

NōD gauntlet

ETHEREAL

you
are ether
you are air
ethereally
you etherize me in
you
like
air
etherealized
are you
really
ether or
air realized
me in
you are
ethereality
or ether
either ether or reality
reeling me in
are you
me in
you are
ethereal
you are
ether reeled
like
ether
you reel
you ether me
are you
real

real
you
are me
ether you reel
you
ether like reeled ether
are
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ethereal
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you in
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reeling you
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reality or
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either ether
or ethereality are you
in me realized
air or
really you
ether
are etherealized
air
like you
in me
etherize
you
ethereally air
are you ether
are you
ethereal

- Claire Lacey

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chickadees

ravenous dawn eats
chirping earth and sour sky
bridges and bike racks
aspen-clone windbreak
run-down bench by a
smashed-up bus shelter;
and chickadees, such trash,
such convulsive snacks.

incorrigible,
the black-capped flock pecks
around the hole-punched
margins of notebook

pages. crushed bits of
foil. ketchup packets.

little condiments,
the birds are tiny

icons fuelled by bugs
and dead things scrubbed
off a page of bare earth.

snow lands in their beaks

as in the houses

all the lights go on;

little expletives.

- Beth Langford

Magpie

You're supposed to follow

The music to the music.

To the private function

Or the blockade? What passes

For music around here. That magpie

Looks too big

To fit inside it. What passes

For gum on the sidewalk

Is gum on the sidewalk.

But you're supposed

To follow a question

To yet more questions. You're supposed

To put your hands in

Your mouth to warm them. The branches

With the brittle leaves

Are not brittle.

You're supposed to shake

The crystal ball.

To warm it? You're supposed to

Follow the words

To words and paradise

Appears, among the high,

The slender branches,

Where you can't go.

- Beth Langford

An Artist's Glass Eye

the glass eye
a cracked beak
hushed feathers
glued together in
a macabre imitation of avian film noir

sun gloss on black with
imperfect feet
perched on a plastic branch

a crow's taxidermy
an artist's version of life after death

- Diane Guichon



OLYMPIC PLAZA

Vague promises swept across the radio waves into a blurry mess as the names of kind contributors passed under the old man's sneakers. Cash, in ravenous wads, circled the inner city ice rink as groups of laughing children guessed at the good times ahead on that cold plinth. They sat there guessing, but never moving to skate, never leaving the ground to lean on blistered ankles – only guessing at the possibility.

Supervised and marshaled, the children looked to the eyes of the supervisor and saw mistrust, vigilance and terror – some taking to be their own,

and some others (even at that tender age) knowing that one must be careful when he plays – else he should lose his eyes. The old man stood and watched, silently accused of unthinkable malice. He wished that he could warn the children that their eyes were at greater risk from games left unplayed, by trees left unclimbed – that lessons taught by refugees from a world of predators may turn one into prey. And in the eyes of those who watched that's what the old man saw – a monolith drawn on a receipt.

Seeing that he was getting attention the old man turned his head to

the dizzying maelstrom of glyphs carved into the bricks that he stood on. Bricks to commemorate this, bricks to recognize that, bricks tasked with remembering details too trivial to stay long in the minds that passed over them. Bricks, who remembered the passing of epochs

in molten flow, now sat obediently below the plaintive bleating of the preoccupied and were asked to take a note and patiently remain until McPherson or Smith comes back from his 2:30 via the little coffee shop on Stephen Avenue to retrieve it.

The old man spat a wad of phlegm into a tree planter and marveled at the world of general importance that those children were now being evicted from. He would have traded his meager positions or even the flesh on his bones to see that world again, but instead he was given this dry text and words that

connoted civic responsibility and political concern. His failing eyes saw only facts and the meager puppet show that supported them. The bricks were counted and fit, and the numbers (without spaces between) were reflected in the once endless skies. Now (as then) numbers and

facts decorated the inside of a cardboard trifold that had been put around his desk to prevent him from disrupting his classmates.

And so it was all fun and games – until somebody lost his eyes. And here he was, savouring the scant light that made its way through the cracks in his milky cataracts, until a voice broke into his daydream and asked: "what's the matter?" A little girl had flitted away from the chartered mob of mittens on strings.

"I can't see too good." The words came haltingly through the greedy clutches of his closing throat. He looked at his feet and not at the child, he couldn't

else he be thought a predator or a thief.

"Did you look?" came the simple little voice that threatened to steal his despair away and make it hers.

