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PROSE
For the longest time I could only seem to remember one night from my Berlin years. Even then I could only recall some details. That it was quiet outside and winter. Our strange shadows were extended along the Wall and I could hear the paint bouncing in the bag around my shoulder. We were trudging through some Platz, J-Boy was dickering with a stolen cigarette, I had an arm around Silke, and, as usual, we did not know why we were going where we were going.

By that time all three of us were famous, though they all thought we were one man. They had tried to dissolve our murals with some kind of splash-splash orange juice concoction, believing an authority who told them, yes, this acid will strike out graffiti, yes, the Wall will be blank again, the authors will be known.

But they never saw or knew us, never found us out. And when they fall to sleep now all these years later, gathering dust like so many Communist uniforms of sad burgundy and Brandenburg winters, when they lie down they will not know that we existed in their world, or why some American man decided to play around in that East Berlin underground.

They were passed around, nomadic, unsettled. At age nine and a half, he was born here, in Mitte, to an unknown mother in a paint-strewn cellar. We were trudging through some Platz, J-Boy was dickering with a stolen cigarette, I had an arm around Silke, and, as usual, we did not know why we were going where we were going.

I remember the first time J-Boy told me to run. It was, I think, the night I met him, one of my first alien days in the strange city, some months before we ran across Silke. I had first seen him, I don’t know where, someplace dank and lit, probably a U-Bahn platform in Mitte. He craned my neck and saw the bright and milling lights of the Western line that prodded haplessly into Eastern territory, just beyond the border. Nobody used them; they were just leftovers from the old open days. The West Berliners passing through could look out the window and see these quiet ghost stations filling softly by, a cleared gray empty for echoes, no one around, no sound lasting. They had been closed down and lit dimly, with gunned guards posted in case some fleeing wanted to make use of that absence and the shadowy tunnels that led out to the West. I learned later that these stations were not even named on the maps.

We got down there easily enough. The others had brought some rope to sling over the tunnel pipes as a hoisting tool, a way to climb up to where we could squeeze our bodies between the pipes and the roof. When I got situated on the pipes, lying perpendicular to the tunnel, I craned my neck and saw the bright and milling lights of the Western line that prodded haplessly into Eastern territory, just beyond the border. Nobody used them; they were just leftovers from the old open days. The West Berliners passing through could look out the window and see these quiet ghost stations filling softly by, a cleared gray empty for echoes, no one around, no sound lasting. They had been closed down and lit dimly, with gunned guards posted in case some fleeing wanted to make use of that absence and the shadowy tunnels that led out to the West. I learned later that these stations were not even named on the maps.

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I heard it squeal and, by looking closely, I made out the almost immaterial figures of those on the other side exiting the train. Directly above us, above the ground, the sinuous and arbitrary curve of the Wall pressed down invisible upon us. Our two partners, who were sprawled about ten feet to the West, readied themselves and motioned to J-Boy and me that one of them would take this. I nodded.

The tremors in that night, though. The soul-splintering lights from the Wall’s unseen death-strip, how they cast J-Boy’s shadow into jigsaw fractures as he dashed ahead. The sense that if the officers got as close as possible to the speeding train without losing hold of his canister-clad hand below the pipes, his body softly balanced, trying to get as close as possible to the speeding train without losing hold of his perch. It came to us, and it happened fast, the click of the canister butt, the paint’s hiss, and I saw this guy’s wrist whirl over the passing metal, the hiss there and gone, consumed by the thump and grind of the wheels against the earth.

When the sound passed out his voice could be heard fading in,
shouting in German.

“Get it all down,” J-Boy yelled to me. “He says the whole name’s down.”

I looked out at the train fading now in the opposite direction, almost gone, sighing through the ghost station, and by the gray light I could faintly see what the kid had left, an explosion of color on the roof that apparently spelled his name. How his name disappeared with the train curving around the bend, now there, now unseen.

I heard shouting. Two bodies in uniform were running toward us from Bernauer, guns unslinged, shouting at us. J-Boy put a hand over my bowed head and whispered for us to be quiet, but the other two ash-holes had been hanging whooping from the pipes like chimps in celebration and now the guards had seen them, and these Kreutzberg kids knew they had been seen. They swore, dangled. They looked around, as if they were half-hoping for some saving subway angel to sweep in on an underground wind-breath. Realizing that nobody would come, they dropped onto the rails. The guards were there, ready to grab, handcuff, and march them back wearily to Bernauer and prison. J-Boy and I saw the kids’ silhouettes flitting out of view. The guards were holding them by the wrists. They never saw us.

When you leave yourself untended in a wind like this, the next day always becomes something you can never quite imagine. You feel yourself filing regularly into Mitte nights and Marzahn shadows with Ivory Black cradled in your left hand and Sky Blue slung in the sack about your shoulder. You work until the dawn gives your colors too much light. It seems ridiculous, but it makes sense; the night gives you your name. When you are asked for it, you keep it in yourself and say you are just someone else, as I was Anselm one day, Ziska the next. It is never the American dodging through East Berlin and leaping over chain-link fences into long fields of chartar and broken bottles, the quiet slabs of wordless buildings pressing upon you at the field edge, J-Boy finishing up the design you had thought out the night before for the wall of this unused, squall station house lined with weeds and dust-cloaked glass deposited God knows when. The design on the wall remains audience-less and beautiful. J-Boy remains cheerful when you’ve told him your fill of childhood stories but refuse to tell him your name. He shakes his head and smiles. And you move on to teaching him more English until the night comes on and you two get to work on some giant alley mural of caricatures or graffiti pointillism. When you fall asleep, maybe in a room, always, always as the night recedes, listening to the S-Bahn rumble and the dull unvandalized morning, you are aware that your dreaming may be interrupted by a guard’s gloved hand. You may have to say your name. When you live like that, even for a few months, coming across something like a woman under a cedar by the Spree, lying there unexplained, as if the river had simply begun to accumulate a woman’s body with each quiet wave crash on the bank, fashioning long fine hair and a graceful face, when you stumble upon something like that you can’t help but feel for its strangeness.

She was lying softly with slightly bent knees, with one arm trailing out into the mud palm-up. J-Boy laughed a little when he saw her, then bounded over. She had ragged clothes, but not ragged enough to be the victim of a fight or anything. When I got there I crouched down next to her body and checked to see if she was dead or injured. She seemed ok, like she was sleeping really, and when I nudged her she woke easily.

“Who are you?” I asked her as she drew her eyes on me. They were strange and deep, like twin vanishing points. “Can’t you hear me?” I asked when she didn’t respond. J-Boy squatted next to me with a beaming smile.

“No English,” he said. “She will understand me.”

“Ask if she’s ok.” He did. She didn’t answer. He said something different but her face didn’t change.

“Goddamn it, kid,” I said. “What are you saying to her?”

“Not English,” he said. “She will understand me.”

“Smiling.”

“Who are you?” I asked her as she drew her eyes on me. They seemed wet or wrong. Everything seemed to point to the fact that she was Anselm, but her face didn’t change.

