taxi. She would prefer to drive her own car, but the law does not allow it. There is talk of a new decree, but you can't be certain. Rumor visits more often than fact, and social change is a husband who went out for cigarettes and never found his way home.

Fadwa prepares a face. It's necessary to summon her strength and confidence. She was the first female police detective in the country, and she is the only one. She was appointed eight months ago. Bahrain, Qatar and the Emirates crossed this barrier years before; the Kingdom doesn't want to appear backward or wrongly conservative.

As the taxi makes its way through the city, Fadwa considers the manner in which her own duties intersect with the various tentacles of the justice system. The mutaween, or clerical police, patrol the streets searching for infractions against the Shar'iah. *Mutaween* means "subjugated ones." They give sinners a cursory beating, no more than 12 or 15 swats with a stick as long as their beards. A woman is seen on the street without head covering. A woman rides a bicycle. A woman is seen at irregular hours without proper escort. A man speaks to an unescorted woman. The more serious offenders are dragged off to prison by the civil police, a phrase that makes Fadwa smile. Each morning, the taxi takes the same route and her mind traces its own familiar steps.

She is a detective for the civil police, which means she investigates crime, constructs a case, and helps prosecute the guilty parties in Islamic Court. Although Fadwa makes many mistakes in every other aspect of her life, as a detective she is pristine, infallible. This is beyond dispute because every case ends with a guilty verdict.

Fadwa pays the driver and takes a deep breath before entering the precinct. The first thing you might notice when she enters the building is that her robe is longer than everyone else's. A short robe is a sign of piety. Holy men and the mutaween have the shortest, followed by the royal family, the police and certain wealthy businessmen. Fadwa's robe stretches all the way to the earth, but she's a woman so this is not unexpected.

"Salaam," a coworker says.

"Salaam," Fadwa repeats.

This cycle continues for several minutes. Her colleagues are polite, mechanical. Once she is cloistered in her office, with the door shut and blinds drawn, you can hear them whisper and joke. It's tough for a woman in this place, but that's not her only sin. Fadwa's mother was Egyptian. Her father ran off when she was a little girl. She is quiet and socially awkward.

The way she looks is also a problem. Though her body is hidden, it's all they can see. Fadwa is short and fat. They call her the Troll, though of course only behind her back. Even through a black, drapery-thick abaya you can see the outline of her body. Her backside is a shelf. You could rest a coffee mug on it, they joke. Ask her to fetch coffee. She'll bite your finger. She'll gnaw off the whole arm. Bring a tranquilizer gun. Her eyebrows are dark,

thick and tangled, barbwire surrounding the maximum security prison of her face. And you wouldn't want to be locked in there. Small, angry, black eyes. The nose is wide and red. The face is pitted with scars from teenage acne, a beard of gray divots.

There's a knock on her door.

"Come in."

A subordinate enters. "Good morning, Detective Fadwa." It's Yousef. He reports directly to her. He hopes to make detective soon, but you never know. There's no examination to pass, only a sheikh to impress or be related to. She treats him well, all things considered, but still, he would prefer a male superior.

"Good morning, officer. Yes, what is it?"

"New case, Ma'am. Sorry, *Detective*." Yousef grits his teeth. He's been told to stop ma'aming her.

"Yes." Fadwa doesn't seem to blink, or even breath. Her mouth and eyes do not register tone. Yousef remembers a comment someone made about the warmth of a robot, a frozen robot found at the South Pole.

He holds up a green file folder. "The incident occurred yesterday, late afternoon. I was the officer in charge. We have statements from the relevant parties. The issues are clear."

Fadwa is nodding. "Let's hear it."

Yousef clears his throat, opens the file. "The woman—she is from Syria originally but has been living here for some time—was in the company of two inappropriate men. Her husband died several years ago. She met the men once, at her home, sent them on an errand, and when they returned she visited with them for 20 minutes." He stops. "More?"

She shakes her head. "Have you interviewed the neighbors?"

"Of course."

"Everyone agrees on the facts?"

"Yes, Detective Fadwa."

She pats the desk with her right hand. Yousef puts the file down.

"You may go."

He nods, bows almost, and quickly leaves her office.

Fadwa reads the report, which is clear and thorough but of course not as meticulous as her own work. She finds herself muttering, shaking her head from side to side. *Stupid woman. A man in your house, two men. We know better than this. If I seek full punishment, she will be flogged, imprisoned, deported.* This is an important moment, her first major case. The facts are clear enough, but there are certain…peripheral matters, certain irrelevant frills that might confuse a weaker person, a person of doubt. Fadwa is unflinching, however. Because she's a woman, she must show her muscle. She will prosecute to the full extent of the law.

Several days later, Fadwa walks to the far side of the street. She hails a taxi in the opposite direction, to the courthouse. She is 15 minutes early. Several people wait outside the colossal wooden doors of the courtroom.

The others arrive, gradually, and the doors are opened. The people sit. Fadwa sits on a bench made of splinters and chipped paint. The solicitors sit beside her. The accused sits by

herself, in a wooden box to the left. Three judges enter on solemn feet ten minutes later, with robes hemmed as short as a muezzin. They are seemingly interchangeable in white beards, wrinkled faces, small eyes imprisoned behind large plastic-framed glasses.

A prayer is incanted. One judge mumbles a few words, another reads a statement from the civil police. The final judge nods and sighs, occasionally fidgeting with his papers. The air conditioner breathes with great difficulty.

There are a few dozen people gathered in the vast, high-ceilinged room. They sit glum and silent, schoolchildren awaiting the results of an examination. The first two judges are silent now, and the solicitors have offered concise pleas. The third judge pauses before speaking. He seems to be on holiday, floating on the warm thick courtroom air. Suddenly, he yells at the accused, calling her names, attacking a flagrant and unholy community that could tolerate such reckless behavior. The accused must have been expecting this outburst because, at the first rush of words, her head does not snap back, her shoulders do not tense. No, her back is hunched and her arms continue to hang limp. Only her eyes pull themselves from the floor to seek the judge's mouth.

It ends as quickly as it began. The judge sinks back into the tedium of files, petitions, the execution of his fellow citizens.

It's Fadwa's turn. She clears her throat, collects the skirt of her abaya and rises, walking toward the accused with awkward, hesitant steps, as if wearing someone else's shoes. The others remained seated when it was their time to speak, but Fadwa wants to grab the woman's eyes.

"The facts are simple. She is guilty. It is only to discover why she has acted this way, before judgment is passed." Fadwa turns to the judges with a faint bow. They remain immobile. "A good Muslim woman has no contact with men who are not close relatives by birth or marriage." She is staring at the floor, walking slowly and without direction. "This means her husband, brothers, father and grandfathers. Hallas, no one else is suitable. We all know this." She makes violent eye contact with someone in the audience.

Fadwa stops speaking. She is a statue. Now she turns to the accused and moves a step closer. The woman's face melts within her veil. She is 12 years old standing before her father with a broken vase. "We all know this. But you choose to pretend you do not. This is sinful. Anti-Islamic. If I want to ride in an elevator and there is only a man in the elevator, I have to ask myself: Is he of marriageable age? If so, I wait for the next elevator." Fadwa has been holding her thumb and index finger in front of her face, shaking the hand thoughtfully. Now she allows her arm to drop. "Well, not if *I* want to ride the elevator. I am the police. I am exempt, of course."

No one laughs but the courtroom is filled with the sound of people not laughing.

Fadwa rushes at the accused and shouts in her face. "Why did you do this?"

The woman does not flinch. She looks toward the tribunal. The first judge nods. "I am sorry, very sorry for what I did. But I am so old and feeble. I just needed some bread. I called my nephew who came with his friend. The friend waited outside, by the way." The woman looks toward the tribunal again. The second judge nods, with a face borrowed from his colleague. "He never came into my home. I never even saw him." She collects her robe and straightens her body. "I know the law, but I am 89 years old. I didn't think anyone would care."

She smiles thinly, catching Fadwa's eye. "I fell down a few weeks ago. Cannot walk. Only somewhat better now." She pauses. "I was hungry."

Fadwa doesn't blink. The woman has a point, yes. Some would not concern themselves with an 89 year old woman and a teenage boy, but she must perform her job with fidelity. "This is no excuse. You are stupid, impious. A devout woman would have let herself starve."

The old woman nods, shifts in her seat. "He is my nephew."

"Not your proper blood relation, according to Shar'iah."

The accused accepts the fact that judgment has already been passed. "Haven't you ever broken the law, just a little, if only to survive?"

Fatwa is a block of ice.

"No, no. Maybe not, but how can you understand? You are young, very young, and have never been hungry." The old woman does not realize that this sounds like a reference to Fadwa's weight, but the detective's fist slamming against the wooden box reminds her.

The judges abruptly end the trial. As Fadwa thought, the woman is sentenced to 30 lashes and two years in prison. Afterward, she will be sent back to Syria. Even by local standards this is a harsh punishment, though many people in Jeddah will agree that it is just.

And so it is done. Fadwa is pleased. She wanted to make a name for herself and she has. She has acted with severity, like a man. She doesn't want to spend her career suffering because of her sex. On the way home she laughs mirthlessly, thinking how, in some countries, they boast about speedy trials.

The accused is less enthusiastic. *Sent back home. Home? A laugh almost escapes. Syria is not my home. I am old. The people I knew must be dead or scattered. No one will remember me. Or I them.*

It's been a long day. Fadwa returns home at 7:15. She eats a light supper and walks to the bedroom. She sits before a large mirror. The room is flooded with bright light. She removes the cap and stole. Inside she is electric, but her face remains inert. Fadwa has trained herself to suppress these impulses, to disguise whatever is simmering within.

Nonetheless, as she removes the outward signs of her position, Fadwa feels, *knows*, that she is becoming someone else. The badges of office are more than superficial. They point to something within, or perhaps they create and sustain that something.

With unmoving eyes, she unclasps the steel pin and unwinds the shailah from her face. The air conditioning blows against her head, erasing the sweat. She unknots the hair and brushes it out. The rumor of a smile lifts the corner of her mouth. The abaya, unzipped, falls to the floor. Underneath, she wears a pale yellow shift, which is also removed.

Her undergarments are not meant to provoke or seduce. They seem medical in nature or perhaps they're intended for self-punishment. Unyielding corsets to mortify the flesh, garments a Medieval cleric might have endured. The bra is thick and unwieldy, a bandage. She disarms it. The cups are not empty, but filled with hard rubber.