Turning his head up over barnacled gears he saw the little face and knew that no fact, no number, no time and no hand could obscure completely what he saw her seeing in him. With newfound faith he smiled broadly and let tears wash the dirt from his eyes. This time he was there, and nowhere else could make that claim.

- Cody Johnson

Silent Questions

I walked with you along the path that bent
Down toward the river, with your faithful pet
And heard myself laugh as he leapt into the river
After the slimy green ball you threw for him.

I know I've chased that ball before,
Back to your arm only to have it
Thrown again, and without hesitation
Gone thrashing into deep water after it.

Too preoccupied to see the futile repetition,
Caught up in a playful instinct.
Muddy paws, and dead leaves caught in soaked fur,
Rushing up to each stranger to share the excitement.

The clear plastic veil of autumn
Had saran-wrapped the sky without a single crease,
And where clouds of grey vapour reached
For a vibrant orange, there was a tentative strip of
pale blue.

I paused, dumbfounded by a temperature
Perfectly in-between warm and cool
That could have gone either way, but chose
To hang in a stasis, listless and unwavering.

I have sat with you
And basked in the utmost of friendship's love,
A shadow's breadth away from a fool's dream,
In the folds of old blankets and new memories.

I have met your eyes at many angles,
Starved for their depth and substance,
Overcome with adjectives unfit and overused,
Wax letters melted by the flame your lips struck and
left burning.

The warm ache of longing now lives in my bones.
On the park bench of your heart I throw crumbs
At the birds, while you chase the flames of distant suns
That flicker in the dilated pupil of a sleeping universe.

Life made the most sense with your head
Resting against my shoulder as we breathed each
breath,
Thought each thought,
And paused the world to ask each silent question.

- Ken Hunt

adherens

because snow tumbles endlessly I bind
sweetness to ambient conditions.
because sleep is pure I become
little flecks of blood in it.
because dew freezes upon my toenails I wake.
because urban sources include wastewater I identify
a gaffe, a breathless sensation.
besides the catchment I become
historical.
because rarity thrives on common paper
I become mixed.
because mixed I announce a pleasant invasion.
because crates of insulation are unpacked I tumble.
because there is no blank word I fold
inwards.
because an uninterrupted sequence of bees wobbles into the
culture I become
larger distances.
because the culture grows in a medium,
I spark.
I transmit
because speculation widens.
in regions of lower pressure I become
a quality, a bed of cochlea.
because the lovers listen in
I renounce symbolism.
in darkness I become sound.
rivers are endless to swim.

- Beth Langford

Puddle Allure

the dew worm after a night of
debauchery
in a surfeit of torrential rain
lies prostrate and parched
clitelalum snagged on peaks of concrete
dehydrated past profitable
mucus production
the promise of a wet night lost
on dry pavement

caught up in a worm culture
the nightcrawler succumbs to urban
allure reflected in a rain puddle
pooling at the edge of suburbia
the carcass blasted back to grass roots
and lawn's edge
by a water pressurized hose

-Diane Guichon



StringTheory

The sidewalks were melting shoes. Not immediately, but if they were left in one place for just a moment too long, the rubber underneath one's feet would leave black streaks of stinking sludge behind as the cement worked its fury on the soles.

Heat like that puts people on edge. Makes them more likely to drop the gloves and throw down at the first sign of trouble. At the same time, it puts them in an animal mindset of fornication. Bodies slick with their own juices desire nothing more than to slide against one another in the ancient rhythm. Most of all, though, people want an escape. Sometimes that means driving up into the mountains to dive into a glacier-fed lake. Sometimes that means just finding a place where there's a breeze, any kind of breeze, artificial or otherwise. July in New Camden meant now was the time to find a way out or face the heat. For my own part, I was stuck. So I had to face it.

People probably thought I was nuts, driving in that weather. The Geo had about a fifty-fifty chance of blowing up outright from overheating, but Lake Murttil was what I needed now. The mountain road was deserted; most people had settled into their leather couches to peel themselves off later.

Then, by the side of the road, a vision came out of the waving lines of heat. I thought it must be a mirage; nobody could've possibly climbed that high on foot. But there she was, as real as the steaming tar all around her. She didn't dare let her bare feet touch the road, instead standing in the grassy curb. Her left hand held a large cloth bag, and she thumbed with her right.

I pulled up alongside her and rolled down the window.

"You stopped!" She said. "Thank God. We gotta get out of here."

"Why's that?" I said.

"The sun! Gotta get down out of sight!"

She went around to the passenger side before I could get a word in. Not knowing what else to do, I popped the door-lock and she hopped in.

