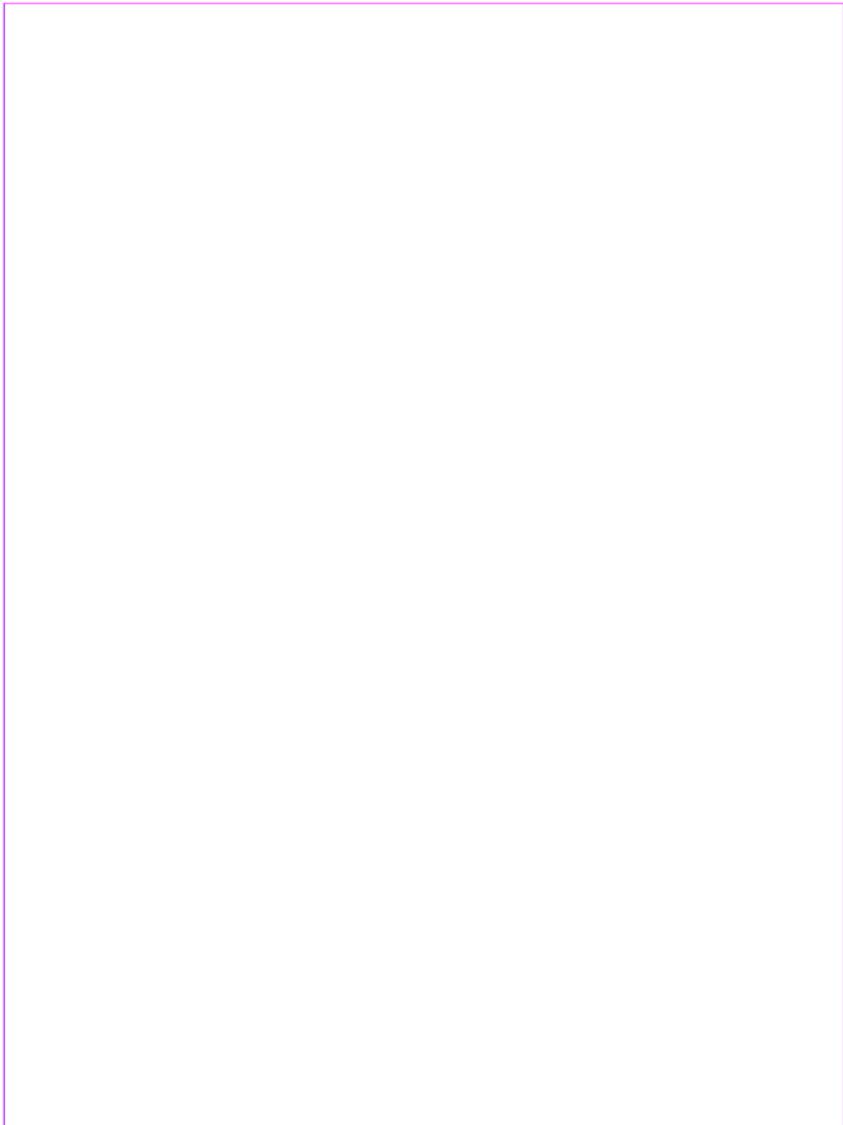


will never have Paris
volume 5 home



September 2007



Volume 5

Home.

Cecelia Mariscal

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Shaheim Jackson

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Gabriel Liston

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Gus Iversen

Jaime Borschuk

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Redguard

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Dave Cole

* Andria Alefhi

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Karen Lillis

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.....Veronica Liu

.. .printing by Amaury

neverhaveparis@gmail.com

letters of recognition

Aug 20, 2009

Nhu Le

I picked up volume 3 while visiting nyc last month in an independent bookstore in east village and loved it. I just wanted to drop a note and let you guys know that I enjoyed it. I liked that it was short and diverse in perspectives. I think your approach to publishing is great. Please keep up the great work.

March 19, 2009

My name is Matthew Mendez and I am a new zine maker. I spent the months of January and February traveling around the US, and in several places I went I came across zine sellers/libraries, at some point picking up volumes 2 and 3 of your publication, and when I returned I made one of my own that I sent to all the people I had stayed with along the way. I'm currently at work on issue 2 with a friend of mine who can draw so that it'll be a bit more visually appealing.

The purpose of this email is just to sort of say, "Hi, I like what you do," to offer to send you a copy of the one I've made so far if you want it, and to find out if it would be possible for me to write something for you for a future issue. Are you still looking for submissions for issue 4? March 31st is close, but I could come up with 1,000 words before then, I think. Lemme know.

July 25, 2009

I saw your zine We'll Never Have Paris on the Dead Trees and Dye zine distro website and Peter Willis gave me your email address. In August I am putting on an exhibition of work by young English and German artists in Berlin with an accompanying pop-up shop. We hope to stock a few zines in the shop, to complement the art if you will, and I'd be interested in including yours. The exhibition opens on the 15th of August so if you'd like to contribute some zines please contact me as soon as possible with some details about how to order from you. I'm based in London, the exhibition is in Berlin and you are in New York so it could prove to be an interestingly inter-continental affair.

Hope to hear from you soon,

Zoe

THE NEW WORD FOR MODERN

****editor's note: real letters, real readers. Always a pleasant surprise. And I thought nobody reads this thing. Volume 6 in May 2010. Submissions of narrative nonfiction.*

neverhaveparis.blogspot.com

andria alefhi

I'm trapped in an airplane surrounded by screaming children trying to remember when my hands were tiny and resembled tissue paper cutouts. Haven't these people heard of benadryl? I try to think and summon my Mother or my cousin to give me patience so that I can go six hours without making a smart ass comment designed to hurt feelings but they are where I am going and not where I am. I want to order beer indefinitely as if this airplane ride were my destination and not San Diego itself. The ride is all I care about. As long as I am moving I'm spared the sanctity of the moment. I do not have to feel you, pay attention to you or consider your needs. I can just live on a vibration. never seen and only temporarily felt.

