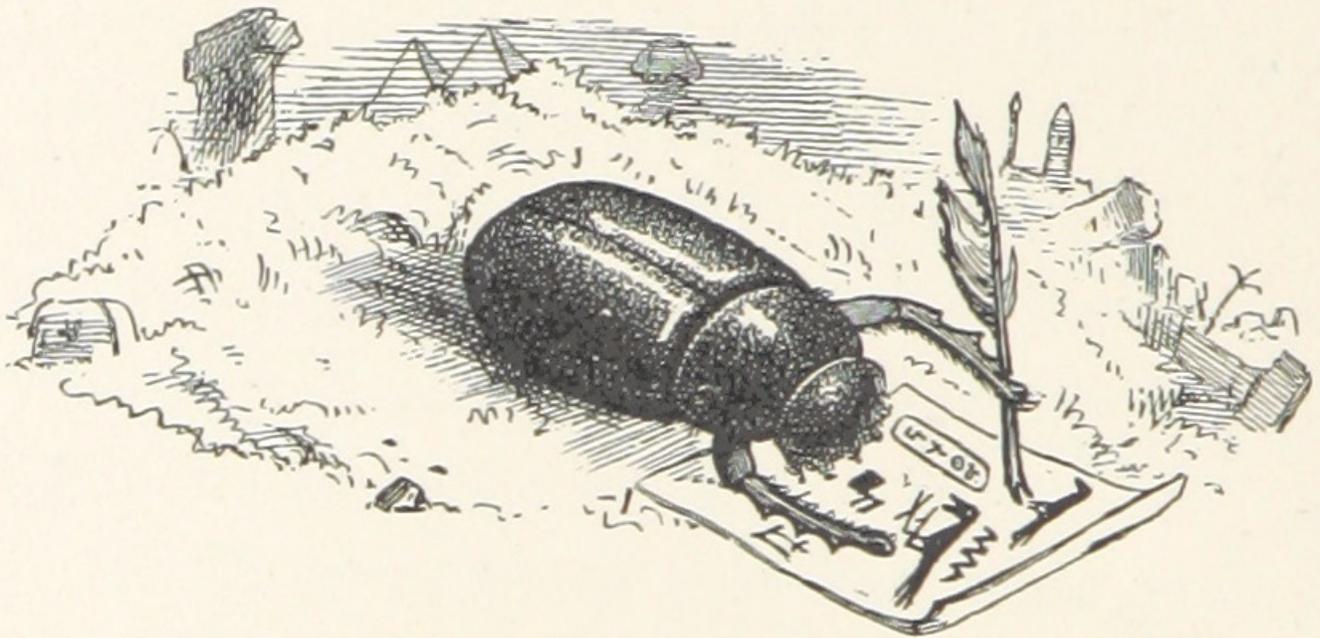


SHIRLEY

ISSUE THREE

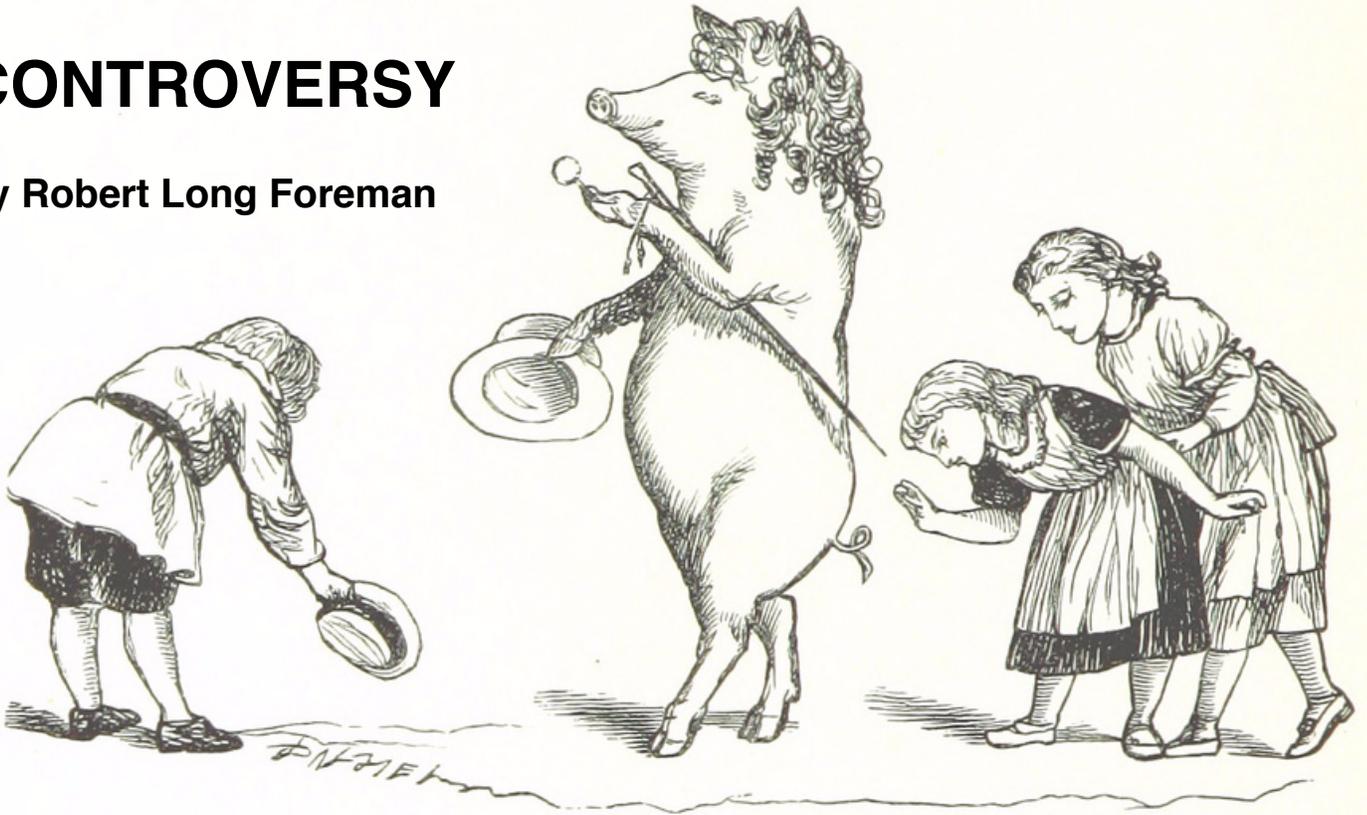


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DECEMBER 2015

CONTROVERSY

by Robert Long Foreman



Weird Pig could handle a lot of things. Controversy was not one of them.

When word got around on the farm that Weird Pig was sleeping with a woman named Sweater, while apartment-sitting for a friend in the city, the animals could not keep quiet.

I heard she has scabies, said a cow.

I heard she has rabies, said a sheep.

I understand this young lady is not from the continental United States, said Abe the Horse.

Is her name really Sweater, asked a duck who was only on the farm for a day. He was on his way south for the winter. What kind of a name is Sweater? he said.

Weird Pig knew they were talking. He heard about what they were saying, secondhand. Whenever he came around, they would hush up and pretend they hadn't been talking at all, which never works.

Not that there was much to say, really. The romance between Sweater and Weird Pig had lasted all of an afternoon. By the time her name was spoken on the farm by the animals, Weird Pig wasn't even thinking of her anymore.

They said she wore an eyepatch, which was true. They said she'd been married three times by the time Weird Pig met her—which may have been true. Weird Pig had not asked her if or how many times she'd been married. Lots of people get divorced, though. Who cares, thought Weird Pig. Who cares about that.

On a Monday night, Weird Pig stumbled home drunk to find an empty blue sweater across his front door, nailed there so that if he opened the door he would have to tear the sleeves, or else first remove the sweater and in that way take ownership of it, acknowledge it by his touch.