A sort of truss girds her midsection. She must stand to remove it. She does not look like herself anymore, though for once she is completely revealed. She is untethered now and can breathe more readily. All the veils have been dropped; all restraints have been broken. For the next several hours, until she dresses for work in the morning, Fadwa will escape from being a woman. P

Mr. Disagreeable Embraces the Whole Bad Neighbor Thing

BB gun, lawn chair, scarf. And patience.
Then exploding Christmas lights. Sagging
inflatable snow globes. Their goddamned
dog. Pop and tinkle, pop and hiss,
pop and yelp.

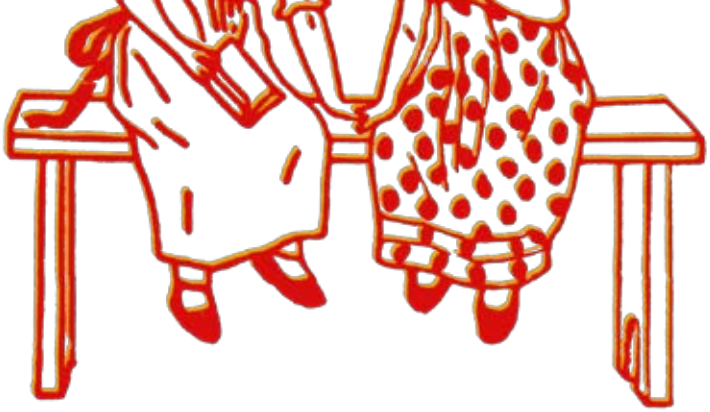
Early mornings, stroll over, hide the paper.
Or just take a section.

Easter Sunday, they sleep late.
Enjoy a shit on their lawn.
A quiet crouch, serene
in that April warmth
and its cool surprise of air.

In June, flush with whisky started early,
ask *why?*, demand an answer
while the kids next door
pretend not to see the bend
and scowl the roses.

Why is the usual: *dog barks,*
kids leave junk in my yard,
snow blower drifts, one loud
barbecue too many. Know
just how much can be built
with the Petty Hammer and
the Spite-Forged Nails
big-assed Leaning Doghouse
of Cranky Froth, surrounded
with clipped-surly shrubbery.

When the breeze is right,
when nearly flammable with drink,
hear the ex-wife's voice:
yr a jackass yr a jackass.
Drinking more won't shut
her up. Just push a body
in ocean of nod,
you bet you bet you bet.



HAVE YOU SEEN SADIE

by Amanda Shapiro

I.

It's hard now to remember the Augusts, the smell of wet paint, brilliant afternoons, Lena's house and her lima-bean pool, how time seeped away through the rich white doors. Harder still are the months in between.

Stretch a rubber band and it snaps back, if you let it.

They are young. Mr. DeFalzo hires Ellen's mother at DeFalzo Chevyland just before the fall. He tells Ellen's mother to bring Ellen by the house sometime to meet his daughter. Their girls are the same age, ten in May. Lena DeFalzo goes to Pembroke Girls Academy, a boarding school in northern Connecticut. She goes to camp every summer in the Berkshires. In August, she comes home. When she meets Ellen, she says, "Come inside please. If we want to be best friends, we have to start right away."

Lena's house has many rooms. Later, once she has spent innumerable days and nights there, Ellen asks Lena how many there are. Lena doesn't know; she never thought to count. Some might just be closets. They keep the doors shut.

Lena has been called pretty. She has been called rough. She is open and loose like a hangnail, impossible to ignore. Clean, nervous, Ellen is proud of being a well-liked girl. The month of August takes on a high shine in both their minds.

When they are twelve, almost thirteen, they paint Lena's bedroom. For Ellen and Lena, it's a peculiar time. There is still the ice cream truck. But, too, the neighborhood boys, sitting on their skateboards in a circle by the curb. Ellen loves them, she is terrified of them all. DeFalzo Chevyland is now DeFalzo Chevyland/Mazdatown. Business is good. The hours are long. Lena and Ellen pass their days with the rollers, the trays, paint like slick soup. They stir the paint with popsicle sticks. After two coats, the walls are yellow and the ceiling is blue. There is more paint and nothing else to do, so they keep adding layers. Lena has a boom box. They make tapes from the radio of their favorite songs. On the tapes, the songs have no beginnings. It's hard to remember to press Record. Sometimes they start more than halfway through.

Ellen has thick dreams in which she is drinking paint in a tall glass and winking, Pepsi-commercial-style, at straw-haired boys rolling by.

On the walls, the colors get darker until they are not the same.

For Lena, this place is a gentle dip. One toe in, then out again quick. She is coming from language intensives, adventure camp, SAT prep. She is going to a new school that starts sooner, ends later, and requires her to play a sport. "Sorry, Ellen," says Mr. DeFalzo. "Lena's volunteering with the retards in Peru." DeFalzo Chevyland/Mazdatown/Izuzuville is thriving, he reports. In the ads that run on TV, he says, "People in this town are going places and they want my cars to get them there!"

There is more than one way to miss a person. Ellen takes someone to the bleachers, those pews over green turf, temple of youth. She lets him kiss her there. He is gentle, she says "harder," he leaves thumbprints on her ribs.

"What's in here?" says Ellen, sniffing the flask.

"Your mom's bourbon."

The playground at night is a council of shadows.

"My mom has bourbon?"

"Nightstand, middle drawer. And weed and a Magic Bullet and 'Double D's Done Dirty' on VHS."

"Please."

"I'm kidding. About the weed." Lena drinks and swallows hard. "Yeah, this is filthy."

Lena's interests are aimless and indiscriminate. They're a pile of snapshots taken out of focus by an unsteady hand. She calls their town artless, she rails against its worn-out sunsets and the fields with peeled fences and the little blue flowers, the family sedans, the women in their capri pants and pastel v-neck tees.

But not the swings. Somehow the swings are the opposite of all that. Metal chains cold with dew, cracked plastic seat. They are lifted forward, weightless, every time higher, but there is something serious, too, a literal gravity to the shape of the move. They push each other hard, hands on spines. The harder they push, the harder the weight returns.

And the flat disc that spins makes Ellen throw up, but she does it for Lena, who lies on her back and swears and laughs, Lena watching the sky and Ellen watching her body focus for an instant before it loops madly away. They sleep on the grass pressed together like lips.

Early one night, they get high and walk the big hill. High school is over. Fog is seeping in. The top of the hill is newly bald; someone has started to build. In the last light, they walk on giant mounds of dirt. It's another planet now, moony and meaty and dark. The claws and the jaws sleep off to one side.

"What do things do when they wait for us?" says Ellen. "Do you ever think about that? Cars in garages, clothes in drawers. Or milk. What about milk? It sits in the fridge all day, waiting for us to come back."

Ellen is boldest when she's high.

"No one wants to think about all their crap just sitting there. Then they'd realize how useless it is. Then they'd have to start thinking about landfills and shit. Then they'd buy less stuff, and that's no good. So we make movies about talking toasters instead."

Lena laughs, then Ellen smiles, thrilled.

There are things Ellen knows she does not understand. There are rooms in her she hasn't yet found. She holds Lena's shoulders and kisses her.

Lena pulls her head away. She's still laughing, or maybe she's laughing again.

"Oh, Ellie," she says, and that's all.

Fog is coming, filling the town like water. They sit quietly on the damp dirt, looking out. The orchards, roofs half-hidden under dense trees, the high school's gold cupola. In the distance, lights on the highway are blue.

"I met this girl with an RV," says Lena finally. "When Dad thought I was in soccer camp, we drove all the way to Maine. And we picked up this hitchhiker, Billy Gills, and Billy Gills told us about this place in California that's in the mountains somewhere, and you can live for free if you work there, and they feed you and all that. It's like a hippie thing but less annoying because it's not really about free love as much as just being in the wilderness and doing your own thing, like you can just leave whenever you want. And they have llamas. So Perry—that's her name—and I decided we should just go and just see what happens."

See what happens. Ellen doesn't understand see what happens. She's starting at the junior college in two weeks. Accounting. She already bought pens.

"You bitch, you're never coming back," says Ellen. That's it, play it light.

"Suck it," says Lena. "You're right."

II.

They've found a spot midway between the dunes and the surf. On this day in September, Baker Beach ripples with bodies, dogs romping, umbrellas angled toward the sun. Summer comes, if it comes, late in this place.

They are three. Lena still has the body of a sun-baked skipping stone. She is polished and flat and built to perform. Sunila is dark-skinned and ample. Pale, self-conscious, Ellen hunches beneath a wide-brimmed hat.

Lena is both familiar and strange, and the combination is more jarring than just one alone. Ellen looks at her like she's a house with no door. And she has never seen the Pacific; the waves unsettle her. Like thunder, knowing it will come, not knowing when or how big or how loud it will be.

"Do you mind if I go topless?" says Sunila to Ellen. Her nipples are pierced. They are wide and soft like a mother's.

Ellen and Lena swim past the break to where the waves are like hills.

"Your dad told me you were studying antelope in the Angolan Miombo woodlands."

"He said that? What a fuck. And you work for him too."

It's true. She'd been in school for two semesters when Mr. DeFalzo gave her a job. Nineteen years old, she never thought to say no. She doesn't tell Lena that she took her own mother's office job. She doesn't tell Lena that her mother hasn't worked in eight years or that, just last week, she was found asleep in the frozen food section at Stop & Shop, her cart filled with TV dinners, her face pressed against the freezer door.

"So you're happy here," says Ellen.

"Some roads are so steep that the cars look like they're stacked end to end."

"Huh."

"And you can be apeshit crazy and no one gives a fuck."

There has never been a sky like this. They are bobbing at the rim of the bluest world.

"I wasn't expecting Sunila when she came to the door."

"Who were you expecting?

Ellen doesn't say, "I thought you'd be alone. I thought that's why you asked me to come."

"We're not together anyway, haven't been for a while. But, of course, it's complicated. She thinks we'll never find other people like each other, but I tell her that she found me once, so she needs to have a little faith, right?"

Ellen looks at the red bridge. Lena drifts under the yawing sky. Ellen replays the past eight years, the work hours, the lunch hours, the happy hours—their banality shames her now—she can't think of a single story to tell.

