Sebou Party

Paula Younger

At the Coptic Catholic seminary, Susan waited for the intermittent wireless connection called "brown cow" to appear so she could ride its weak signals and talk to her husband. He appeared via webcam in their baby room. He had taken down the camel pictures that had hung in his room as a child. His deep blue eyes had bags beneath them. "It looks so bare there," he said. White paint chipped off from the seminary's cement ceiling and walls. The lack of decoration, except for Susan's English/Arabic Bible and her travel alarm clock, comforted her, as did her rock-hard twin-size bed that had no room for him. At first she saw the bareness and hard surfaces as a type of penance, but she knew that wasn't true when she saw her husband in their comfortable house looking lost and haggard against those bright yellow walls. Maybe her summer in Cairo was meant to punish both of them.

"Are you going to come home?" he asked.

"Where else would I go?" But Susan imagined herself floating in the Dead Sea, where some of the other teachers talked about visiting after the summer session ended. A few months ago a family had lost their toddler on the Jordan side, but he had bobbed over to Israel, sunburned but unharmed. It was nearly impossible to drown in those saline waters. Susan wanted to dive into that water, daring it to swallow her. She would wear goggles to protect her eyes from the salt and her hands would dig into the mud at the bottom and test if that buoyant water could push her back out.

Susan checked her watch and said, "I have to go. Nader's taking me to a party."

Her husband frowned. "He's a seminarian, right?"

"Was. They kicked him out."

"For what?"

Instead of using the excuse Nader told her—too much time in the computer room—she went with the more salacious rumor the other seminarians spread. "Someone spotted him outside one of those cheap hotels with a girl. I've got to go."

Nader decided he was Susan's guide. She paid for the taxi rides and entrance fees, he showed her around Cairo. She e-mailed pictures of the two of them at the pyramids and Ibn Tulun mosque, hoping to worry her husband, just a bit.

Susan shut off the computer, knowing at some point she would have to acknowledge her husband was hurt too. She pulled out the twenty-week ultrasound pictures from her Arabic/English Bible. The ultrasound tech had typed "Hi, Mom and Dad!!" on the one of their baby kicking his legs. In another picture their baby faced the camera. The lines of his skeleton face were clear, as if he knew what she was about to do to him and he wanted to ask for a pardon.

♦♦♦

Susan stepped over a blood-soaked sidewalk in Shrabaya, on the outskirts of Cairo. Small red pools dribbled into the street. Nader stepped around the blood, protecting his cheap leather sandals, the type Susan imagined Jesus wore and that were sold all over Egypt for five pounds, thirty for foreigners. Nader hadn't led her wrong on any of his outings, but still Susan asked, "Should I be concerned about the blood?"

"Do not worry. It is a sacrifice for the Sebou."

"What type of party requires a sacrifice?"

"Very important. This celebrates a baby being alive for seven days."

Susan had agreed to Nader's invitation to witness an important cultural event in an Egyptian's life, whether Christian or Muslim, unaware it had anything to do with babies. "I should go back," she said. "I have to get up early to teach."

But their taxi had disappeared. Children took over the street, shutting off traffic with their soccer game. They played beneath an outdated billboard of Mubarak, Egypt's president who had held power for the past twenty-seven years under emergency rule. The color was faded, baked in the hot sun.

Nader smiled. "You must come. They are expecting you." He used the word "must" too often and she wanted to educate him about what that word meant. He took her hand and said, "Come, come."

If Susan didn't have to see the baby, she might be okay. But on the third floor a woman stood outside an opened apartment door holding a baby boy with chubby legs and a full head of black hair. Arabic music blared into the hallway. The woman wore a blue dress with matching electric blue eyeshadow. A younger looking version of the mother stood next to her in a pink top with complementing eyeshadow. The baby stared at Susan with large, unblinking eyes.

Nader pointed to the woman in blue and said, "This is Umm Josef and her sister, Mariam."

He held Susan's arm and introduced her. Mariam said, "Like Mubarak's wife, Suzanne." Throughout Egypt Susan's name was changed to Suzanne, the president's British wife.

