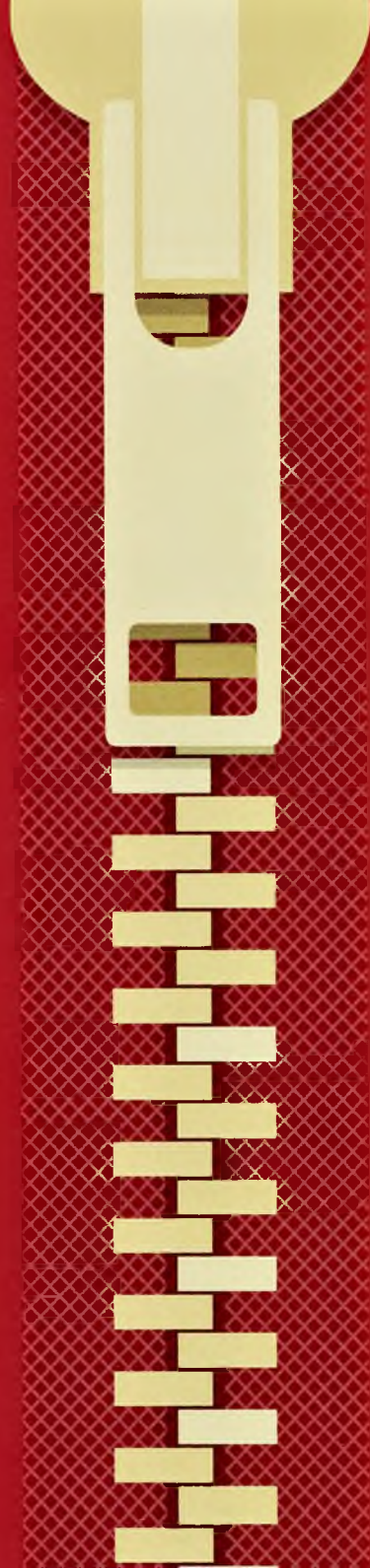


CAESURA

A LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE

FALL 2011





CAESURA

Fall 2011

cae • su • ra [sa-zhoor-a, sa-zhoorae] n., plural

Prosody. A break, esp. a *sense pause*, usually near the middle of a verse, and marked in *scansion* by double vertical line, as in: 2. A division made by the ending of word within a *foot*, or sometimes at the end of a foot, esp. in certain recognized places near the middle of a verse. To pause is to consider. Consider the words preceding the caesura and prepare to relate them to the words that follow.

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“Z is for Zipper” • 2010

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Poetry

Joseph Pentangelo

Dance

i. of a tree

All pain is dough too soft for kneading.
Sundays are whispers,
my dreams – baneful spinsters
riding on through the doldrums I drown in.

The sun is a furnace,
we feared it would burn us;
in ward-rays my freckles grow and kill woe.

Willow willow willow, willow willow willow, willow,
tickle me; hula; drum in storms on my window;
breathe maelstrom bellows and dance down to your bones.
Break off an armiling, a leg, a long nosefrond;
crash it down to the toe-sucking mud that's below.

ii. of a human

Rock me slowly, kookaburra,
shake me gently to my marrow.
Tell me naught of needing,
but of want, here and now.

Kiss me crimson in our snowbank,
igloo-glue me to your spirit;
when your dreamself knows she's dreaming
walk you with her to the silo.

I breathe in blue oaktag on red newsprint mountains -
come with me, young pig's eye,
refill the ocean by thimble.

I swim with the pupfish and dine on salt crystals
of borax and burros I write out my missal.

Thanksgiving

i. America

We are at once the cranberry bogs,
and the cotton fields,
and the gold and copper rushing up from the water.

We are the wicker basket of acorns and iron, of earth-
tone gourds and bluegrass bushels, cicada-rattle and
tall leather boots.

We are a nation of city-sized canyons, ferrous metrop-
olises kissing blue-sky and starlight; we are a nation of
as much closeness or farness as can ever be dreamt of
in our Anglophone homeland.

ii. Ringraziamento e Dopo

The tarantula trecrunk spread her arms
(an embrace or a pushing away)
and I held my breath and ceased tramping the leafbeds
giving ear to the rap of the new-falling snow.

And the moss-covered deadwood hosted five-thousand lichen,
each spreading their fungal and algal spores
through the thin auburn air,
through the fierce Catskill moors.

Winter's not the time for kindness:
no sacred algal pools for wallowing,
nor live ivy-kist cragstone blocks tow'ring skywards.

Three-o'clock sundowns are blacker than
glorious and day after day, turning noon into evening,
we tire at mealtime, retire at nine.

Laura E.E. Murray

The Break

I saw the moment of
The first break
It happened way beyond your eyes
Passed down through your heart
Angled left and burrowed within your soul
And sprang from your throat
I watched the first tear descend
Named each one
Trust fell first
Followed by Hope, then Faith, then Need
And then there were too many to label
And I sensed rather than saw
Something inside of you shatter completely
And you fell to the floor weeping
And each shudder made you tremble

And me watching
Actually searched the ground around you
For the pieces I thought I heard crash
Because I wanted to gather each one
Within the hem of my skirt
Take them home and bond the shards together
And return them to you whole again
To Heal You
But we both were just children
And I couldn't find the fragments
So I started to cry too
For you, with you and because of you
Until they came
To shoo us away

Because they know not what they do

Sundas Nazir

The Merry-Go-Round

spins quite fast and backwards. With each spin it punctures the air. She stutters. Her body parts in two forms—half silhouette, half transparent. Half was real, half was buried last year. From inside the coffin, she whistled. You pulled her out in two hours; threw her out of the window; she has not touched the ground. In the air, her transparent side exposes the gray insides, the white heart, and the black uterus wrapped in electric razor wire. Touch her and die; let us kill her again, bury her deeper next time. She drank the dew that made your eyes green, blue. Who knows the exact color? Let her continue to ride the merry-go-round faster,

backwards. She is now a goldfish, won't remember your name and names of colors; the great blow to the brain. We have buried her so deep, her facial features are the themes of our evenings. This exhausts the patience out of you, mostly. Threaten to pay her a visit; she won't whistle again. Broadcasting continues—you say you have something to say and stop midway. Let us never ask you why you sold your brain in the alley the night before. We can speak of the blank paper you were given in return. Deep in the dirt, she swims and makes bubbles in the water that has seeped into the ground. You spilled the entire glass. You built that merry-go-round crooked and all wrong. This exhausts our patience.

Letter To My Plastic Daddy

The second time, I was born inside my closet. Just to watch me, you flashed brightest lights. Failure, Daddy! Lights have fused out. Blind. Each noon you shake me, make me snap out of it. My brain flipped; you jolted hard, my shoulders fell off. Too bad your fingers broke. Sorry that wasn't my plan; it was to watch you fall face first, bleed until the next full moon. I'm not very sick, only plastic like you, with a heart like yours. Or is it a big, blue rock coated with fungus? I stood before you against the picture-free wall, traced circles with my eyes, danced my eyebrows. "Sick!" You hummed, left the sound of a tight slap beneath my ear. I bit my hair, traced squares in the air, sat in all corners. I didn't break running through to you, through the walls. You said you'd get me locked up. I said yes, shook my head, first left, then right. I'll lock you up tomorrow, promise. You frown funny and say, 'I love you, my daughter.' Failure, Daddy! I don't believe you. I've yet to show you my broken face, Daddy. My rebirth took place in your closet.

What I Forgot To Tell You

*I'm not as crazy as you
think I am.* When I met you I
fell purposely, purposefully. See I
can move about your quick feet
like jelly, rebuild myself—veiled,
perfect nails, perfect teeth. *I'm
very sorry for throwing the brick.*
Who broke your window? Call
me when you need me, split
your worries in four; I will take
them all. I waited so long for
you at the beach.

*I waited until
frozen waves pinned me down
to the sea floor:* I had forgotten
to tell you I needed to see you.
But why didn't you shore up?
Sadly, I bite my nails when I'm
anxious. Really, I can't walk now;
my toes without nails ache. *Last night*
I smudged lipstick on my lips,
broken, chipped lips from when I
slipped on your porch; you would
not open the door; I knocked until
my knuckles were soft as dough,
I wrote your name two times
on my lips. Never speak. Your name,
I continue to repeat in my head.
I know your eyes change color.
They've been dark as middle gray
for a while. The light in my room broke,

the wick froze, the candle dissolved
in the wall. In fear, I outlined my irises
with Christmas lights. Pretty they look,

I swear. *They look as pretty as yours.*

What if you were my shadow?
I'd stand in my semi-dark closet,
still as your smile in every photo.
You'd be on the wall next to me,
so close, I would hear the spark
of your lashes rubbing against
mine. *Let's smoke broken cigarettes.*

I listen to you very closely, if
only you knew. Ellipses, question
marks fell in your lap as we spoke
on the phone. "Time isn't real."
You handed me a pinch of sand.
I wear my watch stopped, upside
down. I turn a page a pulse;
blank pages nailed in place of
my old calendar.