I don't know why I come back year after year. We love each other cause there is no choice and not cause we grew to do it. How do you choose and not choose to love somebody. It must be because it does not exist. Who are all these idiots waiting for this religious experience but me and my family...we got the same blood. It pumps and it runs like the Rio Grande carryin' every Mexican back home. Apparently that's all we need.

I feebly raise my hand. Yea, that's me.

Three and half hours to go. You'd think I'd savor it but I pound the minutes into my eyes until they disappear. I'm way ahead of the speed of light now. I'm already forty with children grown. Tiny hands with bones that shot out like branches complete with briefcases, porches, dogs and car seats. They get taller and I shrivel and become dry. Divorced or never married. My head pounds as the minutes get deeper and expand and grow and become fat like

hours, years...decades. I am the savviest traveler you'll ever meet.
I want some kind of medal for it. I want something to show for it.
I have no stories or scenes in my memory. I just have the airplane
and this ticking in my head.

When the engine cut out, Cody, the driver, nimbly piloted the car into a gravel parking lot just off the main road. It was a small lot however and he had to brake with such a sudden force that the entire car was enveloped in a cloud of dust. Slowly, through the haze, it became possible to make out shapes moving in the swirling clouds outside, then faces. Elderly faces. A dozen or so senior citizens who appeared to be upwards of 85 years began banging on the glass expressing an array of responses ranging from concern to indignant anger.

At this point I should probably point out that we were high (like REALLY high) on some kind of backwoods, mountain grown proto-pot that had rendered me speechless.

“Are you okay?” banded a kindly older gentleman. Another next to him unleashed an indecipherable torrent of dusty curses.

“Ha ha, thank you,” was all I could shakily muster while trying to avoid eye contact.

I was really just hoping that Cody would take charge of the situation. I'd only known him for as long as I'd been in town, which was a little under an hour but he seemed like a stand-up kinda guy. After all, this was HIS car and HIS town, right? Well...not really. As the billowing grime finally dissipated so did any notion that this place was anyone's home more than it was my own. Pushing everything else to the back of my hazy mind I exited the car and stood somewhat transfixed by the sight directly across the street.

The Jarrett House is a 125-year-old Victorian style inn and

restaurant that was one of the original stops on The Great Smoky Mountain Railroad. Not only is it one of western North Carolina's oldest and most well known hotels, it's also one of my earliest memories. Seeing it in mid-October with the leaves at the height of their color and in the supersaturated pre-dusk sunlight had driven home the fact that, although I'd been away for 25 years, I was now back in the middle of everything that'd been my world for the first few years of my life. Everything that'd made me.

A week earlier I'd been at a neighborhood softball game while visiting friends in Charlotte. Honestly though, I can't remember why the hell we would've been at a softball game. It must have had something to do with someone needing to be in the vicinity to flirt with someone else. At some point though a group of us spectator types started talking about our origin stories. This has always been a weird subject for me as I don't really have a conventional hometown.

I was born in Charlotte, a city in which I've never lived. I was brought home to Mt. Holly, NC where I lived for a week. My family then relocated to the tiny, isolated mountain town of Sylva, North Carolina just one year after it had served as a location for the John Boorman film "Deliverance". Insert generic hillbilly joke here if you must, but for those formative years I soaked in the sights and sensibilities of rural Appalachia. We moved on before I reached my fourth birthday leaving me with only sketchy recollections and images of scenery that I could never be sure actually existed. Regardless I've always considered Sylva to be my default hometown.

When I told this to my fellow sideliners and that I was considering a first ever return visit, one them gasped in

recognition. "I know where that is!" exclaimed Grace, a friend of a friend of a friend. "I know a guy who just opened a juice shop there. If you tell him I sent you he'll totally set you up with a place to stay." I of course decided that this exchange as an irrefutable sign of divine predestination and, as quickly as possible, made my way back to the highlands.

Cody's shop, The Juice Junkie, was a comfortably bohemian den on a back street in the middle of town. Cody himself was an easy-going fellow. A hippie but not a flower-child. A motivated hippy of industry if you will. One of the awesomely jaded sort that one comes across quite a bit up in the hills far from the trustafarians and panhandlers you find in town. These hippies actually have their shit together and work harder than you do. Cody had no idea who I was nor had he been told I was coming but with the magical words that Grace had sent me he said he'd see what he could do. First though he had to run an errand, a bit of house-sitting/maintenance. If I wanted to hang until he closed up shop I could ride with him.

That's about where I began. We were on our way back to town when the engine blew. The pot was payment for feeding the homeowner's animals. The old people finally calmed down and moseyed across the street to have their supper at The Jarrett House. We spent twenty or thirty minutes at a high priced antique store until Cody's wife was able to come and retrieve us from our predicament.

The only place they could find to put me up was in an empty shop front they were renting out downtown for extra storage space. If nothing else it had a refrigerator, a microwave and running water.

I unrolled my sleeping bag and grabbed a Gregory MacDonald book from my backpack before settling in for the night. Over the next few days I'd become much more well acquainted with the hometown I'd always wanted which included having several insane conversations with people from the bingo parlor next door. The more I thought about it the more ecstatic I was to be back and quite honestly amid a day packed with absurd situations involving complete strangers. I'd never felt more welcome or at home in my entire life.

interview with cover artist gabriel liston

1. I've known you for a long time. Tell me something I don't know.

I loathe astrology. I hate thinking of you as a gemini, it's just not fair.