Susan shouted above the din of the frenetic Arabic music blaring over the stereo, "*Mabrouk!*" Arabic for "congratulations," and fortunately a word with sounds Susan was used to. Nader had coached her how to say it on their taxi ride. She wrote it down phonetically in her little notebook, next to the other phrases he taught her.

Nader added, "*Mash'allah.*" He winked at her. "You must not forget about God." A person should not praise a baby or child without adding the phrase "*mash'allah.*" "By the will of God" was a reminder that only God was in control. Anyone could lose anyone, anything, at any time. Susan knew that all too well, and hadn't prayed since she and her husband had left the hospital.

Susan smiled at Umm Josef and said, "He is *gamila.*" Beautiful probably wasn't the right word to use when praising a boy, but Susan couldn't think of another Arabic word. She worried about looking too closely at the baby. Umm Josef might think Susan was giving him the evil eye or looking at him with envy, and she was. She longed to kiss his dimpled elbows. During the ultrasound, Susan's baby had been a mix of washy alien-looking things. Her doctor had pointed out his scrotum and announced they were having a boy. Susan's husband joked that they couldn't have a son because he didn't know how to fix cars or appliances. But then the doctor looked closer at the screen and said, "This doesn't look right."

Umm Josef smiled and said, "You are welcome." She kissed Susan's right cheek and then her left one. Her aggressive belly

bumped against Susan's stomach. Susan had felt substantial when she was pregnant, as if she were more than herself. When she boarded the plane to Cairo a month ago, her breasts leaked, despite wearing a tight bra to cease the dripping, like the doctor recommended. Susan didn't have breast pads. Mothers carried those. Each day at the seminary Susan woke up at 4:30 a.m. and ran around the dirt field where the seminarians played soccer in the afternoons. She hoped to trick her body into forgetting that it had been pregnant, but her breasts refused to deflate. She covered her legs in track pants in case someone in the nearby apartments was awake and could see her, despite the intense heat. The nearby mosque's mournful call to prayer swallowed her in its sound. She imagined a man in the minaret, solitary, keeping her company, even though the call to prayer was probably a recording.

On their way into the apartment, Susan asked Nader, "Why is she called mother of Josef?"

"So no one can curse her. If a man tries, he will have to say "mother of Josef." Her name is safe. The curse can not find her." He could be joking, but in Egypt it was an honor to be a mother, and it was the ultimate honor to be the mother of a boy. He represented the men that will protect the women of the family. The larger the family was in Egypt, the more protection you had. Really, it wasn't that different in America. Susan's big, ungainly Catholic family was like an army. One Thanksgiving when she was six, a group of boys started pulling her hair and telling her she couldn't use the swings. Before she could react, her siblings and cousins descended. Susan appreciated the security of a group, even though it was just she and her husband at home.

In the cramped apartment, women sat on chairs lined against the walls, forming a square around a group of dancing women. A few men were in attendance. During her time in Egypt, Susan wondered where the women were. They seemed tucked out of sight. She longed to talk to them after her days of teaching English to male priests-in-training. But in this apartment, Susan feared she might be kicked out. The seminarians, priests, Nader, and the other English teachers thought Susan was a nice woman who volunteered to travel to Egypt in her friend's place. Her childhood friend from Catholic school had spent the past five summers teaching English in Egypt but had to cancel after her mother's heart attack. None of the women

in this room knew about Susan's pregnancy and what had happened to her baby boy.

♦♦♦

As in each Egyptian home Susan had visited with Nader, a picture of Jesus hung on the wall, once again the white, blond, blue-eyed Jesus instead of a more Middle-Eastern-looking one, which Susan had seen once in a small church and kept hoping would reappear. She wanted the people and churches to feel authentic, a hearkening back to early Christianity and closer to the heart of the original church. The white Jesus seemed false, as if the Christian Egyptians had followed someone else's story without realizing it. In this picture, Mary, Jesus' vigilant mother, was absent. Susan sat beneath it and tucked her feet under her chair so she wouldn't trip the dancers.