If I can't meet
your eyes, I am not nervous. I am
lying. Women say if I stare hard,
I peel paint off their nails. *When*
I sit beside you I focus on catching
my breath. I snip the air with my nail
clipper, pointy edges. Breathe.
Why don't you ever write to me?

Elegy For My Predator

Yesterday, I buried the black friendship band you tied so tight on my wrist; and, so, you left. Dirt dried in my nail-tips—blue, purple. It's like

the charcoal sky is full of white holes.
It's like my vision is fogged.
It's like I have lost
my eyeglasses and forgot
my name. I play, replay

beach videos of a rainy June
on mute; you run in search of heart-shaped sea shells; shaking hands, unsteady vision, I keep up. I found you dry clams—you stuffed them with wet sand.
The world talks no more of beloveds like you. You are a predator, a traitor.
And I'm not angry, just upset, just copper.

Hung from the ceiling my fan
keeps spinning. Yours kept spinning,
too, with a bloody noose that hung
like a steel pendulum. Outside the sky remains
scarlet, crimson, burgundy, in love with
someone meeting after a month,

ready to pepper hot rain. Sheer
blindfold—triple-folded—will get me
through another December 31st. January
leaves me ice-cold; always late. I
just got back from the slowest walk.
My heart camps as you enter a deep

slumber. Your stem glass
with my lip prints sleeps on your pillow.
I burned the pictures of you and I
and rocked fast on the rocking chair,
yesterday and the day before. Cracked sea-
shells are turning into powder. Once this
movie comes to end, I will replay it.

Us, Loverless?

I licked the crust of the rust from your
shaving cream bottle on my pink sink.

Tonight we'll have stone soup, boiled
with deep fried green raisins. My hair

crawl out of the brush you watch from
inside the cover in fear—fake, silly fear.

I don't sleep at nights, my arms, legs
sleep sound. Eclipses around my eyes

carry coins you gave me to buy candy.
I broke the vending machine; it was a

dumb machine, accepted cheese and
kiwi slices. I was enjoying free candy.

I saw your hands in begging position,
heard your sneaky feet hop-scotching,

warned you not to confide in me. I had
to tell everyone. My feet are cold; has

been 99 days. You hugged me, stretched
arms, your tall, slanted self. On you, I

smelled kerosene oil, somehow my
lighter turned on. Filled with ego, our

ego, the pouch under our mattress, twin
fat cats murdered, hidden under it. I

can't keep still so move with me. Don't
choke me; that rope is in your custody.

Self-Death

My name is Nameless, I still cannot keep promises. I walk fast so my heart crashes in my rib cage. Thanks for inviting me last night. Blanks have been painted in my lips. Fill in with black and white songs from the night we talked under off-white stars, a blood red evening. I shovel ashes, wheat, dead tea leaves, in all my dreams. My skin ripped easier than wet paper. I had a bag full of hot breeze for you, counted my ribs, cracked, colorless rosary beads. My fingers curled in the bony cage, reached for the hiding heart. I pulled it out, poked it. It beats no more. That time, I had nine lives, none remain. This is ninth. Yours truly.

Matthew Bryan Beck

Ode To Chuck

O, canvas and rubber sewn to perfection,
thy laces corset a figure divine.
Poison of choice to greasers and punks,
Cobain killed himself but thou hast lived on.
Thou art more than footwear; thou art a bird,
Hermes, the winged god, inventor of fire,
messenger of Olympia, running
to victory like the bulls of Pamplona.
High-top, low-top, deep, majestic, smooth, and strong.
Awake, bloom of young Desire, awake
thy galvanized-rubber beauty and let us make love.

Under a Willow

the summer
breeze sings
Leibesleid

tendrils touch
my face, a
tender child

copper clouds -
elephants
and ancient
Armadas

barefoot
bulrushes
silently nod

forest creatures
make love
in pairs

the earth, my pillow
but no one to
beside me

lay.

Elmira Oktayevna Elvazova

Evensong

I have been not eating.

Just burning.

With the places where I have been.

The sunset fades to make room for sunrise.

This is a simple thing.

That looks nothing at all like the impression before it.

The sunrise, marins.

I know you breathe in the air easy.

When the evensong of colors does not overwhelm your being.

With its magnificence.

Even, even among the leaves.

Of course I know, I've studied this.

Not well.

Not with my whole being.

If you ask what I've invented it's charisma.

To capture your colors in one stroke of paint, my love.

Is not always easy.

Poem for Lauren

hello,
explain to me the leaves

and how they fall, over the panel of light
like they so belong

I fished for two fish
coming out of the lake a winner

I start to hate my face
I think faces are full of history

and null, they are so transparent

hello,
what is a bluer light than this?

is it a blue lake
with triple the fish?

in a lake with triple the fish
I come to water

I know a man who only courts in spring
he is in love with the flowers

O now I've said everything I know and now I look to no one

and I am venerable
and O I am in love with those flowers too

Optics

This morning in the fish pond,
A surprise was brought in.

The fish pond has new windows.
And all the fish are checking their reflections.

The glass is bluer and clearer than before.
Before there was the gray sort of mirror-

That saddens faces
With its look like an iron barrack.

Isn't it tempting to believe
Somebody slipped in a fresh sky while you were sleeping?

I think that is how the day is done.
How it is created.

The variation of impression.
Resembled only by the rooster's early crow.

Or smudges on the window.
Marked there while you were not looking.

The Winds in Autumn

Stranded, red
the sun connects
to nothing.

A clown in jest.
A royal jester.

No more the birds
are quiet
by the stones.

No more the birds
are alone
they fly in flocks.

I walk beneath
the open window.

I hear the wind
tug at
the sun's sail.

Sailing, now,
begets a season.

Before the big swallow.

I know only
the dead
flock there.

Michael Dalessio

Premeditated Infidelities

I left you the key under the door mat.
I left every light on in the apartment.
I left her gold chain on the coffee table.
I made sure the bathroom door was wide open,
and last night's dinner was still on the stove.
I made a conscious choice in leaving my socks,
and her panties on the living room floor.
Did I mention the fact that I forgot to lock the door?
It wouldn't matter if I left the key for you anyway.

I liked that she was four years your senior.
Her black hair draped more properly than your blonde
onto her more proper shoulders,
and sat sexier over her more properly propped breasts.
I liked the way she said my name almost as much as I liked
the way she made me forget yours.

I didn't mind you opening the door.
I didn't mind you finding dinner on the stove.
I didn't give a shit about your expression
when you saw us in the bathroom.
I was going to ask you to pick up the socks
when I was done,
but you had already thrown them in the hamper,
by the time I was finished.

She asked me to come
over.
You asked me to come.
I left.

Cocky

I was on the way home, and I had the window cracked a bit too much for January.
The cold air didn't matter to me though.
I had a plan to collect all of my bad habits in a jar that night.
I figured if I captured them all I could abuse privileges one last time.

Walking down the hill, I found my womanizer shades.
I put them on, and all I could see was vulnerability for miles.

I walked cross-eyed for a few blocks and stumbled across my "I'm the shit" t-shirt.
I slipped it on, and I began to stink like the week old halibut from Fulton's.

So I paraded around the corner once before my conscious almost ran me off the road.

A Final Decision After Years of Contemplation

They beg of me large sums of poetic elements
that would scar most naked ears.
They are continually starving for my words.
Over the years, I've hoisted myself up onto pedestals
to be ridiculed.
I've recited break ups and make ups,
and spit them out onto a universal canvas.
They dry,
seep into the reader's cochlea
and now saturated with my sins,
they leak all of my privacy out into the world.
But I wanted this.
I wanted people to see how my mind works.
That's why I left my sleeve open to the public.
I wore it proudly.
My heart beating and pulsating
each and every last instance of my emotion
Why is it that I should be questioned on what I wrote?
Why do they ask me if I'm sure I want to surf across each stanza
freely?
It is of course my life.
I believe poets are a very generous species.
It's not every day that one gets the opportunity to read such work,
like stories about how our people are killed because of war,
drugs, alcohol abuse and various political issues.
I'd rather ingest something a bit more safe.
Poetry never caused cancer,
yet people are constantly contradicting each other's words.
I say leave it all in a pot,
stir it up, and let the world feed off of it.
Let there be no diversity..
Ones' poetry is ones' personality..

An Average Morning for a Poet

I rolled around in a dream,
wrapped up in my syntactical errors.

Minutes later, I awoke to bathe
in a luke warm waterfall of poetic elements.

After scrubbing my mind clean of all prior infractions,
or at least the ones I could remember at the time,
I dried off a few remaining sins from my finger tips.

I got dressed and decided to cook breakfast.
I reached into the cupboard, and pulled out the spice rack.

