

THE SIGH PRESS

ISSUE 7 • WINTER 2015

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

This issue's theme—"instincts, maternal or otherwise"—is a direct result of our studio visit to British-born Florence painter Rosalind Keith. In July, we braved the heat (which seems like a long time ago now) and headed to the outskirts of Florence where the city quickly fell away and we found ourselves in what felt like an artist's countryside retreat. Roz' studio and home are part of a cluster of beautifully renovated buildings (that she and her husband had a hand in).

Her workspace was chock-a-block full of large canvases, bins of works on paper, panels propped against walls, and the supplies of her art-making on any given surface, ready for her experienced hand. The current focus of her work—motherhood and family relationships—feels lusciously obsessive as she returns with brush and palette knife again and again to her subject matter. Her themes may appear traditional, but it is her very courage to tackle them that makes this work risky. And the viewer is rewarded. Her figures boldly fill the picture plane, but they often do so in an understated way, with exquisite color and compositional know-how. The formal harmony of these paintings strikes the very balance her subjects (mother/child, man/woman, family unit) strive for but, in real life, only fleetingly attain, and this may be one of the reasons they are so richly satisfying.

Others tackled our theme in unusual ways as you'll see in Colleen O'Connor Rickey's wintry and memorable tale, *The Goose and Edgar Gray*, and in Ann Lettick's poems about her autistic brother. Luke Whittington's graveside reverie will gather you up and carry you into memories that travel on "ships of grass." And you'll ponder the way Linda Falcone puts her finger on a culture's pulse during the holidays in *Cheer*, the Cultural Commentary for this issue.

Please visit www.thesighpress.com for our Spring Issue theme and deadline. And visit us on Facebook.