Mariam handed Susan a plate of grisly meat and said, "I'm sorry we don't have more to offer. We already ate."

Susan took a bite of the rubbery meat and forced herself to swallow, knowing that meat was an honor. On English menus in Cairo, the sections were labeled "meat" and "chicken." The few times Susan ate meat it tasted like the animals had hard lives and were killed right before they would have died anyway. She tasted their exhaustion.

Then Susan remembered the blood-soaked sidewalk. She took a couple bites, crumpled a napkin above the meat, and then eased the plate beneath her chair.

The dancing women shook their hips, like Latin dancing, but even more frenzied. They spun each other around, planted their feet, shook their hips, and clapped their hands. The best ones kept shimmying their hips and it reminded Susan of belly dancing. A few men sat in chairs. The first time Susan saw men and women intermixed. Nader sat a few seats away, ready to act as translator.

Mariam smiled at Susan, like she expected something. Susan smiled back, hoping to make up for any accidental offense by looking nice and enthusiastic, silently apologizing for the meat beneath her chair. She said loudly, above the music, "I've never been to a party like this!"

Mariam tilted her head. "You do not celebrate child's birth?"

"We have a party before the baby is born. It's called a baby shower. Friends and family bring gifts and eat food."

Mariam frowned. "That is bad luck. Seven days after birth, that is good, but even then, *mash'allah*." She looked up at the ceiling, as if God waited there.

Susan fidgeted. She had asked her husband to wait. She wanted to hold their baby in her arms before decorating the room. But her husband created a list of favorite boys' and girls' names, a spreadsheet detailing items their baby would need, and cleaned out their office for the baby's nursery, as if he could control something as uncontrollable as birth. Their former office was now painted yellow and had a crib, dressing table, stroller, and the one item Susan allowed herself to buy, a black onesie that said, "The cat hates me." While she was pregnant, her husband carried everything for her, cleaned out the litter boxes, walked their dog, started cooking, even gave back rubs. But after they left the hospital, he began working later, sleeping longer, barely meeting her eyes over the few meals they shared.

Her friend called with the offer to go to Cairo and said, "You need to get away from that house." Susan had the airline miles and the school year had ended for her junior high kids. At dinner she gave her husband a printout of her flight itinerary. He asked, "What am I supposed to do?" She said, "Whatever you want." He could go to work and forget, but Susan's body was a reminder of what she had lost.

A teenage girl with green eye shadow sat down on the other side of Susan. She motioned to Susan's clothes and said, "Your clothes, delicious. Your hair, delicious."

Mariam introduced the green-eye-shadowed girl. "My younger sister, Asteer."

Asteer looked at Susan's brown espadrilles and clapped her hands. "Your shoes, delicious!"

Susan's red toenails peeked through the open tip of her wedged espadrilles, something the head priest declared improper. But another teacher at the seminary had painted Susan's toenails. She said Susan was too young and pretty to frown so much and she thought the nail polish might brighten her up. Besides, Susan wore long gypsy skirts, long-sleeved linen tops, careful not to show knees or shoulders or elbows in this insufferable heat. She wore her wedge espadrilles instead of flat sandals to keep from tripping over her skirts. The smaller her belly became, the longer her skirts seemed. These Coptic Catholic women wore their hair down, and their T-shirts and jeans tight, despite the summer heat. Susan felt dull next to these women in their vibrant tops and matching eyeshadows. The dramatic colors would look clownish on Susan's pale skin. These women were peacocks and she was a lump of mozzarella cheese. Susan turned her head and dabbed on her pink lipgloss with plumper, another gift, to give herself a little oomph.

Mariam and Asteer stared and said, "Oooh! *Gamila!*"

Most of the women did not wear lipstick, and definitely not gloss. Susan offered Mariam and Asteer the gloss, not sure how to warn about the plumper.

Mariam giggled and held her hand to her mouth. "It tickles." Nicer than saying it stung.