Strangely, mine was remixed.

The salt was a metaphor, depicting my bad habits.
Its herbal counterpart, the pepper was a simile,
with a label that read: "As high as the mesosphere."

At this point, I decided to skip the day's first meal,
and write a poem instead.

Mindy Mallis

Luna

The heart beneath my heart stopped beating.
The clouds have opened up to howl with my cry
Roars down to let me know he's safe;

the son that I will not raise.
He's floating somewhere beneath the clouds,
beneath me, beneath the earth.

She was stunning
her tears of night pouring on me.
Gracing my lungs with a deep exhale.

I've forgotten about her beauty.
Locked away in reality.
The life that he will not live.

The soft cheeks, I will never kiss
lips that could have resembled his fathers.
Tiny hands, I won't hold.

No fist to lock my pinky into.
Sweet breaths, that will never tickle my nose.
The heart beneath my heart stopped beating.

Phoenix

1.

You, were never planned.
My body wasn't ready
for what you would have done.
The night you were conceived
your father's tipsy lips danced
down my hips. Swore
he was mine forever.
His lips haven't danced since.

2.

He knows how happy I would have been,
had you still have been here.
Fists and feet fighting through
my belly. He cried
mercy when he saw you.
Both of us looking
for the us in you. The face
that would have
resembled our own,
now staring at us in the toilet bowl.

3.

When your heart stopped beating,
I shed blood.
When your heart stopped beating,
I balled up, knees to face. Afraid
my womb was forever wounded.
When your heart stopped beating,
I cried out I'm sorry. I love you.
When your heart stopped beating,
I died too.

Us, Cracked

Your mother's screams are piercing my ears.
18 years and now you're gone, hour glass filled with sand.
An ocean in the living room; our family's tears.

Words can't express what we're going through, a glacier of tears.
Army suit with your Rosary in hand.
Your mother's screams are piercing my ears.

Tucked in safely. Kind, gentle, and true. Counting your short years,
I rubbed the cracked skin on your hand.
An ocean in the living room, our family's tears.

If time stole my prayers from my pew, she'd wipe my tears,
would have left you alone in the living room, this was never planned.
Your mother's screams are piercing my ears.

Fingers pressed to your guitar, begging my mind to clear.
I never thought living in this big house would get so lonely.
An ocean in the living room, our family's tears.

Silence creeps up, screams your name in our numb ears.
Our family is shattered. Stunned, your father can't stand.
Your mothers screams are piercing my ears.
An ocean in the living room, our family's tears.

Dawn

Watching the sunrise at six,
bottom deck I sit shot gun
waiting for this city to give me my fix.
Salt water mist on my skin, tickling my lips
The wind slaps me in the face;
my youth is slipping through my finger tips.
Brooklyn never looked so beautiful,
the bridges light up attempting to
kiss the sky.
The wind laughs at them;
throws their dreams to the concrete.
My city is decorated with lies and deceit.
Liberty winks at me, I own this night.
My wavy hair is wild in the wind.
Knots tracing over forgotten stories.
The time when you were so... that you...
yeah that was fun.
Passing the exit I see,
Men in their suits, women in their heels.
Jealously I watch as the morning's gust howls
at their perfect hair.

John Clinton

Mayflower

O melodies of May
spring a new tune on me
the time has come to pass
wind from windowpanes
blowing out your flame
hardened wax will mend
gaping hearts that let in
an everlasting light

Where did you shine
but to the end of infinity
perhaps I will meet a soul
on an enchanted wave
rolling away without you
where I am deposited
like a bitter grain of sand
on the shore of your love

Will I lay like the dead
in cooling obsidian fields
denying you until the sun
makes me think otherwise
remember you forgave me
for my stupidity and evaporated
with the fleeting mist at dawn
leaving me to think otherwise

State of Affairs

the rise and fall of
America
and your breath was
certainly
controlling the stock of
hearts
crashing with you in organic
markets
where we greedily went to
purchase your favorite resources of
chocolate/
covered/
fruits/
and nuts
was I to think
love could be so easily found in
aisles not from a church
praying
the soy milk wasn't overpriced
debating whether or not to buy or
sell
my heart to you

What Is Heaven?

can you see it
in your eyes

can you feel it
deep inside

can you hear it
sighing beside you

can you smell it
all around you

can you taste it
on rose petal lips
on the tip of a clit
on the top of a prick

and the poets without a dime
just don't give a damn
for we are rich in holy words
that is heavens come

and the stories that we tell
that is heavens tongue

and the songs that we sing
that is heavens symphony

and the love that we make
that is heaven for god's sake

and the moments in between
thought and expression
that is heavens consciousness

and the forty or so garbage bags
scattered down your block
that is heaven pilling up

and the no standing and one way
and monday through friday
that is heaven parking itself

and the bearded young man
walking his dog home from work
that is heaven barking

and the four of five young girls
strutting in short summer shorts
that is heaven flashing

and the puerto rican baby carriages
and their religious mothers
that is heaven strolling

and the hazy duo of drums
and sax swirling out of
a corner in union square
that is heaven bearing free

and the two overgrown hipsters
conversing on the subway
about hell I don't know... life
that is heaven riding free

and the graffiti painted on
each boroughs naked walls
that is heaven pure and true

and the sun setting on
every one of your days
that is heaven winking just for you

and the rain that is falling
forever will be life flowing
from heaven to earth to heaven
and heaven does not exist

She's Something like the Rain

the radiator
coughs
its death rattle
upon
my bleeding ears
as
the half bottle
of Jim Beam
glimmers golden
incandle
incandescence

my tears
will not shed
like the hair of some
mangy dog
feeding off
the darkness

departed leaves
ash
like wild fire
in the burnt
autumn

this winter
do not
bury my body
in snow
flakes white &
pure
melt the soul
into

water falls
reborn
in ascending
winter lights
illuminating
the crying
full moon full
of tears & stardust

listen
that rain
that rain falls
from nowhere

outside
street lamps perspire
inside
lightbulbs crack
with memories
of you in the twilight

listen
that rain
that rain it falls
angrier now

for a moment
or
two hours
it has
stopped this voice
from
becoming a gleaming
phantom
dancing on
the saturated pavement
or
the sound of a piercing
thunderbird
sailing on
the void asphalt

Dig A Dead Horse

newwave nowave
newage noage
newideas noideas
wavesageideas

onelove notime
onesun noshine
oneday nosay
whether I live or die

nomoney noway
nogain nopay
nowall nostreet
just zombies on the bridge

nofeelings justnumb
nofuture justpresent
nocharacter justmoods
and I really don't care

tooheavy toothin
tooblack toogrim
toougly toobad
my heart is grotesque

noideals onlyimitations
noevolution onlyextermination
nostraight onlygay
gay as a line in nature

nobirthdays yesobituaries
nobodies yessouls
nostars yesblackholes
the void is strong in this one

my poems try to commit suicide
before I can read them

redefine time for right now
right now is redefining itself

nothing ever happened
to me you who them
everywhere we goes
om

stopbeating
your heart on the pavement

stopwriting
your soul on the skyway

feed an anarchy
I am starving!

dance like a god
Nietzsche knows!

fuck like your pop
your mom drank it up!

a dead horse
b dead horse
c dead horse
d dead horse
e dead horse
f dead horse
h is a dead horse
i am a dead horse

