



The Windhover

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Cover: *Small Shelter (Wing)*

by Ted Prescott

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Statement from cover artist, Ted Prescott:

Small Shelter (Wing) uses black corian (an acrylic used in countertops) for a base, and white Danby marble, which is quarried in Vermont. This marble is translucent when it is carved thinly. The piece was imagined as a model for shelter that one might crawl up into, and take refuge. The marble form evokes a womb and a wing. I thought of the shelter given by the Lord's wings mentioned in the Psalms as I was shaping it.

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CONTENTS

Emily Osborne

Helicopter Father 1

Jeffrey Wald

Visions..... 2

Mary Grace Mangano

Love in the Underground..... 13

Richard Pierce

Pyotr the Damned 14

Katy Carl

Omnes Habitantes in Hoc Habitaculo 16

Laurence Musgrove

Holding On 24

Tommy Welty

The Company you Keep 25

Anthony D. Baker

On Hearing That My Son Was Assaulted by a Nazi
on the Streets of Krakow 26

Justin Lacour

Tuesday, 1:12 p.m. 28

Richard Bernard

The Nurse and the Rattlesnake Hunter 29

Suzanne Nussey

In my father's house 38

Susan McLean	
The Last Supper [translation of Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Abendmahl”]	40
Carrie Heimer	
Gesthemene	42
Heather Caliri	
Whose Voice?	44
Judith Sornberger	
Like the Moon, the Muse Pulls at You.....	53
Christianna Soumakis	
Night Season.....	54
J. Malta	
The Wilderness	57
Sarah Crowley Chestnut	
Unrequited.....	58
Dan Leach	
Like Trees, Walking.....	59
Robert McNamara	
Consider the Waxwings.....	63
Rhett Watts	
The Flying Monk	64
Marjorie Maddox	
Landscape	66
Lisa Knopp	
Fleet.....	68

Maryanne Hannan	
like sparks among the stubble.....	70
Chris Anderson	
Shining Like the Sun.....	71
James Owens	
Eschatology.....	72
Bill Stadick	
First Stroll in the Resurrected Body.....	73
Contributors	74

EMILY OSBORNE

Helicopter Father

Our toddler unlatches doors so fast, crying
Out, out. His playground is beyond his father's
house, his mother's floors swept clean of risk.

Safety-tested gifts he shuns for mud and sticks,
oozing slugs, the surf's tickling suck.
We know each wonder is toy and hazard—

pulse-tripping foxgloves,
berry-dotted dropoffs,
barnacle's razors.

There is a myth of immanence,
that a father's eye sees every harm
as it's inflicted—

for it's written, the universe is planted
in innocence and sin.
Our son's garden is endless.

Eden, maybe, was baby-proof,
no roots to trip small feet, no puddle
too deep, no plum-pits to eat.

Eve would lay Abel on pillowed soil, turn
her back to pick apples. Adam would teach
Cain to name a creche of hungry tigers.

But God peered into his play-yard and spied
the danger. He cried *Out, out*
to any would-be toddlers.

Then angels' sword-flames slashed round
like chopper blades to save this sheltered
space from unborn babes.

MARY GRACE MANGANO

Love in the Underground

In Kharkiv, where trains don't come, rubble rocks
Are stacked like vertebrae in crooked spines
And missile blasts tear through the backs of buildings.

It's been like this for weeks. But this is where
They'll say their vows. A cellist strings some Bach
To empty streets. The sirens stop for now.

Amid a clay-red sea of broken bricks,
They dance and kiss. Cut flowers crown her head—
Their beauty for this day is what will last.

The bouquet she holds greens the grey and ash,
But it no longer grows. They marry in
The metro, since the safest place in town

Is underground and half the city sleeps
There now. It's here that they stand side by side
And gift their souls. The strongest roots reach wide

And deep below. *I do* they say out loud,
While bombs still shake the ground. Untouched, they answer
The dust with their lips: *here's to you* and kiss

Again, but this time with their foreheads bent,
A bow to all that's lost. But look at what
Can live here, see what they have found: the rose

That grows from concrete. Watch them make their way
Across the street. Today—in love, in war—
We must begin. We learn to fight by fighting.

