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Manomet 2
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I am molded between ocean and sand,
and I am where I should be, so return.
The tide engulfs my toes like your hands over breasts
but I stand like a mold between ocean and sand,
sobbing—becoming as salty as the rocky point,
remembering how your lips felt on my eyelids.
Molded between the ocean and sand
I am standing right where I should be—return.
Our Descendant
Matthew Lorello

Waves crashed here once. Endlessly more after the other, so many currents like his black and gray hair, dense and architectural. Recalling the roads we traveled in blazing sun—miles of hair; we follow the trail, grown over 15 years of piety.

We call him a Rasta, as the salted humidity sticks to our skin. In a million lights, Charlotte Amelie blinds, yet these lights know Hodge, the name applied by tourists from a distant land.

As he works on our charity, we watch. His same hair swaying like palms in mediocre breeze—timed, measured.

The lights grow horizontal as we fly toward the ocean, in open carts to his paradise. “Coki,” he says, “is the place my people go.” With a joint and the sun setting faster than that thing, he speaks of celestial abilities of conch or how concrete sand is when held tight.

He sips Redstripe slowly before the island— with the lights and miles of hair and sun and sky and water sinks—and we go too, into blue together.
It was a city of color, air, and water, a foreign place where the heart beats in time with the tides. The same water flowing through our veins is tugged and pulled by a moon so distant and wanting. Blood evolved and human, blood that pulsed with beats rhythmmed with endless time. The ebb and flow leading towards an abyss of the darkest nightmares and a whirlpool of infinite energy.

And then there was city of green hours that stretched on till midnight, where grey skies had once given dreams to our ancestors. A place of new beauty and youthful emotion stirred alive again. A place where we felt at home, tangled, warm, and sheltered but we were doomed to leave. Oh if but that had been the nutshell in which we were bounded we would think ourselves not kings or queens but rather lovers of infinite space.

The night holds for each of us, his or her own secrets. Hopes and fears far beyond the creationist’s reality. Perhaps the pulsating moon drags us closer to that which is solely of the night. And in those moments, dark and light alike, we find our most pure self. Maybe they are just dreams, the heady revival of past occurrences and over-wrought memories. Or maybe they are the part of us that is born, breaths, and dies again with every silent passing of the solitary, immortal moon.
"Maledirlo," he cursed. It was the third time today that the grinding wheel had cracked his lens. The spinning stone, exactly a foot and a half in diameter and carved to his specifications in Tuscan whetstone, whittled the fragile glass to the thinness of a fiorino. The little disks of ground glass, when finished, were no larger than that same coin.

Across the study, a little boy’s head perked in response to the oath. He quickly snapped his gaze back towards his sweeping, feigning deafness. It was a pretense that Galileo found very amusing.

"Venuto qui, Celestino," beckoned the old man.

The boy eagerly dropped his twig broom and hurried over to the maestro. The old scholar was seated on a high stool at one of his work tables. A spread of glass lenses, frames, tubes, spectacles, and diagrams covered the table’s surface, mirroring the motif of ordered chaos the rest of the study embodied. The room was inarguably that of a scholar. Leather-bound manuscripts, parchment, and loose sheaves of thin onionskin littered the dusty floor. Several large tables were spread with pots of ink, goose pens, rolls of paper, and smudged dissertations peppered with figures, equations, and geometrical diagrams. Scraps of metal gears, clumsy magnifiers from France, silver casings, little hammers, and miniscule nails were littered like coriandoli over everything. In one corner sat the grinding wheel, near it precarious stacks of raw glass, emerald-green in the fading light.

Three of four walls were encased with disorderly tiers of books from floor to ceiling. The remaining wall was a massive window with a stunning view of the hilly Tuscan lowlands, where twilight’s curtain was just settling over the orchards and townstead. Lamps in the distant Pisa, like faerie-lights, blossomed out of the growing gloom. Several strange scopes, all bulky prototypes, were pointed skyward through the window. A strain of new starlight filtered into their crude glass lenses to pool on the wooden floor.

Celestino had found a smaller stool, and dragged it over to sit somewhere near the knees of Galileo, where a large cat basked in the hearth’s warmth.

Galileo reached down and lifted the little cornicello of red coral that Celestino wore on a leather cord about his neck to examine it. It was a tiny curve of crimson resembling the crescent moon, an amulet of protection against the evil eye.

Pisa, Italia. 1610.
“You see this, ragazzino? Questo cornicello?”

“Of course, maestro,” replied the boy. “My mother makes me wear it every day. My father is not pleased,” he laughed.

Galileo let the charm fall back on the boy’s chest. “I would imagine not.” Few marriages of the old beliefs and Christianity yielded a solid agreement about how to raise a child.

“And what do you suppose it is made to resemble, your little amulet?”

Celestino looked down at the talisman on his chest. “Well, I should think the moon, signore, but it is red!”

“The moon, indeed. Where is the moon tonight?”

Celestino went to the window and found the moon. The pallid sickle sailed low in the sky, hanging, it seemed, above the horizon only by a spinster’s strand of silver cloud. The little boy indicated it with a confident finger.

“There, signore!”

“Bravo, ragazzo.”

“Signore Galileo,” began the boy timidly, idly fingering an ironcast armillary sphere on a nearby table, “Why does la Chiesa dislike your work?”