shoot a dead horse
just so I can sleep

sunglasses for the moon

Photography



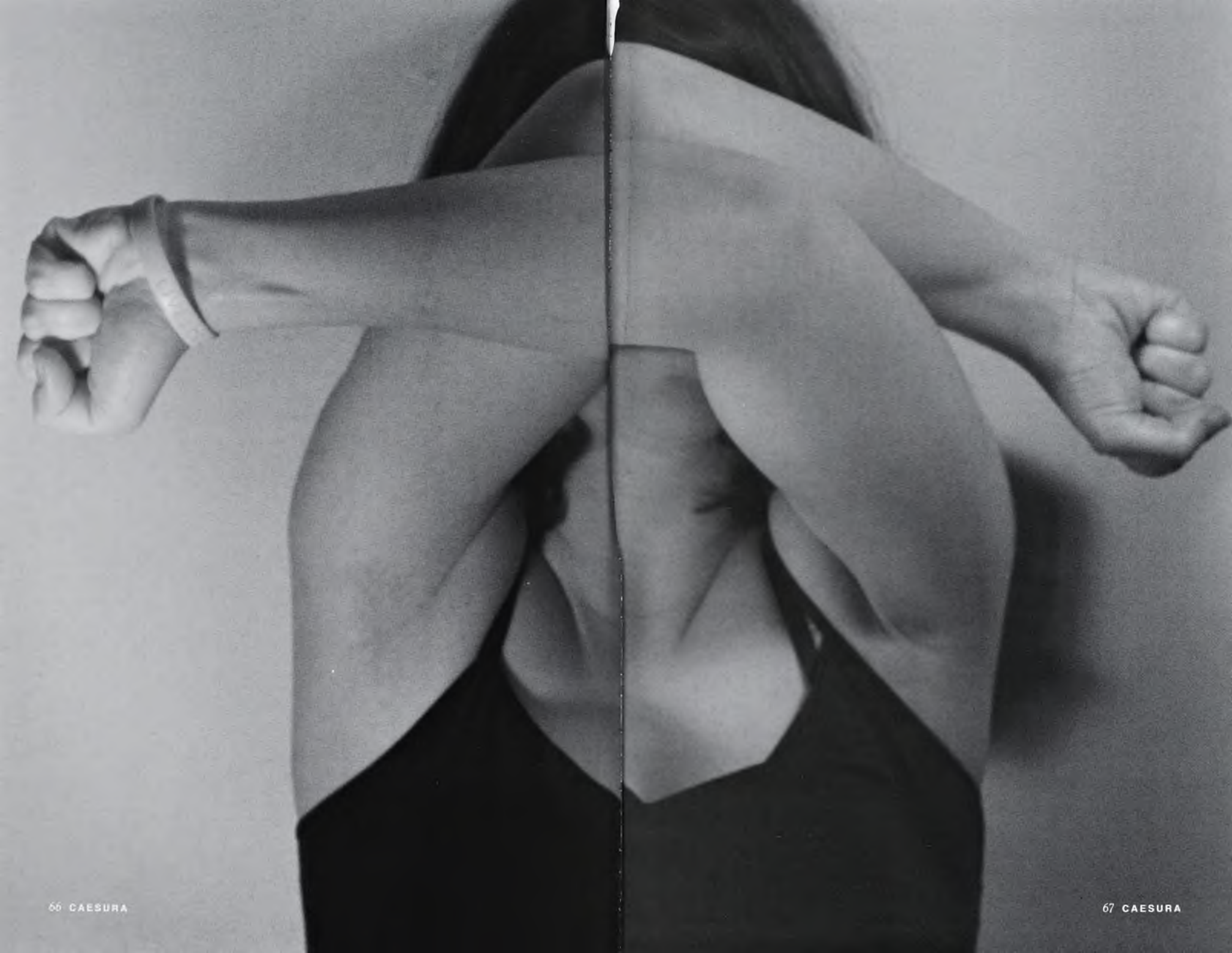
Annie Breen

62 CAESURA



63 CAESURA



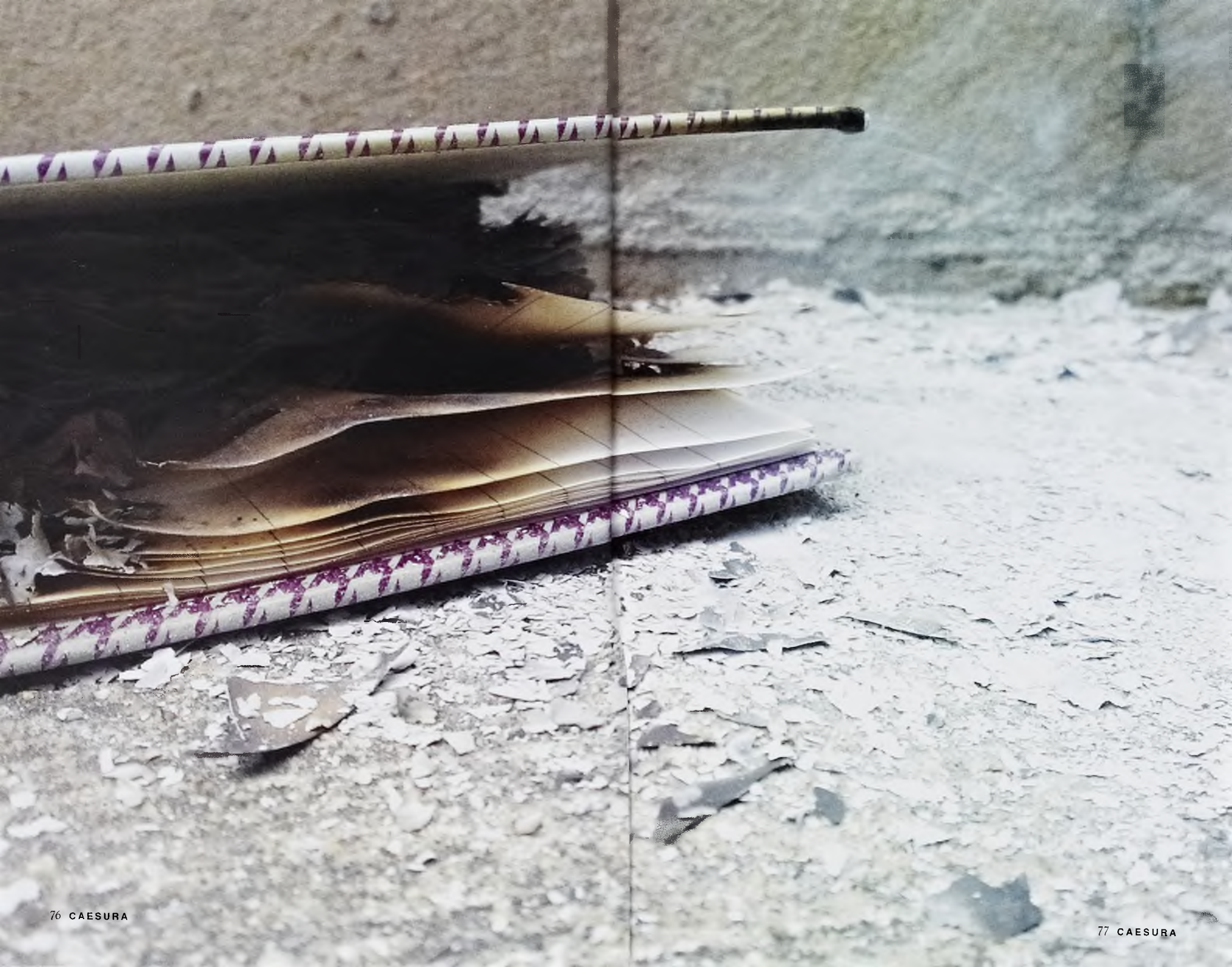
















Anonymous

80 CAESURA

81 CAESURA









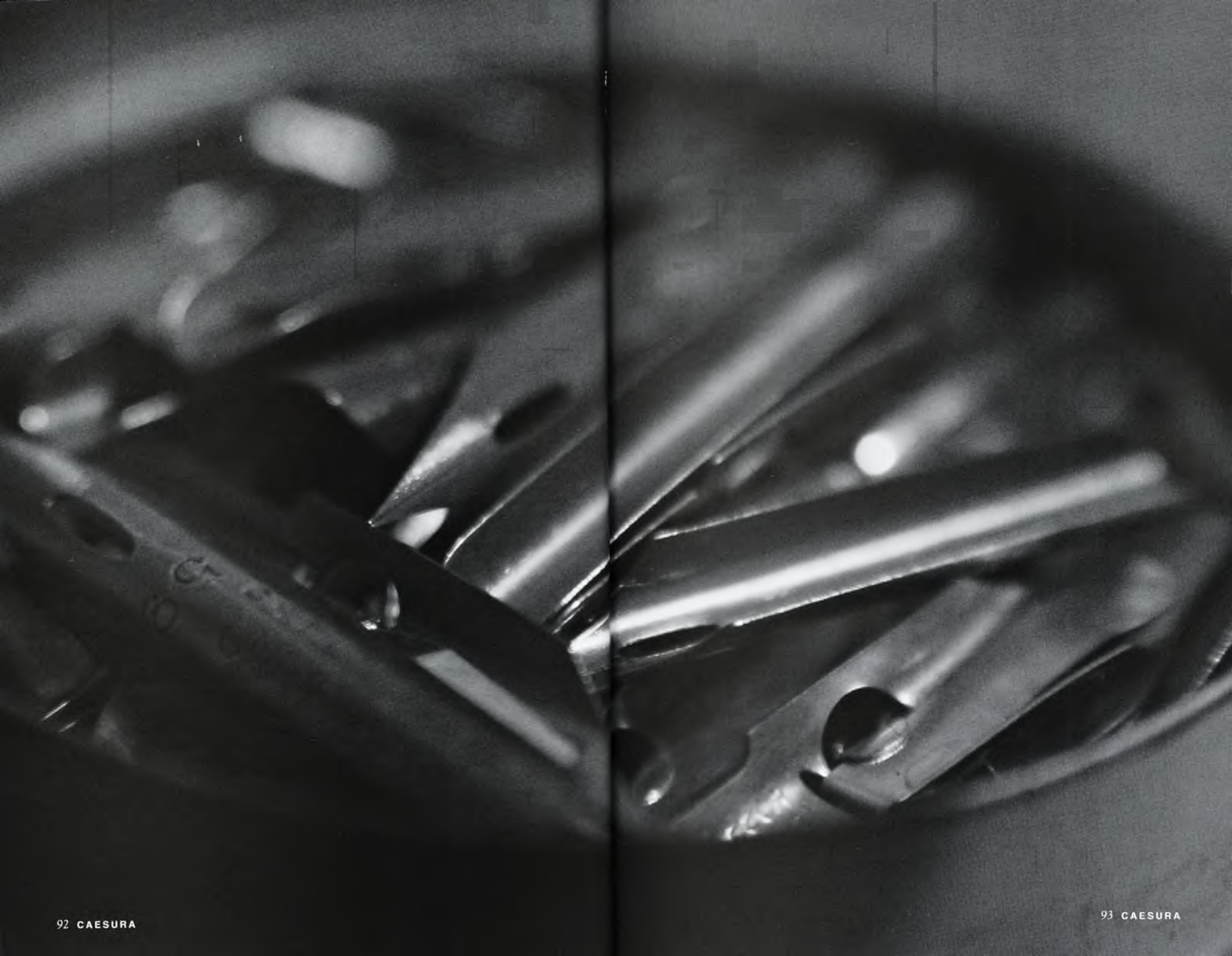
Zara Kittel

86 CAESURA

87 CAESURA













Matthew Bryan Beck

98 CAESURA





Emily Peters

100 CAESURA





Fiction

Sundas Nazir

My Predators, My Beloveds

With panicky steps, I walked over to the wooden gate, picked up a broken brick, and threw it at Chantal's house. How is it possible to forget so fast and move on even faster?

It was a foggy, November morning, the first day after my wedding. My husband was home sleeping and didn't know I was at Chantal's. I needed to see her, and tell her that he'd hurt me, and that I didn't know things were going to be this way, and that.

I was unsure what a marriage really meant. I took me two hours to walk to her house; it was 5:00 AM and the sun was late.

How could she hate me? What did I ever do?

The brick hit the door with an angry thump; I froze. She never came out, in fact, no one came out.

His hand limply clutched my left wrist. Slowly I freed myself and recalled the afternoon Chantal and I spent at the beach in the middle of July. I hadn't spoken to her since then.

"I'm going to Mexico with my husband next week," she said.

"You're married?!" I sat upright. She sipped coffee.

"My daughter is two."

"Are you going to abandon me?" A small child ran past us and flung a fistful of sand in my hair, on my face. I licked the gravels from my lips and crushed them in my mouth. "You never told me you were a married woman."

"You never asked."

But sometimes I forget that there are certain things people always ask each other. I began to put sand in her coffee. "I should have known."

"What? Will you read me another poem?"

Clearly, she had no idea how confused I was.

"So, you don't love me?"

"Of course, I love you, Sofeeya."

"More than you love your husband?"

After three long seconds, she said, "Both of you have special places in my heart."

"Being in the heart is not all that special. If I am in your right atrium, then I'm not in a very clean place and that bothers me." She was slightly frustrated. "The poem, the poem!"

I began, "Queen Elizabeth wrote my favorite poem of all time. 'On Monsieur's Departure'

*I grieve and dare not show my discontent,
I love and yet am forced to seem to hate,
I do, yet dare not say I ever meant,
I seem stark mute but inwardly do prate.
I am and not, I freeze and yet a burned,
Since from myself another self I turned."*

I stopped after the first stanza. "I'm getting married to Young in November."

"You are?" She gave me attention. "I thought men had cooties." Her voice was gentle and cautious, like a therapist who only asked the right questions, said the right things.

"They do. Copper and crimson colored cooties."

"You met him only a few days ago. Why are you even getting married?"

"Because I want a husband to put in my right atrium and because women leave you faster than falling face first." She threw her head back and laughed.

"What does marriage mean to you, anyway? You just turned twenty...too young, Sofeeya. What's he like?"

"Yup. Sofeeya Young."

I stared at the two deformed clouds in the sky. They were far apart and one chased the other as if it had all the time in the world. "You don't love me very much and I'm not your best friend like I thought I was. And you'll leave me because your husband is probably your best friend. I just know it."

Chantal spilled her coffee in the sand between us. "Well, we've only known each other for a few months. It will take time for both of us to understand each other." I moved closer to her face and whispered, "Did you know five months have over 150 days?"

"That's not a long time." She faced me and we were only four inches apart.

"My father..." made me leave him 750 days ago. "It's like yesterday."

"Did you say something?"

You're not invited to my wedding. No one will be. It will be a secret. And I will never be lonely ever again. I got up and ran away from her.

"Sofeeya!" She yelled from behind. "Where're you going?"

"I have to see Young." I called back without understanding

how foolish I sounded.

I stopped seeing her after that day and began to spend time with Young. There was no point spending time with someone that was going to leave in the end. I wanted someone to stick to and someone to stick to me.