2. I've never asked a professional artist what his favorite color is. Is that a one-word answer for you or will there be more to say?

Red, no, blue, no, yellow. Blue. Buff. I think I'll go with Buff. Maybe I'll make a zine called Buff. Is it the word I like or the color?

3. What happens in your mind when you read? Don't think too hard; your first response.

When I am composing letters or notes in my head for friends, I certainly think in words. To say I think in pictures the rest of the time isn't accurate. I think in weight, light, distances, spaces. I think in gusts rolling over hills and into obstacles. I think in far-flung snapping strands. A picture is just the best approximation of this sort of thought.

4. I asked this already but I liked the way your titles for your drawings and paintings seem like song titles. Why is that? Is this the writer in you trying to get some air?

Most of the picture titles are captions taken from inside the Moby

Books Illustrated Classic editions themselves. The challenge is to make the title appropriate to the image without having it over-describe the image unless it does so in a particular way. It is a form of selective appropriation, like the images themselves. I am responsible not for originating the idea, but for presenting it. (Recall that all the pictures are based on observed events, not other pictures nor total invention.)

5. What is your ‘never have Paris’? What do you think of when you think of HOME?

Danielle and Caleb and I were going to walk the West Elk Ridge trail (from the fenceline there up the ridge and over down to the Roberts’) this trip, but Caleb was too busy on the river. We did make it to the Roberts’ for the Fourth of July in their new barn, but we drove down the road to get there. I wanted to show Danielle the vanadium prospecting mine/moonshine cave, and the great view of the Hogback and the Grand Valley. Maybe next summer. The Fourth was fun. There was a live band from town and almost everybody danced. The Roberts’ was where I first learned to dance when I was twelve. Haven’t really progressed beyond that and still can’t swing. Kevin Roberts still doesn’t dance much, but his sister and Grandparents do, and when his toddler started sacking out on his shoulder he rocked her gently around the hay bales.

**** Gabriel divides his time and his heart between his home in Portland and his mythical homeland of Colorado. He is the father of three girls and plays the accordion. His art is his blood. www.lastwater.net*

There were two Indian women on the subway. Each of them wearing a colorful sari and holding an enormous blue cart at their feet. Like a grocery cart but twice as big. The carts were filled with large cloth sacks, which were filled with I don't know what. The older one had a small stud in her nose. We were sitting directly across from each other and I wondered if they had just arrived from India or maybe Bangladesh. I looked closely at their mouths and tried to see if they were the kind of mouths that form English words.

A man with a gray goatee and a Puerto Rico baseball cap sat down next to the older one and accidentally brushed her elbow. They smiled at each other in the way people on the subway do when unintentional contact has been made. She then turned away from him and back towards me. She put her head on her daughter's shoulder and giggled uncontrollably. Her eyes had fireworks in them. I imagined he was the first American she had exchanged idle pleasantries with. Between bouts of laughter she would whisper a strange language in her daughter's ear. My heart nearly exploded, I diverted my eyes and concentrated on those mysterious cloth sacks. I wanted to know their secrets.

In Berlin I met a Russian man at 4 o'clock in the morning. We were the only people around and we both wanted company. I spoke zero Russian and he spoke zero English. We drank two beers together, throwing non-sequiturs back and forth to keep the silence at bay. His countenance was sort of frightening but I decided it was

just a cultural thing. I imagine our conversation may have gone something like this.

“I am going to Prague in two hours. Sad to leave Berlin. Beautiful people here.”

“I don’t understand a word you just said. What a shitty night it’s been!”

“Umm... yea. Ah. Have you ever been there? I want to see the Charles Bridge.”

“You’re a strange person, aren’t you? Thank god for beer. Why on Earth haven’t you gone home yet?”

“...My sister broke her leg once taking out the garbage...”

One morning in Amsterdam I awoke to find a ladybug had made a home for herself in my belly button. I had been dreaming about flowers. Beautiful flowers of all different colors and impossible compositions. They were everywhere and for some reason I lacked coordination and kept stepping in their beds. Every time I stepped on a different flower it made me feel terrible. I really didn’t want to step on them, but my muscles were not in my control. So to awake from this dream and find a ladybug had made a home out of my belly button -- well, I stayed in bed extra long so as not to disturb it.

When I finally got up I scooped my little tenant onto my finger and she walked around a little bit. She was disoriented with sleep but at least I hadn’t squashed her. I hopped down from my bunk bed and

took her to the porch. This woke up my Italian roommates. I told them all about it but I'm not sure it really came across. I do not speak Italian.

It was the first time I'd been out of the United States in over fifteen years. I was traveling alone and I only got back a week ago. Ever since returning home people have been talking to me more on the streets. They ask me for directions, they comment about how nice the weather is, one little kid even asked me to pet his dog. Nobody spoke to me before the trip. I had been closed off somehow without knowing it. Furthermore, certain elements of the tourist still compel me; the landscape will not be lost on my lens. This is New York City, after all.

The Indian women, they understood this. It was an enthusiasm we shared. They got off the train at 104th St., deep in Queens. Their gargantuan carts thumped as they jostled from the train to the platform. They pushed their carts westward, the mother walking ahead of the daughter. I continued on until 121st St. in Kew Gardens. I don't live here. I am cat sitting here for a friend of a friend while she is in Seoul negotiating fabrics. That was a long train ride. I was on my way back from downtown Manhattan. You can sit on the steps of Federal Hall with its bricks and winding sidewalks and forget for a moment that this is where you live.