Susan took the bobby pins out of her flattened hair and shook her hair loose. The familiar weight brushed against her shoulders. When Nader took Susan around Islamic Cairo, he checked the scarf on her head to make sure it was okay. Susan tried to restrain her hair, but tendrils escaped and her forehead slid into view. Nader pulled on her curls and laughed when they sprung back in place. At the largest mosque, she headed for the main doors, but he ushered her to a small side entrance. Susan followed the women into a room that felt like a closet compared to the men's spacious area. Nader waved and smiled from his side, as if this was a funny joke. Susan stared at the men through the screen. They bowed and prayed, some slept on the cool marble floor, a break from the outside heat. She imagined her husband among those men, solemn and sad and removed, and out of her reach.

Mariam asked Susan with a smile, "You look for husband?"

"I have one."

"Where is he?"

"In the United States."

"It's okay to travel without him?"

"Sure, sometimes it's good to be without the men in your life." Mariam's forehead crinkled. Susan added, "He misses me, but he's happy I'm having fun."

Mariam brightened. "That is wonderful!" Such a different reaction from the seminarians who couldn't believe her man would allow her to travel without him. But the seminarians were jealous of her excursions with Nader. Most were from Upper Egypt and had not seen the pyramids at Giza. Susan toured them twice.

Nader said, "Here, men say that they will be a good husband and woman can spend time with family and friends, but then she marries and he won't let her go anywhere."

Susan said, "We call that bait-and-switch. You say one thing and then do another."

"Bait and switch?" Nader pulled out his pen and notebook, filled with American sayings and euphemisms, which wouldn't be much help with the more common British tourist. Since he couldn't become a priest, he decided he would be a tour guide.

Mariam glanced at Susan and said, "Your husband must miss you. You're very far away. You talk to him?"

Susan sat up straighter. "We try. Are you married?"

Mariam blushed. "*Insha'allah*, I will become a nun. God will be my husband. He is the best husband. Most devoted and kind."

Umm Josef and her blue eye shadow approached, arms outstretched with baby Josef. She handed him to Susan and said, "You must hold him."

Susan leaned back. "No thank you." The women and their intense eyeshadows stared at her. Susan added, "I don't want to drop him."

Umm Josef put baby Josef in Susan's arms. "You be good. Just relax."

Josef closed his eyes despite the loud music. Mariam said, "He likes you."

Nader grabbed Susan's camera from her bag and said, "Smile!" The camera flashed two times. Susan cradled Josef's head and brought him close to her body. She breathed in his baby-powder smell and stroked his soft chubby legs. She had read about a scientific study where grieving primates clung to their infants for days after they died. She imagined herself cradling Josef throughout the party, but then he began mouthing her right breast through her shirt.

Umm Josef and Nader laughed. Mariam clapped her hands and said, "He wants you to feed him!"

Even though it had been a month since Susan's breasts last leaked, maybe it could start again. Josef felt too heavy and his face looked too angelic. Her skin prickled, sweat broke out along her skin. She felt like throwing up and passing out.

She handed the baby to Umm Josef. "Please, I can't." Umm Josef glanced at Susan before joining another group of women, ones capable of properly fawning over a baby.

Mariam asked, "You have children?"

Susan patted her stomach, hesitating. On her first day of class at the seminary, Susan showed a picture of her husband and dog hiking in Moab, Utah. The seminarians asked how long she had been married, if she had children, and acted shocked when the answer was five years and no children. She said she was thirty and still had time, then joked that the dog was training, to see if they could handle a child. That was what she and her husband used to say before she became pregnant. One of the seminarians asked her why Westerners cared more about animals than people. At the end of class, another seminarian returned her pictures and said, "I will pray for your soul about your dog." Since that moment, she swore not to tell anyone about her baby, not even the other female teacher who seemed somewhat safe and friendly.

But Mariam, this pink-eye-shadowed woman, was eager and kind, and Susan might never see her again. Susan's husband and home seemed far away. Nader had left to take pictures of the dancing women with Susan's camera. Among the noise of the party, maybe Susan's secret could be freed, if only for a few minutes.

Susan leaned into Mariam and said, "I had a baby."