Did Weird Pig, they wondered, believe in God? Did he believe in war and peace? What did he think of what was happening on the Korean peninsula? So much suffering there. Did he think about free will and fate? What about faith?

They talked and talked, and soon Weird Pig found across his door a scarecrow who had on yet another sweater. He was made of brooms and straw, with a grinning pumpkin for a head.

The sweater was pink this time. Did it mean something? Weird Pig wondered this on his way to the garbage to throw away the scarecrow, sweater and all.

He ate the pumpkin. No point throwing that away.

Weird Pig went to the cemetery, to commune with his elders, to meet them and their bones. This controversy, he said. It follows me. I hear it walking behind me with every step, and yet it maketh no sound. The people talk. The animals talk.

The bones did not respond. If they could have, they might have said, That's life, Weird Pig. Get used to the obloquy.

When he was younger, Weird Pig never thought he would turn out to be the kind of person who talked to the bones of his elders. He thought it was something people did only in movies and on TV. He thought it looked dumb, when they did it. It's just bones you're talking to, he thought. They can't talk back.

Then people started dying: his parents, his brother, his friends. All succumbed to heroin addiction. Soon Weird Pig was alone in the world.

For all the talk about Weird Pig that went on all around him, he had no one to talk to—to really talk to. So he became one of those pigs who talks to ghosts at cemeteries.

Finally—when all the controversy got to him so that he thought he couldn't take it anymore, Weird Pig went to see a professional, a licensed therapist with a PhD in clinical psychology. He mentioned the controversy, but he told her about himself in general, like how he liked to sink down into the good, soft mud, where everyone could see him. It wasn't the same, he said, if no one was watching.

Why is that? asked Therapist Jane.

Oh, said Weird Pig. I don't know. I never wondered why.

Maybe now is the time to start wondering.

Yeah. You could be right. Wait. You mean right now?

Yes, precisely.

Oh. I can think of some reasons for it.

Go ahead.

For one? Things are always better when you have company.

Everything?

Yeah.

Why is this one of them?

Great question. Because everyone loves mud?

There's no correct answer here, Weird Pig. We're just feeling this out.

Okay. Maybe I just can't stand to be alone. Like, when I'm alone I feel like I'm drowning and dying.

Jane paused and wrote something down, on her leatherbound legal pad. She had to turn to the side to do it, turning away from Weird Pig. She wrote with one hand, and held the other one up so he couldn't see what she was writing. You're getting warmer, Weird Pig, she said. You're not there yet, so I'll offer you a shortcut. A lifeline. I'm diagnosing you with exhibitionism.

Exhibitiowhat?

Exhibitionism. Opposite of voyeurism. You like being watched.

I didn't know that had an opposite.

It does.

Or, I always thought the opposite of voyeurism would be that you hate to watch other people have sex.

No, it means you like to be watched. You like voyeurs to come down and take a look.

I don't know, though. Mud's not sex.

Mud is not sex. That's correct, Weird Pig. But it doesn't have to be sex per se for you to get off, for it to be a symptom of exhibitionism. It's how your aberration works.

Wait. What?

What's wrong?

Did you just call it an aberration?

I'm sorry: disease. Think of it that way. It's a mental disease—in your head.

Oh my god.

It's a glitch. A mistake, and one that can be corrected. You don't want to live like this any longer than you have to. Do you? I didn't think so. You don't want to have to have an audience, in order to enjoy sitting—let's see here, she said, quoting—sinking down into the good, soft mud. She looked at Weird Pig with her eyebrows arched.

But, said Weird Pig, I don't always need to have an audience.

But it's not the same, if you don't have one. Admit it.

That's true. It's not the same.

Weird Pig was dazed—overwhelmed.

This is what I'll do, said Jane, writing again. I'm writing you a script for two forms of medication.

Okay.

I am so glad to hear you say that, she said, stopping and looking up again. You would not believe how many people come to me for this diagnosis and have no interest in helping themselves. In curing themselves!

That's wild.

It is. It really is. She nodded vigorously. Here are your prescriptions. This one is for the first pill, which you'll take five times a day. It's a kind of sedative-stimulant. A mood regulator.

Why do I need that?

Great question. You need it because the other medication is a mood ruiner, a shot you'll be giving yourself with a four-inch needle. It sounds bad, but it isn't that bad. You'll stick it right into your little pig belly—or get a friend to help, since your parents and brother are dead. You'll inject yourself three times a day.

My god.

Weird Pig, listen, said the therapist, her hands now on Weird Pig's knees. Cures are never easy. They are always hard, especially when they're still at animal trial stages like this one is. You need to be cured. This syndrome must be rooted out before it spreads.

Spreads?

What?

How does it spread?

How does it spread. Okay.

It's not a virus. It's not like I have the flu.

You're right. It's not like you have the flu. But listen. What if a child learns that Weird Pig is an exhibitionist? Weird Pig! We're not talking about any pig. We're talking about a pig—yes, admit it—a pig who serves as a role model to many children. Does your acceptance of exhibitionism not indicate, to a child, that there isn't anything wrong with it? Isn't it something like condoning a behavior, when a hero to children like yourself, a beloved character they've let into their homes and hearts, accepts into his life a certain behavior and says publicly that there's nothing wrong with it?

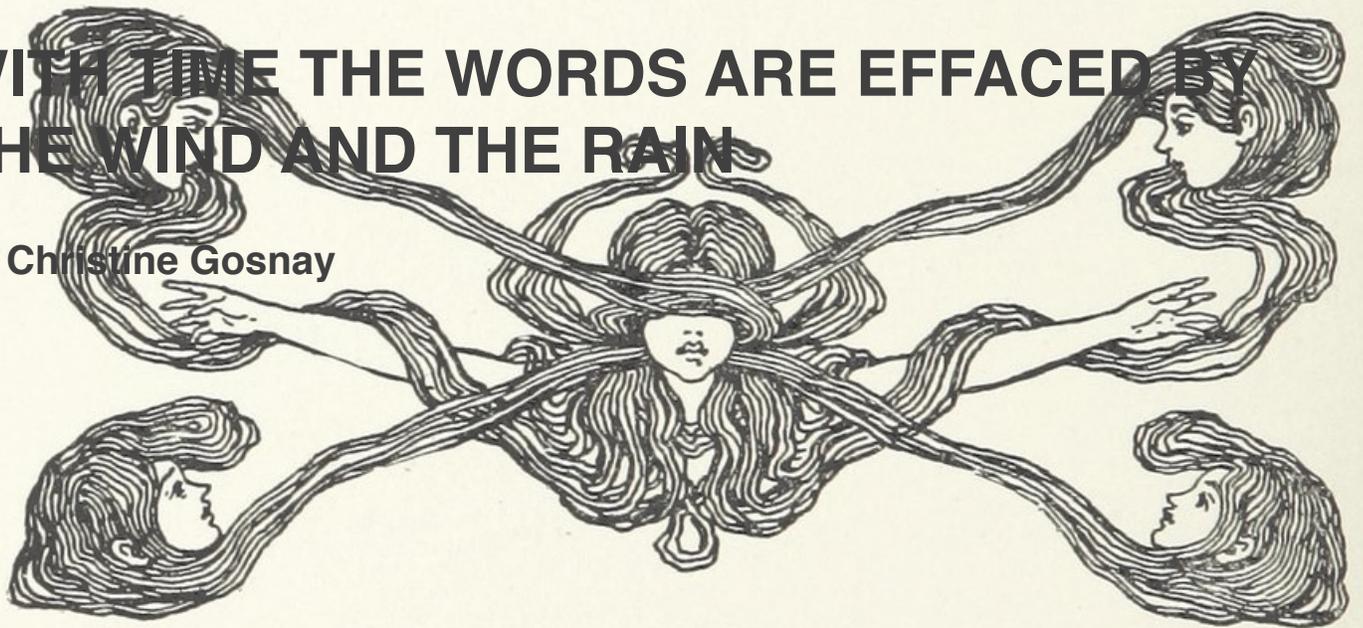
Weird Pig broke down. He cried for four minutes.