KATY CARL

Omnes Habitantes in Hoc Habitaculo

Great-Grandmother ran the house from beyond the grave. Against Mignon's mother's distinctly expressed wishes, Great-Grandmother demanded that the furniture be arranged a specific way, that crystal lamps be perched where little girls must sit in tense fear of knocking them over, that mirrors be polished and porcelain belles dusted daily, in the one room Great-Grandmother had reserved to her own exclusive use. That room held only creaking pointelle-cushioned princess chairs, their stippled embroideries too sharp to relax against, and one sofa, upholstered in cloth the color and texture of burlap but with tufts of scratchy white wool, beige cotton fluff, and an unsettlingly slippery butterscotch sateen ribbon woven between the fibers. Great-Grandmother would not permit Mignon's mother to get rid of this furniture or even to slipcover it, no matter how Mignon complained that she could never sit comfortably enough to read or fall asleep there, that the couch as a couch was unsuited to its purpose. *Who said it was your job to be comfortable, young lady?* demanded Great-Grandmother. *Keep watch and stay awake.* The question of guests' comfort was as moot as that of Mignon's own, since Great-Grandmother had convinced Mama that the house was unfit for guests and, therefore, no one ever came over.

Then in the family room there dwelt Mignon's grandfather, who howled and gibbered in the night about the soldiers who, he claimed, were on their way, who'd tortured him and told him they would use the address on his bead-chained aluminum dog tags to find and to behead his family, in vengeance for what had been done to theirs. Daytimes, Grandpa only grumbled about the soggy cornbread and the stringy roast beef and the absence of decent Scotch whisky in this part of the country, despite his lack of any place to put such matters, had he found any he'd approved. A great-great-aunt sat in the corner with her ring-decked hands folded on her black-clad knees and simply did nothing at all other than lace and unlace her fingers, making a soft clinking sound of gold and gemstones that only Mignon could hear.

By contrast, Mignon could easily handle the occasional skeleton that chased her through the rooms of the house or the set of disembodied teeth that pursued her out the door and down the block. The specters of her dead relatives vexed her much worse. They congregated in the back yard, warning her that the vines on the fence were poison ivy, that rabid rats lurked in the compost heap.

They stood, admonitory, at the top of every climbing tree, every ladder, every staircase, prognosticating the likelihood of a fatal tumble. They stood at the edges of pools and streams and ponds, instructing her about drowning and snakes and waterborne diseases. When Mignon began to learn to drive, they sat in the passenger seat. Sometimes they climbed right into her lap to grab her hands off the wheel and scream that they were all about to die—or, worse, become liable for the payment of an astronomical insurance claim.

The specters accompanied Mignon to college, which she discovered that first night after her roommates had gone to sleep. Mignon lay awake in the cinderblock room, listening to ambulance sirens wail away thirteen floors below. Then she heard the whisper.

—If you had a stroke tonight, it said, now I know women your age usually don't but let's say you did, your roommate probably wouldn't even wake up.

—Who is this? Mignon asked the air.

Mignon's grandmother answered questions with questions: —You got that li'l phone a yours close by? it said. Let's put 911 on speed dial.

Mignon obeyed and then put the phone on top of the microwave that served her for a bedside table.

—Put it closer, her grandmother urged.

Mignon put the phone on the mattress beside her pillow.

—Closer, hissed grandmother's voice.

Mignon complied.

—Not under your pillow. You're not gonna be able to reach under there if you're blacking out and you know you only have a second to react.

Mignon sighed and laid the phone on the mattress next to her hand.

—Better, said grandmother.

That night the dorm room was visited by a lost and drunken fraternity pledge who mistook her roommate's beanbag chair for a public urinal.

—Let's get a single room, muttered grandmother in Mignon's ear when they woke up and scented the damage. Your roommate forgot to lock the door. You won't make a mistake like that.