“Yeah, I don’t know what she’s doing that for. She’s got mud smeared up to her eyes.”

“I think she’s deaf,” J-Boy said. “Or mute or something.”

“Who are you?” I asked her as she drew her eyes on me. They seemed wet or wrong. Everything seemed to point to the fact that she was Anselm, but her face didn’t change.

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“Who are you?” I asked her as she drew her eyes on me. They seemed wet or wrong. Everything seemed to point to the fact that she was Anselm, but her face didn’t change.

“You can’t stay here, she’s got mud smeared up to her eyes.”

“Smiling.”

“Yeah, I don’t know what she’s doing that for. She’s got mud in her eyes.”

The three of us squatted or lay silently there for another minute or so. Along with the sound of the river we could hear wavering singing from a nearby opera house. I looked her over again. Had she been in the river? Only the cuffs of her taupe pants were damp from where the Spree ebbed up onto the bank and under her resting feet. Nothing else seemed wet or wrong. Everything seemed to point to the fact that she had come from nowhere at all.

I helped her to stand up, which she did well enough, only stumbling a little. J-Boy and I debated where to take her, finally settling on a usually empty warehouse not far from Ostbahnhof, a large gray place that had been ignored and abandoned soon after they built the Wall. We sometimes used it for sleeping. We climbed in through a shattered window and led her to a sink in the back corner. She washed the mud off her eyes and face as J-Boy returned outside to search for clean clothes in street dumpsters. When he came back with some she was spraying...
nonsense designs on the wall with one of his canisters.

“Did you let her?” he said to me.

“Relax, Jung,” I said. “She’s fine.”

“She talks yet?”

“Nope.”

J-Boy bristled and said something about saving paint.

“I think,” I told him, “we should have her work with us tonight, huh?”

“Weather says we don’t work tonight.”

“Yeah, well,” I said. I was leaning back in a chair and watching her spray something in lavender. It looked like lines of German verse, although the letters, or whatever they were, quickly dripped and blended into each other. She seemed tall as she worked, and the long hair that fell down her back from her quiet face seemed to flutter in an unfelt wind.

“We’ll go out into the rain,” I told him. “Can you do that? We’ll bring jackets and go out into the rain to find a dry spot.”

“Lightning comes tonight.”

“Well, we’ll go out into that too.”

The storm came as dusk fell, the fiercest I’ve ever seen. It brought constant lightning and blown grass up from Dresden, and thunder that would thwack and blend into the night air with incredible force, creating echoes indistinguishable from their direct sounds. The rain that fell that night would keep itself on the ground in lazy puddles for weeks afterwards.

On our way out we decided to just name her Silke, the name of one of J-Boy’s lost aunts.

We went over to the other side of Ostbahnhof, to a wide and quiet alley over which two buildings were connected by a glass walkway, leaving only a slim but workable dry space for us. As soon as we got there Silke quickly wandered back out into the shadowy storm. I hardly noticed her leaving. When she returned she seemed to come from the lightning flaring behind her, illuminating the gaunt outlines of the Alexanderplatz buildings and leaving her bare silhouette against the rain.

She had brought back a cracked bucket filled with water. When she came under the walkway she went directly to the canister-filled duffel bag and picked out various shades of blue. J-Boy began to protest, but I stopped him and told him we stand by and let her. She took a canister, knelt down, looked up as if she were studying the bottom of the walkway, and began to spray in a style we had never seen before, holding the can far off the ground and flicking water from the bucket into the path of the paint as it made its way earthward. It built up on that dry strip in wave-like sediments, blue and lively, and we began to make out the almost formless outlines of three figures from the paint, each seeming to extend downward under the ground, rising up faceless to meet their origin Silke. She seemed rapt and furiously awake, and never took a break for the next few hours. J-Boy and I just watched her. By the time we left she had completely filled the dry space.

Next gray morning, the storm’s last remains turning silently overhead and around in floating mist tendrils, we walked by the alley and saw that a small crowd had drifted around the three blue figures looking back at them. There was a man with a camera. Guards were attempting to break up the crowd. We turned and quickly whisked ourselves away. J-Boy cursing under his breath. A few days later I found a newspaper with a picture of the thing and my heart stumbled, and sank again when J-Boy told me that the article quoted a Western artist who thought Silke’s work a masterpiece. As with everything else she made in Berlin, the painting remained where it was long after I had left the city. Nothing could dissolve it, not even the rain.

I came across another article from the West the next month. A wind had blown it over the Wall and I found it caught in the rings of a chain-link fence. J-Boy translated again:

October 14, 1973
by Klaus Mühlbach
East Berlin Police investigated an enormous graffiti painting on the wall of 54 Ebertstrasse last night, measuring nearly 10 meters across and 6 meters in height. None of the questioned tenants of the building reported hearing the noise of vandals.

“We all just slept through this,” one resident said, wishing to remain anonymous.

The Ebertstrasse painting is the latest in a string of giant murals, all executed in East Berlin. They are believed to be the work of one vandal, and have generated much excitement in the West, where crowds have gathered to protest the police investigations.

“We need to stop this.”

“Relax. Kid. The odds of them finding us?”

“They will capture us in the night.”

“Relax.”

It began then, the coverage of us, or who they thought was us, calling us names like Schatten and Nebel and others that faded and re-borned in different forms for different months, names all ghosted and undefined. Whoever they thought we were was famous for both his daring and his effortless skill. They knew it was the same person; they came to know the style. It made J-Boy and me nervous, but Silke, who never spoke, seemed not to hear of it at all. She wordlessly persuaded us to spill out silently into the shadows each evening, following the scent of blank walls and unsung billboards. Any surface would do,
tween the pools of darkness. She seemed to be talking to me. I don't
red bulbs of the underground scattered and lighting her unevenly be-
together through the subway tunnels, the trains done for the night, the
world wavered and dissolved into another. Now we were walking to-
skyline behind her, me standing on some fragile iron framework. That
me in a gray greatcoat, the light rendering her delicately on the gray
standing in the blue glow of a deserted station, she somehow above
in many of my dreams, but I can only remember this one. We were
those days as we all slept on the floor of another warehouse. She was
at one of us, just watching, and we could never look away.

I still don't know how it happened. Silke had clambered up
to make sure everything was clear.

When they found their Wall colored over the following morning,
the police and guards went berserk. Reports began to filter in about a
special force being organized to collect night vandals. We knew it was
for us. When we began to hear rumors of a growing number in the West
asking for our release, who were saying that the skill of our nightly art
was too great for imprisonment or anonymity, we tried to ignore it. And
as our unknown names grew, J-Boy and I wondered, always wondered,
about the mystery of Silke, how she managed to remain so unconcerned
in the pressure of preydom. She could become so easily lost. The shad-
ows of the night could simply and so quickly gather her forever, and
we would never hear from her again. But having her nearby gave us a
hope of her permanence. She would sometimes stop working and look
away, and we had to go tonight to the Wall and get him up there. She drew a sketch of the Wall with her design on a blank sheet so
that we both understood where we all needed to go. J-Boy and I had to
relent. We went there, right up to the empty surface of the thing, and the
canister hiss was quiet enough for the unseen guards to believe there
was no one there below. The old poet's face fit nicely on the cement.
J-Boy sprayed to my right, creating a background with the same shade
of electric blue that Silke used for the eyes, those old deep orbs looking
back at her as she painted them from her perch upon my shoulders. I
barely felt her weight. We remained there for a long time, working in
the darkness between two splashed orbs of lamplight.