Mundy Walsh & Lyall Harris

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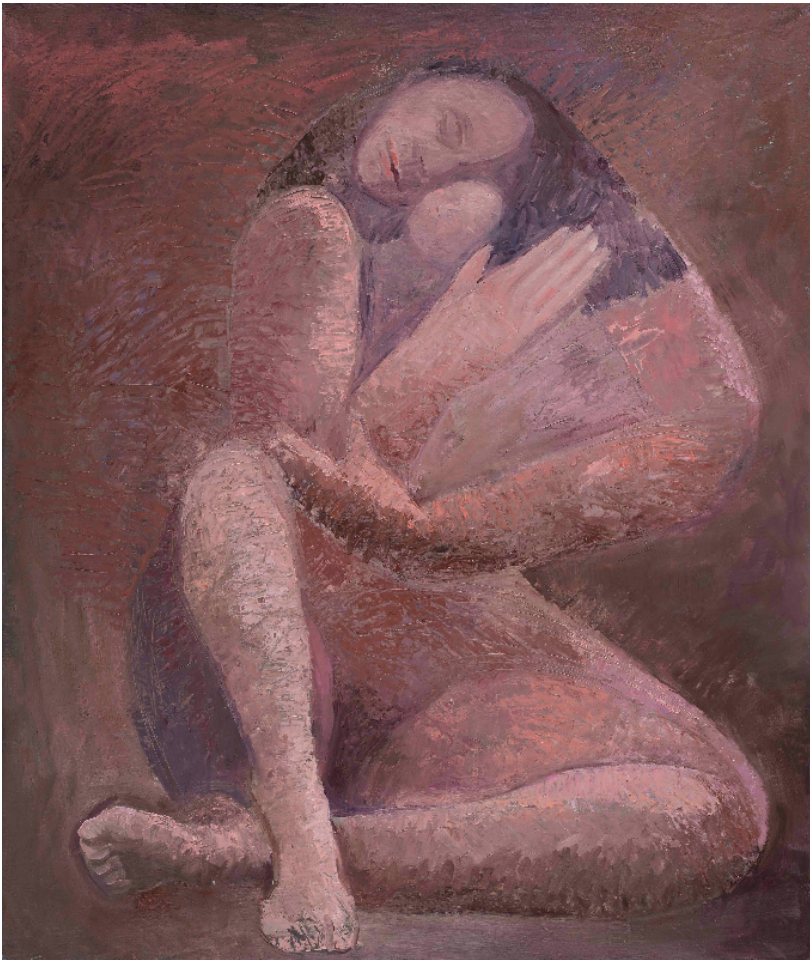
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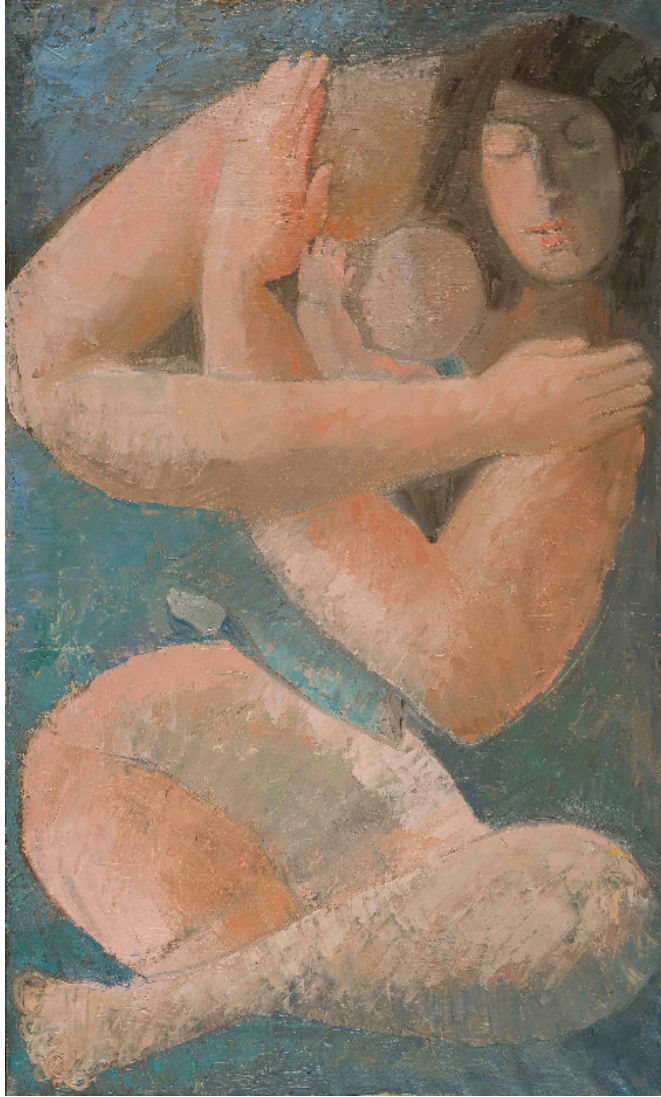
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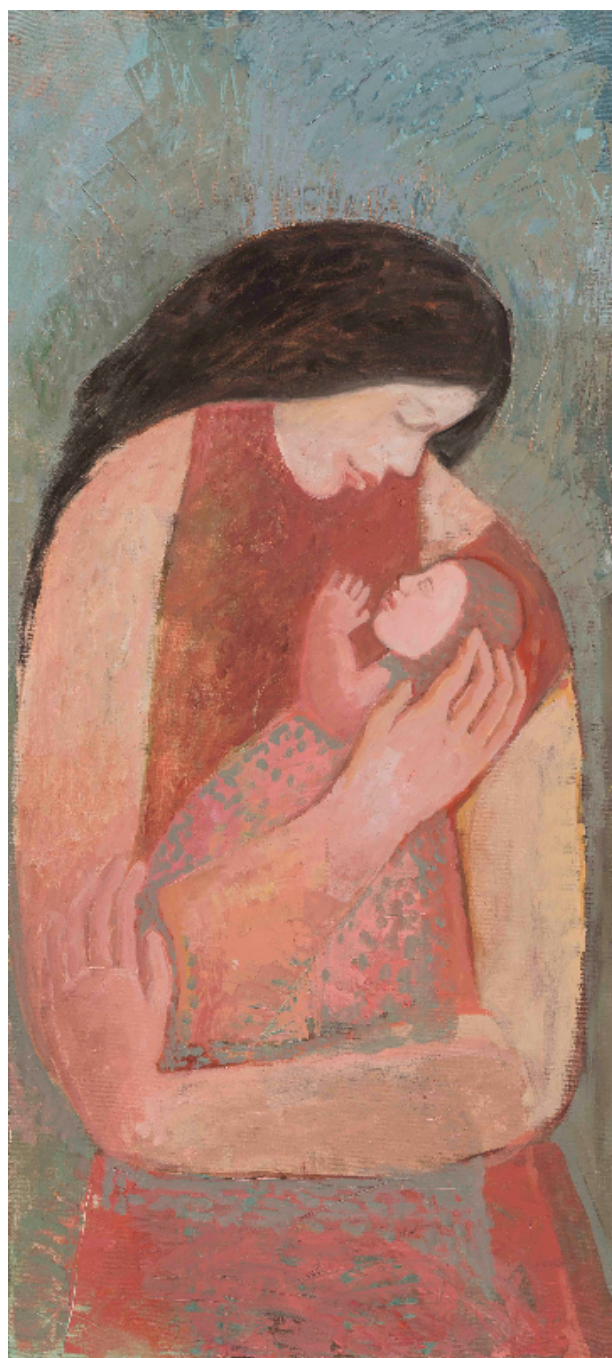