So Mignon applied at the housing office and was transferred to a single, which had gone unoccupied only because the window-unit air conditioner didn't work. Reluctant to bother housing staff again, Mignon made friends with a boy who promised he could fix the air conditioner, but who, once inside the room, seemed more interested in Mignon's body, an interest Mignon didn't share, than in making any repairs. He told her so. She told him *no*. He didn't

listen. Crashed into her. Left.

After, the ghost of her grandfather made its presence known.

—My little girl, he said. He didn't ought to have done that. Hadn't you better look for an apartment off campus? You might be safer there.

The apartment Mignon found was just a studio; she couldn't afford more space on her own.

—It's enough, said her grandfather, and brought in more relatives: grandfather, grandmother, great-great-aunt, a man in glasses and a camouflage cap Mignon didn't recognize, a pair of immensely fat twins, and a tiny wizened woman in a high-collared black dress who identified herself as Aunt Vicky and informed Mignon that she was there to give lessons on deportment.

—Staying still, Aunt Vicky said. Going unnoticed. Being ladylike. Sit right here next to me, she ordered, tucking her many layers of petticoats under her bony thigh, patting the cushion on the floor. Mignon sat down next to her and stayed there until dusk fell, when Grandpa sidled up to her with a Swiss army knife in his hand, saying:

—Let me teach you some self-defense tactics.

He became her jailor. He lectured Mignon about attackers, terrorists, biochemical warfare. He enforced masks, a curfew; he forbade visitors. He had her hang thick rubber-backed privacy curtains at the windows.

—Situational awareness, hissed Grandpa, crouching beside her as she squinted into the thin sunlit bar between the curtains. —Stay here until the coast is clear.

The coast was never clear. Grandpa considered everyone a potential threat: delivery people, bus drivers, professionals, the homeless, parents with strollers, youths with earbuds—especially students. Mignon stopped going to class. Then she stopped going out, even to the store around the corner. She could keep soul and body together with what she could find in her own building's first-floor bodega. Even if she couldn't, it seemed to her that nothing she was doing now couldn't also be done after soul and body came apart. So she ate Doritos from cellophane packets, drank orange juice from little plastic barrels. She sealed up drafts in her window and door with strips off an \$8 roll of duct tape. She bought tampons in travel packs, \$3.59 for six, until she stopped needing them due to the poor nutrition.

—Better that way, murmured Aunt Vicky, in case that air-conditioner boy ever comes around again. He don't know where you live, does he? Suppose he found out and you ended up with another kind of unexpected guest, get my

drift? Much better this way.

Mignon began taking lessons from Aunt Vicky on invisibility. She began to slink downstairs at night, take goods from the closed store, and check herself out at the register, leaving cash in the drawer. Then she ran out of cash and, with no job and no apparent way to get one (how could an invisible person be interviewed?), just took goods from the store. The bodega manager expanded his hours, posted a night worker.

Now Mignon only stole in the daytime: lunch hour, rush hour. She got to know the cashiers: a business-school student with sky-blue rectangular glasses; a tall hawk-eyed girl who walked and dressed like an athlete out of training. Both, when not busy with customers, absorbed themselves in other pursuits behind the counter. Blue-glasses read books on quantitative easing or how to appear empathetic. Hawk-eyes constantly texted.

Mignon never knew which cashier had spotted her the day she fainted—she must have fainted, to have woken up no longer invisible, in a hospital room with an IV in her arm, but she remembered nothing except looking at the shelf in front of her—gummy worms or peach rings? She woke to the sound of a triage-room TV blaring news of a school shooting at already traumatized patients.

People in scrubs challenged her: —What have you been eating? Is that all? For how long? Where have you been living? How? Why?

Mignon could say only that Aunt Vicky had told her to be careful. —Who is Aunt Vicky?

Gold rings, she told them. Clinking. She couldn't say more.