The medications—both of them—were enormous successes after Weird Pig took them for the prescribed six months. Throughout that trial, Weird Pig had no interest in sinking down into the soft, good mud, no matter whether anyone was watching.

Eventually, though, he stopped taking both medications and enjoyed the mud again, though not without a newfound sense of shame and guilt that somehow, in an unlikely way, made it a little bit sweeter.

WITH TIME THE WORDS ARE EFFACED BY THE WIND AND THE RAIN

by Christine Gosnay



I don't want to have a face anymore. Without a face, my personality will improve; the face-less me is a promiscuous, reliable young woman who exercises and dresses before six in the morning. She curtails her appetite between the hours of four p.m. and ten p.m., and she uses bookmarks, and she opens the mail. She takes care in organizing her drawers and uses eggs before they expire. She owns a hammer that she never even swings. She cleans the baseboards out of a sense of duty. She waits to have children. She employs a sex toy and applies lotion to her elbows. She washes her bedspread. She eats lean meats and has never speared a block of cheese on a knife and "worked on it."

On some days I am foolishly convinced the potential me is a nascent me. I go around with a rictus, with my face looking smug and pleased, rubbing my elbows with cold, smooth hands until I remember, until I pass a clean window or a waxed black car.

I won't have a face. I will rub it off until what is left is only two eyes. My eyes are good. The problem is with my eyelids, my forehead, my eyebrows, my nose, my cheeks, my nostrils, my chin, my teeth, my jaw, my temples, and to a lesser extent my lips. I may keep my lips. I will keep my tongue so that I can taste and pronounce blue curaçao when, without my face, I go out for drinks with young, optimistic friends. I will keep my philtrum, in order to sense my own sweat when I run.

The problem is not with the constituent parts. The problem is with narrow angles and shadows that produce an air of hesitance and anger. The narrow angles make me invisible and the shadows obscure my voice. I don't want to have a voice anymore. My voice is indecent. My laughter is obscene. My ghastly voice barrels down a hill in a soap box derby car. When I get rid of my voice, my neck will improve. It will be rendered swanlike. Without a voice and without a face I will radiate the impression of

an arrogant swan in every room I enter. Swan means to sing, or to sound. I've never heard a swan make a noise. Like the swan, I will be a fraud. I will glide and stare.

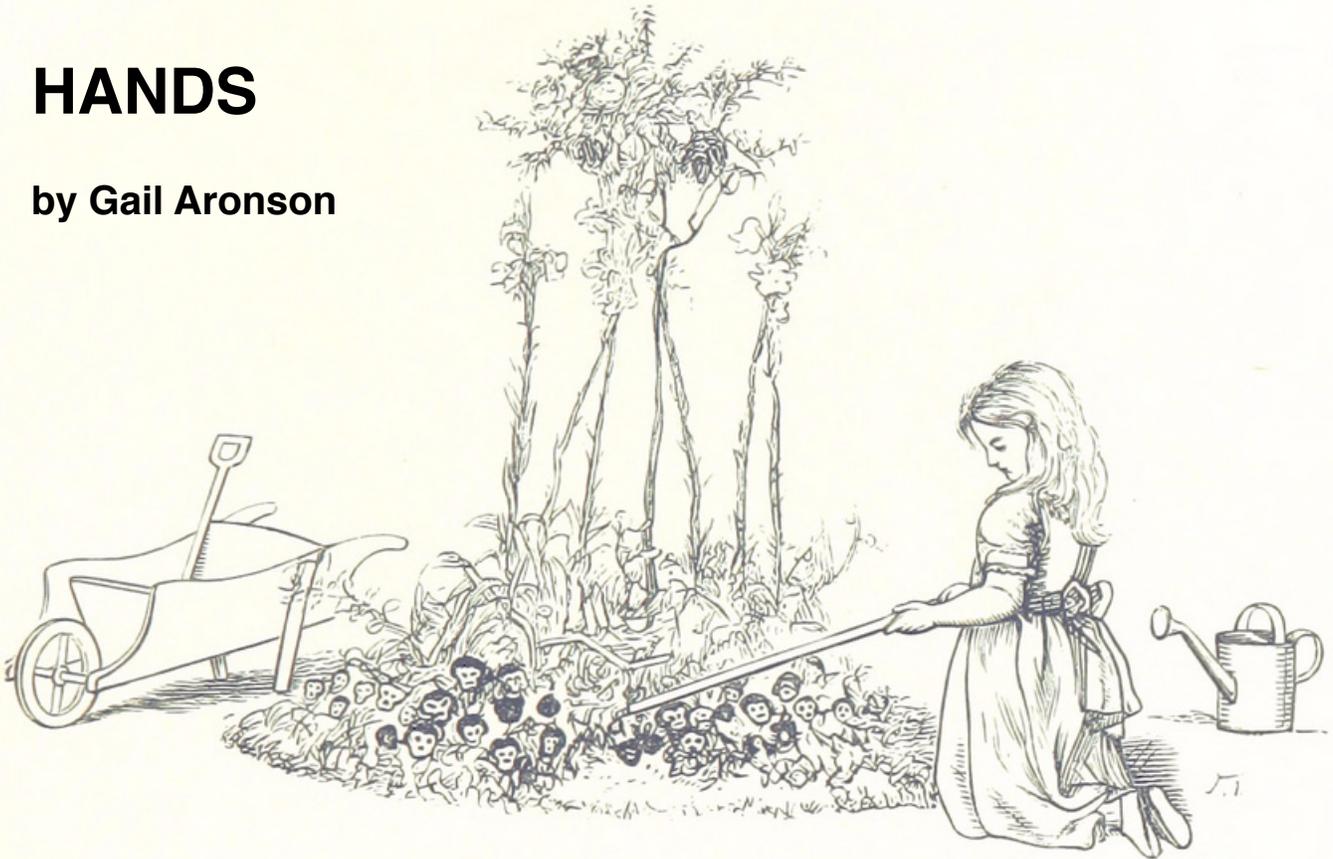
There is a problem with my hair, because it is so close to my face. The problem is with the texture and the color. My hair is hard and grey, and drab, like the inside of a refrigerator. I soak it in thick solutions the color of turpentine. After an hour my hair turns the color of the hardwood floor, close to the color of a library carrel like it used to be. But my hair will have to go. The smell of the solution gives me unpleasant dreams about dissection. And when my hair is in a high ponytail and I slide my palm and fingers under the band and feel the size and aspect of my head I am shocked. I will replace my hair with something that makes it impossible for me to feel the curvature of my skull.

I want to keep the scar on my nose and the scar on my temple. I want to open a box of Magic Erasers and throw them into the air like Mary Tyler Moore. And then I want to get to work. I will bend over and pick up the Magic Erasers and replace them in the box, except for one. I will wet the corner of this eraser under lukewarm water in the sink, and start removing my face, being careful to preserve the eyes, the philtrum, exactly the lips, the scar on the temple, the scar on my nose.

I should not do this in front of a mirror. I will do it in the shower with my back to the water, out of respect, and so that I can wash the melamine foam from the Magic Eraser off of my skin more easily, melamine foam which has a component of formaldehyde. That's a tremendous word to pronounce, like *curaçao*, or *philtrum*. My personality will soon improve. I will stop repeating words that make it possible for me to feel the curvature of time. I will run miles in the dark. I will scrub the baseboards until they shine like bone.