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we would never hear from her again. But having her nearby gave us a
hope of her permanence. She would sometimes stop working and look
at one of us, just watching, and we could never look away.

I can never forget this one dream I had about her on one of
those days as we all slept on the floor of another warehouse. She was
in many of my dreams, but I can only remember this one. We were
standing in the blue glow of a deserted station, she somehow above
me in a gray greatcoat, the light rendering her delicately on the gray
skyline behind her, me standing on some fragile iron framework. That
world wavered and dissolved into another. Now we were walking to-
gether through the subway tunnels, the trains done for the night, the
red bulbs of the underground scattered and lighting her unevenly be-
tween the pools of darkness. She seemed to be talking to me. I don't

onto my shoulders, which wasn’t unusual. She always wanted to pain
the highest sections of the murals anyway. But this time, almost im-
m ediately, she grabbed two of the cans out of my open bag and, with
an agility I had never known in her before, stood on top of me and
leapt onto the top of the Wall. It seemed impossbly high but she did
it, seemed impossible even though the snow bank had given us some
added height, but still, now she was up there, balancing herself like
a tightrope queen, and J-Boy was scrambling around pantomiming,
screaming mutely trying to get her off, and I had backed away in chilled
paralysis, knowing that behind the Wall, in a place we couldn’t see,
guards with guns were posted in towers stretching across that death
strip before the West. And that death runway, as opposed to everything
else, was lit loudly.

I looked at her and didn’t know what to do. I could only see
the artificial luminescence framing her, arms out and palms up, as if
she were in supplication to the ceasing snow, keeping balance in a
strange limbo. She could have slipped at any moment. At some point
she stopped, crouched down, and began spraying something on the
other side of the Wall. We heard voices behind it.

“She can’t,” J-Boy was stammering next to me. “Get her down,
we’ve got to.”

And then the voices grew louder and started shouting, blend-
ing into other voices coming from behind us.

“They’ll get us, kid,” I said. “We need to go.”

“They know her face.”

“Get her. We need to get her down and run.”

That’s when, I think, she felt. I still don’t know what made
her fall. I remember hearing a man’s sharp cry and then looking up to
watch her look back at us. She was smiling a little with her canister
raised against the night, as if to say she had done it, whatever it was,
and I looked down, and when I looked up again she was gone.

The kid was shouting at me now to run.

“Where’d she go?” I asked.

“They’re coming behind us. You hear them? We need to run.”

A snow-mist had come on us and that was cover enough. But
when we turned into an alley I heard them coming from the right and
he, I guess, heard them coming from the left, and we didn’t have time to
stop and ask each other. I remember having all the time in the world the
night before, when I told Silke my name, when she was still sleeping,
J-Boy somewhere right, her eyes still closed as I whispered my name
to her. But now I saw his sharp and darkened face, I saw her fall again,
I saw him turn to me one last time before disappearing into the mist,
as she had looked down at us before falling like an aria’s lowering note
into the place behind the Wall, the canister still in her hand, the chase
still in his eyes, gone.
The first time I saw her she was sitting on her stoop in a halter top. Smoking cigarettes and cracking dry peanuts between her teeth. She had long legs, big lips outlined in pink, a sunburn that crept up to her neck. Her skin looked like it was on fire. As I passed by she took a drag of her smoke and reached inside the bowl on her lap. A bunch of ashy butts and peanut shells were scattered on the steps below her feet. I slowed down and wanted to say something—Mind if I sit down?—or—You want to go for a walk?—but that day my Camels were back home and I was still on crutches.

—Hey, what happened to you? she yelled at me. We had never met each other before but she was like that, talking to everyone like they knew her mom and had gone to her graduation party.

—I broke my leg. As soon as I said it, I saw how obvious it was and felt stupid. I thrust my cast out so she could get a better look. A bunch of plaster molded to the break in the bone. Pale blue and dirty, as tight as my ribscape.

Jessica. She said her name with a Y—more like Yessica—but when I picked her up the next day she only told me the things she wouldn't do. Eat ice cream after dinner; it made her stomach go sour. Skip church even if she was hung over. Babysit her sister's kids, live in Bedstuy until she got old, go home with a guy on the first date. She was saying all these things so fast it made me think I was driving over the speed limit, like somehow my car was tuned to the beat of her voice, but when I looked down I saw we were only going 40 mph.

Still, she was fine. She had these hoop earrings that flashed silver when she shook her head, and her hair was all curly. I let her run down the list without saying anything back but a huh every now and then. It was only when we ran into a red light on the corner of Bailey and Mayfield that she stopped talking and looked over at me, pushing down on the brake with my good foot. So, she said. What's your deal?

Me. For starters, I used to get in a lot of fights over nothing. Some guy would give me a wrong look, tilt his head too far to one side, and next thing he knew I'd be messing up his whole face. But then I tried to start something with this skinny guy who pulled out a gun and made a hole through the stop sign on the corner. When he tried to reload, I decided not to wait around for the next one. There was a fence and a jump. Then there was a bad landing.

At least that's what I told Jessica in the car that day. When I was done, she gave me these big eyes and told me to be more careful next time. Then she laughed, and I laughed too.

—Okay, I get it, I got it, but what do you do when you're not getting in trouble? she said, still catching her breath.

—Oh, you know, I said. Got a job. Pays the rent. She nodded instead of asking me more, so I shut up instead of adding that my boss and my landlord were the same person.

I met a girl, I told Uncle Ralph when I got home. He was on the couch drinking a Corona after covering my shift. Oh yeah? Is she hot? he said.

—She's all right. Talks too much.

—That don't make a difference, he said, if she's hot.

I was about to climb up the stairs on my crutches when Uncle Ralph called me back.

—Wait, I forgot. These things came in the mail today. He pointed to a bunch of colored envelopes on the table, next to where his feet were propped up. I sunk my crutches down into the old rug and took my time swinging over there while he kept his eyes on the t.v.

As soon as I saw the handwriting, I knew what it was. The same fancy cursive my mom's friends tried to pull off last year, and the year before. I tore one of the envelopes open. There was a card with a picture of a bleeding Jesus inside. On the Day of Your Loss Turn to the Lord.

My mom had been dead since I was fifteen. Before they started mailing cards, her friends used to bring me cakes.

—You going to write back? Uncle Ralph asked, pretending not to look at me from the couch.

—Don't see why I need to, I said. You got any Coronas left?

Three beers later, I went up to my room, put the envelopes in a drawer, and fell down on top of my sheets. My eyes stayed open, but instead of asking me more, so I shut up instead of adding that my boss and my landlord were the same person.