"So Sunila's twin brother killed himself a couple years back. He was in India. So she took me there this summer like some kind of vacation. She had a video camera and found all his friends and asked them to tell her all about him—Rami was his name—and she asked them what Rami did in all the places we went. She fixated on every person and every spot that had anything to do with him. I have all these pictures of her in, like, a McDonalds in Chennai where Rami studied and the river where Rami swam and the shitty Mumbai clubs where Rami tried to get laid. It was a fucking pilgrimage, Ellen. A million holy sites that only she knows are there."

"She must have loved him."

"He was abusive. That's the thing. They didn't even speak. When he found out about her life here, he broke her arm."

"Maybe she only realized she loved him once he was gone."

"But it's a complete lie. Rami's dead. What she loves is just something she's invented to look like him."

Ellen treads more vigorously. She knows something, she thinks, that Lena doesn't.

"Maybe love is nothing but a desire to get over distance. You can't love something unless you don't have it, at least a part of it, at least some of the time."

Lena's body is motionless in the lull between waves. When she speaks, she doesn't take her eyes off the sky.

"Or you can just love the distance."

The waves are getting bigger, but Lena and Ellen are too far out to know. Sunila is looking for them, dark shapes against the edge of blue and blue. A plane passes low with a banner that says *Where is my daughter? Haveyouseensadie.com.* Rush hour happens in the city. In the streets and on the bridges, people drive away.

Ellen looks toward shore.

"We've drifted."

They swim to just behind the breakpoint and wait for an easy wave to take them. Ellen picks one; they paddle hard. Their bodies rise together but Lena falls back as Ellen is pitched forward with a force that shocks her. Then she's falling, and then, as she falls, the undertow rips her under the crest of the wave. The sand cuts her, she's choking on brine, a ragdoll, flapping head and limbs. Twice more, Ellen is caught at the seam of the wave coming in and the one that pulls away.

Dogs dance in whitish foam. Still behind the break, Lena waits for another way in.

The bar where Lena takes them has shuffle board. Women in hiked-up plaid skirts and Doc Martins sing on a small stage in the corner of the room, their voices loud and petulant. In the booth, Lena sits facing Ellen and Sunila. There is a pitcher of straw-colored beer between them.

Lena is a nimble conversationalist. She probes and challenges, picks up a thread and jumps unexpectedly across topics, laughing, refilling their glasses at a steady pace. When Sunila goes for the second pitcher, Lena squeezes Ellen's arm.

"So how'd you get so wise about love?" she says, winking. "You got someone at home you're not talking about?"

"There were some people. But not now."

"You never tell me anything! Swear to God, I thought you'd be married by now."

"I never planned on it."

"I know you don't, Ellie, but you will. You totally will. You're going to have some nice husband and a kid—he'll be the sweetest—and my dad will get you a deal on a station wagon or whatever, and you'll live near your mom and go to her house on Sundays for dinner."

"Lena, why do you think I want any of that?"

"Why else would you be there? It's not like you owe my father anything. Sorry to say, the DeFalzo Empire can limp along fine without you."

"And where do you suggest I go?"

Sunila comes back and sits next to Lena. The music and the sun and the water and the beer are making it hard for Ellen to think. She slumps in her seat and closes her eyes. After a while, she curls up on her side of the booth. She feels sand in her ears and in her eyebrows and in every corner and crevice of her body.

She pictures Sunila's breasts, the dead brother. In this woman, Lena found a home. Burrowing, nesting, she moved in. What will happen to that space when Lena leaves? If Sunila is lucky, she will fill it like she filled the space her brother once had. She will stuff it so full with memories that nothing else will get in.

If Sunila is lucky, Lena will let her.

She lets herself cry. Three hard sobs and it's done.

When she sits up, there is a half-full pitcher of beer on the table. It's a lovely color, blonde and rich and creamy. Past the beer, over the top of the booth, Lena and Sunila are dancing. The music snarls, but there is no sign of friction between them. Their hips press together. They move in an easy way.

III.

Ellen loves the city the way people love books they own but have never read. And she is a watcher and also she loves to be watched. She feels eyes on her in the streets. At night, she looks in windows. Her roof is lower than the rest. Up there, she sees other lives play out, a thousand screens at once. A shadow, a flash, a curtain pulled closed.

The city is obsessed with its past and indifferent toward everyone else's. Ellen's neighborhood is mostly Russian mob, formerly Italian mob, Irish before that. If there was someone before the Irish, no one will say who. Like bean stalks in summer, skyscrapers grow. Her office is on 53rd and Park. She is the new girl, the lowest-paid, and they like her for that. She likes them for liking her. There is a smoothness to her now, she is unperturbed by most things. Her mother is dead. Her pantsuits are basic but flatteringly cut.

When the dealership tanked, Mr. DeFalzo sold it to a young couple with plans to open a tanning salon, and he retired to Palm Beach. The old house stands empty now, on the market, waiting to sell. When he told Ellen the news, something lifted in her. After the messes and the falls, hot nights of fear, her mother walking lost, naked under an ermine coat, the only fur she'd ever owned. After the room aired out and the last casserole dish washed and returned. After all that, it was the dealership that set her free.

Her apartment has only two doors.

One day in spring, a person asks Ellen to a dance. He is the dancer. Afterwards, he sits with her at a bar for three hours, and he asks her one question after another until her voice is sore from talking above the din of the raucous room. They stand at the top of the subway stairs. She is still talking, flushed. She has never had so much to say. The man, Cole, takes her hands to stop them from moving.

She says, "I don't know what to do now."

"I like you," he says.

"Oh. Do you like Jewish delis?"

"Absolutely."

He is a vessel for her, a bowl into which she can pour herself. He keeps her heat. He is lithe. Wrapping, holding, he sleeps against her like a sloth on a tree. She has a small and wooden bed.

She brings him to the roof. He brings plastic bottles of Perrier and rough clay mugs that feel safe in her hands. They sit on a thin white quilt, him smoking, Ellen watching, the sky bruised purple by light.

The roof is on a forgotten plane. Weathervanes and water towers, metal baubles spinning. And a miraculous quiet, somehow. She sees the neon a block away: RED LOBSTER. REGAL THEATRE. ERNST & YOUNG. All summer she's watched HOTEL CARTER as its letters went dark one by one. Some letters get replaced and some don't. Ellen wonders who makes the decisions and if maybe they are short on bulbs. The newest building has no walls, just lights that hang like Christmas.

He becomes more than a man. He is Cole. For the first few months, they don't have sex. They touch in places all over the city, across tables in restaurants, in grassy medians, on subway platforms

and desolate streets. They touch so much she forgets they haven't slept together, but when they do, she feels that she has never been with him or anyone, not really, ever before. He has a deliberate, asking way. Ellen guides his fingers until she comes.

She doesn't think of Lena. Unless fog, unless wet paint leaves stains on the ground. Although Lena would like her roof, this low spot in a high place.

The last time she sees her is not the first day of fall, it's the first day she thinks of fall. The day is warm, and the pigeons gather on the stoop and wind like the face of a blade, ready to turn.

Along the river where she often walks, there's a pier that is her stopping point. The pier is where she rests before she turns around. Next to it is another pier, blackened with rust and collapsed into itself. Time and neglect have stripped it to a skeleton, useless and half-sunk. People like to photograph it. They seem to think it's art.

Ellen stands at the end of the pier.

Maybe Lena is in the apartment still, but probably she is gone.

That afternoon, Ellen had left the door open for Cole. She had been cooking, thinking of napkins. Did she have two that matched? Did she have napkin rings? Then Lena was in her kitchen. Her bag was slung over one shoulder. She was holding a bottle of bourbon with a bow on its neck.

Ellen burned her hand on the sauce pot. She bit her cheek to keep from screaming.

Instead she said, "Well, dinner isn't ready."

"It's always about timing with us, isn't it?" said Lena, easily.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I could use a shower at least. I've been on a train for three nights. You know, I thought there'd be real people on the train, like hobos and artists or whatever. But it was just these boys with their thick novels and their notebooks, and all they want to do is talk. Like they're tying themselves in knots looking for stories. Like they're dying to have the times of their lives. Finding you was easy enough, though I refuse to believe you live here. You look good—very *Cosmo*."

As Lena rambled, she rocked gently on her toes. Her hands stayed in her pockets. Her hair was short. She wore long sleeves in the heat. Ellen said nothing, ran her hand under cold water.

"So, I was thinking of hanging out for a while in the city, see if this place is as great as they say."

"It's a little late in the season, don't you think?"

For just a second, Lena seemed afraid. Then she softened, warmed.

"Oh Ellie, remember how much fun we used to have? Remember how we used to jump off the balcony into the pool and how scary that was? And how we saw Mrs. Daley's cat get eaten by the Hartfields' Rottweiler? That was so nuts."

Ellen turned. Her eyes were like flares, warning.

"I just thought I'd check in. You know, while I'm passing through."

While Lena was in the shower, Ellen called Cole and cancelled dinner. She walked through her apartment: her play-sized kitchen, the bright white room. How little one needs to make a home. How little space a person fills.

The bathroom door was not open but not closed. Ellen saw her, she was standing naked. Her body had changed. A tree was tattooed on her back with roots that spread from the base of her spine out across her hips. She turned, and birds flew up her belly from the thicket between her legs. The window grate cut chunks of sunlight on her, her short hair, wet, drops sparking from her when she moved. She saw Ellen through the space between the door and its frame.

Sauce sputtered on the stove. No one moved. From across the threshold, Lena's voice may have cracked.

"So, I'm thinking about the South. New Orleans would be nice."

"It would."

"You would love it."

"I would?"

"You could love it."

"Could I?"

Lena moved into the doorway, out of the sun. "Maybe you could. For a while."

The hurt rose in Ellen then. She felt it in her burned hand and she felt it in the parts of her that had changed. Or was it in the other part, the part still there from when she was 18, her butt damp on the hill. Every time, when Lena says she's leaving, Ellen lets her go. She thought of Lena on the swing and Lena spinning, and the two of them together, pursed lips on the face of the earth. Distance was a weapon Lena wielded well. Ellen had forgotten how well. Until she was there, steps away and naked, framed in the rectangle of the half-opened door.

It's never the leaving, Ellen thought, it's always the coming back. She's always coming back. How can you love someone who's always coming back?

Ellen turned the heat off on the stove. "I have to go," she said. "Help yourself to anything."