I do not wish to be a tourist – not the kind referencing an unfolded map in plain view, noting the worlds’ agreed upon monuments of interest. When something is so grand that it catches all eyes, what remains often becomes a thin, universal message. Perhaps that is the essence of something important, but what if it is merely the lowest common denominator? I instead notice my spectator instincts kick in when I walk into someone else’s living space. Peering at photos and furniture arrangements, I am compelled to know where the objects of meaning and motivation come from at this singular level. I was a tourist at Peter’s house yesterday.

I had not seen Peter in a few years, and yesterday we allowed ourselves all evening to catch up. Peter lives alone in a house in the East Bay, and splits his time between the Bay Area and Albuquerque, where he co-runs an independent cinema. His house provides stacks of proof of his ongoing projects and interests: albums, old film reels, CDs, mini discs, computer parts, books, kitschy toys and products. He receives many of the latter from people who know his humor and choose to donate things he would appreciate showcasing in certain rooms: a can of “Mediterranean-flavoured” Pizza Pizzazz spray for the kitchen, a badly translated liquid soap named “Barf” propped near the bathroom sink. Each item a story to tell, each room its own evolving installation.

Whenever I enter someone else’s personal space, I try to understand how to make decisions about living. How did this person come to these details? What does this house make me feel like doing? If I lived here, would I be inspired to be a different

person? There is a blissful disassociation. The order of my own apartment disappears, along with the expectations looming over me and my things: the pile of New Yorkers I mean to read, the guitar asking for daily practice, mail to be gone through, clothes to be washed. Compared to my critical and relentless possessions, the stuff of others forgives and invites.

Peter has an impressive collection of 35mm films and he planned to treat me to a private screening of two Douglas Sirk Technicolor prints. This caused me to consider what I had to offer a houseguest, and how such a collection and set-up could become a priority and, more, a reality. Why didn't I have my own version of this? An environment for friends. A consistent way of life to attach to, and to call my own. Peter is a film collector and archivist, something that he has learned about and kept up with for many years. He spends his days managing his film collection, and pursuing a few other creative, fruitful endeavors, and is able to talk about it all with extensive enthusiasm. As he spoke throughout dinner, I spied on his devotion and scanned my mind for things that I could think about doubtlessly every single day. Later on, as we watched *All That Heaven Will Allow*, I closely noted the pleasure Rock Hudson's anti-establishment character feels in just being himself. Referencing Henry David Thoreau, the strength of his character lies in the fact that he marches to the beat of his own drummer. I became frustrated by the thought that there are plenty of stories celebrating those who, after years of suppression, let it all hang out and become true to their own "drummer." Fine, good for them. But what about those of us who would simply like to meet the drummer?

There is a rite of passage to becoming a full member of one's

own private club, and I am constantly on the lookout for the remaining qualifications. At the 11th hour of a soul search, I fold to astrological doom: Gemini, with Taurus rising. This giving up appeals to my inability to commit, but deeply bothers my headstrong need to walk on solid ground.

Once the films were over, Peter and I stayed up talking, mostly about the changes, achievements, and plans in *his* life. This means I spent a lot of time listening, and comparing his vigor to my comparatively sinking feeling. I often feel that speaking about something creative I once did is to underscore the fact that a better inspiration is not currently alive and possessing me. Why aren't I doing something, anything, right now? These thoughts persisted in my mind, but Peter wouldn't have known. I came to figure that the things he was saying were perfectly in line with the things he was thinking, and a hole in me spread as I imagined the difference between my thoughts and words. What would Peter think if he caught my thoughts? I lingered in his house, hoping the matter-of-fact devotion I read in him would rub off on me.

The next morning, I woke up on Peter's couch and he brought me some coffee. We talked about travel, as he had gone on tour in Europe with one of his bands recently. Peter complained that he is not a very good tourist. I wondered why this was a complaint. I yearned to know what it felt like to be self-contained, never divided by what else may be out there. I commended him on being more interested in himself than his surroundings, pointing out that he wouldn't go somewhere without reason, and that it is precisely his interests that take him to new places. As for me, would I ever stop looking around for myself?

I left Peter's house feeling like I had to do something. He dropped me off at the BART station, and I started taking pictures while waiting for the train. It felt forced. Here I was, implementing one of many unrequited interests in no particular direction.

I realize now that what I am looking for is the feeling. That essential desire. What am I supposed to be doing, and how will I know when it is right? Being up against this is more annoying than listening to well adjusted people speak knowingly about recognizing love or an orgasm— these are things one should just know.

Can you lure the essential desire? Cultivate authenticity? How can there possibly be “how to” books about this? I have to wonder if the well adjusted have anything more than a lack of doubt. For now, I will continue to visit museums of singular feeling, aka other people, and observe, speculate, and patiently consider my own gut reactions.

We live in a world where home is associated with family. You know, that explosive, bombastic, Enola Gay-style nuclear family. Boom!

The deep, dark, cold woods where I grew up was home. Everyone said so. I hated it. People hurt me there. The isolation was suffocating. Eventually, I isolated myself even more to survive. Strange thing that.

Home is such a loaded word. What does it mean, really? It implies something more than a place where you seek shelter from the elements. That something is supposed to be fulfillment. Home is like family that way. Home is like love that way. It is inevitably disappointing because it can never live up to its intangible mystique.

I like specific, material, real words. Apartment. Fucking. Lover. House. Kissing. Children. Cottage. Eating pussy. Friend. Get it?

A home is supposed to be more than a shelter, but when someone is homeless, it means they don't have a house, apartment, or other shelter or their own. Isn't that weird? The fulfillment part doesn't figure into it.

I've been homeless, as in, without a place to live. It sucks. It is uncomfortable, scary, and frequently painful. It is something that no human being should ever have to suffer through.

That period of my life was mercifully brief, though it could strike

again at any time. It is just a bad memory. But I've been homeless, as in, without the promised fulfillment of home, my whole life.