The next day at the pawnshop I couldn't concentrate. I looked down at the row of gold chains I was supposed to be guarding. One of them had a skull pendant with fake diamonds glued around the eye holes. Further down I could see the Zippo lighters and the 8 oz. flasks lined up with their price tags. Uncle Ralph always bought a bunch of crap he couldn't sell.

The clock said it was noon. I had been at work for two hours, and Jessica kept popping into my head, like one of those stupid clowns you spray down with a water gun at Coney Island—every time I tried to get rid of her face, it would come back a few seconds later, smiling at me. I couldn't win.
When was the last time I had gone this crazy? I ate lunch. I scooted around the store and used my finger to wipe lines of dust off the broken t.v. sets and the old headboards. I sat down by the cash register and stared at the clock. Noon turned into 1, then 2. Five hours to go.

The phone rang. I almost killed myself to get it out of my pocket. It was Jessica.

— Hey Dom. Her voice sounded smoky over the line.
— What's up? I cleared my throat and wondered what she was wearing.
— Not much. You busy tonight?
— Maybe. I hoped she could tell I was kidding around. Still, it wouldn't hurt if she thought I had other things going on.
— You should come out to San Loco if you get the chance. They're having a live d.j. Should be fun.

Things I don't do in public: Kill pigeons. Cuss out old ladies. Piss on the sidewalk while other people are watching. Piss all the time, unless it's dark and I'm in a bind. Break windows in neighborhoods where the houses have security alarms. Start arguments with cops on duty. Dance.

Jessica was waiting for me at San Loco, facing the bartender as she stirred something frozen in a glass. One of her feet was touching the back of the other leg, and she kept switching which foot was on the ground as I stood there for a while, just looking. She was wearing heels that night, three inch heels the color of Pepto Bismol, and when I got closer I saw her toes were painted a darker pink.

The place was dark and smelled like spilled beer. The kind of dive I used to go with the boys, back when we all had fake i.d.s and girls on our minds. But now I could feel myself getting sick as I tapped Jessica on the shoulder.

— Dom! How you doing? Want to dance?
[453x961]I shook my head and pointed to my crutches. The music was loud and shitty. Some techno beats imported from Sweden.
— Come on! It's my night off!

Before I could say something to stop her, Jessica was in the crowd of people. Half of them were jumping up and down, and the other half were grinding against each other. There was nothing I could do but follow.

I found her by the d.j. booth, doing a two-step and shaking her hair around. Each curl was a black snake twisted onto her head.

— Dom! How you doing? Want to dance?

I shook my head and pointed to my crutches. The music was loud and shitty. Some techno beats imported from Sweden.
— Come on! It's my night off!

I forced myself to stay. There were a bunch of guys eyeing Jessica, and if I left early she'd probably give her number to some asshole. I saw Uncle Ralph on the couch, telling me to stick it out. He was right. I dragged myself against a wall and watched Jessica's bouncing head. Her eyes were closed in some kind of techno trance, but every once in a while she'd open them and wave in my direction, like I was her chaperone dad or something. Finally, ten minutes or an hour later, she danced over to the wall and stopped in front of me. Her hair was wet and her face was all sweaty.

— You want to get out of here? she asked.
I nodded. We pushed our way to the door and then we were on the sidewalk. No one was outside except for us. Even the late night deli across the street was closed, a metal gate blocking the window sign that spelled out an ad for Cold Cuts—Phone Cards—Cigarettes.

Jessica's heels made a noise each time she stepped down on the pavement. I like your shoes, I said. Click. Thanks, she said. Click. Got them on sale.

Things that suck about having a broken leg: When you're walking a girl back to her house and you can't put your arm around her waist because you're too busy holding onto your crutches. When she invites you up to her room and it takes you five minutes to climb the stairs. Then, when you've been kissing for a while and her jeans come off and all of the sudden she's lying there all warm-eyed and bare-legged, you think that if you climb on top of her you won't be able to move the right way and you start to lose it. And you point to your cast, tell her she should save it for some other time, and she says okay, that's a good idea, and you start to snore like your uncle does when he's had too much to drink.

I went to the doctor in the morning after leaving Jessica's house. My one-month check up. Under the cast my leg was itching, and I was sure there was something wrong, that it was swollen or infected or, worse, about to fall off.

At the hospital they took an x-ray of my leg and told me to wait. I sat down in a plastic chair and messed around with my crutches. Half
an hour went by before the doctor came in holding the results. A bald guy with good teeth that showed when he smiled. He fished a pen out of his pocket and stuck the x-ray to a lightbox on the wall.

The bone in my leg was a hollow white tube someone had snapped in two. There was this hazy glow around it that could've been muscle or skin, and behind that there was a field of black.

—How's it looking? I asked him. It's been itching me these last couple of days.

—That's normal, he said. Try not to think about it. Your leg is coming along…

He took one look at my face and stopped talking. These doctor guys are always acting like they know you better than you know yourself. Like anything you say to them is wrong.

When I got home Uncle Ralph was frying slices of ham in the kitchen. I could smell it by the door, and for a second I thought of my old house. I walked in hungry.

—Where were you last night, boy? he said, hearing me come in. He was standing by the stove, no shirt on. He could have passed for a pregnant lady with a moustache.

—I was with that girl.

—Oh man. He pounded me on the back. Do you like her or what? He shut off the stove, flipped a piece of ham onto his plate, and left one for me.

I thought about Jessica in the club. Dancing in a 360º pattern and barely missing some guy who tried to grab her ass when she spun around. What kind of girl meets up with someone, then ditches him for an hour?

But then I thought about the way she had looked that morning. When I woke up, I could see her face right next to me on the pillow. She was breathing low, her eyelids closed, her eyeballs moving underneath like they were looking at a secret picture. Her make-up had rubbed off, and two moles on her right cheek were showing. They were kind of cute.

—Yeah. Guess I do.

After lunch I worked up the nerve to give Jessica a call. In my head she was still in bed, covered by a blanket, and the thought of waking her up got me all nervous.

She picked up after the fourth ring.

—Dom? What happened to you?

—I had to go see a doctor.

—Oh, well, I had fun last night. Too bad you couldn’t dance, huh?

She laughed a little, then stopped.

—Yeah, too bad. You know, when I get both my feet, I’m better than Michael Jackson. Listen, you doing anything later on?

—I don’t get out of my shift at Kellog’s ’til 1, but I’m free after that. You want to come over?

When I hung up the phone I asked Uncle Ralph to borrow the car again. It was a beat-up sedan, but just knowing how to drive was enough to impress a girl in Brooklyn. He said yes, as long as I’d fill it up on my way home.

Jessica was waiting to answer the door when I knocked. She was wearing a starched dress with her name sewn onto the pocket. She looked good.

—We need to be quiet, she said, pointing behind her to a room upstairs.

I pushed my face towards hers and leaned in. She got the hint.

Jessica’s room still looked like a messy Victoria’s Secret catalogue: bras and panties mixed up with heels and make-up. I stepped on a tube of lipstick on my way in, but she told me not to worry about it.