On the pier, she turns her body toward the cooling sun. The air has changed imperceptibly. Overhead, a formation of geese shatters and reforms. The end of summer is a wordless thing. She'll walk beside the river, past the cab companies and car washes and the men who stare, the truck depots, the storage facilities, the parking lots, each promising the lowest hourly rate. She'll think about well made containers, about wrapping her hands around things with no handles, about how to hold it all in. She'll walk four dark flights to an unmarked door. No one will be inside, but waiting will be bourbon on the counter, and sauce, ready in a pot on the stove.

She'll eat, leaning her weight against the sink. She'll pour the liquor in a mug and take it to the roof where she'll sit, like most nights in summer, and watch daylight leave through the western door. The pigeons will speak gently, and, in the windows, there is always someone to see. HOT CARE says the sign. Her mother died young. A new skyscraper is a humming core of light.

Photography by Rob Shore

Katie's Potatoes

New England Dandybird

Roll Away

THE RABBI WHO COULD SMELL THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

BY STEPHEN G. BLOOM

For years, Rebecca was uncertain when she first heard her calling to stand on the *bima* and lead a congregation in prayer. Wherever the inspiration came from, it certainly hadn't come from her parents, secular Jews who hadn't stepped inside a synagogue for more than thirty years, save for Rebecca's ordination at rabbinical college. To the best of Rebecca's knowledge, the seeds to her destiny were sown when she was thirteen, invited to so many of her friends' bar and bat mitzvahs. Each celebration was a mixture of envy and regret when Rebecca realized that she'd never get to stand front and center on the *bima* and read that week's Torah portion. She had pleaded with her parents, but no, they said, such a religious celebration was not necessary, especially for a girl, and why in God's name would she ever need to know all that Hebrew? You'd be better off learning Spanish, they told Rebecca. Study hard in school, that will be your *mitzvah* to us.

Her parents' pronouncement thus rendered, Rebecca was consigned outsider status, an observer at these Saturday morning *simchas*. She'd sit mesmerized on the edge of the pew, shushing those around her. She'd turn testy with the boys, chafing in their blue blazers and gray wool pants, and scoff at all the gossipy girls whispering God knew what in their princess heels and crinkly pink party dresses. No one was paying attention *at all* to the ritual up front: the chanting, davening, sipping from the ornate silver goblet, the unrolling of the holy Torah, the lilting cadence of exotic Hebrew. *And my parents want me to study Spanish,* Rebecca thought, shaking her head.

If Rebecca's desire to become a rabbi turned from fantasy to possibility that thirteenth year of her life, it would be an adult's explanation, looking backwards for a motive, attempting to plumb a particular turn of events to explain when and why a young woman had decided to turn to the Lord. Truth be told, Rebecca had no earthly idea why she had chosen the rabbinate, and when someone would ask her about it (as they often did), she'd smile serenely and glide to another topic.

Actually, a far more interesting question, one Rebecca was asked many times, was what she liked most about being a rabbi. To this question, she had done a good deal of thinking and, while she knew her answer to be unorthodox, she also knew it to be fact. The smell—that's what she liked most. The smell. Leading a synagogue, packed or empty, made no difference to her. Even in her most private moments (which weren't many, given all her rabbinical obligations), Rebecca could neither recreate in her mind the congregational aroma she found so intoxicating nor could she describe it. The scent was singular, and each time Rebecca filled her lungs with it, she was transformed and transported. To exactly where she wasn't sure. Her job as a rabbi wasn't to question, but to affirm God's covenant with the Jewish people.

All houses of worship are sanctuaries of symbolism. Catholic churches with their masses of crucifixes—the crown of thorns, the nails in the hands, the drops of ruby blood—are the most graphic. Yet synagogues have their own symbolic power to impress and intimidate: the flickering eternal light, the carved ark, the elaborate Hebrew lettering replicated throughout the sanctuary, the hand-inscribed parchment of the Torah, the silver finger of the *yad*. But all this Rebecca could plainly see; smell was wholly different. Every time Rebecca walked into the sanctuary she was struck anew with the confluence of scents through the dusty sun-lit air: from the stacks of prayer books with their thumbed wavy pages, the lingering presence of worshipers past and present, and, of course, the fabric—the lumpy seat cushions, the prayer shawls hanging lifelessly on racks waiting to be called into service on shoulders small and large, the scores of anonymous yarmulkes in wait to be plopped on a different head week after week.

These scents changed seasonally, and their intensity depended on how many congregants were in the sanctuary at any given time. During the High Holy Days, the smells took on a life of their own: the union of gaudy perfumes, the fresh-cut flowers on the *bima*, musky colognes, tacky hair sprays, lingering cigarette smoke, stale coffee, breath mints, not to mention the distinctive body odors of several elderly male regulars, particularly Harold Perlmutter and Alex Grobard. Rebecca knew the smell of each man, and had so attuned her olfactory skills that could tell whether either man had set foot in the sanctuary within the previous forty-eight hours.

Other rabbis might cringe from the onslaught of such aromas, but for Rebecca there was something incarnate about the multitude of smells wafting towards her as she stood in her flowing white robes leading the congregation in prayer. She imagined each human particle of scent rising from the body judaica before her, attaching itself to other similarly charged particles, forming a sort of spinning DNA model of odors, swirling tempestuously above the congregation, ascending high in the synagogue's rotunda, and then in one resolute motion, heading down towards her in a turbulent whirlwind. From this jet stream, Rebecca inhaled deeply and contentedly, taking her spiritual nourishment. Sometimes, the commingling of so many smells

would be so great that Rebecca didn't think she could withstand their onslaught. Other times, when just a few congregants showed up for the Saturday afternoon havdala service, the scents would be subtle, coyly sneaking up on her, tickling the fine hairs in each nostril, which caused her nose and eyes to water, sometimes prompting her to sneeze. Whenever that happened, it was both embarrassing and satisfying, sneezing, as she read aloud from the Torah. While it was an abomination to sneeze onto the holy parchment, to Rebecca, the sneeze consecrated the Torah with the viscera of her congregation, and for that, she believed such an act to be a *mitzvah*.

Rebecca had been among sixteen women out of one hundred and twelve rabbinical students at Hebrew Union College in the class of 1987. Her parents, Elaine and Sheldon Skorton, had not been happy when their only child announced her intention to attend rabbinical school. It was only to avoid World War III that Shelly had consented to attend Rebecca's ordination. Religion had no place in Shelly's universe. God, he said, on numerous occasions, was a *goniff* invented by holier-than-thou sons of bitches for one reason: to separate fools from their money. Secularists, rationalists, pragmatists were words neither Shelly nor Elaine understood, but this was what the couple was. Perhaps that's why they were so pleased when Rebecca had majored in biology at Brandeis University as an undergraduate. Biology and religion were polar opposites. One demanded proof; the other required belief, which was the absence of proof.

When Rebecca graduated (summa cum laude), both Shelly and Elaine just about *plotzed*. "Summa cum laude!" Elaine *kvelled* to her friends in the lobby of the garden apartment she and Shelly leased on Normandy Isle in Miami Beach. "Not cum laude, not magna cum laude, but *summa* cum laude!" Elaine said as though the foreign words were a passkey to not just their daughter's future, but to Elaine and Shelly's, too. Rebecca's professors at Brandeis said after the very nice graduation ceremony that Rebecca had been one of their finest students, someone with a limitless future. That was the word they used, limitless.

"Biology!" Shelly, a retired men's clothing salesman, used to intone Elaine and Rebecca, then to anyone who'd listen. He said *biology* with a mixture of pride, celebration, awe and reverence, but most of all, with anticipation.

Shelly's satisfaction turned out to be short-lived. When Rebecca decided to do nothing with her degree (at least, that's how Shelly saw it), this *biology* of his daughter turned into embarrassment, then scorn. "She could be a doctor, even a scientist, maybe she'd find the cure to cancer, but instead she wants to be a rabbi?" Shelly would say to Elaine as the two sat at their table inside Arnie and Richie's Deli on 41st Street, as Pilar, the waitress, filled their cups with more coffee than was good for them, especially Shelly, since his most recent PSA numbers were not good. "This makes sense? Our daughter, the rabbi. With a degree in biology?"

The problem was Shelly. Elaine's husband of forty-one years hated organized religion. Truth be told, Shelly hated all religion, organized *and* unorganized. He was what the observant call a lox-and-bagels Jew. He loved Jewish food. He loved to talk Jewish. He identified himself first and foremost as a Jew, and was proud of it. But to get Shelly into a synagogue, even a synagogue led by his very own daughter, well that just wasn't going to happen. "For the birds, that's

what religion is," was an expression Shelly had said several thousand times. Shelly had even given Elaine explicit instructions upon his death. No rabbi, no *Kaddish*, no Star of David, no religious mumbo jumbo. And he wanted to be cremated, he made Elaine promise on her mother's grave. No Hebrew lettering anywhere—on or in the casket, the shroud, even the mourners' book. "I'm a Jew, and every minute of the day and night I know I'm a Jew, so why do I need to wear my religion on my sleeve like I'm holier than the next *schlepper*?" were words Shelly had said to Elaine more times than she cared to remember.

Elaine was always the first to temper Shelly when it came to matters of Rebecca. "Who are we to judge? Is it so bad that she's a rabbi? She could have done worse, believe me. Look at that Helene, the Stone's daughter. Divorced three times and not even thirty! And with two children! With no help, no alimony, no child support! Three bums she married. Maybe Rebecca knows something we don't know. Couldn't that be possible, Shelly? Could it?"

"With all that education, I *hope* she knows something we don't know!" Shelly shot back. "How many years, four plus five, plus the year on the Israeli kibbutz? All the tuition we paid, all the checks I wrote out, our savings? Whatever education she wanted, we gave her. Parents *should* give their children all the education they want. But when she turns out to be a rabbi? *This* is what we paid for? Our daughter, the rabbi, in that *farchadat* synagogue where the more you pay, the better the seat you get for the High Holidays? This," Shelly said, taking another sip of coffee, then putting down the cup, "I can do without."

"We should be proud," Elaine, always the peacemaker, offered.

Elaine didn't like where Shelly was going with all this. She knew her Shelly. She knew when he was getting cagey. Elaine was no *shmendrick* Shelly was selling suits to. She took a sip. Even decaf was keeping her up at night.

"Lemme ask you this," Shelly said, lowering his voice, looking toward the restaurant as though none of regulars at Arnie & Ritchie didn't already know everything there was to know about Elaine, Shelly and Rebecca. "What man is going to marry a woman rabbi? What *normal* man is going to want a wife who's a rabbi? This is such a silly question?"