HANDS

by Gail Aronson



Maysun planted her stepmother's collection of ceramic hands in the backyard, and after not much time at all her stepmother's real hands transformed into something earthen, unruly.

It was just the two of them in their house, in a subdivision where all the houses were the same. The streets were connected and spiraled out from each other. All the different streets were also the same. They were each named some variation of Pine: Pine Street, Pine Terrace, Pine Circle, Pine Avenue, Pine Street 2, and so on. Much as their neighborhood was usual, it was also quite unusual. Just as a tree reaches up to the sky, the children in their houses would grow taller, wearier. And with growth comes change, an eventual ending.

Maysun and her stepmother lived on Pine Circle 3. There were no pine trees or streetlights but a splattering of window lights that made Maysun feel as though she was never alone. Her father had died earlier that year. They had buried him in the woods because he did not want his body filled with chemicals but he especially did not want to be burned. Maysun remembered the conversation she was not supposed to hear through the thin the walls. I don't want anything done to me resembling what men do to each other. Maysun's father spoke like a character in one of her storybooks, very grownup and wise. Her stepmother had since spent long hours washing dishes and staring into the backyard from the window above the kitchen sink but was often not

home at all. She was not a bad stepmother, but so quiet. So gone. She was also the only mother Maysun had ever known. Her biological mother had already been buried deep into the earth of a faraway country where Maysun had been born. Immediately after her death they moved away, before she could ever place it, remember it.

*

To begin, Maysun dug holes in the dirt with her own fingers down deep to scoop spots for her stepmother's hands throughout the large back lot. As she dug, she could feel her own bones to the touch, blue veins visible and vulnerable in the bright afternoon. Bones so pronounced came as a surprise to her—she felt soft to herself. Doctors told her she was obese. They didn't tell her but she saw it on her father's computer one night when he had fallen asleep from his meds, still logged into their streamlined insurance company website where you can refill pills with a click and have them delivered in three business days. Ongoing conditions: obesity. Maysun had never considered her own body a condition. She said it over and over to herself: a condition. It sounded like a world problem she would hear about on the news. Outside, she considered her blue veins and how they deceived her, since they held red blood, and wondered if the sky itself could be red. Could be red or blue or invisible in the vastness of outer space. Out there, as she planted, her own hands appeared as unfamiliar alien limbs or as a creature in a deep layer of ocean made of mostly jaw and light. Hands began to lose all meaning.

*

They had both become collectors. Her stepmother took her to dollar stores, stopped at curbsides on garbage day. Maysun chose scented candles with sparkles, candles in the shapes of squirrels or owls while her stepmother bought the necessary household items, the disinfectant sprays and the paper towels. Her stepmother didn't say much because she didn't know what to say, ever, but to Maysun especially. When she did speak, she grumbled slowly, though not unkindly, and even though she spoke to Maysun as if she were a child and she was on the precipice of puberty, her words were comforting. She wouldn't look at Maysun when she spoke to her — she would keep her eyes and her hands on shelved items, practical items to care for Maysun and at the house they shared. Come here dear, her stepmother would say in the dollar store. Shouldn't we be off, then? and off they would go, to the curbs.

Her stepmother found her first hand on the side of the road. It peeked out of a cardboard box alongside empty glass bottles, the tips of its fingers poking up in unison, waiting to be found. Maysun's stepmother reached her own fingers down, grabbed the statue by its wrist, then placed its stand on the surface of her upturned

hand as if waitressing a plate. The ceramic had no wrinkled indents to be seen, smoothly surfaced fingers that curved ever so slightly into a narrow, gloss-pinked palm. Her stepmother sniffled from the windy day, cleared her throat and said, look! Maysun felt unease. The hand was too perfect, so unlike herself or any other hand she had encountered. She noticed her stepmother's own hands and their prominent veins, how her arm and veins traced all the way up to the ceramic placed at its ending point, her hand.

For months to follow, her stepmother acquired new hands that waved themselves inside gradually, held themselves open as balloons lined up on the living room mantel. The hands were various skin tones, and the one pink hand, the first of the collection was the least detailed, the most doll-like. They each rested on a square base, reaching up with fingers slightly apart, not quite welcoming or expectant. Just there. Maysun held her own hand against the others until she found a skin that matched hers, the skins cold and too small and curved to fit evenly palm to palm. The matching hand had carved nail beds and wrinkles at the knuckles, an oversimplified three lines on the palm. Dollar store necklaces dangled from their fingers. The necklaces tangled together under the open palms, turned green against Maysun's neck when she wore them.

*

Before digging so she could bury the hands and watch them grow, Maysun decided to hold a séance with them in the living room. The living room was dark and carpeted and always smelled too sweet. A mixture of rasberry scented candles and carpet cleaner. Maysun couldn't understand why it smelled like carpet cleaner but the carpet was never clean. The television stayed on often. Infomercials and soaps played, whatever her stepmother watched while drinking caffeine free diet sodas and staring at the ceiling, sniffing and mumbling. She didn't spend time with the other children who lived on the Pine streets, and she had always wanted to try this. She saw it in a movie once — a lonely girl with no home joined a coven and held an entire conversation with her mother who had been killed by evildoers. Maysun had never conducted a séance before, so she searched how to conduct a seance on her stepmother's computer and found a list of steps.

Maysun knew she wanted to contact her father, but she had to wait until her stepmother was away. She had to wait what seemed like all night, until her stepmother left the living room and the infomercials continued. When she heard the bedroom door click, she went downstairs and got started. Since she couldn't bring her stepmother's computer with her, she had to try to remember the steps, the first of which was to choose who you want to contact, the next of which to set the mood and to gather in a circle.

Maysun watched the blonde woman on the screen wearing short shorts and a high cut shirt, smiling out as she spooned strawberries into a miracle blender. Maysun wondered whether or not she wanted to be her. A blonde woman with bright-sky blank eyes who can smile while doing another task entirely. Maysun lit candles and placed them across the coffee table. Between the candles, the hands, and now a new vacuuming blonde woman that looked very much like the strawberry blending one, they formed a circle together, a circle of matted down carpet stained with soda and burnt rice.

They could not hold hands but they were holding hands on the inside, which is what matters. It was easy to turn the mantel hands to face each other, but the fingertips did not connect and become one like the Pine streets. She changed infomercial channels to the jewelry network, and designated the straight-toothed smiling woman adorned in jewels to be her medium. The medium stood tall and held her chin up to display a gold chain that did not stain her neck, ready to welcome spirits into the circle. Though Maysun was the one who needed to do the speaking, she imagined her voice belonged to the woman on the screen, instead. She knew she needed to chant in order to summon the spirits, to make them hear her. Closing her eyes and imagining herself as the woman on the screen, she repeated, we welcome you. Although this is all that she said, she thought very hard about her father and the ground and inside she could feel something empty and powerful as wind, the winding back and forth of her breath and beating heart and all of her inner longing spirit she could not possibly identify within her small, candle-lit life.

First try, the spirits were rude, were not her father at all. They made their presence known by ruining the circle. The hands jumped and hopped as if playing on an invisible playground, hopscotching on invisible chalk and jumping an invisible rope. Maysun wasn't sure if these were spirits or the hands themselves until she heard them laughing. They laughed as schoolchildren do, voices tangled together like vines. Maysun thanked them for their presence and asked them politely to leave.

Next, the medium waved her hands to display a bracelet dangling with animal charms. The owls glowed and the sweet raspberry plastic scents sparkled and the medium waved, but the spirits ceased. Perhaps the spirits stayed within the hands before she planted them, but this Maysun would never know, for the voices were gone.

Maysun remembered from the steps that the most important part of a séance is that you must wait. Must be patient. Must keep trying.