Maybe this is the source of my confusion.

I often fantasize about living homeless in Prospect Park. Surviving or not surviving. Eluding the eyes of police and Slope yuppies. Negotiating terms of survival, food, sex with other park dwellers. Foraging in trash cans. Hiding behind trees, under bushes, in ravines to avoid detection.

In another fantasy, I imagine hopping a bus to some faraway town in the middle of nowhere. Walking the highway out of town until I can wander into a deep, dark, cold forest. Like the one I grew up in, but no house, no "home." I think how I would bury myself in leaves under thick brush and wait to die of thirst and hunger. Would I have the self-discipline to lie there and die? Or would I go mad and run around the woods? Either way, the most important thing would be that no one found me.

The second fantasy is not about being homeless, as in, without shelter. It is about fulfillment.

Home, family, love. I don't like those words or what they imply. Home equals pain.

Apartment, fucking, lover. House, kissing, children. Cottage, eating pussy, friends. These are words I like. Get it?

The first article of clothing I ever purchased by myself was a magenta sweater. I also purchased blue dangling earrings from Claire's and a cream-colored mesh belt that tied around my waist and fell past my knees. For 1985, this outfit put me near affordable suburban mall fashion. I was in 8th grade and had gone to the mall with my best friend. My mother refused to take us shopping and so I purchased my own clothing that day. I don't know where I'd gotten the money from, perhaps Christmas, but I remember her looking guilty and me feeling this was the start of growing up. Looking back I would call it bittersweet.

I also went to the mall to shop for back-to-school clothes at the start of 9th grade, which was high school and therefore doubly important. Ann and I bought identical white shirts, tan pants, and grey flats. Our bodies were completely different so we resembled friends displaying their private awkwardness together. While she was quite a bit taller, as was my other best friend, all three of us wore the identical shoe size. They never let me live this down. I also had an abnormally large big toe and when I tried out my first pair of open-toed shoes, the laughter was so beyond ribbing as to be true peals of hysterical disbelief that I never have bought open-toed shoes again and slyly judge women who wear them. But on this day I walked home from the mall.

There was not much in my hometown except the mall and one's imagination, and I combined them both by making the 2-mile walk home a magical journey. There was an open field leading to a country club golf course that took up a third of the trip. A lot of

figuring out where dramatism separated from actual drama took place on private walks that were sometimes accompanied by Matt the Penguin, called such for his half-blond half-black Robert Smith hairstyle. I liked our friendship but he freaked me out and scared me a little. We had been to the mall together buying birthday presents for his mother, and when he got home that day he was the one to discover her dead. He was 16. This bonded our friendship for a while. My mother would invite him over whereas previously he had never been to our house. Our friendship didn't work in my house. A lot of us from school went to the funeral and at that time I was one of his best friends. I was all right until I saw the flower wreaths that said 'Beloved Daughter' and 'Loving Mother'. I was wearing my most favorite shirt that made me feel powerful, still, I sobbed uncontrollably in the bathroom. Ann was in the bathroom also, but she wasn't crying. Later when we had talked about the day, I told her I was surprised she didn't cry. She told me she was surprised that I did.

Yet when my parents divorced, I was the one who had to comfort my friends. Though they practically grew up in my house, they didn't. They were shocked and each one felt privately the pain of what they feared most for themselves – where their own parents had failed, that they had latched on to a family that fooled them, lured them into false hope. That men would always leave. That this was no longer the safe haven. Since I already knew, I didn't have that far to go. I wore the suit of armor with a handkerchief tucked in so they could dab at their tears.

Being one who never cried, my role (as all roles are) was securely fastened to the other moving parts, supporting roles, set scenes and props. Fixed. Not comforting but copacetic, a shock absorber.

This was who I was, sanctified since the time my father realized he could trust me to shift the manual car while he drove home from the diner, nodding off while he did. Our clothes smelled of the fryer. I sat with my hand on the shift, and he would call out “-second”, “-third” to keep himself awake, hitting the clutch while I shifted. He thought we made a great team and eventually I didn’t need to be told what gear to choose.

I didn’t need to be told a lot of things but I was. Part of the adult teamwork that started way too young included taking me out for one-on-one talks about my mother and their relationship and why she couldn’t see where he was coming from. Like driving, I learned the adult answers because even at twelve it was obvious. I can’t say I didn’t care. I did care because I was too young not to and also too young to know that this was weird. Not so much mothering as cooling. I felt honored that I was chosen - “your brother doesn’t get this, I could never talk to him like this.” But was it my superb listening skills or just being a woman he could take out for dinner? I prefer not to go there. I remember one evening above all others. My mother was angry with me; hurt and mad, and all those emotions only drove me closer to a conscious, deliberate effort to not be like her. My father took me out to dinner, just us, to snub her and assert his fatherly power. I felt guilty but proud in my sophomore year giant orange sweater that was my signature piece all throughout high school. The 80’s theme was ‘down to your knees’ and I’m sure there’s a deeper meaning in there somewhere. That night at dinner at Casa Too Mucha, in my orange sweater and Avon lipstick, at fifteen I was my dad’s marriage counselor and friend. Listening and understanding. Agreeing and empathizing. Unemotional.