"A man who falls in love with our daughter, that's who," Elaine replied as she spread margarine on a poppy-seed bagel toasted too much for her liking. Should she ask Pilar to toast another, which, chances were good would come back burned even more than this one?

"And where's she going to find such a man?" Shelly asked. "One day, she's going to look out into the congregation and her dreamboat will magically appear? This is how it happens these days?"

Shelly paused, sipping his coffee, making that slurping sound that used to drive Elaine crazy, but by now, she had gotten used to, had even grown to anticipate, if not appreciate. After four decades of marriage, Elaine knew exactly where Shelly was going with this. He was setting her up. This is how he did it. Elaine took another bite from her bagel.

"Our little Rebecca is getting old. I hate to say it, Elaine, but Rebecca-la is no spring chicken."

Say what you will, Shelly had a point. Elaine knew all too well. Grandchildren, that wasn't an issue any longer. At this point, all they wanted for their sole prodigy was for her to be happy. What every parent wants. But how happy could Rebecca be without a home? She lived in a tiny apartment down the block from the synagogue. It was a place for her to rest her head, no

more. Maybe you could make a home without children, but can a woman make a home without a husband? Can a fish walk?

"She's everyone's best friend," Elaine said, nodding a little too forcefully for Shelly's liking, but this, too, was a habit of Elaine's that Shelly had grown accustomed to. "She's a giver. Everyone comes to her with their problems. She listens."

"She listens without giving away what she thinks," Shelly said. It was a trait Elaine wished her Shelly would learn. Maybe Elaine could talk to Rebecca about how impatient and argumentative Shelly had become, but Rebecca would probably just sit there, taking it all in, that serene look in her eyes. Is that what they teach them in rabbinical school? Rebecca hadn't always been like this. She used to be a girl who'd let you know what she thought. Frankly, she hadn't been the easiest daughter to raise. Shelly and Elaine had had their moments.

"If she told people what they *needed* to hear, how long do you think she'd last in that hoity-toity synagogue of hers?" Shelly asked, a replay of the same discussion he and Elaine had had a hundred times.

"Let me ask you this," Shelly said, now on a three-suit roll.

Let him talk, Elaine thought. Let him get it off his chest. Keeping things inside is no good.

"Who does Rebecca go to when *she* has a problem? She doesn't come to us. She can't go to members of her own synagogue, and she certainly can't go to the other rabbi, her boss. What's his name?"

"Rabbi Popov," Elaine said, tightening the muscles around her mouth, another of his wife's habits Shelly had grown more than accustomed to.

"Here's a question for you, Elaine. Who helps the rabbi when the rabbi needs help? And who's the rabbi supposed to see when she realizes that being a rabbi is what caused her her problems in the first place?"

At which point, Elaine, realizing she didn't want to have this argument with Shelly the one-hundred-and-first time, said shrugging her shoulders, "She'll manage. How she always manages."

Elaine didn't liked Shelly's tone. She hoped he'd get down from his high horse. Their relationship with Rebecca was not so good. No wonder. People don't change, or if they do, they just get worse. Elaine occasionally would stop off at the synagogue to see Rebecca, but not once in the twelve years Rebecca had been at Beth Israel had Shelly ever been to services. Whenever she brought up that fact, Shelly said whatever problems Rebecca had stemmed from her wanting to be a rabbi, and why would he ever want to visit the place that had caused their daughter to have such problems in the first place? "It'd be like going to a whorehouse if your daughter was prostitute," was Shelly's retort. Where'd Shelly get such language, and why so angry?

For a passing moment, Elaine felt like she had led Shelly down this road and in doing so, had betrayed Rebecca, the love of her life (of Shelly's, too), giving Shelly advantage to turn nasty at poor Rebeccala's expense.

Which by all accounts ended the discussion, as such discussions always ended, with Shelly and Elaine finishing their coffee, not saying another word, leaving Pilar a dollar tip, then exiting through the back door of the delicatessen to the parking lot with all the pot holes.

Fact is, Rebecca had little time, even for her parents. When it came to meeting eligible men,

God couldn't begin to manufacture enough hours in her day. Once, Rebecca had consented to go with her friend Helene to a round-robin Jewish singles event at the Eden Roc on Collins, where you spent ten minutes with a bachelor, then someone clanged a fork against a wineglass, and you spent another ten minutes with another eligible man. The organizers guaranteed everyone at least twenty encounters (as they called them); if you didn't meet someone you wanted to go out with, they'd give you your twenty-five dollars back.

Well, Rebecca didn't. But how could she admit that and ask for a refund? She had met two attorneys, one accountant, three salesmen, a stockbroker, and six "self-employed" businessmen. She forgot about the other six, that's how bad they were. Elaine and Shelly had been right when it came to men. It wasn't that Rebecca was too picky. She had gotten over that years ago. As soon as frizzy-haired, brown-eyed Rebecca said what she did for a living, most of the men got this scared look. It was like saying she was a stripper. Men might go see a rabbi or a stripper a couple a times a year, but did they want to marry one?

She certainly couldn't date members of the synagogue. Nor could she ask the congregants to be on the lookout for eligible men. Rebecca had made a separate peace with her condition of singlehood. It had probably been twenty years since she'd been out on a real date, back when she was an undergraduate at Brandeis. She'd had a steady boyfriend at Brandeis, and they had started sleeping together in her sophomore year (a stage in their relationship Rebecca had anticipated and encouraged), but as she became more and more observant, the more the young man, who was studying economics, pulled away. The student body at Brandeis was overwhelmingly Jewish, but once she began harboring plans to apply to rabbinical college, she found herself drawn into a smaller, more committed circle of Jewish students, those who didn't just attend synagogue weekly, but formed a morning minion daily. Rebecca took to wearing a *kippah* and *tallit* whenever she entered the campus chapel, and was overjoyed one Saturday morning when—finally—the rabbi called her to the bima to read from the Torah, the fruits of four years of studying Hebrew.

Rebecca started at Beth Israel in Miami Beach as the assistant rabbi when she was thirty-three. She'd been lucky to snare the appointment just three years out of HUC. The pulpit had brought her back home to where she had grown up. Some of her classmates from rabbinical school had had miserable luck finding jobs. Her roommate Maxine Gerson had been forced to accept a pulpit in a God-awful place, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, at the only reform synagogue within one hundred and fifty miles. At least Rebecca was in sunny Florida, at a large and prosperous synagogue, in the middle of a thriving Jewish community she was long familiar with, less than two miles from her parents (which was good and bad, depending on a host of factors that seemed to change weekly). After a decade at Beth Israel, Rebecca had ascended to Associate Rabbi, due in part to the retirement and subsequent death of her mentor, Senior Rabbi Henry Mayer. Rebecca oversaw youth education, and had officiated at hundreds of funerals, weddings, baby namings, bar and bat mitzvahs, even brises. In any given year, she wrote and delivered twenty-one sermons every other Friday night (Rebecca and the head rabbi, Aaron Popov, alternated.) She took on all

conversion training at the synagogue, and was proud to say that she'd been responsible for more than seventy-one Jewish converts, Jews by Choice, as the parlance of such things goes. There were myriad other obligations Rebecca took on—the trips to Jewish convalescent homes, preparing for the synagogue's annual *mitzvah* day, the essential fundraising dinners for everything from Israel bonds to battered-women's shelters. Rebecca liked to go to Israel as least once a year, but she was so busy she hadn't made a visit now for three years, and for this she felt guilty.

Such duties were expected of a rabbi, but for Rebecca, this multitude of obligations constituted only two-thirds of what she did at the synagogue. What Elaine had said about her daughter, the part about Rebecca's ability to listen (or really the appearance that she was listening) was true. This talent did not go unnoticed by those at the synagogue, and increasingly over the last decade, more and more congregants began appearing at her office door next to the sanctuary, unloading their problems, some of which were deeply personal and intimate. While at first Rebecca enjoyed the vicarious thrill of eavesdropping on the peccadilloes of synagogue members, Rebecca wasn't sure she had the training (not to mention the time) to do all this counseling. She was a rabbi, not a therapist, yet a good three hours a day were taken up with therapy sessions for synagogue members. The synagogue members who booked weekly appointments liked Rebecca's skill and tact, and it wasn't costing them a penny. The more she counseled, the more counseling she was called upon to dispense. *Such a deal!* Rebecca thought more than several times.

Her senior colleague at Temple Beth Israel, Rabbi Popov, carried himself as the Talmudic scholar he was. While Rebecca certainly conceded that Rabbi Popov was a learned man, his demeanor (and reputation) scared away most congregants. How could they confide in him? Rail-thin, one skinny leg draped over the other, he sat so erect, peering at you in those half-frame glasses of his; he talked like he was always judging. No wonder everyone gravitated to Rebecca, who was as warm as Popov was cold. And recently, things had gotten worse. Rabbi Popov had started referring to himself in the third-person.

This ridiculous habit had started innocently enough. When his secretary buzzed him on the temple intercom and he didn't want to be interrupted, he'd tell Marjorie, "Not now! Rabbi Popov is busy." To Rebecca, that was insufferable enough. But Rabbi Popov had taken it further. In the monthly meetings with the Board of Directors he'd say things like, "This might be fine for Rabbi Miller, but for Rabbi Popov, this simply won't do." Who was Rabbi Miller, anyway? A straw man who was a rabbi? It was all Rebecca could do not to roll her eyes.

When Rebecca thought about it, she was convinced all of it was an act Popov had concocted. Rebecca had a phrase for it: feigned incompetence. Send the troubled congregants who were too cheap to see a shrink to Rebecca. Rabbi Popov had let it be known that he couldn't help them—or worse, that he'd give them answers they didn't want to hear. Rebecca's father had been right on that score. Let Rebecca do the heavy lifting. Rabbi Popov was too busy poring over a particularly vexing line in the Talmud to counsel a husband and wife whose son had been diagnosed with leukemia or a wife who had just caught her husband sleeping with the Honduran maid.

So, for better or worse, Rebecca took them on, all of them, following what her mentor Rabbi Mayer used to do when called upon to counsel congregants. She nodded, thought pensively, asked

a few open-ended questions, listened, occasionally reached for her Bible to read a line or two (along with her interpretation of the *humash*), and at the appropriate moment, she'd arise from her chair, guiding the troubled congregate to the door, lightly cupping his or her elbow, and always concluding with, "We are always here for you. Please know that."