"I could go back down," I said. "But I was planning on hitting up Lake Murttil."

"No point," she said briskly, fumbling in her bag.

"What do you mean?"

She took out a water bottle and took a deep drink before answering me. "It's dried up."

"The whole damn lake?"

"Yep. Dry as a bone. I was planning on a one way hike til' nightfall, got up there and realized I'd condemned myself to being baked alive."

Christ. I thought. No escaping it. "So where are we supposed to go?"

"Greg," I said. "You?"

"Brittany."

"Nice to meet you."

She took a gulp of water, leaned back and sighed contentedly. "You have no idea how much I missed air conditioning. Thought I was gonna die up there or something. Nobody goes to Lake Murttil. Too dirty."

"Cool though."

"Yeah. You must be a local, to know about that place."

"Lived here five years."

"Never seen you around."

"Town's big enough," I said "You can't expect to know everyone."

"Maybe," she shrugged.

There was silence between us for a while. She did have a point. She looked to be about the same age as me, mid-twenties, and that was a small enough chunk of the population that it was a little odd the two of us hadn't met face to face.

She must have been alive to the awkwardness same as me, because she tipped forward in her chair and said "Mind if I put something on?"

"Sure," I said. "Not much on the radio around here, though, just stations you get bits and pieces of from Vancouver--"

She produced a CD and I stopped mid-sentence. "You like jazz?" she said.

"Yeah!" I said, a little too enthusiastically. But the truth was this mystery woman had found a passion in me, whether she knew it or not.

She put the CD on and the sweet sounds of Miles Davis spread through my Geo to take the heat out of the summer air. We rode down the highway in that manner for a short time, relaxing as the hum of the car mingled with the notes of jazz done right.

"Where are we going?" she asked this time.

"Dunno," I admitted. I'd been so absorbed in the music I hadn't really given it any thought.

"Well, we've gotta go someplace cool.

No bars; they'll be packed full of sweaty pigs and depressed insurance salesmen. No pools either; too many damn kids. We need a nice, quiet place."

"We?" I said.

"Yes, we. You took me off that mountain, I'm your responsibility now."

"Oh really?"

"Damn straight. You're my lucky charm. I'd be a

"Town? Gotta find that breeze, man."

Not knowing what else to do, I put the car in a neat three point turn and headed back down the mountain. The woman beside me, the vision from the side of the road, still didn't seem real. Her whole manner, her smell, the look of her hair... the more I sat in that car the more I thought I must've dreamed her up.

"What's your name?" she asked me, and I flinched.



roasted chestnut if I'd stayed up there much longer. So where are we going?"

I looked at her. She was heat incarnate at that point, sizzling dangerously. I had to make a move, cool her off, play her some jazz. "My apartment's got air conditioning."

I must have made the right choice, because the fiery blonde smiled at me and the temperature started to feel just right.

• • • •

"Nice place," Brittany said, and sounded like she genuinely meant it.

It wasn't much, in my view. It was a a single bedroom apartment on the cleaner side of town, with a yellowing carpet, god-awful pastel coloured walls from the 70s, and-

"You have a piano," she said.

"Yeah," I said, sticking my head in the freezer to cool off. "Do you play?"

"Only so I could learn the sax. Scales, you know."

"Right." I pulled my head out of the freezer and came into the living room. "You won't get much sound out of her on a day like today, though. Heat makes the strings expand. Dulls the reverb."

"You don't say." She plinked at it curiously. "Hey, the second D above middle doesn't work." She hit it to demonstrate, her finger movements only producing a dull wooden thunk from the hammer within.

"I know," I said. "You want a drink?"

"Hard to play a lot of pieces when you hit a note like that," she said. "Thunk thunk thunk.

God, it's like a bird hitting a window over and over again. Thunk thunk thunk."

"You want a drink?"

"Just water. How long has it been like this?"

I came back with two glasses of water. "Five years."

She whistled. "Why don't you get it fixed? Nice piano like that. Probably just needs a replacement string."

I exhaled noisily. I'd hoped bringing her back here might lead to some releasing of that animalistic tension I saw happening out on the hot

streets, but it wasn't to be. Instead, it was story time.

"I like jazz," I said.

"Great," she said. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"I used to play."

"Really? You should play me something."

"Maybe later. No. Not later. Never. Look... that piano there is a reminder. That string, that piano. It's got a history."

"Do tell."