“Take that cornicello of yours, and spin it around your neck once.”

Celestino did so, taking the little coral amulet and turning it in a circle around his head on its cord.

“Such,” said Galileo, “is the movement of the moon, la luna, in her heavenly sphere around us. That much we know to be true.”

The servant boy reclaimed his spot on the low stool, brushing off the large cat, and looked up at the old scholar for him to continue.

“But what,” Galileo said, voice becoming passionate, “if the same motion existed between us and il sole? If we moved around the sun as the moon moves around us? That, ragazzo, is why the good Church mistakes my inquiries for devilry. Because I have proved just that.”

Celestino, transfixed, gazed upwards at his master.

“Sometimes,” whispered the astronomer, “to find truth, one must sleep on anthills.”

A bell, somewhere distant in the house, clanged loudly, interrupting their private reverie.

“That would be the dinner flangia. Best you should run off,” said the old maestro with a wink.

Celstino grabbed his broom and made for the study door before turning back.

“The clockwork gears have arrived from Firenze, signore. The men put them in the basement.”
“Grazie. I will deal with them after dinner.”

The servant boy left the study, closing the carved oak door behind him.

“His Holiness, Don Aldobrandini, il camerlengo della Città Vaticano!” declared the household nuncio, his reverberant baritone traveling easily throughout the casa, when three strangers appeared that evening out of the cricket-charmed Tuscan night.

Galileo shrugged on a high-collared tunic and waistcoat over his shop apron and breeches before hurrying downstairs. A man of the cloth is not to be kept waiting.

“Buona sera, camerlengo, eserciti onorati,” said Galileo pleasantly as the nuncio opened the anteroom door to the guests. He offered his hand in greeting. The camerlengo did not accept it; nor did he immediately reply at all. Instead, he spoke to the two armed shadows behind him. “Eserciti.” The two tall shadows leaned into the torchlight towards their master, and suddenly had faces. They were two of the Swiss Guard, and both of them carried halberds taller than themselves. “One of you shall wait outside. The other shall be my escort for the evening.”

One of the Guard tapped his halberd in salute and remained at the doorpost. The other, bowing his head, entered at his master’s heels. Neither the camerlengo nor the Swiss Guardsman touched the silver key nailed to the portal, as was a custom of good luck and respect for the household among Italians. The Guardsman was not Italian, but the camerlengo certainly was.

“I will take some wine now,” the priest said to no one in particular.

“Per favore, Celestino. Meet us in the study,” said Galileo, nodding to the servant boy. Celestino scurried off into the pantry for a stoppered decanter of Nebbiolo rosso as the three men ascended the stairs to Galileo’s study chamber. A moment later, Celestino returned from the pantry. Standing on his toes to remove two Murano glasses from a cabinet, he poured wine from the fetched decanter into them. Celestino placed the brimming glasses onto an intaglio-etched tray and walked as fast as prudence would let him to the upstairs room.

Neither Galileo nor the camerlengo said anything as they walked. When Celestino entered, both Galileo and the priest took a glass, Galileo being careful to allow the chamberlain to take his first.

“To what do I owe the honor of your presence to, camerlengo Aldobrandini?” asked Galileo.

“Il Segno e Il Nunzio delle Stelle,” said the camerlengo, pulling from his voluminous robes copies of the texts, “are the subject of my visit. Volumes of heresy. Tomes of profanity and wickedness. You poison the mind of the common
italiani with your misguided deceptions, Galileo.”

This last word he spit out, clearly forsaking the honorific ‘maestro’ that should have accompanied Galileo’s surname as a professore dell’ Università.

“I do God’s work, signore camerlengo. It is with his whispers in my ear and heart that I pry the secrets of our skies from the unknown. Are science and religion so at odds, camerlengo, that one must exist over the other? Science and religion are comrades, working hand in hand to unlock truth from its hazy confinement.”

“No, they are not, signore,” the chamberlain said, not a little annoyed. “Science insidiously seeks to usurp the place that God holds in men’s hearts. It is with the devil’s spyglass that you glimpse the darker secrets of Satan’s stain in this world, the spread of his taint from the shadow-realm where evil thrives. È il vetro ombreggiato del diavolo!” For emphasis, he took his Murano wineglass and drizzled the contents over the chamber carpet. The empty glass he threw into the hearth, where, with a very audible tinkle, it broke.

“Religion and science will not abide in the same household, just as aceto and acqua refuse to mix in the same bottle.”

Galileo sadly watched the crimson discoloration of the wine sink into his carpet without speaking. Celestino, peering around the corner, knew how expensive both the carpet and the beautiful Murano wineglasses had been. Galileo took a sip of his wine and waited a long moment before saying anything.

“It is most sensational of the papal chamberlain to punctuate his sentences by throwing my property. My household is privileged you have honored my glassware so.”

Hearing the last comment, Celestino fancied he had other work to finish around the house, and quietly made his escape.

The camerlengo turned an unpleasant shade of beet, but did not respond. He gestured to the Swiss Guardsman standing as still as a gallows at his back. The soldier produced a sack from his sash, which he whipped open. The massive man went from table to table, knocking without care manuscripts, charts, compasses, devices, and scopes into the bag. With each little clink and crash, Galileo seemed to shrink more and more into himself. The meager lamplight cast stark shadows on his wizened visage, giving him the appearance of age beyond his years.