Calmly, fifteen years later, it was I who had the task of taking my mother's cat to be put down. My brother didn't understand the slightest bit about the cats in her life, and yet he made a show of not forcing me to be the one. As if anyone else would ever be the one. "I'll do it!" I slammed over the phone. "I want to do it." And I did want to do it. For all the ways I had leaked my disdain of her life, her choices, her illness. Not only for me but for my whole family's shame of disconcert. My father took us with him like the Pied Piper. It was no wonder, now looking back, that she went with the rats given her choices. Not rats but cats. But now we were sending the healthy ones away and the sick one to be put to sleep. Rather, I was. I saw this chance to do the right thing. The parallels that I didn't even know were lining up because it was still being played out, not being looked back on five years later. I don't know what I was wearing the Thursday morning I drove from the hospital back to my house that had been housing only three cats for months while my mother's fate lay undetermined. When I walked in, Michele had already taken the two cats and put the white one in the carrier, ready to be taken to the vet. We disliked the cat so much we couldn't even call her (him?) by name, just by color. Michele had given me the tidy gift of not having to meet her like the slave auctioneer at the block or the reaper at the gate. She'd separated the live from the soon to die and left me to be alone for my final task.

She told me the white one just waltzed right into the carrier. Normally cats resist getting in that thing with all their might, sensing they are going to the vet. But this one went right in and waited calmly with blue eyes dead ahead because it had been throwing up for months and none of us noticed that it was just

ready to die. That moment I gripped the carrier grimly and fought back tears, biting down hard on logic, holding onto logic to help me through the truth, that this cat had to go. That when my mother, after months of throwing up and being ready to die *didn't* die, didn't stare ahead with dead blue eyes but came back home, wasn't going to be able to care for these cats. And I was going to take care of them for her benefit.

I drove this dying thing to the vet bawling uncontrollably all the way. I could see the flowery wreaths that said 'Beloved Daughter' and 'Loving Mother' and don't know I how stayed on the road to drive there. I picked up the cat, said 'ok let's go' and brought it inside. It was quiet and knowing and as much as I had hated this cat, when the time came to go, I couldn't leave. I petted and petted this cat as if I could make up for the years. It wasn't my fault; it wasn't my mother's fault; it wasn't the cat's fault, but it was too late. As the vet tech carefully removed the package of life from me, (God knows why) I blurted out a line from a Lorrie Moore book: "Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye!"

MIGRAINES, TORNADOS, FIRE-EATERS, AND OTHER MYSTERIES OF WESTERN MEDICINE

by Karen Lillis

There was the migraine headache that came out of the blue when I'd gone to visit my brother and stood two hours in the blazing summer sun (on the banks of the James River) helping him deliberate over the potential purchase of a mini-kayak. After leaving Scottsville, I was due to drive back to my hometown, where my mother was waiting for me; after dinner with her, I had plans with my ex-high school sweetheart. Running late, it was getting less likely I could do both, but I was going to hear it from my mother if I skipped her part of the evening on a short visit "home" from New York.

"Home" was a pretty straight shot on just two sparsely travelled highways. Now the sun had ducked behind some clouds; I put on the radio, put the pedal to the metal and hoped to make good time. Not long into my drive, however, a radio announcement cut into my music to say that a tornado was making its way across central Virginia. I thought I heard something about Culpeper before the station went static, or was it Fredericksburg, and which way was it headed? I kept hitting the search button on the radio dial, but I could pick up nothing—all the radio stations were out or barely audible—this wasn't the message I wanted to hear.

I didn't know which path to follow—should I pull over somewhere and get out of harm's way? Or should I speed even faster towards home, because my mother was going to kill me if I didn't get there in time for dinner? There didn't seem room to make a correct

decision. I kept speeding on and wondering, letting the fifth-gear driving be my non-answer. I really didn't know what was the best idea. I was terrified of getting smashed by a tornado and equally terrified of causing my mother's disappointment. My temples pounded.

I reached my parents' house before the tornado sent me to Oz, but once there, I was good for nothing. The migraine was full-force, I had to cancel with the ex, I went to bed instead of dinner. My mother was furious, saying, "You always get sick when you come home."

Another time, I was living in Brooklyn. A friend, Liz, was coming to the city from Philadelphia to see the Bindlestiff Family Cirkus perform in Williamsburg; we were to meet up there and she would come home and sleep on my couch for the night. I was excited to see the Cirkus because I never had. Also, a friend was one of the founders: my friend Stephanie had worked with me on the Paper Floor at Pearl Paint, back when she had spiky short hair and I had a bob. Stephanie worked in the Roll aisle and I had moved from the Paper Sheet Mezzanine over to Stationery. I remember Alam always called Stephanie, "Stevanie," or just, "Steve." I think I even vaguely recall Stephanie meeting Keith and telling me that he was teaching her to eat fire and that it was incredible; this while we were having seltzer water and Little Debbies in the Afghani luncheonette below my then-Manhattan apartment. And then one day at least a few years after that, because Stephanie had very long hair, I ran into her on the Williamsburg Bridge, and she told me about Bindlestiff, and that they were making their living entirely on it. That was in the mid-90s, and they have been ever since.

So I was eagerly anticipating the Cirkus. Liz had mentioned that if you came to the show dressed as a clown you could get in for free, or for three dollars, I don't remember, but it was appealing to me. This would have been when I was making a living as a freelance shelver at the bookstore; the success of this lifestyle was contingent on keeping a tight budget, to say the least.

I was dressing up a lot in those days, mostly for Rocky Horror but also for my literary readings; I was comfortable experimenting with makeup and loved excuses to go out in costume. But I ran into the problem that I really couldn't picture a good clown face and didn't have any books illustrating one. The thing with pancake makeup is that it is not subtle. You really have to come up with a design and commit to it. And once you've done something dramatic it can really transform the look of your face, and even how you feel; what is drawn out of you. It's why I liked doing readings in costume: I could feel the transformation from neurotic book clerk to confident female creature, at least for a time.