They put Mignon in a room: one that, she noted, had straps on the bed, though these weren't used on her. They presented her with a tray heaped with turkey, candied sweet potatoes, green beans, canned cranberry sauce, white rolls, butter. At the sight of the heaped tray the relatives descended all at once, shouting contradictory orders. Grandmother begged her to remember the starving children in the Third World. Aunt Vicky yelled back at Grandmother that Mignon's not eating it couldn't hurt anyone a bit. Grandfather barked back that for all they knew, it might have drugs in it, mightn't it? The fat twins drooled, complained: they missed having bodies, missed food, it wasn't *fair*. Aunt Vicky stood up, walked across the room, pointed a knife-sharp pearly nail, and pronounced right into Mignon's face:

—Just how do you plan to *pay* for that meal, young lady?

Mignon lost her patience. She began to scream, to throw dishes at the wall,

to kick the bed, to crush handfuls of food into the sheets. Orderlies came; a new needle went into Mignon's arm.

Aunt Vicky stroked Mignon's forehead. She whispered in her ear: —Don't tell them about us.

—Why not? Mignon asked.

—They'll say you're crazy. They'll say we aren't here. They'll say you belong here. You can't afford it here. You can't afford how long you already been here. You got to get out. We'll help. Now listen. Here's the plan.

After trying to carry out the plan, Mignon lay strapped to the hospital bed, and no matter how patiently bland-faced people sat and explained her rights under the Subsidized Care Act, she screamed her throat raw. Never mind the things her relatives were telling her now. They were her, now, or she was only what she had seen and heard them be, what she surmised it was necessary to become.

All along, Mignon had assumed she was doing the right thing by imitating them. But imitating them had led her here, imprisoned her here. She felt a victim of circumstance, although simultaneously she blamed herself, unable to point to any one action the relatives had asked of her that she hadn't believed she was freely choosing. She felt a rightness, a sense that what was happening to her was happening the way it should be.

And the relatives crooned to her.

—We always said you was crazy, girl.

—Shut up, Margery; you ain't crazy, Mignon, world done gone crazy. Just got to just let it roll off you, like water off a duck's back.

—Shut up, Harold, girl's upset. You want to disappear now, don't you, girl? It's okay. We'll teach you how.

—You want to go away now, don't you, girl? Look over there. Now here's what you do. . . .

—You want to go home, don't you? Come with us. Come be one of us. You're just like us. Be just like us.

And they told her stories, and they forbade her to recount the stories they told her: of infants born deformed and buried hours after birth, of toddlers locked in cupboards, of children beaten with belts or with branches trimmed off saplings, and the relatives averred their firm belief that the world would be better if more children were locked away or beaten sooner, oftener, with more focus and conviction. And Mignon threw up over the rail of the hospital bed, because now she had shrunk to three feet tall and they were all sitting around

her in a circle watching her play with hollow plastic blocks that slipped about and wouldn't stack or stand contiguous to each other, blocks with corrugated convex sides, blocks that hurt Mignon's small hands. Meanwhile the relatives discussed in no uncertain terms the dreads and terrors of the world, and she had begun to cry, because nothing would stay together and she didn't understand how anything was supposed to fit, and now Grandpa crouched down and went very red in the face as he began to shout at her to STOP THAT CRYING OR I'LL GIVE YOU SOMETHING WORTH CRYING ABOUT, as tears filled his own eyes and he screamed at her about little girls her age found dead under leaves in the jungle, without their heads, without their dresses, and worse, and worse, AND YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN BY WORSE DON'T YOU?, and she didn't know, she didn't know, but her body knew and it vomited. And now only a little bit of greenish scum, then nothing at all but still every muscle was cramped and locked and the room was full of spiral-dancing stars and then of grayness and then of unholy quiet.

When she woke up she didn't know how long it had been, but she assumed she was dead because of the way the relatives were standing around moaning and keening. Only she counted one too many of them. Crouching on the floor, cleaning up the green scum with blue disposable cloths, was a man she didn't recall having met. He seemed vaguely as if she ought to know him, though: like they had been introduced sometime, but she had forgotten his name. Embarrassment stuck like an ice chip in her throat.