Rebecca wasn't sure why she used the first-person plural *we*, but it seemed like the right thing to do. After several years of automatically saying this, though, she realized that by intoning *we*, she implicitly was lessening the burden on herself. She was saying that if she didn't—or couldn't—help the congregant, perhaps the congregant or God shared some responsibility for things not working out right.

Her latest, and most time-consuming synagogue member was an irksome woman in her early eighties, Sophie Mendelsohn. Sophie had been a Rabbi Mayer special. For years Sophie used to *hok a tchynik* to Rabbi Mayer, but since Sophie's husband had been Abraham Mendelsohn, *the* Abraham Mendelsohn, the largest distributor of alcoholic beverages in South Florida and a member of the exclusive Eighteen Club of Israel Bonds buyers in the entire United States, tending for Sophie was part of doing business as the rabbi. The Mendelsohns' care and feeding was critical to the continued financial success of the synagogue, American Jewry, and the state of Israel.

Rabbi Mayer certainly had had the touch with Sophie and Abraham. With his silvery hair, blue eyes, ruddy complexion and polished European accent, Rabbi Mayer could sell yarmulkes to the Palestinians. When Rabbi Mayer gave a sermon, you could hear a *kippah* clip drop. He was a classically trained biblical scholar, but unlike Rabbi Popov, delighted in extending his erudition to the congregation so that all could benefit. Rabbi Mayer had the trait that all great men share: everyone wanted to be his friend.

His one weakness, however incongruous it may seem, was cars—fast and most often red. He took particular pleasure riding with the girl or boy to be bat or bar mitzvahed each upcoming Saturday morning, taking them out to lunch, then the two of them would cruise along Collins Avenue in the rabbi's red Mustang with the top down. The kids loved it, as did Rabbi Meyer.

An apocryphal story about Rabbi Mayer is that he and Rebecca went back some years. It may have even been because of Rabbi Mayer that Rebecca first toyed with the idea of becoming a rabbi; certainly he was the reason Rebecca came to Beth Israel. Their lives intersected one Saturday morning two decades ago, during the bar mitzvah of one sandy-haired Scott Krasner, on whom Rebecca had developed a massive crush. That crush stayed in tact until the day of Scott's bar mitzvah, when it was clear for everyone in the sanctuary to hear that Scott had neither studied nor learned his Torah portion. Instead, Scott was reading the English phonetic version of that week's *parashat*. Scott hadn't even memorized the Hebrew.

Crushed, thirteen-year-old Rebecca looked up at the *bima* from her seat midway in the sanctuary, and in a blinding instant, her adoration of Scott Krasner transferred to Rabbi Mayer. At that very moment, he was nodding, scanning the congregation, barely smiling, but when his eyes reached Rebecca, he stopped. This, she was sure. His beatific gaze was directed at her. She never talked to Rabbi Mayer until years later when she came to the synagogue for the round

of interviews for the opening as assistant rabbi. After a grueling day with each member of the temple's Board of Directors interviewing her, Rebecca sat down with Rabbi Mayer. Whether because she was exhausted or taken in (again) by his gaze, she relayed to Rabbi Mayer her experience at Scott Krasner's bar mitzvah years earlier, and the rabbi told Rebecca that he indeed remembered that Saturday morning, of locking eyes with Rebecca and seeing her future telescoping before him. Was Rabbi Mayer's recollection bluster or truth? Rebecca couldn't be certain, but it seemed awfully hard for her to believe that Rabbi Mayer remembered a fresh-faced nameless girl seated in the Beth Israel's sanctuary twenty years ago. But would he lie? She thought not.

Whether what Rabbi Mayer said was true, exaggeration, or a case of mistaken identity, Rebecca knew she had the job at that instant, and she was delighted when the president of the Board offered it to her one week later. Rabbi Mayer fast became her mentor, and over the next five years, it was from him that Rebecca learned almost everything about being a rabbi, including his comforting habit of cupping the elbow of a bereaved or troubled congregant, as well as steadying a benevolent gaze on each and every member of the congregation.

Even though he was modest to a fault, Abraham Mendelsohn gave away a fortune to the synagogue (so much that the recently refurbished chapel had been renamed the Abraham Mendelsohn Chapel) particularly because of Sophie's fondness for Rabbi Mayer. A year after Rabbi Mayer died, so did Abraham Mendelsohn, leaving Sophie with a colossal fortune and no children. Rabbi Popov saw Sophie several times, but gracefully steered her to Rebecca, which was good and bad from Rebecca's point of view. Both women bonded by mourning the lost of Rabbi Mayer. In doing so, Rebecca hoped Sophie would continue the financial legacy of her late husband. But Sophie was no walk on the beach.

"I told them *never* to give me flowers," Sophie said one Friday afternoon even before taking a seat inside Rebecca's study. "*Never!* Flowers make me think of dead people. Flowers make me think of Abie. They make me think of a cemetery. This is so crazy? Why do they do something they know sends me up a wall? And it was Mother's Day!

"So, she picked them from her garden at that palace they live at. They need such a big house? I must have told them a hundred times, and they still show up with flowers. On Mother's Day! And I hit the roof. This is wrong? When they know how I feel?"

Rebecca had to be careful. Sophie would never leave Beth Israel, of that Rebecca was sure, although she could count on both hands how many rabbis in Miami Beach would love to have Sophie in their synagogue, particularly the Lubavitchers in their black hats and their mitzvah tanks.

For just a moment, Rebecca was weighing the pros and cons of telling Sophie what Rabbi Mayer had once told her when she had come to him to discuss her parents' ongoing displeasure over her becoming a rabbi. She had grown to cherish her time with Rabbi Mayer, sitting in that big upholstered chair in his study, across from him. She never could imagine anyone else sitting in her chair. After months of citing passages from the Torah, lending Rebecca book after book from his personal library, holding her hand as she cried ("I think they'd be less disappointed if I'd become a Catholic!"), during a rainy late afternoon, Rabbi Mayer quietly said, "When all else fails, I have a motto and it's FIDO."

"FIDO?" Rebecca asked.

"FIDO," Rabbi Mayer said nodding with the same serene smile Rebecca remembered that day when she was thirteen, but now his skin had turned wrinkled, his steely blue eyes cloudy.

"Excuse me?" Rebecca asked, knowing full well that Rabbi Mayer must be having fun with her. She felt like her mother, being set up by her father.

"You know what I mean, Rebecca," Rabbi Mayer said. "You're driving along the causeway, having a perfectly wonderful day, looking at the water in the bay shimmering like glass, feeling you're the luckiest person in the world, when all of a sudden, someone cuts you off. A guy comes zooming in a yellow Corvette, and you almost have an accident. And to make matters worse, after he cuts you off, he flips you the bird. The nerve of this guy."

Rabbi Mayer waited for Rebecca's reaction and he got it. She was nodding, now smiling, as much from his story as from sitting across from him and another one of his stories. She pictured him in his red Mustang, tooling along the Macarthur Causeway.

"Your first reaction is outrage, that's normal. But you also realize that such a reaction takes you nowhere. That's the moment when you think of FIDO."

"Fido? Like Fido the dog?"

"No, Rebecca. Like "F-I-D-O," he said, spelling out the letters.

Rabbi Mayer paused just so, another one of his trademarks, before delivering the goods, whether in a sermon or a joke.

"Forget It and Drive On," Rabbi Mayer said. "F-I-D-O. When you can't do anything else, I rely on FIDO."

Rebecca paused as Rabbi Mayer paused, and then at the exact same moment, as though on cue, they both laughed, and laughed hard. Behind all of the Parashat of the Torah, the elaborate *Humash*, the dense commentaries from centuries of rabbis, this was the bottom line for Rabbi Mayer: "Forget It and Drive On."

At first, Rebecca was shocked by the simplicity and more so, such simplicity coming from Rabbi Mayer, but then she understood. The moment was sublime for Rebecca. The rabbi was trusting her, allowing his protégé behind the curtain. They had become equals. Don't let conflict destroy you, he was saying. Love your parents, love your fellow man and woman. Love God for the bounty of life He has bestowed upon you. But when you can do nothing to change the outcome, FIDO isn't such a bad motto.

It was at this moment, as she mulled over the meaning of the sublimely ridiculous notion of FIDO, in Rabbi Meyer's study, when the aroma came to her. The scent shot deep into her nostrils, and once she realized she was inhaling, she forced herself, against her will, to restrain herself. The smell was dry parchment-like and scholarly, wholly pleasing, completely different from what she discerned when Harold Perlmutter and Alex Grobard sat and *davened* in the sanctuary. Rabbi Meyer probably knew more about Rebecca than Rebecca knew about herself, but her olfactory pleasure was perhaps the only secret she had kept from him. The pure sanctified aroma all around her was something to breathe in, to imbue her lungs with, to uplift her spirits.

She smiled at Rabbi Mayer, not wanting to let on, then took his veined hand, squeezed it, rose from the chair and left the study.

Dazed and euphoric recalling that moment, Rebecca mused whether she should chance FIDO on Sophie Mendelsohn. But before she could fully apprise herself of the fiduciary ramifications of such a decision should it fail, the words had already come tumbling out of Rebecca's mouth, even though Sophie Mendelsohn hadn't driven a car for years. Lord knows what Rabbi Popov would think of such advice.

But the parable had the same magical effect on Sophie Mendelsohn that it had had on Rebecca. "Yes, I like that," Sophie said, first slowly, then gathering force and conviction. "Don't let minor issues get in the way. In *my* way. That's what you're saying?"

And again, just as Sophie was beginning to feel whole again, if not to greet the world, but her son and daughter-in-law, Rebecca had the same sensation she had had in Rabbi Mayer's study that day. She smelled the scent of Sophie Mendelsohn. Not just the toilet water Sophie had dabbed behind her ears, but the scent of her person, the smell of her being, the core of her existence. By the time Sophie walked out of Rebecca's study that afternoon, Sophie was positively floating, as was Rebecca.

Rebecca's life somehow took a turn that afternoon. She picked up the telephone at her desk and dialed her parents' number. Truth be told, she had been avoiding them. If she got her father, he'd turn the conversation around, leaving Rebecca depressed for days. If she got her mother, the conversation was usually so mundane (about shopping at Publix or mah jongg with her friends) that it, too, would send Rebecca into a state for days.