I landed on a harlequin clown image in my head, maybe from Picasso's Blue Period. Diamonds over my eyes--just keep it simple, I thought. Sometimes less is more when it comes to covering your whole face in stage makeup. The result, though, came out looking far more like the fifth member of KISS. And immediately after seeing my face in the mirror in this persona, I got a raging headache. I sat around my apartment for a while like this, wondering about what to do. Worrying about what my friend would have to resort to if I didn't show up at the Cirkus. Worrying that even if she reached me on the phone, she'd never find me way out in the sticks of Greenpoint by herself. This was in 2000, when Greenpoint seemed like a relative wilderness and still well before

everyone in New York had a cell phone.

Well, I finally had to admit that I was too ill to do anything, that Ace Frehley had stolen my evening and my good health, and I took that damn makeup off. I never heard from Liz until the next day. She said she got to the show late, went in and yelled my whole name at the top of her lungs a few times, and got it that I wasn't there. Then she ran into some other friends and crashed with them.

It was years later, when I called a whole different city home, that I had the pleasure of watching "Stevanie" eat fire.

When inspired to wax poetic on such esoteric subject matter as interconnectivity I've been known to say with sufficient intensity that New York, for all its animation, is really a dead city. I usually then attempt to qualify this bold and wildly unsupported claim with the concession that it does however have a current running through it that gives the appearance of life.

This is probably just sour grapes, a petulant way of saying I've never mastered the art of feeling at rest or at home here. I've always had this nervous feeling that I'm at least two feet to the left of wherever I'm supposed to be at any given time. If this is true, it explains among other things why I was never any good at sports, but more importantly it explains why most people ask, with alarming regularity, where I moved to NYC from? I reply, in a tone less confident than to my liking, that I'm a NY native. They then look at me with incredulous eyes, that seem to say, "Go on, pull the other one." I resist the urge to apologize for what now even I suspect to be an egregious lie and try to meet their scurrilous gaze as steadily as I can. To my horror I know for the rest of the conversation I'll probably attempt to affect at least a slight NY accent that won't fool anyone.

What these fine people seem to instinctively know is that though I may claim to be from NY, I'm not of NY and I clearly don't belong here. I won't profess to know what gives me away as I feel I do everything other New Yorkers do at the very least in successful imitation. I cross streets at odd and dangerous angles without regard to traffic signals or direction. I walk through crowds with a lithe

and aggressive quality while looking put out and inconvenienced by the sluggishness of everyone around me. I even pretend I'm accustomed, to the point of ignorance, to the plethora of foul smells that pervade the subways in a never-ending assault on olfactory glands. All this is done with a sense of pride as I mentally shout in my best faux German accent "Ich bin ein New Yorker!" only to have a smaller mental German with a more convincing accent quietly riposte "Nein." What else is to be done?

Perhaps I just have the quality of one who isn't really at home here, or more to the point cannot be at home here. Too meek. No demonstrable scrap or pluck. An absence of the gnash, gnaw and claw mentality that is essential to survival. I'm not saying I'm without drive and ambition but I think if I were Shakespeare's Caesar, things probably wouldn't have come to a point between Brutus and I.

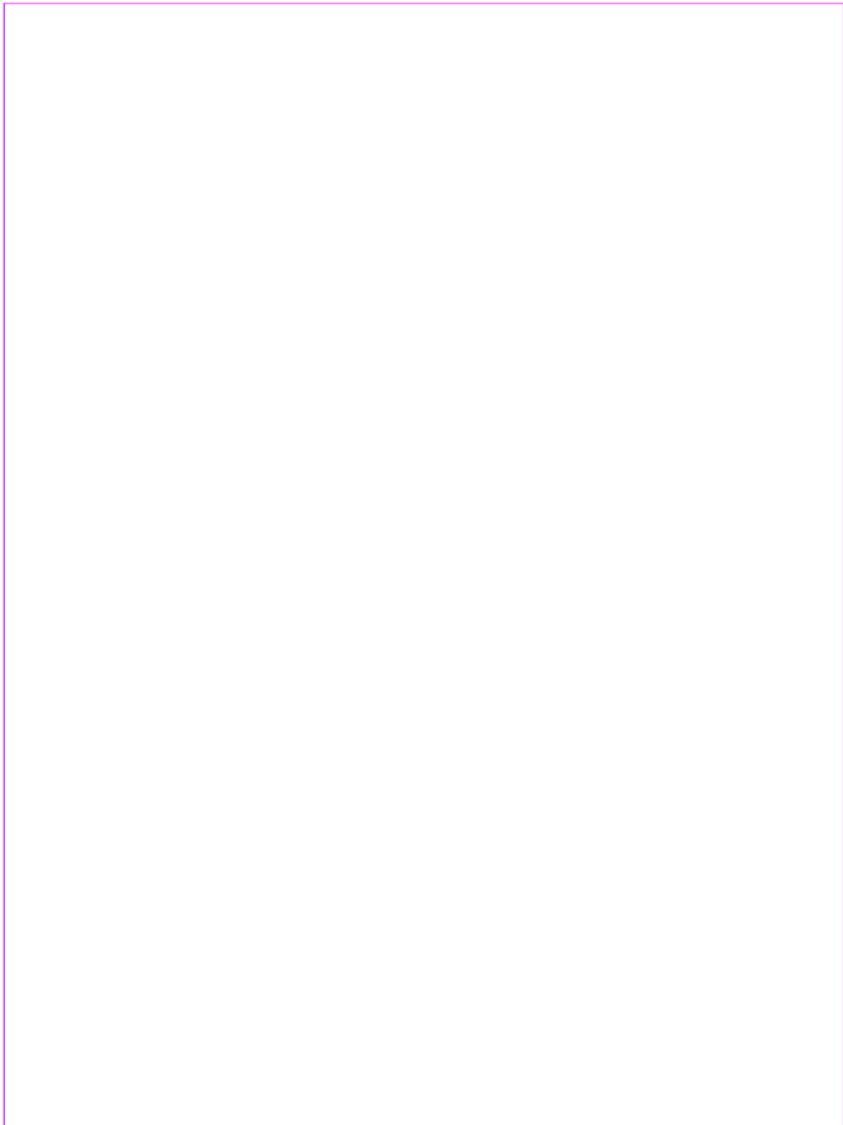
I find myself envious of my childhood icon, Bugs Bunny. Who at the very least was able to say that he should have taken that left turn at Albuquerque. The implication being that although he was lost, he became lost traveling. Point A to point B. Through action he came to fault. We can forgive this. What is harder to defend is having started at point A, having traveled no degrees in any direction and having made no turns, still having to admit that somehow I've lost home. Some would say it's an offensively careless thing to have done; I'm inclined to agree. With a little luck perhaps I might find a city willing to adopt a just south of thirty slightly used un-New Yorker who, at present is still looking for a place to call home.