Mid-July waves slapped and somersaulted on the shore. Chantal called my name from the distance, drowned in that very sound, the sound of soft snores. I was back in the mute dark room, back as a married woman. I got up and walked to the mirror to my other body. With a pair of scissors I gingerly snipped the air, hoping to perfect its shape, hoping to breathe with ease. Blood-red, sharp lines on the clock: 2:21 AM.

...As long as you both shall live? I tried to think of his name but there was a blank, a beep. Will you cherish her? Perhaps the whole world had asked me at one point—old trees, square-shaped pebbles, and blue colored winds. Each time I let my arrhythmias distract me as I would say, ‘Of-freaking-course,’ minding the infix for nonchalance.

“Wake up, husband.” I turned my side lamp on and sat on the edge of the bed, waiting inaudibly like a clock with no batteries. There was no way to check if he was dead but to stare at the space over his nose; surely, his breaths glowed in the dark. After a few minutes, I walked over to the sliding doors and allowed purple colored winds of early morning to touch my face; outside was always fresh, always alive.

“I will not cherish him because,” I talked to a few birds, “men

have maroon and mint colored cooties." It became silent as if the birds abandoned me because they couldn't put up with me anymore. "They interest me the least out of all species."

I stared at the empty block. In New York, people walked in countable steps. With each step, the distance multiplied to a heavy number. People left people all the time because everyone had a life to look after. When dad asked me to leave him because he guessed I would leave him in the near future anyway, I left him in Pi steps. I knocked on his door for the next three weeks and added more distance because he was sick of my constant questioning. I needed assurance and reassurance about him never leaving me the way mom did. Mother needed time to herself; she had told me after making breakfast on my seventh birthday. If only dad had opened the door, he'd realize I only wanted to give him Sylvia Plath's poem, "Daddy" stapled behind my version of it called, "Plastic Daddy." In the poem I accused him of having a blue rock coated with fungus instead of a heart. Eventually, he left the city or *died* and there was only one equation that counted the distance between us: time to the power of life divided by miles of impatience.

"Where am I?" I whispered to no one.

"Only with Young." His voice broke the composed air in uncountable pieces. It startled me so much I wanted to spill on the floor, move around like a puddle of white paint, rebuild myself with blackest irises and blacker hair. He reached for a lighter. "Smoke?" I shook my head to motion a speechless, excited 'yes'; the silence of flame standing up was romantic.

"Here." He offered me a Nat Sherman. I inhaled and coughed and immediately felt smoke sitting in the space between my skull and scalp.

He chuckled. "Please don't try it; it's bad for your already white lungs."

"I have to tell you a purple secret."

"Uh...yea...purple?"

"Hold on." I took a puff, grabbed my cell phone, opened to a picture, and brought it to his face with a grin.

"And?"

"And?" I looked at the little screen that shook more than my hand did, to make sure it was her picture. "She is my only best friend and her favorite color is purple. I'm sure it still is even though she went to Mexico and we haven't spoken to each other since the end of July."

"Huh?"

"Shocking information can cause heart attacks, did you know?" I laughed soundlessly.

"You were acting weird yesterday and weirder today."

"That's not a long time, Chantal said so." I looked at my phone; the hot tears collecting in my eyes burned my irises and smelled like the ocean. "But I love Chantal."

"Guess what?" He whispered, "She hates you now."

I was convinced. "Really?" I sat on the bed in slow motion. "She is married and her best friend is her husband, anyway."

"Yup. She called your phone last night to tell you that you were a crazy-good-for-nothin'-liar." He walked to the sliding doors and closed them—"You need rest,"—and sat next to me on the king bed, moved hair strands off my face—"silly woman."

"I don't know what marriage means?" I looked at him. "Do you?" The smell of cigarette continued to smear on the walls, underneath the gray carpet, inside the pale light. It stitched itself in my hair. Young took it from my hand and put it out on my leg.

“Ouch.” I rubbed the side of my thigh. “What did I ever do?” He held on to my thigh that seemed to be on fire.