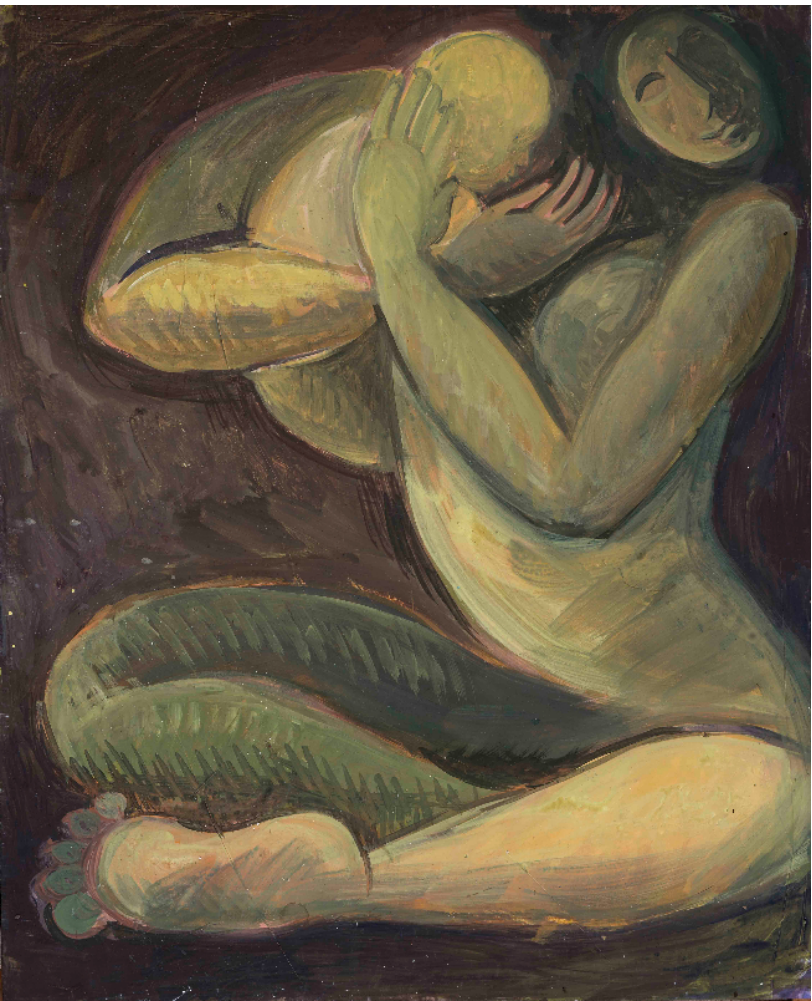
MOTHER AND CHILD

ROSALIND KEITH











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LEAVES OF SONG, ITALIAN GIRL

LUKE WHITINGTON

And the leaves spun
Their innocuous dance about the grave
In the grove opening deep into the forest
And the music played in the wind

As if a madman's feet not a fiddlers' — danced about there
Amongst emigrating leaves around the fresh-filled mound
Across the sunlight sailing through in little ships of grass —
The dancer with no shadow — later you grew to know

It was death celebrating its harvest
But as a young man you only remember her lovely face
Drifting slowly like a kite and vanishing slowly into pale pink light
Rising to a single glint curling in the sky — today wherever you are

In whatever dialect of a borrowed land, whatever season of the eagle
The swallow, sparrow or the crow, travelling with shadows of clouds, the
colours

Of spring, winter or autumn, or reaching up for the blinding ropes of
summer sunlight —

The bird with a face rises into the lightness of bright vapour or slow
auburn colours.

Death did not take her from your heart, death stamped around
Furiously anchoring its tenure — the sodden winter ground below
That took her and as you watch the whimsical language
Of wind in love with a leaf now and a leaf
Chasing the wind's tail around, around and then you remember

How the leaves became silence
And for years remained so and how human sounds
Came and went, minstrels of backgrounds you passed as nomad —
The strange stranger as you skirted around, around always
And the sound of silence in the sky of leaves
Forever reminds you of the fiddlers that day

Playing for her memory as the madman death — skipped
And leaped but could not reach one leaf
To catch the sense of her — now like a leaf descending, she
Is turning, turning, to land a touch
A finger's touch, light as a leaf on the top of your head.

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THE GOOSE AND EDGAR GRAY

COLLEEN O'CONNOR RICKEY

Hunter watched Edgar sleep for a minute before he woke him. It was a sunny, windy December morning, and the pale yellow walls of the hospital room reminded Hunter of his kitchen at home. His wife, Bonnie, had painted the kitchen by herself a few years ago, fed up with waiting for him to find time to help. It wasn't so much that Hunter was working cases all the time as it was that he was visiting friends and helping them with their home projects. In a small town like Claremont, Maine, there was little need for a detective, and Hunter usually ended up directing traffic and shooting rabid animals for people who didn't own guns.