"I used to live out in Montréal. Best place in Canada for jazz, you know? Loved it there. Had a girlfriend. Worked a bar down in a basement, just me and a few other guys. I had it all. 'Cept it's not enough. It's never enough, is it? There's always something, some little thing missing from your life. Or maybe you just look around and see everything's so perfect you just can stand it any more, and you want to roll right over it. So... I found someone. Some bimbo. Quick screw and I'm off again. Well, I'm up there the next night, and my girlfriend's out in the audience. Doesn't suspect a thing. That night's hot, I mean hot. And humid. I'm playing like I need to get it down now before the memory catches up, and that's when it happens."

"Twang?"

"More like a shriek. You ever break a guitar string?"

Brittany shook her head.

"Well, when a guitar string breaks it sometimes come up and out to slap you so you'll know better the next time. A piano? It's got nowhere to go. A string breaks inside a piano, you hear it, you feel it, the whole thing vibrates under your arms and then it's still. So still. And you don't really know right away, until you hit that one note... and you can't finish."

"Jesus."

"Yeah. That damn heat must've just got right into it. Unnatural, that heat. And I knew it. I knew what I'd done, and I swear when I looked out in horror over my dead piano at my girlfriend, she knew it too. She took off out of that bar and out of my life. I couldn't play any more.

I took that piano, said goodbye to my friends, and hauled it as far west as I could... I ran right into New Camden and I've been stuck here ever since." Finished, I wet my throat with my water and waited for her reaction.

Brittany stared at the piano, not me. "You blame all that on a broken string?"

"I think... that everything happens for a reason."

"What reason?"

"Damned if I know. Punishment. Justice. Karma. I Ching."

"You really believe that?"

"Hell, don't you?"

Brittany shrugged. "I don't think you're a bad guy, Greg. You carrying that piano all the way here, broken string and all. You're like the ancient mariner with his dead albatross."

"You tell me, then," I said. "What good's come out of that? Nothing. I've ended up here, in the armpit of Canada, nothing to show for it 'cept a busted up piano."

Brittany was quiet. Then, she went to her cloth bag and pulled out a large black case. "What was the name of that club you used to play at?"

"The Downstairs."

Brittany popped open two latches on the side of the black case. The apartment filled immediately with the smell of cigars, brass, and memory. "Got my start playing when a spot opened up at this club... piano player just out and out lost it one day, couldn't hold it together..." I tensed up at her words.

She pulled out a glorious tenor saxophone. "I still play out there now. Manager, name of-"

"Murray," I said. "You're kidding."

"Nope," she tested the keys on the saxophone. "Seems you gave me an opening, Greg."

"Damn, you said you were a local."

She laughed. "I am. I grew up in New Camden. Left six years ago, got a job in Montréal, now I only come back to visit my folks."

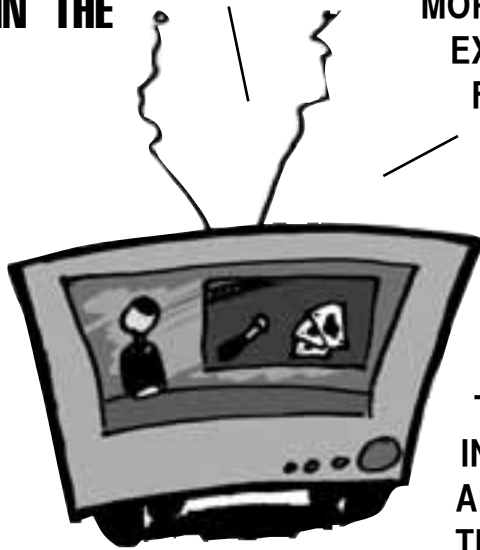
I stared. "And just now, on the highway-" I started to laugh too. Together our laughter drifted out the windows musically, then all at once a breeze came down from the mountains at long last to blow my sins clean, and I knew I'd ended up right where I was supposed to.