—Oh man, I’m tired, she said, falling onto the bed where I had left her that morning.

I stayed on my crutches for a while, trying to decide how fast I should move. Did she like me more after what happened last night? Well, I figured, as long as I was here might as well give it another shot.

I lay down beside her and gave her a kiss on the neck. Good Smooth.

Jessica kissed me back below the chin. Then she sat up.

—I need to tell you about this asshole who comes into work tonight. So he orders a hamburger medium-rare, right?

—I nodded.

—So I’m like, we don’t do medium-rare. Only well done. And he’s like, I want it red and juicy. So I roll my eyes and tell him I’ll see what I can do, but of course I can’t do nothing because the chef is a dirtbag. So I bring it out to him cooked and leave it on the table and go off to wipe the counters. And this guy takes one bite and tries to call me over, but I ignore him and keep on wiping away, so he gets up and finds the manager. Ends up getting his food for free, and I get yelled at.

—Sounds like hell.

—Yeah, and you know what? Things aren’t like that in nice restaurants. It’s like last New Year’s Eve, the place is empty, right? Everyone is out partying with their friends. No one wants to eat. And my friend Angela is having this big party out in Bushwick, and she calls me up and tells me I should come, but of course I’m stuck with the shitty shift no one wants and my boss won’t let me leave. So I hear from
her later that the party got so crazy the cops had to come and break it up, and all I want to do is quit my job. What’d you do last New Year’s, Dom?

— I stayed in.
— With your family?
— With my uncle.
She didn’t hear me.

— It’s just that I’m so sick of serving these ugly men coffee six days a week. All they do is leave me shitty tips after they look down my shirt all night. Seriously, every time I refill their cups their eyes pop out. But you’re not like that, are you?

— What? Like what?
Jessica shook me to make sure I was still awake. The whole time she’d been talking, I’d been lying down with my eyes closed.

— Like those guys.
— No way, I said. I opened my eyes.
Outside we heard a pair of sirens go by. Inside it was quiet.

— Hey, she said. Will you give me a backrub?

Jessica worked the night shift. I mostly worked days, so I’d pick her up in my uncle’s car and we’d drive over to her house. Jessica lived with her mom, who went to bed early so she could catch the 7:30 PATH train to New Jersey, where she cleaned a house owned by this dentist guy and his doctor wife. In the mornings, her mom would leave us some hardboiled eggs on the table for breakfast. We’d peel them nice and slow, pour ourselves two glasses of orange juice. Put on some music I could stand.

— Look, I’ve been meaning to ask you…what do you want, Dom? Jessica asked me from the open door to her closet. It was late. She was changing out of her work dress.

— What do you mean?
Was she tired of moving so slow? We had been together for a few weeks, but with the lights off we were still fourteen, messing around with our clothes on.

— I mean, you know. Whatever you think I mean. I thought for a while. Don’t bring up the cast.
— Can’t think of anything. Wait, I got it—money. You?
She finished unbuttoning her dress and put it back on a hanger.

— Every time I think of something big, it just sits there for a while, then goes away. It’s like I have all these ideas, you know? But all I do is wait and wait.

Jessica walked over to the mirror in her closet. She stood there and checked herself out. Lowered her eyes, made a face. Ran a hand through her hair to loosen it up. Got less bored when she looked over and realized I was watching her from the bed. She started swinging her hips from side to side, and when she turned around, she smiled at me like she was about to tell me something I’d been wanting to know for a long time.


— My friends started calling and leaving messages on my phone.
— Where you been, Dom? Haven’t seen you in a while.
— Dom, it’s Veto. You still got that broken leg?
I called them back from work.

— Yeah, man, doing good…No, no, haven’t been getting out much…Still dragging my leg around…Yeah, you try pissing when you got crutches.

But I always made excuses when they asked me to hang out.

In my head, I could see them standing on the corner of Myrtle and Wyckoff like a pack of baggy-coated turtles. Watching the traffic lights change, talking about who was pissed off at who. Only moving to pull up their pants. Once in a while, someone would pass around a joint, and five minutes later they’d all be laughing at some joke about a girl who walked by with a little too much showing.

With Jessica, I felt good just sitting with her and knowing that she wasn’t somewhere else. I told this to Uncle Ralph, and all he did was shake his head and pass me another beer.

— Got to watch out for yourself, boy. How long you been seeing her?
— Long enough.
— You know what your mom would say to that.
— What?
— Don’t give me that lip. Look, I want to stop by the store today and see what’s there. You coming with me, right?

Like I had a choice. We finished our beers and got into the car, drove the twenty five blocks to the Devauro Pawnshop. Uncle Ralph always wanted a place named after him. Too bad the place is a rented room carved out of an old fabric warehouse.

When he unlocked the door and I walked in after him, the first thing I saw was a bunch of dust dancing around in the air, looking for some place to land. Uncle Ralph saw it too.

— You going to clean this place up? he said. He moved towards some old typewriters we had on sale, all of them with missing keys.
—When I get the chance.

I watched as Uncle Ralph counted the things in the store and subtracted what I had sold in his receipt book. Then he called me over.

—Listen, Dom. You got to step it up. The rate you're selling, we're both going to be working at Dunkin' Donuts by next Christmas. You've been spending too much time with that girl. Can’t let it get in the way of your job.

I told him that I felt bad and repeated what he said to Jessica that night, but she just told me not to listen to him.

—That man needs to get laid. Did you say your aunt left him a while ago?

I nodded. Aunt Eva was like that—one night, without telling anyone what she was doing, she woke up to a sleeping house, packed her clothes, her rosary beads, her toothbrush and toothpaste in a suitcase, and only asked God for forgiveness once she was on a Greyhound heading south to Baltimore. My uncle went nuts, then got a younger girlfriend who broke up with him a few months later. This was before my mom died and I moved in to his house. My aunt still asks me if he's mad at her when we talk on the phone.

—Don't worry, Jessica was saying to me. We're tight, okay?

—Okay. She leaned in and grabbed my hand. I felt her acrylic nails dig into my palm, but I didn't say anything about it.

—When are they taking that thing off? Jessica asked me one night. We were hanging out in her room again. She was sitting in a furry white chair across from me.

—Not sure. Why'd you ask? I looked down at my cast and wondered if it smelled bad. I had been stuck in it for three months, and the doctor was aiming to keep it on for two more. He kept telling me that my leg just needed some time to "get its act together." Then he'd add some time on to how long that would take.

—Did you drink milk when you were growing up? he asked at my last check-up.

—Yeah, I drank milk, I said, too pissed to even sound pissed.

I looked back at Jessica.

—Oh, no big deal, she was saying. Just wanted to check.

There was something in Jessica's voice that made me keep my eyes in her direction. I saw that she was still wearing her shoes. They were black lace-up sandals that showed her toes.

—You know, she started up again. I was talking to some guys over on Driggs the other day, and they said they'd never heard of you. She stopped, though I could tell she wanted to keep going.