“What would you have me do, don? Abandon my studies? Give my books to the flame? Commit the rest of my life to living in the solitude of ignorance, behind the grey gates of isolation that unawareness brings?”

The priest bowed his head slightly in the affirmative.

“I have sent two daughters away to live behind the doors of a casa del
Dio,” said Galileo. “I have buried a father and a mother, and forsaken a wife. Do not think I am a stranger to loss, Don Aldobrandini,” said Galileo slowly. “But this is loss of a different breed. If you had asked me to give up a finger or a thumb, I would not object. Such is my duty as a devoto della chiesa and a god-fearing man to sacrifice for my church. But to take my work, camerlengo,” he said carefully, fixing the chamberlain with his pale, solemn gaze, “is to take all of myself.”

“So be it. Buona notte, signore Galileo,” said the camerlengo coolly. He motioned to the Swiss Guardsman, who had by now removed most of the telescopes, lenses, and star-charts from the study. Not by accident, he had also tossed a few handfuls of papers into the blazing hearth after the Murano wineglass.

The Guardsman tied a knot in the knapsack, slung it over his shoulder, and left on the heels of the man who was second only to il Papa, the Pope.

“Who is the more ignorant, camerlengo?” Galileo asked the retreating priest’s back, “He who denies that God’s hand releases thunderbolts, or he who is struck by lightning in an open field because he trusted that God would spare him?

But the Pope’s chamberlain had gone.

Later that night, Celestino found his master sitting in the darkened study. In the darkness, the bookshelves made the walls ominous shadows, tiled in inky blackness. Only one candle was lit, a rushlight, flickering and small. Its inconstant illumination made the silhouettes of Galileo’s shattered remaining inventions jerk and dance upon the walls, an archaic shadow-show of smashed Renaissance machinery. The star-scopes that had previously gazed out of the study window had disappeared. Galileo himself was seated in his oak chair farthest from the hearth. From his chair, he could see most of the sky. Tonight, not a cloud marred his view. A dreamscape of cold, bright stars spread before him, winking and scintillating in their distant spheres. A faint crescent of moon sat on its nebulous throne, prepared to slide down beyond the horizon. Galileo’s eyes were closed, his breathing rhythmic. He held in his hands the chipped and broken remnant of a telescopio, one the Swiss Guardsman had neither confiscated nor thrown into the fire. His fingers ran despondently over the carvings on its elongated cylinder.

Thinking his master asleep, Celestino crept slowly forwards to collect the empty wineglass.

“What is the purpose of a burning arrow, Celestino?” asked the old astronomer, without opening his eyes.

“Why, to pierce an enemy’s heart, signore,” replied the boy, startled.
“No, ragazzino,” said Galileo, with a barely perceptible shake of his head. “Its purpose is to set his house aflame, so that he must run from it. The words of the Church are burning arrows, and we, like soldiers, must turn them aside.”
september
Heather Langley

she’s got that autumn slant
two-tone light playin’
mixing colors from both sides of the wheel
bites while kissing
in misty blue shadows
Boy, if I ever catch her
eating overripe grapes by the barn
vine-drunk and pomegranate-red
waxing apples an’
singin’ the cows home an’
breathing sweet-soft over night mists
I swear
I’ll never want anything else again
Six Ways to Peel a South African Orange
Meghan Smith

I.

Here
is an orange.

II.

The orange peel cuts
under my thumbnail,
A dark spot stains pale pink,
as naartjie blood
acidifies my own.
Yellow-white pith glazes
whorls and calluses,
and all the perfumes of South Africa
could not cleanse
these umntu omhlophe hands.

III.

Pavement—blurs—orange groves,
gated homes, palms—
becomes the Styx.
A boy made from dust
with knees like fists
Raises a blue net
pregnant with oranges
just to tantalize me.
His grandmother squints as tires
cast stones—she erodes another wrinkle
while I run my tongue over my teeth
and realize that I have no fare.
IV.

Orange room, cracked linoleum, and Oz, the groom, passes tin pails of umqombothi, shots of brandy—nkosi. This rice feast cannot fill me, but he is brimming, frothing, spilling joy, so I lick his happiness from my fingers as he says: “I’m so blessed, blessed, blessed.”

V.

Oz’s cousins leap from the chimney into American arms ready to twirl, spin, and upside-down torn orange coats, to tickle toes sticking out from soles. Brandied sunshine warms the wind, skirts, kerchiefs, and sweaters flap their wings. We sing in Xhosa—“we knew this day would come”—and we dance, the happy flock, until we reach the stop sign.

VI.

Plastic bags blossom in trees, on lawns, on elbows—these are “the flowers of South Africa.” Mama Rat crouches on the sidewalk with her piles of oranges as the baby boy, the lamb, whispers “please sissi.” He stands against the wall, palms up, feet crossed, crowned by an unraveling woolen cap.
People change. Places change. Climate changes. You changed overnight. You forgot who you were. Something changed between you and me and then it was like when we first met and I thought you were strange. Our individuality melted away in a waterfall of summertime snow runoff. But this time, there is not enough snow to really make much of a difference. It’s not a waterfall, it’s a sad little trickle down a rock face. But you still take pictures because a waterfall is just as pretty as a weeping rock. Slowly, the water will smooth the rock face like water will smooth our waxen facial features. And then I will forget who you are. You will move away from here like I moved away from the desert and it will not matter where you go. Because both of us will always adapt to our surroundings, even if it means moving to opposite poles of the earth.