They kept trying. She kept trying. Maysun had many questions and no one to answer.

Finally, the medium with her jewelry became the morning news and the raspberry scent from the candle was so strong that Maysun vomited into the circle. The color of the carpet changed from murky brown to greener, burnt earth tones but

Maysun knew that it was just the scrambled eggs she had been making her and her stepmother for dinner and fruit juice and microwaved peas.

The final step was to discuss your experiences but Maysun left the hands turned towards each other, left the candles burned down to circles of wax on their plates, and scrubbed the carpet in silence. And the next morning, Maysun began to dig.

*

After digging, Maysun took hold of the variously shaped palms as if she was taking the hand of another, all different shades of peach or brown or much too pink with manicured nails. The ceramic was hard but very hot under the sun. Fitting them into holes as bulbs should, Maysun imagined their oversimplified, poorly constructed palm lines splitting into roots that grew down further and connected together into a net holding up and containing the whole yard. She worked for hours, shoveled dirt to cover the holes with the palms inside, and ceramic fingertips poked themselves through, nudging past black dirt into the cloudless spring sky. Maysun was satisfied, told herself to have patience, and went to sleep early that evening, skipping her dinner of scrambled eggs and crawling into her sheets. Her bedroom was warm and weighted as the sun's heat. She imagined herself a quivering bug on the fuzzy underside of a garden rock, felt cooler then—in hiding to keep safe but not far from a wide open yard.

When she awoke the next day, the hands had fully sprouted up from the ground. Full size palms stood up into trunks, and from the largeness of the palms with poorly constructed lines came fingers that branched into one another, held each other in a canopy over the yard.

And as the trees grew, so did Maysun's stepmother's hands. They grew into leaves and turned the colors of moss and twigs. Her fingers no longer fit around the steering wheel. Maysun's stepmother no longer looked for more hands or took Maysun out for dollar store candles. As Maysun's stepmother's hands grew earthen, Maysun saw her grief unfold, spreading in the same manner as branches, in the same way you can pile on objects, become a collector, but the result is unkempt. The result does not bring you any closer to fill in the empty drawn-out space. Shoveling dirt into the hole from which it came cannot fill it ever in quite the same way that it was, but rather, it makes something new, changes as do all things that grow.

*

For weeks, Maysun's stepmother tried to cut them off but they grew right back. She tried to dig up the trees but they were too strong. Maysun was afraid that one day the hands would catch her, clamp into a fist and swallow her whole.

Maysun's stepmother was not swallowed by the trees, but the trees came up from inside of her. Maysun's stepmother would no longer speak in mumbles, and would no longer walk the dollar store aisles. The seasons would change and the trees would stay canopied there, blocking out the blue-sky-red-sky sky unseen from the inside of the outside of Maysun's and her stepmother's space.

*

After the trees, Maysun will grow up not into a tree and not much earth but all skin, all makeup over the skin and school and other girls and boys to play with in each other's yards within the Pine streets. As the children grow older, usual as it might be, they find pieces of endings that are remarkable. The weight of these endings rests dormant, though there if you look, something quiet in the housed neighborhood earth of Pine streets where there are no living pines to be found.

On Pine Way 3, Sarah Jane finds toes in the sandbox.

On Pine Lane 5, Tommy's bushes look like scalps with wisps of gray hair.

On Pine Grove 7, Anita's chimney smokes like a cigar, her house more mouth than mortar.

*

When Maysun grows up, she will see a palm reader when she no longer believes in séances or looks at the women on television. The palm reader will take her hands gently as if she were still young and when the palm reader asks for her palms Maysun might think of tropical trees. The palm reader might tell her she takes care, that she should take care or that she is a natural caretaker. And when the palm reader says care Maysun might hear can't or she might hear cunt or she might hear lair and she might think deep woods or dirty carpets. The palm reader might tell her Maysun wants children of her own, or she might trace her fingers over the lines and say: dig, dig, dig. She might say the word over and over until when Maysun listens, she forgets to hear the d altogether until the sound becomes guttural, grunting, undone.

PRISON

by Hugh Behm-Steinberg



There exists, naturally, a secret club of prison escapees. Announcements for their meetings arrive in the form of coded ads, marks on trees, birds and other acts that cannot be depicted without putting people's freedom at risk. "Freedom is always at risk," says K, who escaped from his cell using a sharpened toothbrush. "You're either in prison or you're on the lam." He keeps scratching where his tattoos used to be.

Mostly to yammer and wax, attend the occasional workshop, eat chicken, network. They gather in ones and twos. Tonight it's how Blah Blah Blah escaped and did not die in the icy waters of the Pacific but instead remains uncaptured to this day, as depicted in M's thirty minute slideshow with uplifting jazz interludes. "The popcorn was better when we were in prison," N remarks.

J says it's important to understand that a cell is only a structure within a larger prison, and that each prison feeds parasitically within and upon another. Escape is also philosophical, not just physical, otherwise everyone would be free. "Are you sure you're not still in jail," K asks N, "I mean how can you know for sure? Maybe they just let you go? Maybe they're just fucking with you?"

"If I act like I'm bored, am I still your captive?"

M drones on. He's trying to make a point, no one wants to tell him that points are just another word for prison. You are your own warden, you are your own worst snitch. You ran away and now you keep looking for ways to get caught. "It's hard to

resist this," P says, "if you really mattered you'd be in prison right now, they'd be torturing you, they'd be torturing your friends and family, they'd burn your house to the ground, but you don't matter, that's what the guards tell you when everything happens that way anyway."

The meeting is chaired by one who has escaped from every prison, including her own body; she flaunts her ghostliness at every meeting. Her daughter runs around underfoot.

R says "If you can't escape, you deserve to be in prison. You might as well just admit you believe in rehabilitation; maybe the system will cut you a break and give you a lollipop." R's an asshole.

"And you," the chair interjects, "who think you're so free, what have you done for all the others less lucky than you?"

"I'm innocent," K tells her. "So guilt doesn't work on me."

For dinner they eat roast chicken or fish, for dessert the lights dim for cherries jubilee. Afterwards, tabs are paid in unmarked bills. Members disappear one by one. "It's unsettling," J tells N, "how much freedom consists of erasure."

"Just like prison," K says.

"No," says N, "it's not like prison at all. If I have to explain why then you deserve to get caught."

"All this deserve this, deserve that," J says. "Where's it coming from? How come we keep winding up back in prison?" The bus in front of him looks like it's the sort of bus that only goes to the halfway house.

"I learned that if you say no to everything, it feels that much more liberating when you finally say yes for the first time," says the chair's daughter. "Let's get out of here before my mom catches me."