He had known Edgar since he was born, which wasn't unusual in Claremont. Everyone in town knew everyone else. It was usually embarrassing, and in rare moments, comforting. By now, everyone knew about Jack and Nancy Miller finding Edgar in the woods while snowmobiling. They found him about 40 yards from route 11, snot and tears frozen all over his blue face, murmuring about a goose, and looking anxiously at nothing in particular. Rumors were already circulating at the Kitchen, the diner that Bonnie worked at and Edgar frequented.

Edgar was a loner, and no one knew if that was by choice or consequence. Twelve years as a blacksmith made him one of the strongest men in town, but there was an unsettling fragility about him. People tiptoed around him like he was simple-minded, and kept their distance as much as possible. There was an inarticulate pain behind his eyes and a desperate arc to his smile. He, like many Millennials, had no idea what he was capable of, and this dearth of knowledge kept him half-cooked, waiting for a moment when he would fight or retreat. Hunter's generation and every generation before it had proven itself in other ways—war, hitchhiking, starting a family, things like that—but in a time when everything was so easy and at once so hard, there was no adventure, nothing left to be conquered. Most of the young people in town buried this dilemma inside themselves in gadgets and social media and coffee from franchises, but Edgar didn't understand his peers, and he wasn't understood by them. He knew the paralyzing truth that the worst thing that will ever happen to you will never haunt you like the worst thing you've ever done. Most people his age never had to find that out.

Hunter touched Edgar's shoulder. "Edgar."

Edgar blinked once, then put his hand over his eyes. "What? Who is it?" He put his hand down and blinked again. "Oh. Mr. Hunter. Hi."

"How are you feeling?" Hunter asked. He thought about sitting, but decided to keep standing. He would get more answers that way. Edgar noticed Hunter's uniform.

"Are you here on official business?" he asked with a grim smile.

"Edgar, you were found half frozen to death in the woods with blood on your coat and an empty revolver." He looked down at the black and white tiled floor that permeated the hospital.

Gripping the railings on the sides of the bed, Edgar attempted to straighten himself out. His skin looked blotchy and thin under the fluorescent lights. Hunter hoped that Edgar wouldn't cry or yell or make any sort of scene. There was a volatile look in the man's glassy, bloodshot eyes. Edgar folded his hands in his lap. "What do you want to know," he said.

"Tell me what you were doing on Indian Creek Road on the night of December 3. And why your truck was parked four miles away."

Edgar sighed. "I walked through the woods to Indian Creek Road from my truck."

"Why?" Hunter said.

Edgar chewed his thumbnail and shrugged before starting his story.

On December 3, Edgar parked his truck on Rattle Hill Road and set off into the woods. He didn't lock the doors. He was carrying a revolver, a ham and pickle sandwich, and a bottle of store-brand ibuprofen. Edgar always had a bottle of ibuprofen on him. Over the years, the noise from his job had given him chronic migraines.

It was a clear night, and the reflection of the full moon against the snow illuminated the woods as well as any flashlight. Edgar walked southwest, toward Oak Lake.

"You were found on Indian Creek Road," Hunter said. "That's two miles north of Oak Lake."

Edgar knocked on the metal rail of the bed and put his finger to his lips.

It was a hard walk, especially in the snow, and Edgar wasn't sure how long it took for him to get there. As a kid, he and his father went fishing at the lake in the summer. Hunter had grown up next door to Chris Gray, and knew the family well. Edgar and his mother, Joleen, hadn't really gotten along since Chris's death when Edgar was a senior in high school. Joleen was a bit of a drunk, and Edgar was Edgar. He moved into Chris's blacksmith shop after he graduated, and from what people knew, he and Joleen didn't talk much.

When Edgar got to the lake, he saw something moving on the other side that he couldn't quite make out. It was something light colored, and with a long neck. It stayed in one place but was moving frantically in every direction where it sat. He thought it might have been a swan but realized as he got closer that it was a goose, one that had gotten frozen into the lake. It happened sometimes. People (usually the flatlanders that worked at the college in Middlefield) bought their children goslings and ducklings for Easter, not realizing that the wings were clipped. They "freed" them when they stopped being cute, and then the birds would eventually freeze to death. Jenna Scott, who sold birds at the farmers market in the spring, said that she felt bad about it, but, as everyone knew, you had to make a living.

The goose was matted with blood and waved its head and wings in a panic. There were small paw prints in the snow around the goose; between that and the rustling in the woods, Edgar guessed that a coyote was snacking on it before he got there. There were chunks of feathers and

flesh missing around its torso, but with the goose moving around so much, he couldn't get a good look at its wounds.

"Edgar, please tell me why you were running around the woods with a handgun on a night when it was zero degrees," Hunter said.