Before I knew you, I lived in the desert. I worried about things like rattlesnakes and coyotes and scorpions in my Norman Rockwell neighborhood. We were used to no rain. We didn’t really feel global warming immediately because, after it hits 100 degrees, numbers don’t mean anything anymore. I suppose when you get to a certain point, it stops feeling hot and you stop feeling dehydrated and your insides burn from the sun so that all emotion sizzles out and evaporates before it hits the black hot pavement. The desert is not so bad at first if you move there when are young and have no choice. You learn to deal with it, you adapt. You make new friends. Eventually, though, I realized that I don’t really like watching out for rattlesnakes and coyotes and scorpions and I really didn’t like feeling dehydrated. I especially disliked watching my emotions sizzle out and evaporate before they hit the pavement. So I moved.

And here I am. I am on the opposite side of the country. I am in lush, green, hydrated New England. But it will not stay this way. Like the airport that I went through to get here, we are in a permanent code orange, high alert. I guess if you wanted to stick to the trend, you could call it code green. “Go Green!” “Help Our Planet Stay Green!” That kind of thing.

We are right near the ocean. I have not been to an east coast ocean yet, but I have always wanted to see the sun set on the other side. I think the ocean would have been different a hundred years ago if I had moved then. I think it has risen. Now I have nightmares that I am drowning. Sometimes I am like Alice in Wonderland and I am drowning in my own tears. Sometimes I will wake up and I can still taste the salt. But I guess I don’t have anything to worry about because my emotions still sizzle out and evaporate before they hit the pavement. It didn’t really matter that I moved. I think the east coast might be as wrong for
me as the desert was. Maybe it’s just my age and I want to explore everything before I choose anything. I will move eventually and adapt to some new change. Maybe I will move to California. But while I’m there, the entire state might detach from everything I will have gotten used to and I will slide into the ocean along with my new life. Hopefully, though, I won’t melt in large pieces like a glacier and crash into the ocean. Sliding into it is more pleasant than crashing into it. But, if I could choose, I would want to melt into the ocean.

Our ice caps are melting. Our extremities are going through a freeze-thaw cycle until it gets too warm to ever properly freeze and we just melt. How hot do you think it would have to be for our organs to melt within us and leak out our belly buttons? It is that hot right now and we go crashing into the ocean and tourists will pay money to watch. They will take pictures and record videos and they will upload them onto the Internet for the rest of the world to see. Everyone will look on in horror and stare at our misfortune, their misfortune. They will watch as all pride we may have ever had drips from our poles down our temples and runs into our mouths. It will slide down our cheeks and mouths, past our equators and pool in our belly buttons. Then our brains, so safely situated in the topmost parts of our northern hemispheres, will not be able to think of any new ways pretend like we are slowing the melting process and we will start melting so fast that water and thought fills our gaping mouths and begins to pour out a waterfall of sad water that will eventually trickle down our tracheas like it trickles down a rock face and it will seep into our lungs.

And we will drown in a warm ocean. An ocean warmed by a gaping mouth we created above us. The warm sun will have done a number on us, making us think that it was being nice, allowing us to drown pleasantly in a warm ocean. Somewhere, way deep down where the warm sun can’t reach no matter how hard it tries, the ocean is still a cold place. And that is where I will be waiting for another change. I might see you down there.
Sleeping giants
John Campopiano

sifting through brush
a calescent golden haze settling
across Aztec skies and fields
hanging pothos longipes provide sustenance
for orange footed movers
and black fingered thinkers
warm breaths paring the bark
off banana trees
of tremendous stature
as we scour the land for sleeping giants

deterred by hastily falling snow
gullies of violent winds
and stagnant deserts of captured radiance
I'll hunker below the dunes
absorbing the twilight
hoping to reach REM
carefully
and without obstruction
before reverberations are visible moon-side
and awaken the sleeping giants
from their fantastical slumber
Setting: A dimly lit bedroom. A WOMAN is lying in a disheveled bed. A MAN stands in the open doorway.

WOMAN: You’re back!

MAN: Yes.

pause

WOMAN: Did you forget something?

MAN: No. (pause) Yes.

WOMAN: Okay. Looks around to see nothing of his in the room.

MAN: What do you do after I leave?

WOMAN: What do you mean?

MAN: What do you do when I am gone, when I walk out the door and you’re still in bed?

WOMAN: I don’t know. Fall back asleep I guess.

pause

MAN: Do you know what you look like when you’re asleep?

WOMAN: No.

MAN: You’re frozen in your sleep. You’re a statue.

WOMAN: Is that okay?

MAN: You are perfect.
**WOMAN**: Do I snore?

**MAN**: Sometimes. But only a little.

**WOMAN**: Does it bother you?

**MAN**: Sometimes. But only a little.

**WOMAN**: Do I take up too much room?

**MAN**: No.

**WOMAN**: Do you wish I was smaller? Do you wish my hips weren’t so wide and my legs weren’t so long? Do you wish that I could fit better with my head on your shoulder?