"Please come to services tonight," Rebecca said as soon as her mother picked up the phone. "And bring Daddy."

"Out of the blue, honey, why? We haven't been to services for how many years I don't know."

Rebecca knew only too well. The fact that neither Elaine nor Shelly had ever attended even one service led by their daughter—not one measly service, not even the Holy Holidays!—hurt Rebecca to no end. They had never seen Rebecca on the *bima*, leading her congregation. Didn't they want to bear witness to their daughter, their only child, leading her congregation closer to God? Talk about irony. Hundreds of congregants looked up to Rebecca for guidance, yet she couldn't even convince her own parents to attend a solitary service.

"Is there something special?" Elaine asked, sidestepping. Perhaps Rebecca wanted to introduce them to a man she was going out with? Finally, our Rebecca was going to get married?

"No Mom, it's not that. I just want you here. I want you to be part of what I do. I want you to want to be here. Is that so much to ask of a rabbi's parents?"

Easy, Rebecca said to herself. Don't make this a make-or-break case. Rebecca had always said they'd come on their own timetable, and if they never came, then they'd never come. Don't make this into a federal case. Remember Rabbi Mendelsohn's advice, remember your advice to Sophie Mendelsohn.

"But why tonight, honey? On such short notice. I'm not sure your father will be able to go. You know your father."

"Try. That's all I'm asking. I know how Daddy is, but see what you can do. I'd love to see both of you."

"I'll do what I can, honey. If not tonight, maybe next Friday. In just a couple of hours, I just don't know," Elaine said, trailing off.

At which point, Rebecca chose to say nothing. Silence, she had learned as both a rabbi and now a therapist, translated to guilt, and guilt was a powerful tool.

"If I can't get your father to come, maybe I'll come alone."

"Surprise me. Both of you, surprise me," Rebecca said as she hung up, deciding this was about as strong a plea as she could make.

Elaine went to Shelly, who was stretched out on the bed, alternating between the Marlins and Jeopardy on TV. "For the sake of Rebecca, you are going to put on a tie and we are going to see our daughter tonight."

Shelly put down the remote. At that moment, he had Jeopardy on, and the category was HATS, a subject Shelly knew something about.

"Fine, we'll meet her at Arnie and Ritchie's. Friday's special is Hungarian goulash. You don't have to cook. Forget the cooking. It's too hot, anyway. If we leave now, we can get there for the early-bird special."

"No, Shelly, we're going to see her at the synagogue. We're going to see our daughter, the rabbi, lead the congregation."

"Correction, Elaine," Shelly said sharply. "*You* might be going to the synagogue, but *I* most certainly am not."

But by then Elaine had pulled out Shelly's blazer, gray pants, a white shirt, and one of four ties he still had, a blue one with little palm trees on it that Rebecca had given him for Father's Day years ago.

"You *are* going," Elaine said as she picked up the remote, zapping Alex Trebeck and his Botany 500 suit in mid-sentence. "That's that. Put these on," she said laying Shelly's clothes on the bed. "We are going to see our daughter lead her congregation."

Jesus, what had gotten into Elaine? They had gone over this before. This was still an issue after so many years? Elaine had been cranky lately, but this, this had come out of the blue.

"I think she has something to tell us. She specifically asked us, both of us, to come. When a dog barks, you go see what he's barking at," Elaine said, at once sorry for how she put it.

"Then tell her she can do all the barking she wants over dinner at Arnie and Ritchie's."

"She wants us to attend services, and that's what we're going to do."

"I'm be damned if I'm gonna set foot in that temple of hypocrites. You don't know the pain it's caused me. The pain it's caused Rebecca, even though she might not know it."

"You are going with me tonight, Shelly. And that's that!" Elaine unzipped Shelly's gray pants, opened the waist and helped him get into them as he still lay on the bed. Then she picked up the white shirt, opened the buttons, and helped him into that, too.

By now whatever resistance Shelly offered was bravado. Whenever Elaine put her foot down like this, which honestly wasn't often, Shelly had no recourse. "She gets a bug up her *tochis* that not even a proctologist can remove," was how he might explain it, although even Shelly would recoil at his own characterization.

Elaine fished around in his leather jewelry box on top of his dresser, filled mostly with wrapped toothpicks from restaurants, found one, then the other cufflink, and threaded them through the cuff holes of Shelly's shirtsleeves.

"But I'm not going to wear those leather shoes," Shelly said, a sure sign of capitulation. "They give me blisters."

"Wear whatever shoes you want to wear. No one's going to be looking at your feet."

Rebecca hadn't really expected her parents to show up. Perhaps it had been impulsive to command them in such a unilateral manner. But it was time. They were getting older. She was getting older. They lived just three miles, not three thousand miles, away. Was being a rabbi so bad, was it something they ought to be ashamed of? After all these years?

Shelly let Elaine drive to the synagogue. His driving was none too good at night, but having Elaine drive gave Shelly the opportunity to rail on about the failure of modern religions, all of them. Elaine let him talk himself blue in the face.

Elaine was nervous about the evening, this momentous reunion of parents and daughter, and perhaps because of that, she took a wrong turn. She had to drive nine miles out of the way across the Julia Tuttle Causeway and back, which gave Shelly more time to rant and rave. By the time they got to Chase Avenue, parked, and made their way into the synagogue, they were late, the service inside had already started. The president of the sisterhood was lighting the Sabbath candles in front, on the *bima*. And right away, Shelly made a production about wearing a yarmulke. There was a box of them at the entrance, but Shelly would be damned if he was going to put one on his head. "I need *this* to pray? What happens if I don't wear one?" Shelly asked the usher who handed Shelly and Elaine their prayer books and then shrugged his shoulders. Elaine grabbed Shelly's arm and pulled him away.

Once settled in the seats, Elaine looked up and saw Rebecca. She was wearing a long white robe. How pretty she looked, Elaine thought. That strong chin of hers, her clear eyes. Rebecca had put her hair up. Did she do this every Friday or was it for us? Her hair was still so lush and thick, Elaine thought and smiled to herself, her hand absentmindedly going to her own hair.

Shelly, on the other hand, was not appeased in the least by what he saw—the four dozen supplicants around him, the grandiose setting, the gilt on the *bima*. He was a stubborn man, he knew that about himself. There was a reason he had avoided going to synagogue for so many years. And it didn't have anything to do with Rebecca! She had chosen her calling in spite of everything Shelly believed in, and that which Rebecca knew Shelly believed in. He stared up at Rebecca, whom he had worked so hard to imbue with his ideals, his wisdom, his sense of right and wrong. She had to know what this had done to her him. She was smart, so smart she

could have been a doctor, a scientist. Shelly recalled the words of her professors, that she had a limitless future, that she could go as far as she wanted. Rebecca, they said, could make a difference in the world.

And just then, just as Shelly was repeating to himself all he felt and all he knew to be true, he noticed a huge bouquet of fresh-cut blooming flowers in the front of the bima, flowers of all kinds and sizes, and it was then that Shelly started to wheeze. Roses, irises, freesias, tulips, crocuses, lilies, begonias, snapdragons. It must cost a fortune every week to buy fresh flowers! Imagine, the synagogue has fresh-cut flowers! In a place that promised salvation, they had to shell out a hundred dollars every week for flowers. Flowers for people who prayed to an almighty God who guaranteed their problems would be solved only if they coughed up enough money. Did the flowers make the prayers sweeter, the worshipers worthier of redemption?

Shelly's eyes suddenly started to tear. The flowers, the commingling of such strong competing aromas. Shelly took out the handkerchief Elaine had put in the pocket of his blazer and touched it to his eyes, which produced more tears. Shelly soon was wheezing, his nose running like a faucet.

At first, Elaine thought Shelly's tears were tears of joy, and when she saw her feisty, stubborn Shelly crying, she started to cry, too. She took Shelly hand, and squeezed it, then looked towards Rebecca.

Rebecca, too, saw the tears of her parents. She nodded down at them, smiling from her chair on the *bima*. Her gaze said she finally understood. Cry as much as you want. You now understand what it is to sit in this house of the Lord, to breathe in the body judaica, as Rebecca closed her eyes and prayed to the Almighty for this miracle of reconciliation.

It was just as that moment that Rebecca sensed the aroma in the sanctuary air. She inhaled and there it was, a singular scent she had never before experienced. This was different from the cloying perfumes, the stale cigars the old men smoked, the hard candies the old woman sucked on. Yes, there was the usual aroma from the flowers, but that wasn't what Rebecca noticed tonight. The aroma was salt from her parents' tears. She was certain, there was no mistaking the singular scent. It was the same as the saltwater of Passover, the salt of the Red Sea, the salt the *shochet* used to leach blood from *glatt* carcasses. She inhaled deeply. The salt entered Rebecca's nostrils, traveled to the back of her throat, and now lay on her tongue. She could taste it. It had traveled all the way from Elaine and Shelly's seats, to the *bima*, to her, and for this Rebecca was thankful, and for this she closed her eyes and asked for God's glorious blessing.

LILY PADS

Poem and Photo by Keith Moul

Uncommon quiet, beside freeways, in a large city,
on a walk through the botany at lake's edge,
I find ways through light to the surface of depths.

Regularly hard light enters at this angle its spectrum;
positioning myself, not for mystery, but natural law
continuing to summon me to its litigations.

Spectral bubbles offer themselves in evidence—sustained!
Fins flash survival, scales feed on flakes of sun—sustained!
Lily pads, your argument in this light is clear and convincing.

Of the medium, fresh water, this as venue and arbiter too:
wise in its ways, unswayed by irrelevance or immateriality,
the lake binds the day's light to justice, freed or imprisoned.

On oblique images caught in amber I can only muse. What
of forgotten worlds? What of future implications? What
of incongruities of shadows, uncertainties of nether light. . .

I will not wait to measure effects of darkness. I will not wait
to quibble the change or babble the opportunities lost.
I will weigh the facts, determine sentence, and hand it down.

Puppy Love:
A Dog-Eared Romance

(translated from the original Pig Latin by A.W. Strouse)

Outside it was raining cats and dogs. Everyone in the place was squawking like geese. She was eating like a bird, maybe because she was poor as a church mouse. He was eyeing her like a hawk. She was a real fox, what people call "doe-eyed." He was chomping at the bit, but he felt like a fish out of water.