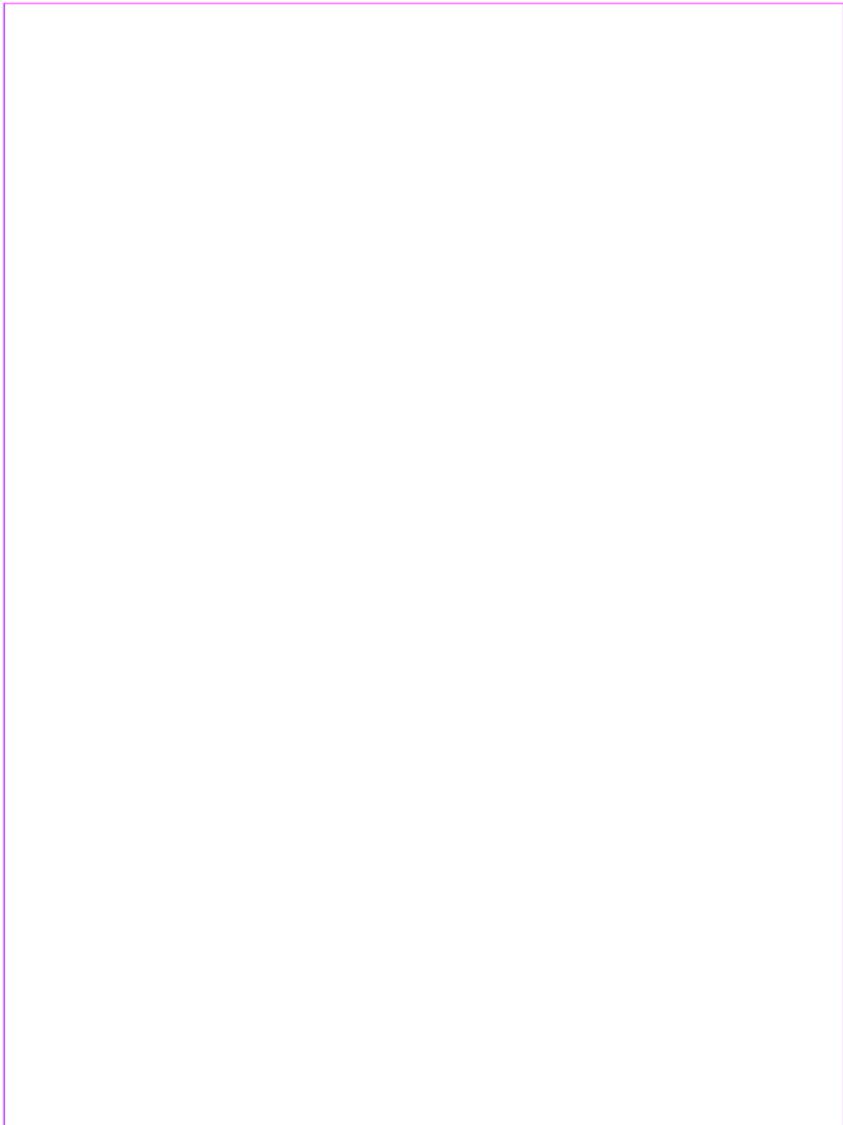
In Toronto, I could hug my grandma all day and be content. There's home in the mound of her bosom set on the recliner in front of the Blue Jays game.

But flying over New York City, as we are now, I get the sense that this whole city, the expanse out the window, which I can see all at once, is home. I can try and identify streets and awnings—if I had better vision I might be able to see license plates. There are places I know. In Toronto, the identification is linked with memories of outdated locales, of places that used to exist but don't anymore. Places I won't make it to anytime soon. But here, through the window pane in this five-borough cityscape that I just want to reach through the glass and embrace it's so exhilarating, I have plans. I think we're flying over the Greenwood Cemetery—I've seen where it roughly lies on a map, the big patch of green that isn't Prospect Park, and I think those little white specks are tombstones—and though I've never been there, I want to go, have plans to go, not concrete plans of date and route and accompaniment, but vague, vague plans. I will see it soon, because I want to, and it's right there.

These bridges—I know them, I have traveled over them using a variety of transportation. I couldn't tell you what the street address is of the building over there, but I know which it is when crossing the Manhattan Bridge on bike or by foot, the one that contains a particular apartment with a window I like to spy into at night when the lamplight is on and I can see the colors, of the wall, of the wall hangings, of the faintly reflected television (or

maybe computer?) monitor. I know the windows of that apartment better than some of the windows in my neighborhood, yet I have no idea what street it's on. And yet, thousands of feet in the air in the bright 5pm summer sun, I can see it, I know where it is because I've read this city in a way I never had a chance to in Toronto, and won't anytime soon.







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