**MAN**: Never.

**WOMAN**: Do you love me?

**MAN**: Always.

*pause*

**MAN**: You leave your scarves on the hook next to the door.

**WOMAN**: Yes.

**MAN**: I took one once. When I was leaving, I took one off the hook and I put it in my jacket pocket.

**WOMAN**: Why?

**MAN**: I hoped it would be like you were with me.

**WOMAN**: Which one was it?

**MAN**: It was a blue and purple and yellow. pause I kept it for three days. I would take it out and smell it once every two hours on the hour for three days.
**WOMAN**: Did it help?

**MAN**: I would have preferred smelling you.

*pause*

**WOMAN**: I miss you.

**MAN**: I’m here.

**WOMAN**: After you go though. I miss you all the time.

**MAN**: When I go?

**WOMAN**: I try to find you in the bed.

**MAN**: What do you mean?

**WOMAN**: I try to find where you’ve been sleeping. Where the pillow is still indented and where the sheets are still warm. I try to find them so I can lay in them and pretend I am laying in you.

**MAN**: Does it work?

**WOMAN**: I would prefer if it was you.

*pause*

**MAN**: It is raining out today.

**WOMAN**: I know. I can hear it.

**MAN**: I still have to go.

**WOMAN**: I’ll miss you.

**MAN**: Is that okay?

**WOMAN**: Yes.
**MAN:** Do you wish that I—

**WOMAN:** Never.

**MAN:** Do you—

**WOMAN:** Always.
Behind a Yellow House in Cincinnati, Ohio
Isabel Tarshis

*After James Wright’s “Living in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota.”*

Sitting in the grass, the orange cat that makes her sneeze comes to brush up against me, pushing with all his might, starved for affection. Purple asters, she plants in a semi-circle garden hugging the house. Nuthatches and Carolina wrens—birds she doesn’t know the names of—constantly dart around the feeder. I notice a quiet doe and fawn on the other side of the fence and smile. I sometimes forget—She’s been dead for six years.
Even though I asked him to, my father hardly ever told me stories. For a little while he would read to me from a small book of fairytales. The man who never cut his fingernails. The woman who lived in a glass house – if there’s a moral to that one, I guess I’ve forgotten it. He only told his own stories when you got him mad, which I managed to do fairly consistently despite my best intentions. What got him really mad, and I mean really riled up, was if you didn’t finish your dinner.

One night after he had finished eating and I was having a staring contest with the relentless remainder of my green beans, my father broke his plate right in half. “We were so hungry,” he shouted, his forehead closing in on me, “that my brother stabbed me in the hand with a knife. He stabbed me in the hand because I was reaching for the last piece of bread.” My father’s eyebrows were raised so high that his eyes looked twice their size. The skin circling his eyes creased and seared, as if he had been hoisting the table above his head for twenty minutes now and couldn’t hold it up one second longer. And then he pounded his pristine plate on the table. We jumped in our chairs from the hardness of the crack, the vibration surging through the wood. I remember my mother crying, and I remember thinking that if he could break a plate, my father could break other things. He raised his hand to my face. “He stabbed me,” he said, pointing with his other hand, “right there.”

When he calmed down my father glued the broken plate back together. After he died my mother bought a new set of plates, but for years someone’s dinner would wind up on the plate with a glue line smack down the middle. Mine never did though. I made a habit of switching the plates around before anyone sat down for dinner, so that if the broken one were on the table, it was at my father’s place.
Before Evensong
Gabrielle Kappes

We bend long grasses where palominos and pintos
take no notice of our wild gait,

but the houseboat honks, gliding downriver toward
Abingdon lock. Moorhens along the bow eye

your shadow, tall, it reaches to the far end of the bank,
then dips. Cool warmth lingers, extends into

the shade of an iced tumbler on a table in Monticello,
a slight smile on your lips, you turn your head toward me or

to listen. The evensong bells muddle a dark bellow,
lifting light heat, hanging softly.
Evening Prayer
Elisabeth Lohmueller

Death was sudden last week,
posing as a fence then the trunk of a tree.

The newspaper recounted the tragedy:
alcohol most likely was not involved,

and speeding had not been an issue.
The teen simply lost control of his vehicle.

Tonight I pull down the window shade
in case death feels like slipping into something warm.

My heart thrums like an erratic Morse code
message I can’t translate.

I am imagining the cardiac muscle
dispatching a cadenced telegram,

each cell pumping out the same question
until that swift, unexpected response.
I remember visiting the old farmhouse once (pre-fire, pre-move to Pond Road). My sisters and I sat in the living room on the old plaid couch, which was nubbly and sagged from years of family holidays. As usual, we had stalled outside on the tire swing for as long as possible, hesitant to move inside because of some vague bias against the dusty interior lodged in the bottom of our stomachs. The arc of the swing would always grow smaller and smaller until we inevitably would be forced to hop off and pass into thick darkness through the screen door. It wasn’t that we were scared of our grandparents or that we disliked them; I think it was that we felt, for some reason, uneasy when we were all confined within the dusty old house. I think we all, grandparents included, preferred the rolling fences and arching fields of the farm as a backdrop for our interactions.

On this particular September day, my grandparents (Bang and Grampy), my father (their son), my sister Kate, and I were grouped in the living room of the old farmhouse. Kate and I huddled on one end of the couch, too young to be expected to help buoy conversation. I quickly grew indifferent to the chatter of my dad and grandmother and let my eyes dart around the familiar landscape. The space was filled with dusty teacups, a stack of magazines, and three cardboard boxes of books Bang had rescued from the side of the road last week; she was eager to deliver them to the safety of the library’s dim, cool shelves. As I reached down to comfort the cat twining around my ankles, I noticed a small, dark lump which almost blended into the antique rug. A mouse.