—You sure? How old were they? Must've been too scared to say they knew me.

I puffed up my shoulders to try and make her laugh. She didn’t buy it. When she got quiet like this, I got scared.

—It's a good thing no one's asking about me, I said. I don't want them to know how easy I let off that guy who made me break my leg.

I was talking as fast as Jessica normally talked, but I stopped when I saw her staring at me.

The sweat started oozing out from my skin. What was I supposed to tell her? That I had really crushed my leg by falling off the back ramp of a truck while unloading a chest of drawers? A few months ago, Uncle Ralph got into this streak of buying heavy things that used to belong to other people's grandmas. He called them "antiques," but I should have told him before it happened that you can find the same stuff at Salvation Army.

I stayed quiet. Jessica looked away and started to play with the bow on her shoe.

—Forget it. They probably didn't hear me right.

You know how it is when things start to go. First, the kissing breaks off early, and instead of staying in bed you decide to watch a movie in the living room, when it used to be the other way around. Then, ten minutes into some James Bond action flick where all the women are wearing those tight plastic bodysuits, you start to want it again, so you reach over and put your hand on her thigh, but she pulls away and tells you she's not in the mood.

When Jessica said it a few days later, there was something in her voice that told me there was going to be no back-and-forth convincing, no trying to get her to sit on my lap. I sat there, breathing hard as Jessica tuned into a waterski chase playing on the VHS. The volume was low so we wouldn't wake her mom up.

Two seconds later, I heard her sigh. I looked over and saw her head tipped against the back of the couch.

—Will you go get me a pillow? she asked, but it didn’t sound like a question.

I didn’t want her to start getting worse, so I took my crutches from the floor and swung up to her room.

Jessica's pillowcase had little red lipstick kisses printed all over it. The kind I used to wipe off for real when my aunt attacked my face on Sundays, while my mom stood off to one side. I tucked the pillowcase under my left arm, fit my crutch under there too, and was swinging out into the hallway when I heard Jessica turn off the t.v. and walk towards the kitchen below.

I went down the stairs. I felt like I was getting smaller as I went down. 
The night it happened we were up late again, watching an old movie about a cowboy who leaves his ranch and goes to find gold in Mexico. A good-looking guy who gets in trouble for his stupid way of pronouncing Spanish words. In the middle of the reunion scene, when the cowboy comes home broke but finds his wife still wearing the same dress she wore to the train station to see him off, I heard Jessica's cell phone beep.

The movie kept playing. She picked up her phone and read a message on the screen, then typed something back. Then she glanced at me like she wanted to say something.

—What is it? I asked. The cast on my leg was still scheduled to come off in another month or two.

—It's nothing, she said. She scooted a little closer and gave me a kiss on the cheek. They want me to come in early tomorrow. You know how it is. Let's go to sleep right after this.

I figured she was ready to doze off. But once we were in bed, Jessica kept rustling under the sheets. I lay beside her on my back, thinking it was the coffee she drank at work every night. I knew the feeling—when you're tired but not tired, running through all the stuff that happened today and all the stuff you'll have to do tomorrow. I held out and pretended to be asleep. As long as Jessica was awake, there was still a chance she'd reach over and start stroking my arm.

Instead she kept tossing around by herself, and I started to fall asleep for real. The space in my head got jumbled up. Then it got empty.

I woke up sometime later. The room was darker than it was before, and I couldn't even see the ceiling. I turned over to spoon with Jessica, but the mattress was smooth on her side of the bed. Then I heard her moving around the room somewhere, and I closed my eyes again without knowing why. There was the sound of a dress being zipped up, then the sound of a door opening. She was standing there, I could feel it—her hand on the knob, her hair all over the place. I turned my head towards the light coming in from the hallway. The door closed.

I lay there for a while longer, not knowing what to do. I was hoping that maybe Jessica had gone to the bathroom, except there was no way she'd change out of her t-shirt just to go pee, but maybe the dress was really a pair of jeans she put on so she wouldn't be cold.

A few minutes passed. A few more. She didn't come back. Did someone tell her about that stupid thing that didn't even matter… Finally, I found my crates beside the bed and flipped on the light switch.

Jessica's purse was gone. Instead, there was a dip in the carpet the size of a watermelon. I felt a muscle on the left side of my face tighten, like it was about to have a spasm. The right side of my face turned numb.

Somehow I managed to put on my sock, my shoe, my shorts over my boxers, my jacket over my undershirt, and make it out of her room with my crutches—

Lift. Swing. Foot on the ground. Lift.

When I kicked the front door shut behind me, I wasn't sure whether I felt closer to the cowboy guy or his wife.

The air outside was cold. I looked down the street one way and saw that it was empty. I looked the other way. Same thing. Jessica's block was a row of brownstones with Keep Out and Beware of Dog signs taped to the front doors. A neighborhood where all the families knew each other's business and hated anyone whose mom wasn't second cousins with someone's brother. I could have told you what was where during the day, but in the dark all the houses looked the same.

I flipped a coin in my head and decided to take a right.

A few blocks away, a car horn beeped. I pictured Jessica stepping off the curb and getting into a cab.

Across the street, a blinking crucifix was shining out from one of the houses. On. Off. On. Off. The yellow light hurt my eyes. It was almost worse than staring into the sun.

Now Jessica was giving the driver directions, sitting back, and pulling out a mirror to check her make-up.

I was going down the street as fast as I could when I stopped and remembered Uncle Ralph's car. I felt around. The keys were in my pocket. Good. But then I realized the car itself was parked at the other end of the block, and I wanted to kick myself. By the time I got there, unlocked the door, and put the key in the engine, Jessica would be dancing up against a stranger at San Loco's, thinking I was still back home, asleep.

Or maybe she was already there, wrapping her leg around some guy's waist right after he bought her a drink.

I swung my cast around and worked my crates like they were being propelled by jet fuel. Lift. Swing. The houses passed on either side of me, their front gates locked, their owners asleep or in the shower or playing poker in the kitchen. Meanwhile all I could think about was getting to the car and tossing my crates in the backseat.

I would go and find Jessica, and once she saw me she'd act all surprised, maybe say my name loud in front of everyone. And then… Well, after that, things get less solid.

I was halfway down the block and working it hard when I hit a puddle on the sidewalk. A spread of oily water that blended in with the pavement. Someone else's spill. Before I could figure out what was going on, my arms were hanging onto nothing and my crates were flying off. I watched as the left one hit a wrapped-up newspaper. The
right one soared a few feet before landing by a fire hydrant. Then I lost it. The last thing that I saw as I fell to the ground was a patch of sky with no stars, and I remember thinking all the light was being blocked out by the skyscrapers over the bridge.

I woke up in the hospital wearing a blue nightgown. I felt like shit. My head was throbbing like someone had knocked me through a door into a wall, and when I looked down I saw my cast was gone.

—Dom? You awake?

It was Uncle Ralph. He was sitting in a chair a few feet away from me, chewing on his bottom lip.

—Yeah. What happened to my leg?

—They had to take off the cast to make sure you didn’t hurt it again.