—Don't worry about that, she said, or thought she said, but the words didn't echo on the air the way they should. —I'll get it: but again, no sound came from her mouth.

She tried to get up, but the straps.

“Don't worry, I'm almost finished cleaning this up,” he said, and the vowels of his speech were long and warm and round and slow. He got up and put the cloths he'd been using into the trash can. The lid flapped shut again with a barely audible pop. The man washed his hands with soap at the sink in the corner, lightly hitching up his black cuffs, then turned around and smiled.

“You need some water?” he asked her.

—Yeah.

He brought a cup and a straw from the bedside tray.

“Looks like about time they brought you more. I'll tell the nurse as I leave.”

“Are you a doctor?” She found the sound startling: her own unfamiliar voice.

“Er. Not really. In a very limited sense only.”

“Don’t worry about me.” She turned away. “I don’t plan to be here much longer.”

“I can see you’d rather not stay. Also, I notice you have a lot of visitors. I’m afraid I can’t get the staff to discharge you until they feel you’re ready. But maybe I can help you get some privacy.”

He had a book in his hand and a tray with two small jars: water, white powder.

“What’s that?” Mignon asked.

“Salt,” he said. “Here, taste.”

She did. It sharpened her tongue.

He sprinkled the flakes around the room. The door seemed to open, though Mignon could see it was still closed. In came seven orderlies dressed in white scrubs and white sneakers. In their hands they held what seemed to be bungee cords, woven through with copper and steel wires.

“They can bind them,” the man said, nodding around at the relatives. “Is that all right with you?”

Mignon couldn’t find her voice anymore, but she nodded. The men stepped up to the relatives, marched them out through the closed door that was somehow also open.

—You can’t let them take me away, Mignon, I’m a helpless old woman, I’m depending on you, squealed Aunt Vicky. The man in black shuddered. He could *hear* her.

“Close your ears,” he whispered to Mignon, laying his hands over the sides of her head. Mignon closed her eyes and lay very still until the whole group disappeared. Then Mignon and the man in black were alone. She cried out with fear.

“Be not afraid,” he said in a voice like wind over still water.

And she was not afraid.

“Be healed.”

And he read from the book in an unfamiliar language while his fingers traced shapes in the air, gripped and shook the water container, traced the letter *t* on the damp petalline skin of Mignon’s forehead.

The book closed. A moment passed.

“How do you feel?” the man asked, and seemed to want to know.

“I . . . don’t think I feel anything,” Mignon answered. “I think that’s an improvement.”

The man gave a slight smile.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said. “Whatever you are expecting when you go back into the world, it will be different.”

Mignon nodded. “I’ve never been alone like this before.”

“Never?”

“Not since I can remember.”

He nodded again.

“Why don’t you do what your caregivers tell you,” he said. “And when you’re ready, think about coming around for a visit. You are free, but free doesn’t have to mean alone.”

He paused, handed her a small white card. Then he asked her:

“Do you *want* to be free?”

Then he left. The air seemed full of a silence like a series of sung notes, a harmony blooming with overtone.

Mignon lay back on the pillow and asked the harmony:

“What’s next?”

Only then did the place’s rightful inhabitants begin to speak.

ANTHONY D. BAKER

*On Hearing That My Son Was Assaulted by a Nazi
on the Streets of Krakow*

These delicate bodies of ours,
 soft even when stretched
 over skeletal frames,
taut tissue on birthday boxes;

bodies susceptible to stings,
 razor blades,
thrown rocks,
 or tumbling against the rocks.

That forehead I guarded
 —as much as a father can anyway—
with foamed corners on furniture,
 and a crash helmet,
 blue with silver-gray dolphins
 leaping from a cranial sea

is now adorned with a red thread,
 a short silk string on the birthday box.