Stellen von Deutschland und Frankreich in Vehm (Vog) und Flug-

POSTMODERN DINOSAURS

by Tarra Stevenson

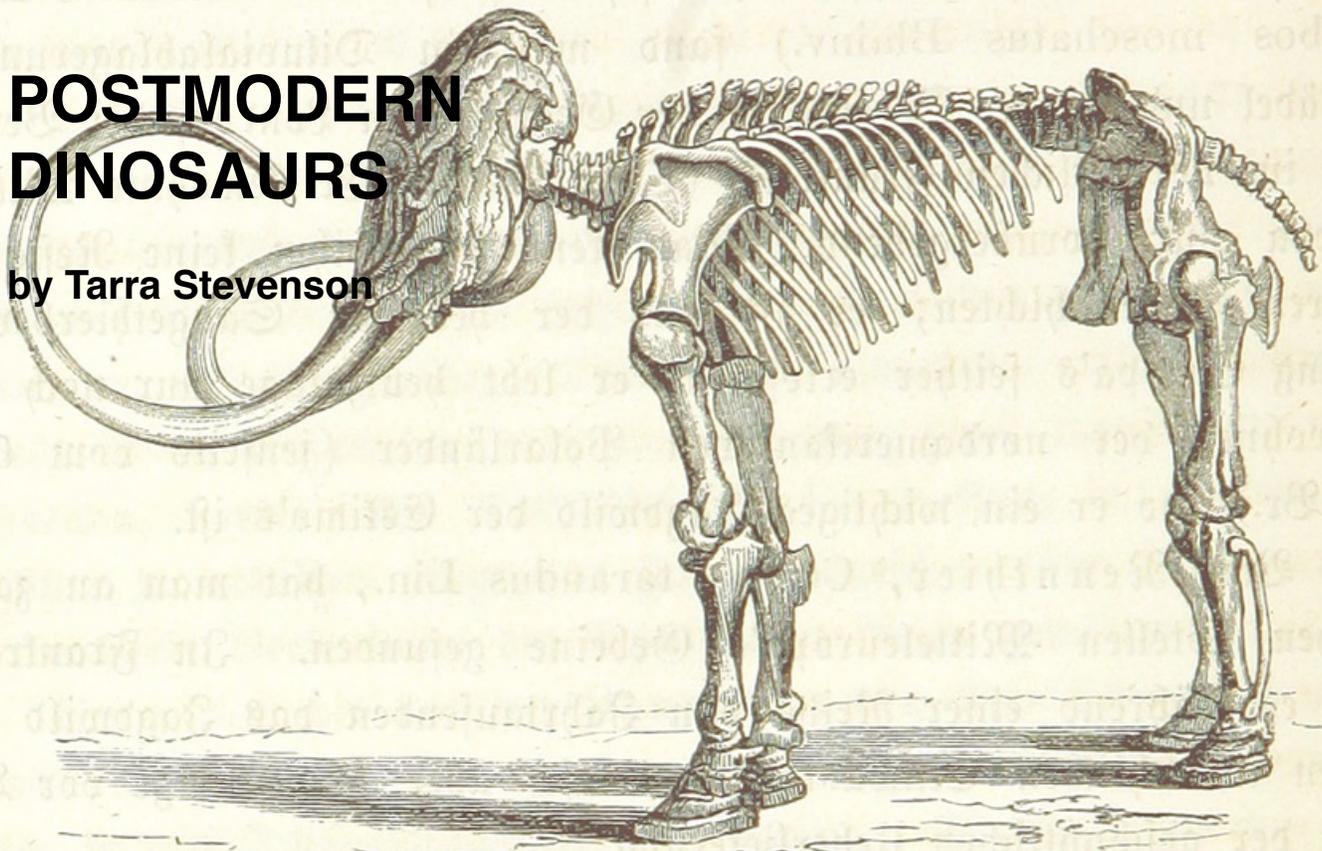


Fig. 30. Der Mammuth, *Elephas primigenius* Blumenb.

Chapter 1. The Writing Process: Purpose and Audience, Thesis Statements

The idea stuck in my mind like the papers smattered to the front grille of my car. I knew, driving to work that day, that the image was important, but I couldn't put my figurative finger on it, couldn't articulate the wonder of seeing those papers whirling, couldn't figure out why that image was so insistent.

And yet it was. It was it was it was so demanding of my time and energy that it was to the exclusion of other thoughts, other endeavors. I was baffled by what to even do with the image; since I had started teaching full time during the day and taken on teaching an evening class as well, I hadn't written anything serious in ages – I had no idea how to approach writing about the image. The birth of my son two years earlier had depleted all of my spare time and my creative facilities had been completely extinguished. I simply had nothing to do with the image – and yet there it was it was it was.

Chapter 1a. The Writing Process: Introductions, Conducting a Peer Review, Choosing an Appropriate Point of View

The truth is, it's impossible to survive Los Angeles without a car.

It began when I moved to Bakersfield over the summer. Because of high rents in LA, a small child, and a boyfriend starting the firefighting academy in Bakersfield, financially it made sense to move in with his parents for the year. I kept my jobs in Pasadena and LA, and entered the world of commuting.

I was on the road by 5:30 every morning, in order to make the 100 miles to Pasadena by 7:30 to my job as a high school English teacher by day, college instructor by night. I left in the cool quiet of early morning, while the stark tract house-neighborhood was still slumbering around me. Coffee warm in my hand, the slow glow of sunrise creeping up the side of my face, I sped toward the mountain.

Chapter 1b. Topic Sentences, Transitions

This is the story(ies) of my sunrise journey, from August to June, one school year, commuting. This is the story(ies) of those days, every/any day, in one day. This is the story of the mountain that stood between my family and my career, the mountain between my relationships and my obligations, my time and my mind. This is the story of traveling that mountain, conquering it twice a day, in order to earn and save money for my family, so that one day we might have a House of Our Own, away from Mango Street. This is the story of one day. This is the story of One Day.

Chapter 2. Clarity: Active vs. Passive Voice

Post-modern dinosaurs roamed the vineyards next to the freeway, slowly dipping their noses into the earth to bleed it dry. Those necks, achingly slow, bowed and rose in an industrial dance, completely at odds with the vibrant, verdant growth surrounding them. Green vines, sprouting almost carelessly from the dirt, appeared casually thrown over their trellis supports, unaware of the life being sucked from beneath them, half an acre away. Their wine would be bitter, as remorseless as the industry depleting them. Monterey Shale oil reserve; what is being (p)reserved? It's an ugly word, frack, as harsh and discordant as its process. Penetrate, fracture, unearth. Mindless, oblivious, the dinosaurs pray.

Faith in their own extinction. Perhaps that was one, now two, sentences too far.

Chapter 2a. Clarity: Parallelism

They seemed completely oblivious to the rolling hills to the south, toward which I was traveling at about 80 mph. The hills in the early morning half-light appeared the color and consistency of caramel, having been drizzled onto the landscape in molasses mounds and clumps. Sandy brush feathered the hillsides, and I imagined reaching my arm out the windshield to caress the hills as if they were dandelion fluff, collecting their spores in my fingertips. I imagined carving a path through the mountain with my fingernail, leaving a trail of red lacquer as my polish chipped into the sod, clinging and clumping beneath my nails, roots dangling into my palms.

Instead, coffee cooling in my mug, I placed it in the module's cup holder and gripped the steering wheel with clean, manicured hands, cherry red fingertips matching the gloss on my Hyundai, reflecting the gloss of the new sun splashing its cool burn over the east side of the mountain, slowly bleeding its way towards me.

Chapter 2b. Clarity: Needed Words, Mixed Constructions

Passing the final rest stop on the right, the last-chance Starbucks grinning greenly to the west amidst the gas stations and fast food, the car begins its ascent up the Grapevine, the trek up the 5 freeway so named because of its winding route and the tiny eponymous town nestled at the base. Behind the Tejon Ranch sign, clusters of stubble, scrubby trees and bushes, squat close to the earth, tumbling up the hillsides. Through the windshield, the bugs own mucilage besmeared across the glass, I squint into the uncertain half-light, and consider burying my face in the brush, caressed by the cleavage between stumps. Leaves in my hair, scratches on my face, I could tidy up at school, make myself presentable.

But no. The car continues to propel me up and over the mountain.

Chapter 2c. Clarity: Misplaced Modifiers, Dangling Modifiers

My foot on the pedal is effortless, the power winging us through the hollow air. A larger, slower truck pulls out of the lane to allow me to pass, a red bullet slicing through, creating a wake the truck rides out. It is silent in my world, the butter rumble of the gravel smoothing out like cake frosting beneath the wheels. The rigs to the right grumble along, swaying in the high winds of the mountains, left and right, carnival rides carrying groceries, gas, oil.