Mariam clapped her hands. "Wonderful! Do you have a picture?"

"He died."

Mariam made the sign of the cross and then grabbed Susan's hand, "May Allah bless his soul."

Susan blessed the language barrier. Mariam didn't follow up with intrusive questions about how he died, how old he was. Just the one basic, unchangeable fact: he died. Maybe dead babies weren't unusual in Egypt. Susan hated that she found comfort in this.

Mariam stared at her and Susan feared that if Mariam looked long enough, she would find the truth. Susan added, "There's still time. *Insha'allah*, someday I might have other children." Although Susan didn't believe it, it seemed the right thing to say in this fertility-driven country.

"*Insha'allah*, I hope you have a girl and that she has your eyes and cheeks." Mariam pointed to Susan's sharp cheekbones. "She will be beautiful."

Susan's son had her stocky legs, or, as the doctor called them, soccer player legs. Susan had watched them moving around as her son

kicked and waved to her and her husband. In that moment, Susan was reckless. She held her husband's hand and allowed herself to think of their baby with the name at the top of her husband's list: Lucas James. That was before their doctor noticed the missing part of his skull.

♦♦♦

Asteer, the green-eye-shadowed sister, handed the guests plates with two pieces of cake—vanilla and chocolate. Sweets were rare in Egypt, so all special occasions were celebrated with sugary indulgences. Susan wished she had alcohol instead, difficult to find even in a Christian home. Mariam and Nader watched her. Susan ate a couple of bites and then said, "*Lazeez!*" Arabic for "delicious." Frosting clung to the back of her throat.

The women began dancing again and Mariam grabbed Susan's hand. Susan shook her head. "Please don't. I'm not a good dancer."

Nader said, "You must. It's an insult if you don't dance."

Mariam led Susan to the dance circle, still grasping her hand. At the seminary, Susan couldn't touch the men, and they couldn't touch her, even though they could hold one another's hands, and Susan liked being safe from contact. She had accepted the summer teaching position because she would be living in a building of celibate men, but she didn't foresee the parish children who liked to crawl on her and teach her Arabic. The seminary was a place for her to figure out whatever type of relationship she and her husband might still have. She avoided the morning Masses and during evening prayer she said the words, enunciating clearly for the seminarians, but spent the time wondering what her husband was doing. She hoped he was disassembling the baby room.

The women created a circle around Susan and Mariam, clapping and singing and shaking their hips, swirling around them. Asteer grabbed Susan's hips and guided them to the frantic beat. Nader held up her camera and instructed, "Say cheese!"

A big blocky man pounded into the middle of the circle, barefoot. Women bounced off his jolting hips like bumper cars. The women laughed and clapped, taking turns rebounding off his body. The rest of the men, including baby Josef's father, continued to sit in chairs along the wall. The blocky man's big toe twisted and turned against

the floor as he shook his hips. Dark chest hair twirled out of his cotton shirt. He stomped his foot at Susan as if threatening to dance with her.

Susan turned to Nader, who stood on a chair with her camera. "Why don't you dance?" she asked.

"It wouldn't be right. I am not family." Nader explained Sebou parties were closed affairs, normally for family and close female friends.

"Then why are we here?"

Nader smiled. "A foreigner's visit is good luck. By being here, you bring that blessing into Josef's life. I am allowed to be here because of you."

♦♦♦

Susan's son would have lived for one hour. That's what her doctor told her, and what her brother the doctor told her. The doctor and her brother had also said her chance of having another baby with the same defect was less than four percent. There was no known cause of anencephaly. Still, Susan suspected her husband's side. They may have deep blue eyes, but they couldn't be counted on for brain rims. She and her husband agreed an abortion was their only option, but Susan woke from dreams that sometime in the last four months of her fetus's growth God had given him a skullcap.