“Remember, you proposed to me with a ring the third week of our friendship? You were in a rush. Don’t give me this crap early in the morning.”

“I didn’t mean it.”

From underneath the bed, he brought a shiny knife, and poked it near the burn. “You can’t leave me like that. Ya know? Not just like that.” He began to carve a crooked ‘Y’.

“But...” I grabbed his wrist with a shaking hand and started crying. Young didn’t stop until he finished and I told him the formula that illustrated our marriage. “Less than or equal to does not equal greater than or equal to.” I laughed until I convinced my brain to call myself a crazy-good-for-nothin’ liar. My purple silk slip was dark from the thigh; blood flowered on the fabric. I took the knife from him and slashed my wrist. “I am crazy.”

He slapped me beneath my right ear and I fell to the floor.

Many minutes were left before sunrise and the room was slightly bright with a blue like that of an over-exposed cyanotype print. I recalled why I had decided to quit photography; my last print was a cyanotype. In the dark room, I coated cotton paper with yellow chemical. When it dried, I placed it in a contact frame and put a black and white transparency of me and my plastic daddy standing by the garage. Then, I took it out in the sun for exposure and my image was ready in two minutes and eighteen seconds. I was ready to cover the frame with my hoodie when I realized dad had moved on and I was still stuck with his pictures. So, I left the frame in the sun until the image got so dark, one could never figure out it was us. It became a photo

of any daughter with her father, or two complete strangers that would leave each other soon.

I brought my wrist closer to my eyes and watched blood drip in 12 burgundy drops.

When I got up, I was dizzy; Young was in bed, covers pulled over to hide his entire body. My lip was cut from the inside and I drank my blood until I got used to the taste. A box of band-aids was on my pillow and I put three vertical bandages on the diagonal cut. It was the sticky part that would bind skin again. I looked at Chantal's picture on my phone; she was holding an iced coffee with a smile that showed her perfect teeth. The time in front of the image read 3:00 AM. I dipped my toes in the puddle of blood and dragged my foot to the sliding doors, and back. Still in my slip, I put a jacket on, turned the lamp off and headed out of the bedroom. I was going to run away to her and she'd save me from Young.

This time I was going to abandon someone.

Rebecca Strobel

Bright

THE OCEAN IS BREATHING HARD, *panting*, and I know it's trying to get in as many respirations as it can because its last is fast approaching. Its deep breaths are tiny, tiny waves. They are sharp. Dense. I wonder if they are made of something harder than water. Pure salt. Diamonds. Glass. They stand three feet tall, all of them identical, with wispy cotton tops. Mist floats off of them, smoke-like, and weaves itself into the fog that obscures the horizon. They glide upright onto the shore before folding in half and pounding the sand. They dive so forcefully into the beach that I wonder why they don't dent the earth. The sky is grey, and so is the sand, and so is he, and so am I.

"Where have you been?"

The wind sweeps my voice into the cobwebs of mist. I know my words do not fall on human ears; his broad shoulders a mile down the beach do not turn in my direction and his face remains fixed away from mine.

Suddenly he is standing next to me. His hand, so big, so warm, finds mine. I turn my head to look up at his face. The mist's sticky strands stop my efforts; my neck turns my head an inch every few seconds. My head swims through the molasses strings and I strain to see his face. It is a blur.

IT WAS STILL DARK when I woke up. I was hot, and as I kicked off my blankets, I regretted not opening the window wider before I fell asleep.

I could just make out Wolverine's silhouette on the poster hanging from my sloped ceiling. I'd hung it there after Mom told me that when she was a kid, she and her friends used to hang posters above their beds so that the last thing they saw before they fell asleep was the thing they loved the most (and if they were stuck lying awake at night, they could at least look at

something that made them happy). She told me she had a poster of Micky Dolenz on her ceiling from her freshman year of high school until she moved out. I didn't know who Mickey Dolenz was, but I trusted that he was someone important if Mom wanted him to be the last person she saw before falling asleep every night, and I asked her why she didn't have that poster above her bed in our house now. Instead of really answering, she did that thing where she laughed and ruffled my hair and looked off in another direction with eyes that weren't laughing at all. But I really wanted to know.

I spent the rest of the night staring at Wolverine and imagining what it would be like to have adamantium claws and bones and teeth. I could jump from my window on the second floor and land in the garden without worrying about breaking my legs (which is what my mom told me would happen when she saw me sitting on the edge of the roof last summer). I could open letters without tearing the envelopes into shreds (though the only person who ever wrote me was my mom, which I thought was funny because her bedroom door is only 27 steps away from mine and she could just hand me my birthday cards if she wanted to, but she sends them in the mail so I have something addressed to me one out of every 365 days I check the mailbox). And since my bones would be so heavy, I would need to have strong muscles in order to hold up my skeleton (which I learned about this summer — I decided to read through the whole Encyclopedia Britannica at the library and even though I only got up to F, the information about Anatomy and Bones gave me a pretty good understanding of Muscles too), so I could help Mom lift heavy boxes and open tightly sealed jars.

The sun came up around the time I had outlined in detail exactly how I would meet Wolverine and what I would say to convince him to take me on as an apprentice. I imagined how Mom would cry, but she would be really proud, and how when I went back to school I would use my claws to carve my name into my favorite seat in the cafeteria so no one would sit there because I would say "This is my seat; it's got my name on it" and all of the kids would laugh with me and applaud my cleverness and they would fight for the other seats at the table, which I would carve out to say "Friend #1" and "Friend #2" and so on.

THE WEEK WE WENT to the seashore for my fifth birthday was also my parents' fifth wedding anniversary, and it was also the last week of summer before I began kindergarten. We woke up early and got into the car, which was full of suitcases, and drove towards the rising sun; Mom and Dad didn't tell me we were going anywhere special. I remember falling asleep for most of the ride, occasionally waking up to peek at my parents holding hands over the center console and marveling over the slice of pink, purple and orange sky visible through the windshield. We arrived at a wooden bungalow that was as weather-worn as it could be without falling down, and I worried over what would happen if a strong wind came during the night.

Every day of the week, Mom and Dad and I carried pails and shovels and all manner of snacks down to the beach. I played in the surf until my trunks were weighed down with salt and sand and I was so tired I could barely walk. Sometimes Dad and I flew kites. One afternoon, the three of us built a sandcastle as tall as I was. It rained that night and I laid in bed crying because I knew that the sandcastle was out on the dark, desolate beach be-

ing torn apart by the storm. I couldn't stop picturing the drops of rain sinking into our masterpiece like watery hooks, carving deep grooves in its walls as they rolled down its sandy sides. By the time Dad came to tuck me in, my misery was overwhelming. He had one foot in the door before I was telling him how worried I was over the fact that our sandcastle would be destroyed before dawn. He hugged me and said that I could always build another, which I knew was his way of telling me that the one we'd built didn't stand a chance.

Once my post-hysteria-hiccups had slowed to the rate of one every few minutes, Dad kissed me goodnight and left, leaving the door ajar so I could see the lights on in the hallway and know that he and Mom were still awake to protect the house from any monsters looking for a place to stay during the storm.

My ears clung to his footsteps as he moved down the hallway to the room next to mine. They relaxed at the sound of the mattress springs creaking and perked up again at the murmur of his voice. I think the place was set up like one of those old hotel rooms from a spy movie where the walls are what they call "paper thin" and words crawl through the vents to make sure the detective hears the bad guys planning their next heist. I thought about how I should have made a telephone out of a string and two tin cans so I could have said goodnight to my parents without them having to walk all the way to my room. The mattress springs creaked again and I heard Mom's voice respond to Dad's. She sounded a little louder too.

I couldn't make out their words, but their voices rising and falling in between the silences and the soft thudding of footsteps along lulled me to sleep. The sporadic sounds kept me from worrying about things falling apart outside.

ON THE LAST AFTERNOON, Mom stayed in the house and made sandwiches for the car ride home (even though she and my Dad weren't going to be hungry and I was going to be asleep, having sandwiches prepared "just in case" is the kind of thing that Moms do) and Dad walked me down to the beach. It was low tide, so we waded in the rocky tide pools and picked up starfish and sea snails from the barnacled rocks. Dad placed a starfish in my hand and its suction-cuppy legs dangled over my palm.

"If a starfish loses one of its legs, it can grow it back and it's like nothing ever happened to it in the first place." I stared at him wonderstruck; I couldn't believe I had been alive for five years and six days without knowing something so fascinating.

"Can I do that?"

"No, Sport. People are different. We have to be a little more careful."

THE NEXT MORNING, Dad's car wasn't in the driveway when I left for school, and it wasn't there when I came home that afternoon. I asked Mom when he would be home, and she looked at me with faraway eyes (which were something I would see a lot of in later years, though I didn't know it then) and she said that she didn't know and we probably shouldn't wait up for him, so I could go upstairs and take a bath and she would be up to tuck me in in a little while.