Through Gorman, past Pyramid Lake, up to Tejon Pass, we climb. At 4100 feet, my ears popping, I lower the window to feel the cool air rush across my face, my hair escaping its bun to thrash about my face. Over the mountains to my left, the hills silhouetted by a sherbet glow, violet on orange on pink, I think of that sticky box of ice cream from childhood, cloyingly sweet on my new adult teeth, unaware of the cavity consequences that indulgence would cost. The window rolls back up, seemingly of its own accord, and I sigh, my breath clouding the water- speckled window. I put my fingerprint into the cloud, and smear.

Chapter 2d. Clarity: Shifts (Person and Number, Tense, Mood and Voice)

Miles later, I begin to approach the series of small towns that cluster together before the grand entrance into the valley. The telephone and electrical wires, held aloft by iron milkmaid figures, splash morning milky fog over the mountains. It remains suspended as I descend into the dirty murk. The gas stations wrestle their neon into my sight, followed by eager minivans, joining us on our trek.

We slow down. We are approaching Magic Mountain, and we all know, our collective unconscious is loud, that cops hover here, waiting to interrupt, impede our progress. Even at this early hour, when no children are present, the threat of their cotton candy fueled excitement warns us to move with more caution. We funnel (cake) into three lanes, wrought iron and fiberglass monstrosities looming god-like on our right, towering their commercial power over the serpentine traffic I wind myself through.

Chapter 2e. Clarity: Combing Choppy Sentences

Birds flying alongside the car for a mile, swooping, converging with the peaks, darting, keeping pace with the car; five birds that may have been seven birds, may have been only one.

Chapter 2f. Clarity: Wordy Sentences

Silent birds flying alongside the car for a mile, swooping, converging, beaks and peaks, darting, keeping pace with the car. Five birds that may have been seven birds, may have been only one.

Chapter 2g. Clarity: Jargon

The audiobooks I listened to on my journey, the characters who sat shotgun in my car.

Chapter 2e. Clarity: Sexist Language, Misused Words

Horizons. In the clarity of early morning air, every tree is stark, every pixel of the mis-en-scene is distinct. The clouds left by airplanes streak across the sky with the same intensity as the sun's reach, though they are fathered by different gods. The jet-trails are shaving nicks on a dead face. There is no blood.

Chapter 2f. Clarity: Standard Idioms, Clichés and Mixed Metaphors

Sunrises. The light hangs over the small town of Frazier Park like clouds, obscuring and illuminating at once. A bright star, still visible, is a beauty mark over the mountains. Punctuated.

Is that a satellite or a star? What is the significance in misidentifying an ancient light for a new technology? What is the commentary there?

Chapter 3. Grammar: Sentence Fragments

One day in March it took me over seven hours to get home because of a massive traffic jam. A big rig had jackknifed and spilled its hazardous materials all over the freeway, effectively shutting it down while we all waited for hazmat to clean it off the road and to stabilize the conditions – essentially environmental factors were at play.

I saw three Japanese men get out of their car and urinate together over the I-5 guardrail that divides north from south, grinning and posing while a fourth documented it with his camera. The vista was stunning, a cleft in the mountain demonstrating several valleys and a blood-warm sunset. The subjects themselves were less than impressive. Several motorcyclists pulled off to the side to chat, cutting off the many drivers who felt entitled to ride the shoulder past 5 hours of restless, irritated drivers. At a break in the guardrails dozens of cars flipped u-turns in the dust, heading back the way they had come. The rest of us sat, urine heavy in our collective bladders, while we pretended not to notice each other, pretended not to wonder why the couple was laughing, why the driver of the blue jeep was crying, what the person representing 1976-2006 on the rear windshield of the dusty red Honda Civic had died from. How many of us had been stymied in the middle of the alphabet game, resting on Pyramid of Pyramid Lake, knowing there was no way a Q word would present itself anytime soon? Why don't cars wear bumper stickers anymore? Why aren't people passionate?

None of us attempted to ride the shoulder away.

I got home late that night, and then turned around and left again, back up the mountain, 6 hours later.

Chapter 3a. Grammar. Run-on Sentences

But the image I can't grasp, the image that floats through my head several times a day and haunts my grading, pulls me away from argument essays on Heart of Darkness and Montag's character development in Fahrenheit 451, is that image of those papers dancing through the air like the spray of a car wash, words trickling then spraying through the wind like the blue suds in that water-dark tunnel. Cresting a small hill I could see the white-washed cyclone in the near distance, or maybe it was more of a hurricane, the cyclones more like hot caramel dripping from a freshly coated apple, cloying and slender, quick to break on the gusts, of which there were many, breaking and slicing the air with their fine edged paper cuts.

Chapter 3b. Grammar. Subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement

As I approached the phantom storm, the paper pelted down around me like so many rain drops, except they were crisp whispers and I became part of the melee, part of the torrent that perpetuated the cycle, my wheels brushing the parchment past the petrichor, my senses overwhelmed.

Chapter 3c. Grammar. Pronoun reference, Pronoun case (such as I vs. me)

Letterhead, newsprint, note, note card, note pad, onion skin, pad, papyrus, parchment, poster, rag, sheet, stationery, tissue, vellum, daily, gazette, journal...

Chapter 3d. Grammar. Who and whom

Beat, blurb, column, commentary, composition, discourse, editorial, essay, exposition, feature, item, paper, piece, scoop, spread, story, theme, think piece, treatise, write-up

Chapter 3e. Grammar. Pronoun case: review

Affidavit, affirmation, attestation, authentication, authorization, certification, coupon, credential, deed, diploma, docket, documentation, endorsement, guarantee, license, paper, pass, permit, receipt, record, sheepskin, shingle, testament, testification, testimonial, testimony, ticket, voucher, warrant, warranty

Chapter 3f. Grammar. Adjectives and Adverbs, irregular verbs, Standard English verb forms, Verb tense and mood

The whole thing reminds me of a discussion I overheard once.

Voices, like cookie fortunes, listing, flutter through the air around me. Caught on a wisp of wind, a male voice, low, catches a gasp and his "blood test...phone call" floats past my hair.

Her giggle, high and lilting, soft, sweeps upward and then sifts through the currents, falls, and melts into the asphalt.

It was a little like that.

Chapter 4. Multilingual/ESL

I-5 Bakersfield to Los Angeles. Fort Tejon. Vista del Lago Road. Hasley Canon Road -- Wayside Honor Rancho. Valencia Blvd. Pico Canyon Road. Balboa Blvd. 210 East -- Pasadena. Sunland Blvd. -- Sunland, Tujunga. La Tuna Canyon Road. Pennsylvania Ave -- La Crescenta. La Crescenta Ave. La Canada Flintridge. Arroyo Blvd.

Chapter 5. Punctuation. Major uses of the comma, All uses of the comma, Misuses of the comma

I should pull over to the shoulder when I have an idea I want to jot down, or at least use the voice feature on my phone, but I don't – I text while driving in order to make it to school on time. I don't need the lecture on its dangers –I know.

Chapter 5a. Punctuation. The semi-colon and the comma

He exhaled
Butterflies
And their feathers
Floated
Like punctuation,
Onto
 This poem.

Chapter 5b. Punctuation. The colon, the semi-colon, and the comma

My two and half year old son loves a lower case "i" for it reminds him of lit candles; seeing one is an invitation to sing "Happy Birthday" every time. I am always surprised and delighted by what he is able to see in language before he is able to understand the meaning of words. He reminds me of the artistry inherent in letters themselves, before they even become word molecules; his semiotic vision is inspiring.

Chapter 5c. Punctuation. The apostrophe, Quotation marks, Other punctuation marks

This morning the sunrise was bruised, smudged by a thumb in oil pastels.