Edgar fiddled with his IV tube. "I'm getting to that," he said, slowly rocking his head from side to side.

A doctor came in. Her gray hair was pulled back in a plastic clip, and she wore frameless glasses. "Detective Hunter, I am going to have to ask you to come back tomorrow. I have to discuss something very important with Edgar."

That night after Hunter and Bonnie finished dinner, Edgar called and asked him to come to the hospital earlier the next morning. They were going to run some tests on Edgar's frostbite at eleven, and he wasn't sure how long it would take. After Hunter got off the phone, Bonnie said in a hushed voice "I had to yell at some teenagers at the diner today; they were saying that Edgar was the main suspect in the disappearance of 'that lifeguard girl' a few years ago. I told them, 'Katie Hunter—my husband's sister—disappeared in the nineteen sixties, long before Edgar Gray was even born.' Well, they felt pretty stupid." She put the dinner plates in the sink. "You don't think Edgar was doing something bad out in the woods, do you?" Hunter said no, but he wasn't sure.

The next morning was frigid. As Hunter drove down the mountain into Middlefield, he looked over the cliff at the valley below. Minarets of chimney smoke hovered over the peaceful houses, reluctant to disburse into the subzero morning air. Hunter remembered that he still needed to

cut some of the bigger pieces of wood that the Matthews had dropped off so that they would fit in the wood stove.

Once, when Edgar was small, Hunter spent a day helping Chris stack firewood. Edgar trailed behind the two men with a piece of wood, insisting that he was helping. Joleen would yell to Edgar to come inside every once in a while. Joleen always seemed resentful of Edgar, even before Chris's death.

Over the years, Joleen gained a reputation for being combative with everyone in town. She had been a knockout when they were younger. Hunter was a senior in high school when she moved to Claremont from Boston as a freshman. He spent the year wishing that she was older, ashamed of lusting after someone so much younger. Four years wouldn't mean so much after Joleen was eighteen, he'd remind himself. There is nothing wrong with eighteen and twenty-two the way there is with fourteen and eighteen. He just had to wait. Hunter started to date Bonnie to distract himself, but the more he got to know his future wife, the more he loved her. Soon he couldn't imagine his life without her.

In the meantime, Chris, who was two years younger than Hunter, had taken up with Joleen. Bob Westcott, the sheriff, said once that Chris and Joleen were always "fighting or screwing" when they were kids. If Joleen hadn't gotten pregnant during her senior year, the relationship probably wouldn't have lasted. The two got married quickly so that the baby wouldn't be a bastard, and in the end it was a miscarriage. Chris and Joleen kept trying to have another baby after that. Some people said that it was because they were devastated by the miscarriage, and some people said that it was so that they didn't get married for nothing. Everyone agreed

that it was a shame that they were making such adult mistakes at such a young age.

When Hunter got to the hospital, Edgar was rubbing the medical tape where the IV met the inside of his elbow. He motioned at the chair next to his bed for Hunter.

“So what are these tests for?” Hunter asked.

Edgar waved his hand. “They just want to check for gangrene and all that.” He looked at the window and pulled himself into a sitting position. “So this goose. It looked starved, so I took out my sandwich and gave it half. I put some ibuprofen in the bread, because the damn thing looked so hurt.”

The goose ate the bread, but not the pills. Its honk sounded desperate. Edgar had trouble getting close enough to it to inspect it. It kept hissing and snapping at his outstretched fingers. Finally, he put it in a kind of headlock and inspected it. Its legs, where they met the ice, were cut through to the bone. There were feces everywhere behind it, and the blood around the animal bites was frozen and clotted. “Shh,” Edgar told the goose. He took out his gun and—still holding the goose in a headlock—tried to chip away at the ice using the handle. The gun kept sliding and hitting the goose in the legs, each time making the goose’s head jolt upright into his armpit. Defeated, Edgar sat back on the ice and stared at the bird for a while. It stared back at him. Thinking that it might be cold, Edgar took off his jacket and put it around the goose. He pulled a loose feather from the snow, and ran it across his nose. After a few more minutes, the goose let him touch its head. It felt strange to Edgar, petting a

goose like a child visiting a farm. He stroked its neck and pressed his face against its head. "Shh," he told the goose. He gripped it under the beak and jerked the head backwards.

The skin on the back of the goose's head separated from the skin on its neck and rolled back like a window shade. The goose started making a terrible, unreal noise. Panicked, Edgar pulled out his gun and hit the goose in the head with the handle. It still didn't die, so Edgar held the skinless neck still and shot the goose in the head.

"That was the only bullet," Edgar said with a sigh. "You should've heard the damn thing though. It was terrible," he pulled on his lower lip. The fingers on his left hand looked like a corpse's, but Edgar looked pretty pallid in general. Hunter had seen a few bodies during his time on the police force—all from natural causes. "I didn't know what to do," Edgar said over his dead hand.