I went straight to bed without taking a bath. My skin still smelled like sea and sand, and my arms tasted salty. I wrapped myself in my sheets so that the flavor of the ocean would seep into the fabric, preserving it forever. Even after my mom wrestled me into the bathtub the next night, my bed still smelled like

the seaweed left on the rocks at low tide, which I considered a victory.

Mom promised me that by the time the trees started to change things would get better, but even when the oak tree outside was almost entirely auburn, I still spent most nights trying to fall asleep and getting stomachaches from crying so hard. Many nights she would come to my bedroom (I don't know whether she came because she heard me crying or because Moms just have a sense for those sorts of things or because she was crying too and when two people are crying about the same thing at the same time, they instinctively go to each other) and tell me that it wouldn't be like this forever, but that didn't help me much because pain in the present makes it hard to imagine a time when things won't hurt.

The leaves changed to hints of reds and oranges that year and the one after that and the one after that. The trees haven't changed yet this year, but I'm sure I'll still feel the same way.

[CHICAGO, IL]

It was still dark when I awoke. You had gone. My eyes wouldn't open, but I could sense your absence the way flowers sense the sunrise.

Je n'avais pas de peur, mais je savais que quelque chose n'allait pas.

The fluorescence bled through the cracks around the door, crawled across the room and tapped my face. It drew back suddenly and your feet crushed 100 dust mites in the carpet.

When you crawled under the sheets and into my arms, he was there too, sitting on the ridge of your now hunched spine.

"Why did you bring him here?"

"He wanted to come."

I do not like sharing you.

The fluorescence woke again, though I knew not how, and I felt as though I was looking at everything through eyeglass lenses of canvas and oil paint. The white sheets were grey in the light of the moon, whose beams were the only thing gentle enough to cut through the heavy material and caked pigment over my pupils. I still could not see him, but my conscience was sensitive and I so felt his demonity tucked behind your pillow.

I do not know what he looked like or why he came, but you slept peacefully with your camel's spine at his face, so I knew he mustn't have been there on your account.

Like an ageless mammal with proportionate wings, my demon stayed until the sunlight lifted the hotel room's peintre off of my eyes and back onto the wall.

If there had been flowers in the street, they would've raised their petaled faces to the morning.

“The obscure we see eventually. The completely
obvious, it seems, takes longer.”

Edward R. Murrow

Dana DiPalo

Vintage Vegan

When my parents' conversion van sailed off the highway and into depths of Virginia's densest woods, I couldn't help but feel a little bit excited.

Sometimes I think about the warm afternoon when I skipped high school and went to the Indigo Diner with my mom. Something about the way they printed "extraaaaa chocolate chips" on our receipt when I ordered pancakes continuously brought us back in. But this afternoon was different. My mom and I did not loosely talk about sex and the elderly waitress with the thick Russian accent informed me, "Vee hoff no chocolate cheeps to-day."

After ordering a tremendous heap of steak fries and a sprinkled chocolate milkshake, my mom looked me in the eye and said, "Your father and I wrote our will a few days ago." I can't help but noticing how beautiful my mother is. She's probably the only woman I know who has naturally blonde hair around here. She's hard-working, respectable and never goes more than a few hours without cursing. People often mistake us for sisters because of our close age and the lewd conversations that we tend to engage in.

"Why?! You're not fuckin' old!" My obscene outburst grabs the attention of nearby guests and swerves me into a childish giggle that leaves my mother looking surprisingly hurt. Head hung and eyebrows knit together in a crochet of skin, she replies, "You know that in the event of something happening to both your father and I, we would have nobody else to leave anything to."

It pains me to be reminded of the fact that the only family I know outside of my home either abandoned us or is dead.

Before I can dig into the soggiest looking french fry on my thick blue plate, I notice that they're overcooked and that the

plate is chipped on the upper right side of the rim. My mother continues, "So god forbid that day should come, everything would be yours. Everything from the house to our insurance money, the cars and your two brothers."

It has been three years since my parents died on the side of Route 95 and I can only hope that it was less painful than what my brothers and I have been going through. After the initial grief subsided and things slowly came together in what became our new life, I felt content. I quit college seeing as I had to serve as both parents to my two younger brothers. My part-time job became obsolete and I took up full-time activities such as cleaning, cooking and shopping for things like yams and boys' underwear. No one really helped me out, aside from my cold, business savvy grandfather who took care of the complicated financial transactions. However, he thankfully lived over five-hundred miles away. I was free to live the way I wanted to in the life that I was re-building for the three of us.

Although our new life was far from normal, we began to adapt to and enjoy our situation. I constructed a life for us that made neighbors and my grandfather roll their eyes. After trekking through homework and studying, I allowed the boys to have their friends over all week long. We shared in hand painting the basement, a project that was in the making at the time of my parents' death. My boyfriend moved in, serving as the fatherly role that my brothers could not get enough of. The weekends were filled with day trips up to the mountains and down to the sea. Despite the judgement of others, my brothers succeeded in school and when we weren't embarking on pitching a tent in

the backyard or buying yet another reptile, we were doing the “right” thing.

For two years, I felt like I was living a dream. Then, something began to tug at me from within. Before my parents' death, I was a successful college student on the dean's list who had high hopes of going for a master's degree and possibly a Ph.D. I evaluated the life I had been living for the past two years and came to find that something needed to change. Dead or alive, I wanted to make my parents proud. It was time to start making something of myself other than a 21-year-old parent to 10 and 12-year-old boys

It's a few hours past orange dawn now and I have just sent my brothers off to the first day of their new school. We relocated to Pennsylvania about a year ago. Our new house is everything we could ever want in a home. The front yard is littered with toy guns and daisies. Our driveway extends about an eighth of a mile from the two lane dirt road named “Henry's Lake Road”. A few weeks ago, all three of the boys thought it would be nice to scratch the “ry's” off of the rusting metal sign. Now I live on “Hen Lake Road” which doesn't bother my avian obsessed self a bit. The backyard houses a crimson wood coop where my chickens, pigeons and turkeys are free to come and go.

Inside of the house is furnished with my growing 1960's/70's art collection and various pieces of vintage furniture. I was never one for new things. My brothers have decorated their new rooms with wrinkled video game posters and cut-out pictures of tree frogs and snakes. Our kitchen is overflowing with wrought iron pots, vegan cookbooks and pictures of our parents. One of my

favorite pictures hangs alongside my famous recipe for pumpkin chocolate chip cupcakes with the cinnamon icing. It's of my parents on our old front stoop. They were on the way to my mother's high school reunion and a candid shot caught them kissing while my mom playfully grabbed my father's behind. They were always so promiscuous and the only parents I knew that still said "I love you!" at the end of every phone call.

Not long after my boyfriend leaves to take my brothers to school, I get dressed for my first day of work. I settle on decrepit skinny jeans from high school and a Woodstock shirt that has the neckline hastily cut-off. As I'm slipping into my sneakers, I grab the apron that my mother used to wear whenever she was cooking a holiday meal. She would tie the knot, slap her behind and playfully grunt, "Do I look *sexyyy*?" What a riot. It's absolutely hideous, threaded with an array of auburn roses and questionable stains. I take it nonetheless; I'll need it today.

The drive down Hen Lake Road is serene. "Pale Blue Eyes" by The Velvet Underground is seeping out of my tape deck and the crusty yellow leaves are hanging like tinsel from the wind. I'm nervous. All along the dirt road, I take in the country mansions, trailers and the golden deer. It's a good few miles before I hit the highway. I take only three exits before I get to Frampton's Lane, stuck behind a green, lumpy tractor the entire time.

Frampton's Lane is a quaint road that caters to the needs of the wealthier part of town. On it you can find "Miss Penelope's Stained Glass", a shop that in essence sells nothing but fancy lamps with bugs and flowers on them. Next to "Penelope's" is "Country Jewelry", an antique jewelry shop that has been run by Mr. and Mrs. Harvey "since before Pennsylvania even became a darn state!". But if stained glass and old necklaces aren't your

thing, then you can skip over those shops and go to “Das Ferris Wheel”, a large store specializing in the importation of German toys for the children of wealthy parents. It always smells like unfinished wood and blueberry scones in there.

The short tour leads me to the parking lot with daisy filled flowers pots scattered amongst the perimeter. I pull my car into the nearest spot and slowly pull the key out of the ignition. The store has a wooden face and big orange flowers dangling near the door. The windows are covered from the inside with curtains more like old army blankets than anything else. Outside, a few mismatching rocking chairs and tables are set-up for those who wish to enjoy the fresh mountain air. The shiny metal letters stand bold and curvy: “Vintage Vegan”. My head sinks back into the headrest of the driver’s seat and I allow myself three minutes to reflect before the store gets unlocked.