It's a straight cut,
 not a lightning bolt like the boy wizard's,
 or the four-legged spider
 inked on the bottle-wielder's arm,

but a little dash—
 a sentence interrupter,
 that fleeting interjection
 after commas and parentheses
 have had their day—

Now signet of a memory lapse,
as if someone went to write a name
 on the papered package
 and managed only to marker in
 a forgetful stroke
 where someone's son had been.

Which in the end is,
I suppose,
what it is to hate.

J. MALTA

The Wilderness

Lord, I am tired of carrying
the weight of your silence.
Remember the nights
when your voice was a stone
I could hold in my palm?
If I ever doubted you
(and even then I doubted you)
I just made a fist
and there you were,
immovable and smooth.
Your silence is a desert,
and there are nights
I do not love you,
yet here am I,
still making fists.
The songs this body carries:
one head that says
you are a lie,
one heart that says
you are a dream.
But we dwell outside
of such frail anthems.
There is no one
like you Lord,
and where else would I go?

DAN LEACH

Like Trees, Walking

We write like the world's burning, and it's better than all the tired elsewheres, so we call it what it feels like—we say we're making something new. And maybe we are. Maybe every sentence is a kingdom in itself, and that's why we feel like God to finally get something good onto the page. But I prefer Viktor Shklovsky's take, which is more redemptive than creative. "Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life," Shklovsky wrote. "It exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony." Say that's what we're doing when we make art—reminding reality how to be real.

We write to resurrect reality, to return to the stone its lost stoniness, but if the scarcity of honest sentences is any indication, reality prefers to stay buried, and the distance between object and essence is serious. We want the world, but the world does not want us, and as any serious loser will tell you, it's lonely work to love the one who spurns you. It's possible to fool yourself into thinking our dilemma is not so bad—until you put words on the page, and you read them, at which point you realize that David Foster Wallace was right when he said, "The fiction always comes out so horrifically defective, so hideous a betrayal of all your hopes for it—a cruel and repellent caricature of the perfection of its conception."

There is a story about how the stone ceased to be stony, about how reality became unreal, though it's unfashionable now to accept its uses, even as an allegory. The story is old, and it's untenable, but it celebrates nearly every strangeness we smuggle out of childhood. It begins with a world given form through language: "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." Every gesture that follows this first one keeps time by the same divine rhythm: God speaks a word, and up jumps the void to take its new shape. He says *day* and *night*—we get day and night. He says *sun* and *moon*—a sun and a moon it is. By the end of Genesis 1, creation is shaped, and the score is unequivocal—all that becomes must begin in language. Nothing that gets a form doesn't first dance as a word across the tongue of God.

I am speculating (nostalgically so), but who wouldn't like to believe that, in that brief Edenic season before the Fall, our senses could know the world as the world itself wished to be known? All objects still wed to their essence. Light as true light, the stoniest stone in history. Who doesn't dream of a time when,

having not yet fallen, reality didn't need to be recovered? I do, and if I didn't, I wouldn't be a writer. That is, I wouldn't be a writer if I weren't a believer. I had a brilliant teacher in graduate school tell me, "I write about utopias." Out of respect to her, I thought (but didn't say), "Who doesn't?" The act of writing is a rebellion against the grave. A good book kicks oblivion in the teeth.

We had reality, then we lost reality, and everything since has been a kind of falling. Christians in The West fixate on the falling away from God, and that is not without application, but isn't it also true that, as we fell away from the Creator, we also fell away from creation? This is why Saint Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, claims, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." The stone fails to feel stony because we're not looking at the stone. We're looking at the stone's reflection and a darkened one at that. In this sense, writing means describing what you have never seen. It also means getting used to working in the dark.

In this way, all artists share in the impasse of the blind man at Bethsaida who begged Jesus for healing. In response, Jesus spit onto the blind man's eyes and said, "Do you see anything?" The blind man replied, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." Here is the patron saint of the sentence writer: half-blind, half-seeing, not purely hopeless, but not fully healed, grasping in his broken vision to tell one form from the next. Like him, we see more clearly than we used to. Like him, we are not content with a blurred version of reality, and we intend to plead with God Himself, until our eyes are opened fully, and we see more color, more form, more reality.