I checked my left leg. It was half the size of the other one, a bunch of limp muscle knotted around the bone below the knee. There were these big purple bruises all over it that made my skin look like a rotting piece of fruit, but it felt fine. Better, even.

I had other things to worry about.

—You see my phone anywhere? I asked Uncle Ralph. He reached down and took it out of a zip-loc bag by his feet that also had my wallet and his keys.

I checked my cell. No messages. No missed calls.

I was going down my contact list, trying to get to the J’s, when the doctor came walking in the door.

—How’re we doing here?

Different guy, same uniform. I stopped what I was doing and squinted at him as he scribbled something on a chart.

—I just woke up. My head hurts.

He nodded like he already knew what I was going to say.

—The good news is, your leg held up in the fall. The bad news is, you gave yourself a concussion, so we had to give you some pretty strong drugs.

For the first time I noticed the small needle stuck to the inside of my elbow. It was connected to a plastic tube that led all the way up to an I.V. bag full of clear stuff that looked like water but wasn’t water.

The doctor pointed to a red button sitting by the pillow. It was hooked up to the I.V. by another cord.

—You use that button when you want some extra relief, okay?

He winked at me and turned around to leave.

I put my phone on the table next to the bed and listened to Uncle Ralph snoring in his chair. I scratched my leg, then looked out the window. It faced the open courtyard of the hospital instead of the street. A plot of dead grass fenced in by eight floors of sick people on all sides. Across the way, I could make out the shadow of a lady getting a sponge bath in another ward. The blinds were drawn. I watched as the lady’s outline held her arms up over her head, like she was reaching for something hanging from the ceiling. To the right, the nurse started scrubbing her back with a black square of a sponge. She took a long time washing off the soap before she moved on to her neck. I wondered what they looked like, but there was no way of finding out—the whole thing was a dumb puppet show no one was watching except for me.

When it was over, I looked down and pushed the button.
POETRY
PARTY GAME

If you were an animal what animal would you be
He said caribou, something with antlers,
rain-shellacked. You could walk
on your whole foot and that seemed
honest. She said a junco because she had some idea
they mated for life (they don't). Her hair grew gray
at the roots, like a species of winter vegetable.

The one whose answer mattered to me,
hostage to both the season's gravity
and a sense of fair measure, didn't play
party games. If you were an animal
what animal would you be, he asked,
refusing the question. All I could think of
was a chair on the patio of my old house,
creaking according to the yen of the weather
and twilight like a tear-dimmed eye
and the boots by the door, waiting.
ICARUS

The sky is unavailable right now.
I think Nature is beautiful. I am a virgin.
It is not my fault I want to touch
everything: wet fur, knuckles,
the pink earth.

I touch the sun.
I don’t care.

A cloud watches the whole thing and says, I can’t imagine
that would be fun for you.

This is such a good song,
let me die to it.
in pinellas, among trees
palm and pine,
this man
who is not my grandfather,
yet to my youngest brother is,
makes conversation.
he tells me about his own
arrest
just over a month ago,
some incident at some bar.
he fidgets while i use the atm
and i too, am restless—
hoping there is enough inside
to cover it.

our approach reveals
the courthouse keeping a
low profile,
a building on the lam.
we arrive and his escape is also
flawless:
a nod of the head
a wave of the hand
a promise to return,
if need be.

there are two structures here,
one for talking cures,
the other, old-fashioned,
outlined in barbed wire.

at the reception
a woman takes the cash—
it is a bucket
for my drowning mother—
she guarantees its return.
she is a thief.

while i wait
the television
vacillates,
caught between
spanish soap and
sesame street.

oh, to learn again the language
of fried donuts,
airplanes made of feet,
and you
happy for a while.

there was the day
when you gave me money
for lunch and
i walked across the madeira
bridge
to order the biggest meal
at mcdonald’s,
spilled my drink
on the floor.
a woman dried my face
with a napkin,
let the same towel drop
and gather the mess
like old, wet cinnamon.

i came back
and saw my brothers
tied to chairs with ropes
as thick as my thumbs
in a too-large house
that we could not afford,
by the water.
during the eighth hour
the receptionist walks
to where i sit
and says there’s an
act
by which the state of
florida may hold
the mentally ill
for their own protection.
your mother has been
baker acted.
she suggests that i go
home.
would that they keep you forever.
did you know what you
were doing
when you left
your youngest on
a doorstep
whose numbers hung
sympathetic
on its front,
and drove into the
balmy night?

no,
probably not.
i did not free you
that week before
moving to the east;
i walked the strand,
red with residue from
the tide
and could not touch the sea.
My father is arguing with his father
about killing a horse. Go on, he says,
Do it. Handing over the rifle,
he steps a few paces back,
between stems of high yellow grass.

It is the best thing to do.
The horse is old; its ribs stick out
like a tunnel of bent, threshed wheat.
The wind moves through it, and the horse
is thirsty, making a hollow sound.
The horse has not remembered
to be hungry for a very long time.
Under the weight of some secret knowledge,
it stands at the edge of the field.

My father steps back, wanting
to know what to expect. As he walks
forward, the older man leaves
a half-bent trail in the grass.
Reaching the horse, he embraces it
like a child.

He brushes its soft shoulders,
its flanks. He leads it to the forest.
Go on, he says. Go on.
On the calendar I marked the day you'd leave
with ring of coffee-stain.
_A prophet shouldn't grieve,_
the angel said. She rubbed my eyes, amused.
The skylight broke
in a rush of feathers. I slept in the rain.

My first task was easy: naked, bruised,
I brushed doors with wreaths of spreading smoke.

Next she placed songs at my throat like stones—
bloodglamour, blackwater, laurelsheen,
the opal heat of polished bones.
My sores healed, my tongue was free.
Glass roses bloomed at my lips
and blew before me into rooms, unseen.

Now I hold time like salt holds the sea.
I cough, and shrug, and the sky tithes a total lunar eclipse.

I'm breathing. Better than ever before.
(Though still today the sound
of a step like yours brought me bristling to the door.)
Nights, the streetlamp hums flat
as a star crumbles to snow—
there's only so much light to go around.

I have made a better trade than that.
There's nothing only lovers know.
You remember it, don’t you, Mother, that afternoon in the yard?
I held a cigarette. You had one, too. Like two old women,
our dogs crept through the grass whispering. And then, as it to satisfy
their disdain, I lifted my face to the sun and sneezed.

It was as if my brain had emptied onto me, suddenly
leaking down my chin and neck like an unwarranted confession.
Disgusted, laughing, you ran inside. Young and wet, I cried.

*How shitty their lives are,* Dot said to Spot.
*Shame, for them, is just another form of love.*
I'll accept the blame for this.

Yesterday evening I was taking a shower outside, while a heron looked on. She was trying to appear distracted but she would move her beak in circles, not quite "come hither."
If I had said anything she would have been embarrassed.
It's gentler not to notice, maybe to gesture toward the ripples, which are minnows trying to hide in the creek.