Hunter coughed and stared at a watermark on the ceiling. "It's good that you put it out of its misery."

"Yeah," Edgar said.

After the goose was dead, Edgar headed north. He wasn't thinking clearly, and he thought if he just headed across the lake, he would be going in the right direction. He was getting sloppy and stumbling a lot. At one point, he slid down the bank of Indian Creek. He was able to catch himself, but his left leg went through the ice. He tried to open his ibuprofen, but he couldn't grip the cap, and he dropped the bottle in the creek. After that, Edgar didn't remember much. He woke up in the hospital.

Edgar kept looping his sheet around his left index and middle fingers.

"What you aren't telling me, Edgar, is what you were doing out there."

"I don't want to."

"This isn't a choice Edgar," Hunter said. "What were you doing out there?" Edgar mumbled something. "What?" Hunter asked.

Edgar leaned forward. "I said that you are conducting an investigation for something that never happened."

Hunter spent most of the morning trying to make Edgar talk, but eleven o'clock came quickly, and he was shooed away by people in scrubs so that they could conduct their tests.

They put Edgar on penicillin for gangrene; he had it in his left hand and his left leg. Hunter felt bad for him; the penicillin was giving him hives and stomach cramps. Edgar didn't try to sit up in bed this time. He just looked at the ceiling, holding his stomach and itching. His skin was transparent.

"Edgar," Hunter said. "Just tell me what you were doing, and I'll leave you alone to sleep."

A nurse walked by and glared at Hunter. They didn't like him coming in every day and questioning their patient.

Edgar pulled the covers over his head. "Please go away, Mr. Hunter," he moaned.

"Why would you bring a gun? Why the middle of the night? You know how bad this looks. People are saying that you murdered someone."

Edgar pulled the covers down and sighed. "Is that what they're saying?" Hunter nodded. Edgar motioned at the hallway. "Close the door," he said as he scratched his neck.

Hunter obeyed and sat back down. "Are you ready to talk?"

"And they are really saying I murdered someone?" Edgar tapped the rail of his bed and nodded. "Do you want to know what I was doing? I was going to off myself that night in the woods. But I shot the damn goose instead." He scratched the back of his head. "So you can go now. Go tell everyone that the only person Edgar Gray wants to murder is himself, and he can't even do that right."

Hunter remembered the little boy carrying firewood so long ago. He also remembered the inconsolable teenager who called his father to pick him up from a party one night when he was too drunk to drive, and whose father fell asleep on the way. It all made sense, but just to be safe, Hunter had two officers check Oak Lake to make sure there was, in fact, a goose carcass. There was, although most of it had been picked clean by animals. The two webbed feet frozen below the surface were the only parts that still had flesh on the bone.

The penicillin didn't work. Edgar's leg and some fingers had to be amputated. Hunter went to visit him the day after the surgery—off the clock. He brought food from the Kitchen. While he was waiting for the order, no one asked him questions about the case; everyone knew him better than that. But Hunter still felt like people were talking about Edgar.

It was snowing that morning, and bad. Hunter liked it though. There is something about a blizzard—a really bad blizzard—that brings

about a sense of community in drivers. They become more patient with one another, more helpful, more cautious. Everyone is in the same boat—their journey is absolutely necessary.

Edgar had the television on but was staring at his bandaged hand when Hunter came in. Edgar nodded at him. “Hey Mr. Hunter,” he said sleepily.

Hunter sat down. “How are you doing,” he said, nodding.

“I am feeling—” Edgar said, pulling the sheet aside to reveal his left leg, wrapped in gauze and amputated below the knee. “Incomplete.”

“I’m sorry,” Hunter said.

“You don’t have to keep me on watch, you know,” Edgar said, pulling the sheet back over his leg.

“This isn’t watch,” Hunter said.

Edgar raised his eyebrows and exhaled, nodding at the ceiling.

“Edgar,” Hunter said. “Do you still want what you wanted that night?”

“I don’t know,” Edgar said, cocking his head. “I am a little worse off than I was, don’t you think?”

Hunter had thought for days about what he would tell Edgar. “You know that what happened to your father wasn’t your fault, right?” he said. “You did the right thing calling him. When bad things happen, it’s not always because it’s someone’s fault.”

Edgar nodded and stared at the television. Hunter wondered if he shouldn’t have said anything. He tried to make small talk for a while and left within the hour.

"They keep saying at the diner that Edgar is responsible for that little girl that just went missing from New Hampshire," Bonnie told Hunter at dinner a few nights later.