A dead mouse. Hardly decomposed but very definitely deceased, with a few sharp bite marks as lingering evidence of the circumstances. I scooped the cat into my lap and resumed petting, not knowing what else to do, not knowing if anyone else had noticed. I didn’t say anything, feeling an odd churn of emotions inside me as I looked everywhere but at the mouse.

Eventually my dad noticed it during a lull in the conversation. I remember his uncharacteristic embarrassment at the fact that his parents had dead mice (or at least mouse) in their living room (his former living room) and hadn’t noticed. Bang was mildly concerned, flung it outside by the tail — but Grampy laughed. Actually let out a guffaw. And this was something new to me, though a moment that ultimately faded into the smooth patchwork of childhood.

My grandfather had always been a solid, if silent, presence in my life. He was a recalcitrant conversationalist to someone of any age, but especially to a shy ten year old. I think I knew even then, though, probably from some
intimation of my father, that this was a great man, an intelligent man, who could have told me stories about the army, or his life’s work on a dairy farm, or his studies at Yale. Unfortunately, the first time I would learn any details about these adventures would be at his funeral, through my father’s eulogy. Though I’m sure I knew it cerebrally, it was only then that it truly clicked that Grampy hadn’t always stationed himself in the blue chair in the corner of the old farmhouse kitchen.

Again, it was never that we didn’t want to see him or were afraid of him; no, it was abundantly clear even to a six-year-old that his quiet demeanor didn’t conceal any menacing characteristics, only made it easier to imagine the nights he knelt in the barn next to a birthing cow or gently coaxed milk out of a swollen udder before the sun rose on some chilly December morning. Bang was simply more accessible: deceptively energetic, quick with a famous, head-thrown-back burble of a laugh, the kind of grandmother who would not only make you dinner but take you outside to pick the vegetables from the garden beforehand (then make you wash them next to her at the sink).

I have always admired my father, somehow known from a young age that he is a kind and generous man, perhaps even great in a small way. But, again, it wasn’t until he gave his eulogy that I realized how many of his most exemplary traits – the ones he had taken the most care to instill in his daughters – were inherited from my taciturn Grampy: intelligence and kindness; the importance of family, faith in God, and civic duty; a love for animals and a deep respect for the land. This, then, was truly a man to whom I owe a great debt. In the years since his passing I have felt far more frequent pangs of longing than I ever did when he was alive. I still know so little about him, and what I do know slips away more quickly each year, receding into the more inaccessible reaches of memory all the time.

Here is what I remember. To me, Grampy is sweet pipe smoke and a particular web of thumb and index finger curled to balance his brown-almost-black pipe loosely in his lips. He is red, rheumy eyes and a deeply rivuleted, tan face. He always smelled like hay, even at the end, like hay and clean dirt, the smoky tang of split pea soup. He is soft flannel shirts, unbuttoned to expose a white t-shirt and faded jean shorts underneath, disturbingly skinny legs and brown, beaten loafers – no socks. He is deep sighs to me and the slowest, most gravel-y voice I’ve ever heard. My aunts and uncles say that he began to die the day the old farmhouse burned to the ground, when he and my grandmother moved a mile down the road to a new old house. They say moving off the farm was for him like losing an arm, and though he could visit, he now had to wait for his wife to drive him down the road, and as she was often busy heading
committees, I’m sure it was not as often as he might have liked. This makes sense to me, this early death, because for me, he is intractably tangled in his environment – the blue corner chair with the broken rung in the old farmhouse kitchen, his armchair in the house on Pond Road, the seat of the faded red tractor now parked in the Night Pasture.

And this: meandering down the center aisle of the main barn, stopping to stroke the nose of one of the horses that have slowly filled the stalls of his old dairy barn. He is silhouetted against the strong setting sun disappearing behind him. It is dim in the aisle, and if you look quickly, he could just be another shadow, a beam supporting the spreading roof overhead.
“Oy, ‘e got me good, that one.” Phil is already squinting, but the sun-tanned creases at the corners of his eyes deepen as his easy smile slides from dimple to dimple. Using his forearm, he wipes at some of the blood that had splattered over his forehead and nose. Most of it stays there, looking like small freckles. “Jos, I think it is time for tea,” he proclaims, gently using the same matter-of-fact tone with which he had acknowledged the blood on his face.

Taking a break from work, I look around. We are a ruddy crew. Everyone perches on the old wooden trailer that holds supplies: wire fencing, a knife, twine, extra medicine, syringes, and a wicker basket with a hot water thermos and biscuits. Our wardrobes consist of over-sized flannel shirts or old woolen sweaters of various shades. Every set of boots is covered in a combination of manure and mud, which unfortunately seems to have traveled up our bodies and smeared over our forearms and faces. Yet we all put in our tea orders as if we are ordering with Queen Elizabeth herself: “Yes a bit of cream please, no sugar. Thank you”. Never a fan of English Breakfast tea, I stare into the darkening water in my cup and wish I could remove the tea bag. The dilemma? Well, my hands are caked with dried mud and shit. Glancing at the Swedes, Dan and Christina, I see them looking apprehensively at their tea bags too. Gingerly, they insert their filthy fingers into their tea, remove the bags, and raise the plastic mugs to their lips with a look of stoic determination. Jos and Phil Deans and their hired Kiwi farm hands think nothing of the tea bag obstacle. In fact, they probably could bathe in their tea and still enjoy drinking it as if it were made from pure, clean Fiji water.