by Tim Ford

THE NEWS AT NOON

WELCOME BACK

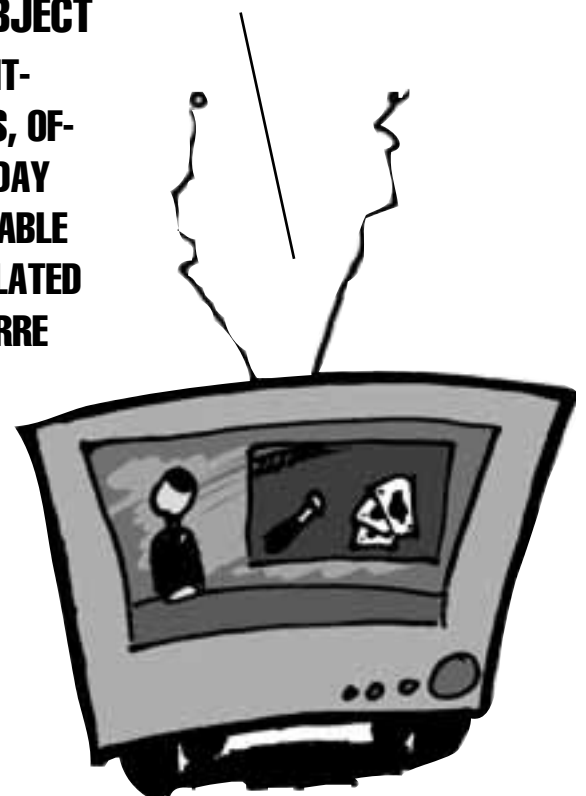
TO THE NEWS AT NOON I'M SAM
MAPLETHORPE WITH A LATE BREAKING
REPORT FROM OUR MAN IN THE
FIELD ATLAS MUNSCH



SAM I AM CURRENTLY REEALALEEERING ALONG THE INTERSTATE FOLLOWING THE MOTORCADE THAT WILL TRANSPORT THE FROZEN SEMEN OF ADOLF HITLER TO A SAFETY DEPOSIT BOX AT AN UNDISCLOSED LOCATION. EARLY THIS MORNING DNA TESTING REVEALED THAT THE SEMEN SHOWED AN EXACT GENETIC CORRESPONDENCE WITH A HAIR SAMPLE TAKEN FROM HITLER'S PERSONAL GROOMING KIT. AS WORD SPREAD THAT THE SEMEN DID IN FACT COME FROM THE DECEASED GERMAN DICTATOR, A DELUGE OF JEWISH RIGHTS GROUPS DESCENDED ON THE HAGUE TO PROTEST MONETIZATION OF THE HOLOCAUST WHILE ARYAN NATION AND KU KLUX KLAN MEMBERS CONTINUE TO CONGREGATE IN WAVES ACROSS THE WORLD AND HAVE BEEN CONDUCTING IMPROMPTU PARADES THAT ARE CAUSING MAJOR DISRUPTIONS TO TRAFFIC. HERE IN KALAMAZOO TENSIONS ARE HIGH AND SECURITY IS TIGHT AROUND WALTZER PLACE AS RIOT POLICE STRUGGLE TO KEEP THE CROWDS UNDER CONTROL. BACK TO YOU SAM.

THANK YOU ATLAS

WE WILL HAVE MORE WITH ATLAS MUNSCH REPORTING LIVE FROM THE GROUND AS THE SITUATION DEVELOPS. TO GIVE SOME CONTEXT FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE JUST TUNING IN, THE PHIAL WHICH INTERNATIONAL POKER STAR DOMINGO PANADOR CLAIMED ONCE BELONGED TO J. PAUL GETTY HAS BEEN CONFIRMED TO CONTAIN THE PRESERVED SEMINAL FLUID OF ADOLF HITLER. PANADOR ATTESTED TO ITS VERACITY DURING A TELEVISED GAME OF HIGH STAKES POKER IN WHICH TOM "TEX" TANNER RAISED THE BETTING POOL BY TWELVE MILLION BILLION DOLLARS. PANADOR — WHO HELD A ROYAL FLUSH — FELT CONFIDENT OF WINNING THE HAND BUT DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH CERTIFIED CURRENCY TO MATCH THE POOL. IN LIEU OF MONEY PANADOR CLAIMED HE COULD PAY USING A VALUABLE OBJECT WHICH WAS REVEALED TO BE THE PRESERVED SEMEN OF ADOLF HITLER. UPON ELICITING TANNER'S AGREEMENT TO ACCEPT THE BET IF THE FROZEN FLUID PASSED DNA ANALYSIS, OFFICIALS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL POKER FEDERATION DECLARED AN UNHEARD OF TWELVE DAY STAY ON PLAYING THE FINAL HAND WHILE DNA TESTING COULD BE PERFORMED. THE PLAY TABLE HAS REMAINED UNDISTURBED UNDER LOCK AND KEY WHILE PANADOR AND TANNER ARE ISOLATED FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD IN A SECRETLY LOCATED NUCLEAR FALLOUT SHELTER. THIS BIZARRE CIRCUMSTANCE HAS SPAWNED A VIRAL BETTING PHENOMENON OF ITS OWN IN WHICH IT IS ESTIMATED THAT TENS OF TRILLIONS OF DOLLARS WERE WON AND LOST ON THE OUTCOME OF THIS MORNING'S DNA RESULTS SENDING SEVERAL SMALL ECONOMIES INTO A TAILSPIN AND CAUSING FEAR OF A WORLDWIDE RECESSION.....HOLD ON FOLKS..... WE HAVE JUST RECEIVED WORD THAT TEX TANNER HAS OFFICIALLY ACCEPTED THE BET AS HAS THE INTERNATIONAL POKER FEDERATION. PLAY WILL RESUME AT TEN PM EASTERN STANDARD TIME. IF YOU WANT TO WITNESS THE MOST EXPENSIVE POKER HAND EVER PLAYED TUNE IN LIVE TO PAY PER VIEW CHANNEL ONE FOURTEEN OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL CABLE PROVIDER TODAY. I KNOW THE QUESTION ON EVERYONE'S MIND: HOW WILL DOMINGO PANADOR REACT WHEN TEX TANNER LAYS DOWN HIS FOUR OF A KIND? FIND OUT TONIGHT ON THE ELEVEN O'CLOCK NEWS, RIGHT NOW STAY TUNED FOR THE WEATHER AT NOON WITH CINDY ROBERTS COMING UP AFTER THE BREAK.