Chapter 6. Mechanics. Abbreviations, Italics, the hyphen, Capital Letters

One hundred and eighteen miles, twice a day, for forty-two weeks (minus three weeks for Winter and Spring Breaks). Over forty-six thousand miles. New tires. New windshield wipers. Tons of oil changes. Hundreds of cups of coffee. Thousands of swear words.

Chapter 7. Grammar Basics. Parts of Speech: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, all parts of speech. Subjects, Subject Complements and direct objects, Indirect objects and object complements, All objects and complements.

The fruit patch stand at Mettler.

Chapter 7a. Grammar Basics. Sentence types.

When I got to school that day, I glanced at the front of my car the way I always do to make sure the nose of my car wasn't getting too friendly with the bushes in the parking lot. A few pieces of crumpled paper were stuck to my grille, paper-feather reminders of the paper... image. They looked like a manual of some sort. One side of the page was tattered and jagged, a result of the wind ripping them from their neatly bound spiral. Upon closer inspection, I realized it was a grammar handbook. Perhaps the very same grammar handbook that I resist using every semester while teaching at Los Angeles City College? It's not so much the handbook that I take issue with, it's the very technical nature of it that turns students off. It can be great to use as a resource, but teaching grammar through it does not work. Students need context.

People need context.

Chapter 8. Research. Research Questions.

Rereading my notes, hastily scribbled while driving, I am often confused by my wording and the time that has elapsed clouds my overburdened memory. What does "X ray 3D mountains" mean? It takes me a moment to understand, but based on the follow-up note of "varying blacks greys" I am reminded of a morning when the silhouette of the mountains was super imposed over a darker shade of night, juxtaposing the early morning physics to which I had become accustomed.

Real life is more of a picture than a reality, and the mountains seemed as though they were a picture. In reality, it was real -- pictures with my mind versus my phone -- how to describe the unreality of a real image? The mountain was its own photo negative.

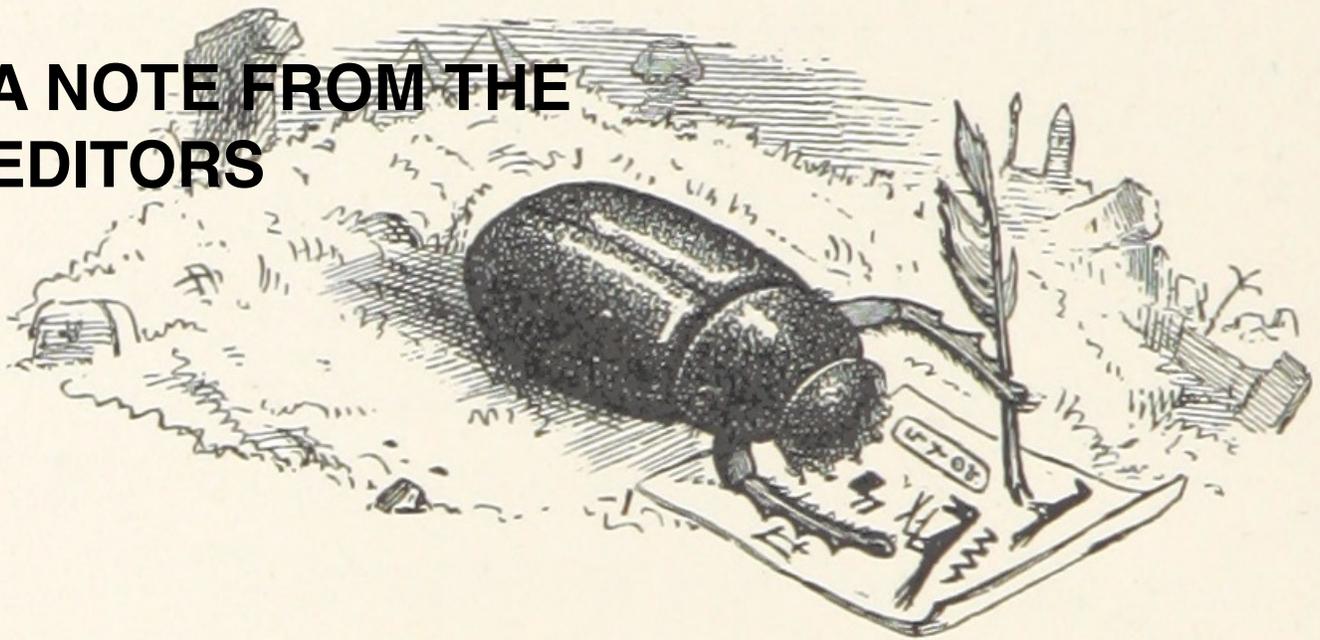
Chapter 9. MLA

When I got to school that day, I glanced at the front of my car the way I always do to make sure the nose of my car wasn't getting too friendly with the bushes in the parking lot. A few pieces of crumpled paper were stuck to my grille, paper-feather reminders of the paper... image. They looked like a manual of some sort. I left them on my car to remind me to write about it, as the sensation of that image would not leave me. I had to get it down.

Chapter 10. APA

June 6. The school year is complete, the commute is over, yet the image remains. Those dancing words, the flutter of paper kites cutting through the air. One day I will write about it.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS



Dear Readers & Writers,

This fall we sponsored an episode of our friend David Naimon's podcast, *Between The Covers*, wherein David interviews Shirley Magazine influence Amelia Gray about her latest collection of short stories, *Gutshot*.

"When I first started writing, I wrote endless stories about really polite, obedient, young white girls who found themselves in a strange situation and then the story always ended with them standing on the precipice of their lives, and it was, you know, 'I wonder why?' But, I ended up, once I realized I was told enough, that people don't necessarily read stories to have that experience--I guess that was posited to me--because sometimes certainly people do read stories to have that experience of being caught between two worlds and the cycle of feeling, but it was suggested to me that maybe something happening in a story would be a cool idea, and I tried it out, and indeed it was.

And I found that for me, shaping a story around an action was really satisfying, and also, when I had a character who wanted to do something, I started to do it, just to see what would happen, even if it was crazy, just as an exercise--like, 'and then she pulled off a piece of her skin' and then that becomes a very interesting idea, like, what's underneath there? But that's me as an absurdist, I guess, I can go there in that way. But really anyone can. So that's the kind of stakes I like, where anything can happen, really, where we're always reminding ourselves that it is fiction and seeing what we can do with that."

Check out the [full interview](#) for more about absurd writing, disgust, and Gray's experience discovering Shirley Jackson's work.

*

In her submission email to us, Tarra Stevenson ("Postmodern Dinosaurs") wrote:

"At this moment, I am staring at a pillow on my couch, a little pillow with a screen print of Abraham Lincoln on the front. The great thing about this pillow is that there is a message inside of it, so on that one day when the dog, or a small child, or the washing machine inevitably tears it up, the salve for that will be this secret message that has been sitting inside the pillow for all these years. I will finally get to know the secret the pillow has been harboring. I feel that way about submitting work. Even if my submitted piece doesn't make it in, the salve is reading all the work that does, all those previously silent secrets."

Reading is so often a refuge from whatever tears us apart, offering that salve which shows us the world is so huge and contains so much, and each writer and reader interprets it in their own way. What is published is there for the taking, and that which was "previously silent" is now piping up.

Before we started Shirley Magazine, we had only experienced editing the work of people we'd later be in the same room with, workshopping around a table. We weren't exactly sure how this endeavor would be different--it's another kind of trust to give your work over to faceless strangers, people you know only as an email address. What we have loved discovering, though, is what happens when you open up a space to be a home for someone else's work. There's a certain reciprocity that happens: the agreement that the space and the work are worthy of each other.

Thank you for reading, and thank you for writing.

Sincerely,
CB & LP
editors

P.S. all of the images in this issue were sourced from the wild, wonderful world of the public domain. For more visual ephemera and strangeness, we recommend the British Library's new Flickr page.