Hunter thought about his sister and her decomposing corpse, alone in the woods. He decided to think about her holding his hand and walking him to school instead, trying to stop the memory just before she shouted, "Jamie, I am not going to hold your hand if you keep picking your nose," in front of Trevor Shaheen, who told everyone that Jamie Hunter was a nose-picker. He could never stop the second part of the memory, but he risked it because of how much he liked the first part. Her hand seemed so big and protective then, wrapped around his little one. He looked at his own fully-grown hand and wished that he could wrap it around hers. In truth, he'd never stopped thinking of her as older than him.

Hunter took a bite of his pork chop. Bonnie had cooked it Cajun-style, which was his favorite way to eat a pork chop. "The New Hampshire girl went missing days after he was brought to the hospital."

"I know," Bonnie said. "But I don't like them saying those things. Can't you just tell people what he was up to so that the rumors will stop? He's going to come back to town, and his life's going to be ruined."

"Hon, he just lost several body parts," Hunter said. "He probably won't even notice the damage to his reputation."

Bonnie smiled and raised her eyebrows. "You've got a point, I guess." She leaned her head back the way that she did when something was funny.

"Just tell those idiots that the New Hampshire girl went missing while Edgar was in the hospital."

Hunter had wanted to be a detective since his older sister went missing from her lifeguard job one day when she was sixteen. Her remains—just bone and bathing suit fragments—were found years later, but there was never any evidence of what happened. Hunter supposed that she was murdered—that seemed to be what happened to girls that went missing. Even though her remains were recovered and buried years ago, it was hard to think of her as dead. It was hard to think of her as alive too, not being able to picture her older than sixteen.

Hunter went to check on Edgar a week and a half after he last saw him. The receptionist he talked to looked surprised. “He’s actually leaving today. Are you here to drive him home?” she asked.

Edgar was gathering the few things he had with him at the hospital. It wasn’t much, Hunter noticed, and he wondered if anyone else had visited Edgar during his hospital stint.

He looked up when Hunter came in. “Thanks for not ratting me out,” he said.

“What do you mean?” Hunter asked.

“If you’d told anyone what I told you, we both know I’d be in a different ward by now.” Hunter felt strange, standing in the doorway. He wished he hadn’t come.

Edgar shrugged. “I like being trusted, you know.”

“What are you going to do?” Hunter asked.

Edgar picked up a little pot of ivy from the windowsill. "I think I'm going to move south," he said. "I've had enough of the cold." He zipped up his duffle bag and pulled it over his shoulder.

"Take care," Hunter said automatically as Edgar passed him on his crutches on his way out the door. He wished he'd said something else. He watched Edgar make his way down the hall; he was carrying his crutches and playing hopscotch with the black and white floor tiles.

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FORGIVENESS

ANN LETTICK

on this old reel
your peach-sweet face
eyes pools
of promise still
teeth more buck
that's right
you were rose-blond
with a wiry body
sluggish gait
and there are those
delicate wrists
my slaps
stung
Winston the glass-man
was one of the family
his battered truck
with its glinting
brittle

cargo
was known to all
as was
the carnivalesque
sweep-up
of shards
no other way
I said to myself
this
can end
you were languid
when struck
and while one
can't ask you
anything son
I do

WAYFARER

ANN LETTICK

when you push a thing to the left
it moves left
when you transport things you do it
by animal
thus the boy leans to the left in the car
to go left
thus they skin the animal
take the skin treat it
and sew it not into raft-shape
but stitch it together like the animal
it was
according to their logic eye
and sense of propriety
inflate it and ferry themselves and goods
on this craft called mussock
across rivers in Asia
but for this mute boy of no beginnings
the car is there
plunk

and he is in it
to apply his weight
a wayfarer with delicate limp hands
and stopped tongue
resorting to the simple scheme
by no mean consensus
bracing himself on conveyances of
other peoples' making
and a rectangle of moving images against
another rectangle of opposing images
is a rear-view mirror
is a star

CHEER

LINDA FALCONE



Celebration is a basic human need—so basic, in fact, I’d call it “instinct.” Weddings, funerals, birthdays, parades—once there’s healthy celebration, humanity comes together and becomes, well, more human. It’s always been that way; living “happily ever after” begins with people coming together to rejoice or reconcile.

Last year in January, on my annual two-week trip to Suburban America, my sister presented me with an enormous red and green plastic

basket overflowing with the two-hundred-plus Christmas cards she'd received some weeks earlier.

"Here," she said. "I saved these for you."

"Really? I *love* looking at Christmas cards!"

"I *know*," she nodded. "You do it every year."

Who knew she had noticed? I tried to explain: "Taking stock of what people are putting on their greeting cards is like putting one's finger on the pulse of society."

My sister already finds me strange. This was just further proof. "Okay, well, have fun," she told me.

Thanks. Though it's hardly a question of fun. It's an almost sick fascination that moves me.