The Swedes and I had responded to the Deans’ brief add in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms booklet. We offered our help in exchange for room and board on the same week in November. For the Deans, the haphazard help-yourself meals and cozy upstairs rooms in their big farmhouse were a small price to pay for a week of work.

I mimic the pros: running pell-mell, stumbling over the uneven terrain in galoshes, flannel shirts flapping like tattered flags, dragging a heavy length of burlap, and yelling “Ha, ha... shhuppp, shhuppp...” We effectively scare a mod of sheep shitless (literally) into their holding pen. On a farm of 11,000 sheep, spring time is a big deal. No small task is waiting: We will inoculate, tag, inventory, castrate, and remove the tails from 4,000 lambs. I wouldn’t go so far as to equate it to a carnival, but a sense of importance, camaraderie, and joviality is in the air. I am lucky they needed a farm hand during a gap in my
finals; it is rare that I can take a whole week away from school in my study abroad program. I think of my American peers studying and going out to bars as I stay with this farm-family at the foothills of New Zealand’s Southern Alps. This has been my dream since I was nine years old and started showing my own sheep in 4-H fairs in New England: I chose to come to this island-country at the bottom of the world because they have more sheep than people. And here I am working on a sheep farm for a week. “Jos, let’s get some tea before starting this mod,” Phil calls out to his wife. “Good on ya,” Jos is smiling in agreement.

“Biscuits anyone?” Jos offers the wicker basket to be passed around. Dried, cracked, bloodied, and muddy hands dive into the basket. The ritualized tea at mid-morning and mid-afternoon seems to offer a calming escape from reality. In America, where many people don’t even take earned vacations, I can’t imagine stopping work every day for a customary tea time.

Christina’s English is close to perfect and she is quick to translate from Swedish to English for Dan. Therefore, communication is pretty easy and our friendship is growing rapidly. Jos, Phil, and the three Kiwi farm hands are patient and laugh just as easily when we make mistakes in our tasks as when we tell jokes. I feel very lucky to have such great company. As we walk over the lush green pasture to the adjacent field, I notice some sheep uncharacteristically lying on their sides. As we get closer I feel my smile fade into a frown of concern. They are not breathing and their flesh is in various stages of decay. Some are even reduced to bleached scattered skeletons that glare in the sun. “Oop, some dead ones,” Phil mentions in acknowledgement as we pass by.

At tea time I look at Jos and Phil happily munching away on Ginger Loaf and chatting with the hired help. Their sheep, dead and alive, pepper the foothills of the Alps behind them, creating a dramatic backdrop. They seem to blend in perfect harmony with their life style.

As soon as the dogs close in on the sheep and the gate of the holding pen swings shut, a mosh-pit is created. Christina and I try to save the lambs. Our hearts haven’t had enough exposure to large-scale farming to see each sheep as one in 11,000, and therefore as statistically significant to the farm as a grain of sand to a beach. Wild-eyed sheep surge up over the backs of the others. According to Phil, the temperature in the center of the pack is capable of reaching 43 degrees Celsius. Adult sheep might easily suffocate if we don’t keep them moving in the confined pen. Lambs can easily be trampled. The mud is thick from last night’s rain, causing the white sheep to quickly turn into balls of dark gray slime. The dogs add to the chaos by barking excitedly from outside the fence.
Despite the strong New Zealand sun, a chill is starting to run up my spine. Phil asks me to pass him the knife. He doesn’t really mean that dull knife I had been using to saw through twine earlier, does he? He does. Careful not to touch the leg that is hanging at an odd angle, I pass Phil the lamb I have been hugging. Dutifully, I fetch the knife off the trailer. He keeps the same peaceful expression on his face as he is positioning the lamb; its small quivering body rests against his thigh. He talks calmly through the procedure: “I pull the head to here so the neck bones snap.” Crack. “And at the same time I cut the throat.” Swish. “Then it is over quickly.” The lamb lays there with its head at a 90 degree angle to its twitching body. The eye lids blink. Phil hands me the murder weapon. I take it numbly and stare at the blood dripping from the blade. “I’ll sharpen it at tea, it is dull,” he calls to me as he strolls back to take his position at the end of the conveyer belt of lambs being tailed.

“Time for tea,” Jos’s voice rings out over the chorus of alto “baas”. The lambs in this mod are big; about 15-40 kilos each. My back and arms hurt from wrestling with them and heaving them up onto the conveyer belt for most of the previous week, but this last mod is exceptionally difficult. A few times these lambs get jammed in the chute from size alone. We are all excited to have a tea break and more of Jos’s great Ginger Loaf smeared with butter and our cups of dirty tea. These Kiwis must have the best immune systems, much better than those created in the overly antiseptic American households. I receive my tea cup over the body of two dead lambs lying at our feet, with their heads attached only by the skin on the back of their necks. Flies buzz around them.