When I say I can accept blame, what I mean is that I would prefer if people left without speaking, taking the boardwalks but leaving the dunes.
Even early, I imagine Adam, eyes forward and beginning to sweat.
I am left in peace to spread shells like a bazaar, stuttering offers to passers who tend kindly to keep their eyes on the coast, though I keep half-wanting them to refuse outright.
Paul Muldoon has published ten collections of poetry, two children's books, and several volumes of translation to great critical acclaim, winning a Pulitzer Prize for his 2002 poetry collection, Moy Sand and Gravel. Muldoon, born in County Armagh, Northern Ireland, worked as a producer for the British Broadcasting Corporation before moving to the United States in 1987. Since 2004, he has written song lyrics for his garage rock band RACKETT. He is currently Chair of the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University, where he teaches creative writing.

Two years ago, Muldoon became Poetry Editor of The New Yorker. The Lit interviewed him over the telephone on April 7, 2009.

YLM: In America, Irish writers are usually referred to as a whole. Is there any difference between Northern Irish writing and the Republic of Ireland’s, as far as you can tell?

PM: I'd say, in general, there is no distinction between poetry written in the North and poetry written in the South. Certainly we've heard over the years—Thomas Kinsella, for example, asserted—that there would be no interest in poetry from Northern Ireland if it hadn't been for the political upheavals there. And, well, of course many of us happen to think that's not the case. It may be that there have been influences in one place that have not been quite so strong in another. I think it's fair to say that for many poets from Northern Ireland, for example in the 1950s and '60s, there was a lot more connection with what was happening with poetry in the UK, with the poets of "The Movement" and "The Group" in particular, which had an offshoot in Belfast, where a number of poets such as Seamus Heaney and Michael Longely, among others, began to develop. That was a slightly different strain than the one that was to the fore in Dublin at the time, though I think they were also influenced by that. There was a lot of to and fro, back and forth.

YLM: You're involved with the campaign to save Tara. In a recent visit to Yale, Eamon Grennan mentioned the destruction of the Connemara landscape through residential development. Do you feel more moved by the changes in these landscapes as a writer, or as an Irishman? Do the changes in these landscapes seem to herald a change in the poetry that will come from them?

PM: I think that one speaks as a citizen as much as anything else, but I'm not against change per se. I'm sure there are wonderful changes, and it's probably preferable to have a roof over one's head than to live in the kind of squalor in which many Irish for a long time did live. But certainly when we have the option to think about planning, and to think about the impact of a series of houses along a skyline, for example, it's probably worth going the extra mile and trying to find a way to integrate developments into a landscape. The Tara business is a slightly different matter, I think, in that while it does involve a development, it has got as much to do with the symbolism of the place as anything else. A motorway is needed in that area but it's not absolutely essential that it take the route it is taking, destroying a great deal of the fabric of what is archaeologically interesting, historically interesting, in the country.

YLM: You have been appointed Poetry Editor for The New Yorker. Has reading all the submissions—the sheer amount of reading that's been handed to you—influenced the pace or nature of your own writing?

PM: I do have several jobs, as it were, and the fact that I have taken on a number of other jobs probably does impact the amount of time I can spend on my own poems. But, you know, that is not necessarily a bad thing. I'm pretty certain that the less time one spends writing poetry, the better.

YLM: How come?

PM: I think in my case it's a matter of being of a certain vintage, and the truth is that all the evidence suggests that the longer one continues to write poems—in my own case, it's a terrifying 40 years or something along those lines—the longer one continues to get so unbalanced. It's probably preferable that one has less time to do it, less time to commit those crimes.

YLM: Still, in your own poems, you are willing to commit highly poetical crimes. Have you ever worked in prose? Would the aspects that are so signature to your poems come out in prose?

PM: I honestly don't know. I would love to be able to do prose. Prose fiction. I suppose I've never really tried to do it, but again, part of the reason for that is that I'm pretty confident that no matter how hard I tried, I just wouldn't be any good at it.

YLM: Why the disjunct between your confidence in poetry and your confidence in prose?

PM: Funnily enough, I'm not sure if I have that much confidence in poetry, however strange that might sound. The fact is, if one spends a day or two working on a poem and it turns out to be rubbish, comparatively little time has been wasted on it. Whereas, if one spends a year or two writing a novel and it turns out to be rubbish, then quite a bit of time has been lost. Still, I suppose there are so many great works
of fiction that I admire that I suppose if I were trying to do it myself, I would want to be as good as Joyce, say, and I just know, of course, that to imagine such a possibility would be a form of craziness. Somehow I've got a little more nerve on the poetry front. I suppose that along the way I felt, everyone would be able to do this. Again, I think it's got to do with the discipline involved. A rank amateur might actually be able (with no training, no ability), might actually, with luck, be able to run a 200-meter race, whereas one knows perfectly well that there's no hope in hell of running a marathon.

YLM: What poem from the Romantic Era would you most like to sing as a song with your band?

PM: Oh, I don't know, I guess it would have to be "Daffodil." "I wandered lonely as a cloud…"

YLM: Do you know that's actually been made into a rap sung by a man dressed as a squirrel?

PM: No, I didn't! But one of the great things about that particular meter, that particular form, is that it's very easily set. One could sing it to any number of tunes. One could make it sound like an Irish tune… What else is there? I'm just thinking of the Romantic period. One of my heroes from that period is Byron. What about "The Destruction of Sennacherib"? "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold…" That's worth looking at. That would be a good song. I'm thinking death metal.

YLM: Say you have a year just to write poetry. Where do you go and how do you live your day?

PM: You know, I really do believe, after what I was saying earlier on, that probably less time rather than more spent on writing poetry is a great idea. It's a very intensive business and I really don't think that it's possible to spend much more than a couple of hours a day writing poems. One should be doing it at a time when one has most energy. For younger people like yourselves that seems to be at one o'clock in the morning, for people like me its more like five in the morning—early in the day, in other words. Then the rest of the day is free!

YLM: What would you do with the rest of the day that might encourage better poems the next morning?

PM: Take a little walk, probably read a book that is not necessarily a book of poems at all, maybe a non-fiction book, have a little swim, go for another little walk, have a nice lunch, and generally adapt yourself. One of the terrible things that I've discovered over the years is that if I do have a lot of time, if I have an expanse of time, I find it very hard to focus. Whereas if I've only got ten minutes to actually sit down and do something…
Liana Moskowitz - Untitled
collage on paper
-27-

Rachel Rose - In The Courtyard
acrylic, latex, & tempera on canvas
-28-

Elijah Barrett - Moca (Adrianna)
grayscale 4x5 color negative
-29-

Mindy Lu - Untitled
pantyhose, chipboard, tempera, & varnish
-30-

Edwin Everhart - LOVE ME?!
marker on paper
-31-

David Muenzer - Molecular Gastronomy No. 4
latex, canvas, & oak
-32-

Andrew Chittenden - test5.pbm
portable bitmap
-33-

Cameron Arnold - Death Bag
bugle
-34-

David Rudnick - Self Portrait
compuserve graphics interface
-back cover-