Firstly, the basket is bursting. In Europe, there's not enough *space* to even know that many people. And, if I get two sent-by-post greetings per season, I feel like Daffy Duck rolling around in Aladdin's den, shouting "I'm rich, I'm rich, I'm filthy rich!" My sister, I'm convinced, must be her neighborhood's Homecoming Queen. Even counting all the soccer moms on her three children's teams, there's still no explaining that number of cards.

Next, there's the question: how have people come to think that their kiddies posing in swimsuits on last summer's Hawaii trip can be passed off as holiday cheer?

A fourth of Nicole's photographic cards simply reads: "Happy and Bright." And I couldn't shake the feeling that the phrase referred to the lovely children pictured rather than to a sense of holiday bliss. Over sixty cards bore the wish: "Have your *selfie* a merry little Christmas." Those

were endowed with take-your-own photographs of the worst vacation variety. Some of the “selfie” cards showed each family member staring into his or her respective electronic device.

Granted, I have no sense of humor. But I’ve been thinking about this for nearly a year now: When did celebration become solely self-celebration?

I miss traditional cards with Kris Cringle, peaceable snowmen, pines with twinkling lights, country cottages adrift with snow and sweet but significant manger scenes. I miss holiday. I miss holy day.

Healthy celebration is a basic human need. An instinct closely linked to life. That is why my wish today is for you to find where your heart leads and to celebrate it. Celebrate it with all your might. And if you believe in Christmas, then, by all means, don’t be a ninny about it.

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What instincts pilot your life?



CONTRIBUTORS

BIOS & TSP QUESTION

TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS: *Tell The Sigh Press about a time you didn't follow your instincts and wish you had.*

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Rosalind Keith is a British-born painter who has lived and worked in Florence since 1983. Since completing her academic training at the Charles H. Cecil Studio in Florence, she has dedicated her work to the painting of personal themes drawn from her imagination, abandoning the "Sight-size Method" and limited palette in favor of experimentation in various painting mediums. A recent one-person exhibition, *Abbracci*, was held by the Council of Cerignale (PC) in August 2015.

All mothers know not to tempt small children with new summer clothes when it's cold. My daughter's first glimpse at her new bikini on a chill April evening led to a tug of war that ended with a fall backward into the cupboard that knocked her out cold. I held her limp naked body in my arms, wondering whether she'd be coming back. Her return was equally as bewildering as her departure when she came to and smiled back at me.

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LUKE WHITINGTON left Australia (and a career in diplomacy) to learn Italian at the University for Stranieri in Perugia. He spent 19 years living in Italy restoring old ruined buildings, then did the same in Ireland for nine years while launching a multi-media centre (Pleasant Factory) in Dublin in the 90s. His work has appeared in publications in Ireland and Australia such as *Post*, *Five Bells*, *Quadrant*, *Overland* and *Contrappasso*, and has been anthologized in *Henry Kendall Prize Anthologies*, *Australian Love Poems 2013*, and *Canberra Poets Anthology 2015*. He participates in public readings of his work, including in Florence, one of the places where he divides his time.

I HAVE NEVER ignored my instincts, they are invariably right.

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COLLEEN O'CONNOR RICKEY lives in Western Massachusetts with her husband. While attending Amherst College, she studied abroad at the Siena School for the Liberal Arts, where she worked on the story in this issue. Since receiving a BA in English in 2011, she has held a variety of positions, including as an administrative assistant, operations manager, and admissions counselor.

I GOT A WEIRD VIBE from a landlord once when I was checking out an apartment, but it had a garden. I rented it. The landlord, who lived in the

rest of the house, practiced with his band at 4am, forgot to order heating oil, and brawled with his friends in the middle of the night.

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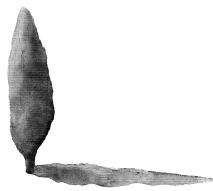
ANN LETTICK is from Connecticut, in the United States, but has mostly lived in Italy, with stints in France and Mexico. She is a long-time lecturer at the University of Florence. She has reams of poetry and some short stories; many, like the ones published here, are based on her autistic brother. The latest publication in which her work appeared was the American review, *Exquisite Corpse*.

RECENTLY I NEGLECTED to make a friend smile, skipping an inauguration I had fully intended to go to because it was a tight squeeze to get there.

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LINDA FALCONE'S books include *Italians Dance and I'm a Wallflower, If They Are Roses*, and *Moving Days*. No one has ever succeeded in overturning her conviction that every page of prose secretly wishes to become poetry one day.

THERE'S WHAT'S CALLED a gut feeling. Something should be said or done to make things right. But then comes the mind-your-own business bloke. He lives in the left brain and stamps out all lead-the-way light. "It's not your place," he argues. When I listen to this mind-man, regret always follows.



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