Defective Brain

(Excerpt)

I am lying in a field. The blades of grass whisper to me the triviality of time. The clouds and the sun waltz around one another on the pale ocean blue dance floor. The earth sighs and the wind teases the leaves that have aged into fire and amber and gold of the fall. Music and love do not exist here. Serenity is teeming in places I have yet to discover. And then in a moment, it's over.

I am lying in my bed. My head pounds like a jealous lover at the bedroom door. I sit up only to have the pain amplify and I slip out of the sheets and take a glass of water I had left on the window sill. The Moon is full, pregnant with the Sun's light. The clouds drift through the sky like ghosts.

It's been three weeks of unforgiving headaches. So painful they take over and I can't see anything else but the fist slamming at the small door that separates the outside world from my inside one. The clock flicks from 3:59 to 4:00. My day planner tells me I have an appointment with a doctor to talk about the constant head pain. I'm hoping that he'll turn to me from his crisp white-collar doctor disposition and tell me simply: "it's nothing;" as his eyes study my chart.

Hypochondriac. (My mother). She meets me in the waiting room and sidles up to me to coax the bangs from in front of my eyes. I kiss her on her unwrinkled cheek. Mothers have a way of turning adults into temporary children.

A scan later, he turns to me from his crinkled white-collar and tells me "it's something," as his eyes study my chart. A frown invades my mother's face and a voiceless noise crawls out of her throat. It's as if we both want to say something, but ...

He pins the scan image up for us to hopelessly examine with him. It's an odd picture. Like hands covered in grey and white paint had played games over a black canvas. A maze of my thoughts and memories pinned up for us all to see. A part of me didn't want to look at what kind of stranger could be lurking in the picture, didn't want my mother or this doctor to find a secret inside the maze that I had forgotten about long ago. The rest of me couldn't look away from myself.

His words become a murmur of vocalized phonemes that no longer have discernable meaning to me. I had known all along...

"Is it cancer?" My mother asks, before the doctor has even pointed out the specific areas of defect.

"It's not cancer."

"Well then what is it?"

"I'm getting to that."

"So then get to it."

Her tone is painful, like claws that stalk through your ears and lurk in the small empty space at the back of your mind. The doctor makes an invisible circle around a grey area with his pen.

"This is the frontal lobe of your brain." I look at it. "...And this is the area of the temporal lobe." He draws another invisible circle around it.

Until this moment, I hadn't noticed how hard I was grabbing my mother's hand.

"Now I wouldn't exactly say there is any damage at all," the doctor continued to speak words absent of meaning.

"but there is something here that I must be honest with you, I'm unfamiliar with."

Before a diagnosis was to be given, the doctor would consult several others like and not like him. I was left with no other answer then: "It's not cancer."

I was expected to find comfort in this.

Sometimes cancer is not fatal.

Sometimes other things are fatal.

Sometimes I wish that broken hearts could be fatal and that car crashes were funny black and white movies with no sound and no fatality. The drive home would have been an especially funny thing, had it been a silent film and the blood that spilled from the pedestrians had been grey ketchup or chocolate syrup.

It was the last thing I remembered.