“Shoo,” I said, annoyed that the flies would intrude on our tea time.
Spilled Cabernet Sauvignon
Caitlin McDonnell

My fingers started spilling burgundy,
I glanced down and said no big deal

because I like this color and I have
tables to get to anyway. But you grabbed

my hand and held its new tint up, away
from the metal and cork culprits, for

all the glasses and beer bottles to reflect.
I said really no big deal, I’ll mingle it

with this cerulean liquid and head to
table five, they only got the show, not

the wine. Coarse paper towels were
barely embracing me when you said

stay put, don’t move, clot, I’ll be right back.
Ten minutes I lingered, imagining the

urgency of your eyes on my hands, and
watching the beige pulp mimic the returning

color of my hand. Apparently, I spilled the
wrong claret all over table seven and it just

wasn’t their shade of red. It’s okay,
they’re gone, I cleaned it up, don’t cry you

repeated a lot, quietly. But I never cried
because I had tables to get to, and my new

favorite color was now the image of my
bloodstained palm mirrored in your hazel eyes.
Ink
Alex Bandazian

Ink is vast. At least as vast as the oceans... No, no, as vast as a dream. Even when it soaks up and dries in the soft blanket of the daily paper or the crisp, justified pages of a text book or a novel or the gesso-rich surfaces of a canvas or the buttery contours of tattooed skin, even then its expanses are limitless; deep and murky and opaque, blocking out light, devouring it. Even as a solid or powder, as is the case with fine Japanese lampblack and typewriter ribbon, there is an overwhelming sense of danger in its permanency. That at any moment, and without provocation, it will ooze and boil and swallow up whole words and sentences, molding them, blurring them, into the great homogeneity, the great chaos of order, the unified nothing of a deep, dreamless sleep.

Truly it is a force commanding the greatest care and respect. Ink is an accident waiting to happen, like a loaded gun, or more accurately, like a pillowcase full tacks and shotgun shells, swung from the hip and carried to bed, hoping absentminded against the day that the tip of a tack lines up with the primer cap and then...

It has, above all else, the power to ruin lives and here in lies its allure. One flick of the wrist, one wrong move... It is intimate, sexual, velvety and fluid, with a Smith and Wesson in its garter belt. Ink is the quintessential femme fatale. A little-known (and unverifiable) secret of the pros -- we’re talking Marlene Dietrich, Barbara Stanwyck, Mary Astor in their most sumptuous and tantalizing roles -- is to simply do an imitation of the ink on the pages of script, or, to achieve maximum potency, the ink in the chamber of the screenwriter’s fountain pen.

But the truest beauty is learning to swim. To master the ocean. To float above it and to feel its silky gravity pull you down. To wrangle a black hole and scar your initials across the heavens. To place words the way a sharpshooter places holes through bullseyes; gently and confidently, aware of both the power and the danger and equally able to wield both. It is the blood pounding through ventricles and on the pages of demonic pacts. Ink is something monstrous and beautiful. Ink is intention coming to fruition.
I.
We climb into the rusted Ford Pickup in Maine,
my father and I.
Eventually we will cut across highways
but for now it’s Vermont, New York,
fog-shrouded hills, sheep, and mountains
that twist twoards the heavens.

II.
We’ve been driving for two days.
We’re only in Ohio.
Yesterday we stopped for lunch outside of Toledo,
nowhere, hot and thick.
We ate egg salad (me) and sliced turkey (him)
with trucks kicking up dust beside the porch
and a lonely mutt tied to the fench near our car.
He untangled the cutlery wind chime before sitting down,
fed the mutt my crust.
I don’t know what I’m waiting for,
but this place is not epiphany.
It’s a dry wafer on the tongue,
and it could suck the life out of you.

III.
We drive on.
Sometimes there is not enough air in the cab
with your reedy, slicing whistle.
All day I’ve wanted to expel the ghost between us,
send it careening through the window
to be lost with the tumbleweeds along this barren highway,
and then all of a sudden it’s gone:
you hand me the map,
I take it,
and we find a new road.
Afterlife in October
Meghan Smith

1

On a pew unsympathetic
to human softness
I watch the shiny heads
of many strangers
bow together like leaves, or like
petals on a wet, black bough.

In the front row, your daughter
sits next to her grandfather.
She cries “Mama” each time
the door opens, and then
there is only crying.
She will repeat this process everyday,
at each hinge squeak,
at each breeze breathed through a window.

I look away.

2

The bray of a flock of Canada-geese
swells with the bag-piped
“America the Beautiful,” and I look up
to see their steadfast V
colliding with the ashy branches
of the tree outside.

Our elegies amalgamate.
theirs for the red summer,
Fare well fare well,
we for your white smile,
O beautiful for spacious skies.
We process from our pews
forming V’s and W’s,
steadying your old father
who falters without warning
and lurches to one side
like a goose with a broken wing or
like your plane before it fell.

Ingemisco tanquam reus
   Culpa rubet vultus meus
      Supplicanti parce, Deus.

3

I look to the window,
imagine the flock
frozen among the boughs,
but only a leaf quivers.
It breaks
with a secret snap
and drifts
like a cinder in the wind.

Dying geese
must slip into the trees
to travel incognito
as autumn leaves
so the rest of the flock
will not be upset by the loss,

And if human beings
were given wings
we would do the same.
A rushlight, flickering and small,
    is better than no light at all.