My parents always wanted to see me make something of myself. It was their dream to see me be a boss and to be doing something that made *me* happy.

I have been building Vintage Vegan since before we even moved to Pennsylvania. Sure, I didn’t finish college or end up teaching in a classroom. But instead, I opened the only vegan bakery within a 57-mile radius and I can only hope that my mother and father would be proud.

It’s 8:59 AM. I’m trembling as I step out of my old, green Buick and take the eleven steps to the front door. My “Hippies Welcome!” sign greets me as I push the brass key into the keyhole. It fits. I turn it. I go inside.

The air is dark and sweet. It smells of chocolate chip pancakes and Virginia’s densest woods.

"We are more often treacherous through
weakness than through calculation."

Francois De La Rochefoucauld

Kevin Macaluso

Alone

"Evacuate, Scott? Are you serious?"

"Benny, everyone here is packing up and getting outta this shithole," Scott locked his hands behind his head and leaned back. "What the hell are we going to do? Are we just going to stay here?" Scott looked away from his older brother to scan the disheveled grocery store. The once beautiful and colorful flower section was shriveled and wilted.

"Precisely! Think about it, man. It's just going to be the two of us in this whole store. We would have all these supplies and food to ourselves. There are plenty of places for stuff around here too. We could easily ride this thing out, man. It's New York City, for Chrissakes."

It was Benny's idea to head uptown, of course. A middle school science teacher before the outbreak, every plan of action seemed to be his, and he had become the *de facto* leader of the group of eleven refugees hiding in the abandoned supermarket. He figured it would have enough resources to last them until the government and the army got things under control. Manhattan had to be a top priority on their list, or so he thought.

The undead knocked on the windows and doors frantically. Someone peeked out long enough to see two men desperate for a place to stay.

"And now they're leaving," Scott said. "Listen, who's to say we'll be any safer out of the city? We would have to travel along with all the other refugees. Those are desperate people. I rather take my chances with the damn undead out here. At least they're predictable. Those people will kill you for supplies in the blink of a god damn eye!"

"We got fucking lucky with this group and you know it! It was the most peaceful two weeks since the outbreaks started."

"I guess it's their choice."

"Correction...it's their loss," Benny pounded the table with his fist. "We'll live relatively nicely until all this undead shit gets cleared up."

"You really think it's going to be that easy?" Scott was still unsure of his brother's plan.

The rest of the group was packing what they could.

"Why wouldn't it be? No one else will know we're down here and we'll have enough food to last a lifetime. The only thing is if they cut the water supply we're going to have to make the bottled water we do have last."

"We already don't have warm water. Do you think they'll stop the water?" Scott asked hesitantly not wanting to hear the answer, but as always he looked to his big brother. After all, he was always the smarter one.

"Scott, this fucking smell is unbearable, man,"

"Then close your legs."

"Good one, jackass. Seriously, what the hell is that smell?"

"Well, it could be the thousands of decomposing corpses outside or it could be all this organic food rotting away in here. Take your pick."

The brothers walked by the fruit displays and looked at all the fruit which was once bright and vibrant, now was brown and foul.

"Why are these damn flies everywhere?" Scott asked.

"Once again, take your pick, the undead or the—"

"Fruit, I know, but there's gotta be some bug spray or shit in here." He gazed absently across the large market.

"Don't you think someone else would have had that idea already? They haven't been here that much longer than us, but

enough time that someone would get ticked off by these friggin' flies. We have to take care all the rotting food."

"Well, how long do you think the freezers can stay the way they are?" Scott asked. The freezers had been condensed and only a few used. All the ice that was there when the first group arrived had been put that small portion. They packed it full of all the meat they possibly could find within the store. It was clear they valued the meat over all other foods. He doubted the current state of the freezers, but considering there was no electricity it held up as well as anyone could've hoped for. Benny and Scott walked up the escalators to the doors.

"So you guys are really just going to stay here?" asked Marge, a middle-aged Russian woman, her hair short and messy.

"Yeah, we'll be just fine," Benny replied.

"I really hope so. You always did have that sense of humor, from the second you two walked in that door." Marge placed her hand on her head. "You did hear the evacuation calls right?"

"How could you not? I hope you're safe, Marge. Remember, safety first." Marge and the others said their goodbyes. They took one last look at their makeshift shanty town, their home for the past two weeks, and they were gone. Once the doors shut it was only the brothers left in there.

"Let's move this shit back and then do something with the damn fruit," Ben said.

We're really alone now, Ben thought. It took the two men two hours to pile back up the goods against the front doors. Sweating, they threw back warm, expired beers and contemplated their next move.

"So you come up with a disposal plan for the damn fruit stinkin' up this joint?" asked Scott.

"We could try to burn all of it, but I don't know what kind of smell that would put out," offered Benny.

"And we would have to use lighter fluid, and we need that shit," Scott said. "Or we could try to dump it somewhere."

"There's no, like, sinkhole or boiler room that leads to the sewers or anything in here somewhere, is there?" Benny paused for a second.

"Well, we could drop it in the sewers outside."

"I'll deal with the smell. It's not worth it to go out there."

"It'll be quick, they won't even notice us. We'll empty out the crates and put as much fruit as we can in there and then just dump it and get back in here quick. It shouldn't take longer than five minutes."

"Well, I guess you're right let's just get this shit outta here. I can't take this smell and most of all the damn flies."

Benny and Scott place the rotten fruit in the crates and hauled them up the escalator.

"Oh, crap. Now we have to move all this shit again? Can't we just leave it here? It's far away it won't smell so bad."

"It has to go soon. It's creating CO₂ and a lot of it."

"Don't we need that to live though?"

"Yeah, some Scott, but as time goes by it will produce more and more. We don't have a steady flow of oxygen into here either. Next thing you know we'll be in a state of acidosis. We won't be able to function properly."

"Huh, don't get all Mr. Scientist on me."

"Well, simply it has to go."

Scott and Benny worked for a while to clear a path once again. It

hadgrown dark and they grew tired.

"Ben, I know you said this stuff got to go, but can't we wait for morning at least? You know it's dangerous out there in the dark. You can't see those damn things sneaking up. Remember what almost happened to Big Larry when he went outside to try to seal the shattered glass?"

Benny gave Scott the are-you-kidding-me look.

"Scott, we just worked for what had to have been over an hour to clear this stuff and you want to stop now? Besides we can't leave the doors like this overnight. Who knows what we'll wake up to?"

"But it is dark, Ben."

"So less chance that they'll see us, come on now."

This is not smart, Scott thought. He knew it wasn't the best option, but his brother never steered him wrong in the past.

"Alright, Scott, run out there and open the sewer cap. Here take this," He handed Scott a small, sharp piece of iron they had found in the maintenance room. "You'll be able to pry it open with this and I'll run the fruit over there and drop it."

"Why do I have to be the one that goes out there first? Huh, smartass? It's your plan. You go," Scott pushed the piece of iron back into Benny's chest.

"Because you're stronger and could get it open quickly," Benny knew his brother was right, but had to divert.

"I'm not buying it this time. I always do everything. We should just wait until morning."

"We're right here and there's only a few walkers in sight. It won't be hard. If you really want me to go first I'll go, but you better be quick with the fruit," Benny said, knowing his younger brother would cave.

"Whatever, I'll do the damn sewer cap," Scott reluctantly took the piece of iron and gripped it tightly.

"Alright, good, you see it? It's to the left," Ben pointed in the direction. "Shit, I can barely see it."

"Barely, I'm not sure." He couldn't make out anything, straining to make out the dark sewer cap. "Alright, take the machete, the pipe and a crate with you."

"I only have two hands, you know?"

"Really?" Benny put his palm on his forehead. "Put the pipe and the machete in the crate and walk on over there."

"You just have all the answers don't you?"

Benny certainly thought he did. "Well, actually yeah, pretty much. Come on make this quick, we have to move this stuff back and then get some shuteye."

Scott gathered his bundle and Ben held the door open for him.

"Be quick, Scott."

Scott's pace was slow, but deliberate. The undead had not noticed him yet. As he approached the sewer cap, he fumbled the crate and the pipe fell out with a loud ringing *clank*.

"Shit, come on, don't notice him," Benny whispered to himself. His hands were shaking so violently he could barely hold the door open. Suddenly, before he could even get the sewer open, saw them all at once.

"Scott hurry up! They're coming!" Benny was panicking.

"Shut up, I almost got it!" Scott screamed.

A large swarm of undead had gathered. Their moans were thunderous. Benny screamed, panicked.

"Fuck the fruit, leave it, RUN!"



THE END

FEATURING

John Clinton
Elmira Elvazova
Kevin Macaluso
Mindy Mallis

Emily Peters
Sundas Nazir
Annie Breen
Zara Kittel

Joseph Pentangelo
Michael Dalessio
Dana DiPalo
And others

POETRY
FICTION
PHOTOGRAPHY

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