Because of the bull market, everyone else was like pigs at the trough. He tried not to eat like a pig, but he was still as busy as a beaver. People said he was squirrelly, and all his life he had been the ugly duckling. At least, "every dog has his day," he thought.

"Well, would you look at what the cat dragged in," she said as he approached. "I'm glad to see that not everyone around here is just a chicken."

"You know," he said sadly, "they all follow like sheep."

"Maybe I'm beating a dead horse here, but it's like lambs to the slaughter."

"To be fair, though, you can't teach an old dog new tricks."

"That's a cock and bull story," she said. "They're filthy rats!"

"Come now," he said, "that kind of talk is for the birds."

"Well, at any rate, I'm not going to ape them."

"I don't know if you should pigeonhole people like that," he said. "Why not let sleeping dogs lie?"

"But they've got their heads in the sand. They're as blind as bats. It makes me sick as a dog to think about it!"

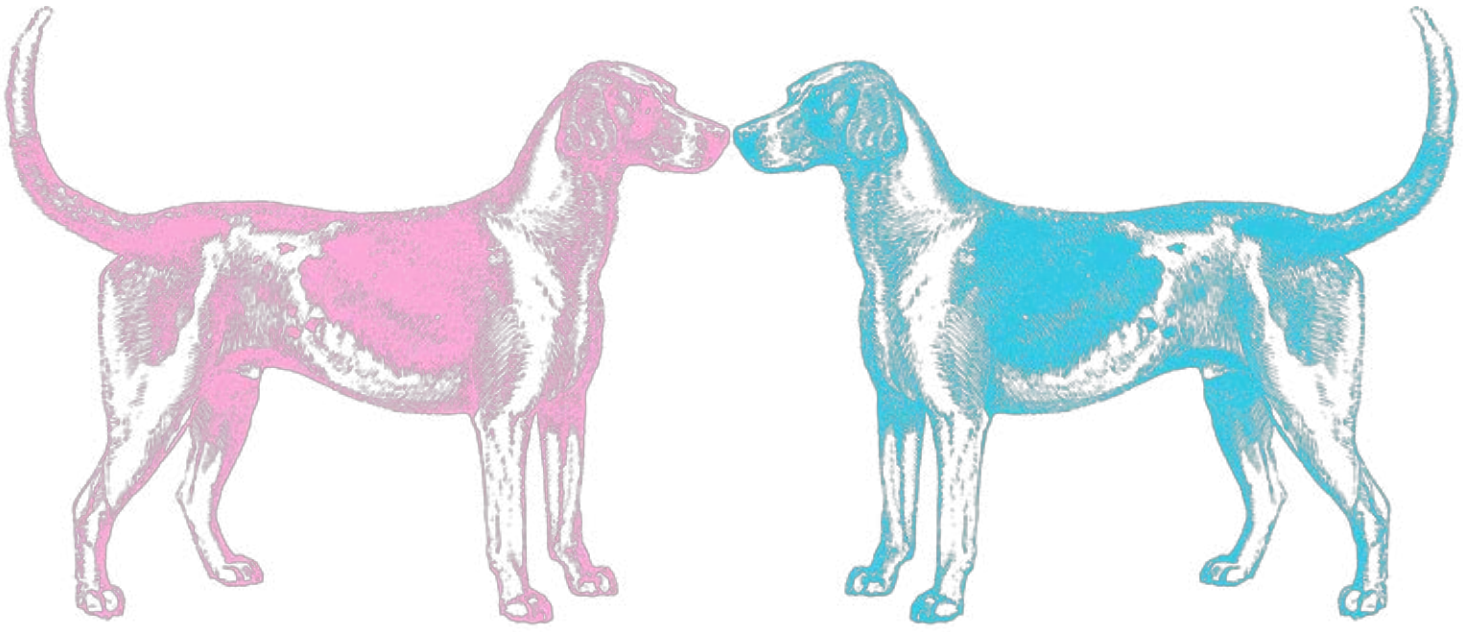
"But at least they've managed to fish out that mole. He's really the canary in the coalmine."

"I agree. What a snake in the grass!" She was starting to sound a little loosey-goosey.

There were other vixens about, he noticed, but "a bird in hand is worth two in the bush." He said, "That guy's goose is cooked. Now, he'll just have to sleep with the fishes."

She said, "I think he'll turn out to be the goose that lays the golden egg."

"Don't count your chicks before they hatch," he reminded her.



"You know, we really are like birds of a feather."

"You mean, you and the mouse in your pocket?"

"Why don't you cut out the horseplay, you silly goose? "

"Yes," he said, "just so long as you don't think you're going to rule the roost."

"That's really putting the cart before the horse."

"You are as wise as an owl," he said. "You're as sly as a fox," he told her. "As brave as a lion."

"You think I'll buy that hook, line, and sinker?"

He said, "We both know what's the elephant in the room."

Now that the cat was out of the bag, the two lovebirds went back to his love nest, like chickens coming home to roost. At first he thought, "this is like shooting fish in a barrel," but it turned out that she was stubborn as a mule.

She said to herself, "if you give away the milk, who will buy the cow?" But then he got as naked as a jaybird. She took like a duck to water, once she saw his donkey dick. "So it wasn't just a fish story," she thought.

She got ants in the pants and showed him her beaver. He stood there like a deer in the headlights. She started to spank his monkey. He was strong as an ox; she was as meek as a lamb. After she choked his chicken, then they did it doggy-style. They mated like rabbits. They did it till the cows came home. In the end, they killed two birds with one stone.

Then he looked just like the cat that ate the canary. He was proud as a peacock.

"Cat got your tongue?" he asked.

"That's none of your beeswax."

"Excuse me," he said. "I have to piss like a racehorse."

She just felt like a horse's ass.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Sean Loughlin currently resides in Brooklyn, NY and works as an Account Representative for Apple, Inc. His interests include fall weather, photo blogs, whisky, and bicycle rides. He also enjoys writing short poems when he's had enough to drink. Sean's mix tape days are few and far between at this point. Then again, effortless style is a bizarre wisdom. Not all situations call for such forms of creativity.

Kelly Coveny is a published poet, essayist, novelist, commissioned screenwriter, and lyricist/singer. She is also an advertising writer/creative director last employed at Saatchi & Saatchi on the Olay, Crest, and Old Spice accounts. She has won awards from *Archive, Communications Art*, and the *New York Songwriters Circle*. She lives with her husband, two sons and dogs in lower Connecticut. Her albums, books and other creative work can be viewed at pancakefaktory.com.

Raggio Colby lives in Denver, Colorado. He has previously published work in *The Mountain Gazette* and *Fetishes*, the now-defunct literary journal of the University of Colorado Medical School.

Mangesh Naik lives and works in Pune, India. He works full-time for a software giant and dabbles in poetry and paranormal research in his spare time. His poems have appeared in *Thieves Jargon*, *Autumn Sky Poetry*, *Gloom Cupboard*, and are forthcoming in *Tipton Poetry Journal*.

Leslie Wolf Plajzer lives in Baltimore with her husband Floodsy and their daughter Sarah. She is a Senior Agent with the Maryland Division of Parole and Probation and recently celebrated 23 years clean in Narcotics Anonymous.

Suad Khatab Ali is a young writer living in the Middle East. Her first collection of stories, *Haram*, won the Said Al-Hazzah medal from the Qatar Academy of Arts, and her first novel will be coming out next year from UAC Press.

Gabriel Welsch is the author of the collection *Dirt and All Its Dense Labor* (2006) and the forthcoming chapbook, *An Eye Fluent in Gray* (2010). He also writes fiction, publishing it in *Georgia Review, Ascent, Southern Review, New Letters, Mid-American Review, Chautauqua, Other Voices,* and elsewhere. He currently works as vice president of advancement and marketing at Juniata College, in Huntingdon, PA, where he lives with his wife and two daughters.

Amanda Shapiro was born in California and raised in Connecticut. An MFA candidate at Columbia University, she is writing a collection of short stories about people in transit. She is currently somewhere in Alaska.

Rob Shore is a writer, photographer, and filmmaker. His writing and photography has been featured in the Fifth Wednesday Journal, Juked, and on The Best American Poetry Blog. His essay "Time Travel" is forthcoming in the book Resident Aliens (Harvard University Press). He wrote and directed the documentary film And Many More. Rob currently lives in Washington, D.C., where he does New Media for the FrameWorks Institute.

Stephen G. Bloom teaches narrative writing in the School of Journalism at the University of Iowa, where he is a professor and the Bessie Dutton Murray Professional Scholar. He is the author of *Tears of Mermaids: The Secret Story of Pearls, Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America, Inside the Writer's Mind,* and co-author (with Peter Feldstein) of *The Oxford Project*. His stories have appeared in many journals and magazines.

Keith Moul was born in 1945 and raised in St. Louis. He married Sylvia in 1967 and has one child, a daughter Ianthe who is a fine artist (www.iantheart.com). Keith translated and published Anglo-Saxon poems under James Dickey's supervision while completing his PhD at the University of South Carolina. His poems have appeared for more than 40 years in the US and Canada, and more recently in Britain and Australia. He also publishes photos.

A.W. Strouse, a native of rural Pennsylvania, lives in Washington Heights, New York City. He believes in the power of language to miraculously transubstantiate reality. As a Bennett Fellow at Fordham University's Center for Medieval Studies, he researches late antique and medieval poetry. Currently, he is "editing" a collection of hymns written by his alter ego, the late-20th century mystic, Claire O. Casey. More of his work may be found at http://thepropagandaofmylove.blogspot.com.

If you enjoyed reading this issue of Porchlight as much as we enjoyed making it, please consider donating at: http://porchlightzine.com/donate.

PORCHLIGHTZINE.COM

A SEASONAL PUBLICATION
COVER ART: Rob Shore

EDITOR: L.J. Moore
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Joshua Liebowitz
DESIGNER: Dave Moore
SUBMISSIONS: We accept submissions in poetry, fiction, non-fiction, photography, and graphic art (including comic strips).

GUIDELINES

- Original, unpublished work only.
- Please submit all poetry, fiction, and non-fiction in .doc format.
- Maximum word count: 4,000 words.
- Please submit all photography and graphic art in .jpeg format.
- If your work is accepted, you grant Porchlight first time publishing rights, though the copyright for each work reverts to and is reserved by you, the individual writer and artist.
- Please send all submissions to porchlightzine@gmail.com.
- We look forward to reading your work.