You need to see clearly to write clearly; and yet, reality itself eludes you. And that's not all. Language, the very lens we cut for looking, obscures the subjects it is supposed to bring into focus. As Walker Percy argued in "The Loss of the Creature," the proliferation of signifiers has ruined the viewing of all signifieds, even one as brutally luminous as the Grand Canyon. Percy writes, "The thing as it is, has been appropriated by the symbolic complex which has already been formed in the sightseer's mind. Seeing the canyon under approved circumstances is seeing the symbolic complex head on... The harder he looks at it, the less he can see." Language is supposed to bring us closer to reality, and it does, except when it does the opposite.

What obscures reality, then, is not only our own half-sightedness, but also countless layers of language attempting (and failing) to cut a path to the level of essence. The more we write about a subject, the more we frame it in

certain phrases and ideas; and the more we frame a subject, the more difficult it becomes for a reader to see it with their own eyes. In fact, when the framing of a subject is genius (i.e., Homer's poems, Shakespeare's plays, Marx's essays), then the subject disappears entirely, and all that remains is the master's apparatus, which many are keen to receive in blind and mindless faith. Nietzsche said of poets, "They muddy the water to make it seem deep." If this is true, then all writers are poets.

This is not to say we shouldn't attempt to describe reality, only that we shouldn't expect to find it; and, moreover, that the muddiness generated by the ways in which we fumble our subjects is, in the final estimation, more interesting and more useful than reality could ever hope to be. 'Aim to miss' is an apt philosophy. Even better: 'Miss interestingly.'

Ambiguity cuts deeper than accuracy, and some of the best sentences seem resigned to their own built-in unrealities. Barry Hannah (on addiction): "My eyes are full of yellow bricks. There are dry tiny horses running in my veins." Flannery O'Connor (on religion): "Later he saw Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark..." Richard Brautigan (on loneliness): "One day I was standing in front of my shack, eating an apple and staring at a black ragged toothache sky."

Even Jesus sometimes delivered a muddied reality. He told parables to woo the lost, but most of His audiences left baffled, wondering what mustard seeds and lost sheep had to do with the Kingdom of God. He repeatedly forecast His own resurrection, but when His own disciples stood face to face with His risen form, they appeared scared, confused, and even doubtful. And then there is His famous twilight discourse with Nicodemus. Nicodemus, who came in secret to have the reality of Christ's identity confirmed in plain language, left with the opposite: a paradox ("Unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."), a metaphor ("The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."), and a subversion ("If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"). Nicodemus stumbled out into the night, and his last recorded words rise like the song of the bewildered: "How can these things be?"

Look around. It is right that we should feel baffled, set as we are in a garden dark and strange as this. The singer is probably right when he says, "We're half awake in a fake empire." This is a double irony, and the longer I write, the less

inclined I feel to resist it. Like one of those pilgrims that only repent in small bursts, I have to remind myself to reject what I used to pursue. False confidence, for instance. Smug reductions. Words that deny reality its due ambiguities. I have to make peace with partial revelation and the sadness therein.

Later today, I plan to write a short story about an old roommate of mine who lost his mind after repeated and obsessive viewings of *Donnie Darko*. With a clarity that frightens me, I can still see his face, and I can remember exactly where we were sitting when he told me that he was dropping out of college in order to follow the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine. A year ago, I would've approached the writing of this story under the illusion that the particulars of our reality (those people, that time) were like fossils patiently awaiting my excavation. Now I expect the opposite. I expect that reality, already veiled by memory, to run headlong from whatever language I send after it. I expect it to hide among the bushes, disguise itself repeatedly, and finally retreat into the shadows, where (if I'm patient enough) I might catch it slipping up. Forgive me if most of what I show you looks like trees, walking. Those are people, I swear.

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The Windhover

27.1

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