She told her brother she was thinking of keeping her baby. He said when he was in medical school, a resident discovered her fetus had anencephaly too. She carried the baby to term, against the doctor's advice. The baby died within an hour. Susan asked him how he knew, thinking this was a doctor's version of an urban legend. Her brother said a resident who helped deliver the baby was on her way to the morgue with the body but stopped at the second floor break room and asked the other residents and med students if they wanted to see an anencephalic baby. The dead baby lay on the counter swaddled on a blue surgery towel, the rough linen type, next to the coffee maker. The baby's body looked normal, but he was missing a brain rim and his oversized, frog-like eyes stared at the Sweet'N Low.

Susan imagined herself as that female resident, hiding with her dead baby in a room where no one could see him or study him. She would not have shared her baby for science's sake. She would have

protected him from people who looked down on misshapen heads and frog-like eyes. She would have kept those last moments all to herself. Later, after her own baby was gone, Susan did some research and found the longest an anencephalic baby had lived was two and a half years, not an hour. When she told her husband, he said, "We couldn't afford a special-needs baby anyway. That's not really living." And she knew then that her spreadsheet-making, always-prepared husband had discovered this research before the abortion and chose not to tell her.

♦♦♦

The women stopped dancing, and someone shut off the loud music. A chill ran through Susan, despite the hot room. Mariam and a few other women brought out blue candles with paper barriers to catch the wax. Women leaned their candles into the woman's next to them, spreading the fire. Mariam turned off the overhead light.

Nader told Susan, "They're going to make loud noises to scare off evil spirits."

"What are the candles for?"

"To bring light and God's protection into baby Josef's life."

The women began to ululate, that ancient sound that reminded Susan of Indians in old movies. Susan curled her tongue and joined in with that fast, turkey-like sound erupting from their throats. Some women banged pots and pans. They poured out of the apartment and then climbed down the stairs to the street. Outside, their candles burned and they shrieked with joy and terror and the thrill of making noise. The women entered the apartment building again and ran up the stairs, past the apartment, going higher and higher, until they entered the roof. They waved their candles, shrieked louder. The ones with the pans and pots stomped their feet.

The city of a thousand minarets spread before them. Sharp towers with crescent moons poked the sky. Some Arabic music boomed far away. To the right the Ramses train station shuttled people in and out of Cairo, carrying them into the surrounding deserts and faraway destinations.

Mariam grabbed Susan's candle-less hand and swayed with her, in time to the ululations. She said, "We protect Josef. His life, *insha'allah*, will know joy. Evil cannot find him."

Up on that rooftop in a section of Cairo where foreigners didn't venture, Susan and these women warded off the wickedness in the world, an entity more sinister than a jealous neighbor's evil eye, something worse than human frailty. Together, with their noises, their shrieks and their joys and their pain, they were a community united against the misfortunes that life can bestow. Baby Josef slept in his mother's arms, oblivious to any potential danger.

Mariam touched Susan's stomach. Susan almost dropped her candle, but hung onto it. Evil wouldn't find baby Josef because she couldn't hold onto a candle. Mariam bowed her head, made the sign of the cross, and then said, "*Insha'allah*, someday God will give you another child, a stronger one."

Susan imagined herself in that break room at her brother's hospital. Her husband was there and that dead baby without the brain rim was their Lucas James. Her husband would clasp their son's tiny foot within his palm, and marvel how it would disappear when he closed his hand. Susan would press their son's cheek next to hers, breathe in his smell, remember it, register it, so that she could call upon it and keep him with her. They would have known him, if only for a few minutes, and maybe that could have been enough.

Before leaving the party, Mariam kissed Susan's cheeks four times and then gave her a plastic baby boy statue in a white net bag, surrounded with candy-covered almonds, tied with a blue ribbon that had an Arabic inscription, what Susan assumed was Josef's name and birth date. The little boy statue was a white, blonde boy who held up a blue heart. "Made in China" was stamped in English on the bottom. If only her husband were here to appreciate the absurdity. She imagined the three of them in the Dead Sea—her husband, their Lucas James—not quite touching, but bobbing along, staying within each other's orbit. Susan gripped her plastic boy, bowed her head, and uttered, "*Mash'allah*," praying to the ceiling or God or whatever Egyptian deities that were still out there that her son was at peace, and that someday, *insha'allah*, he would forgive her.

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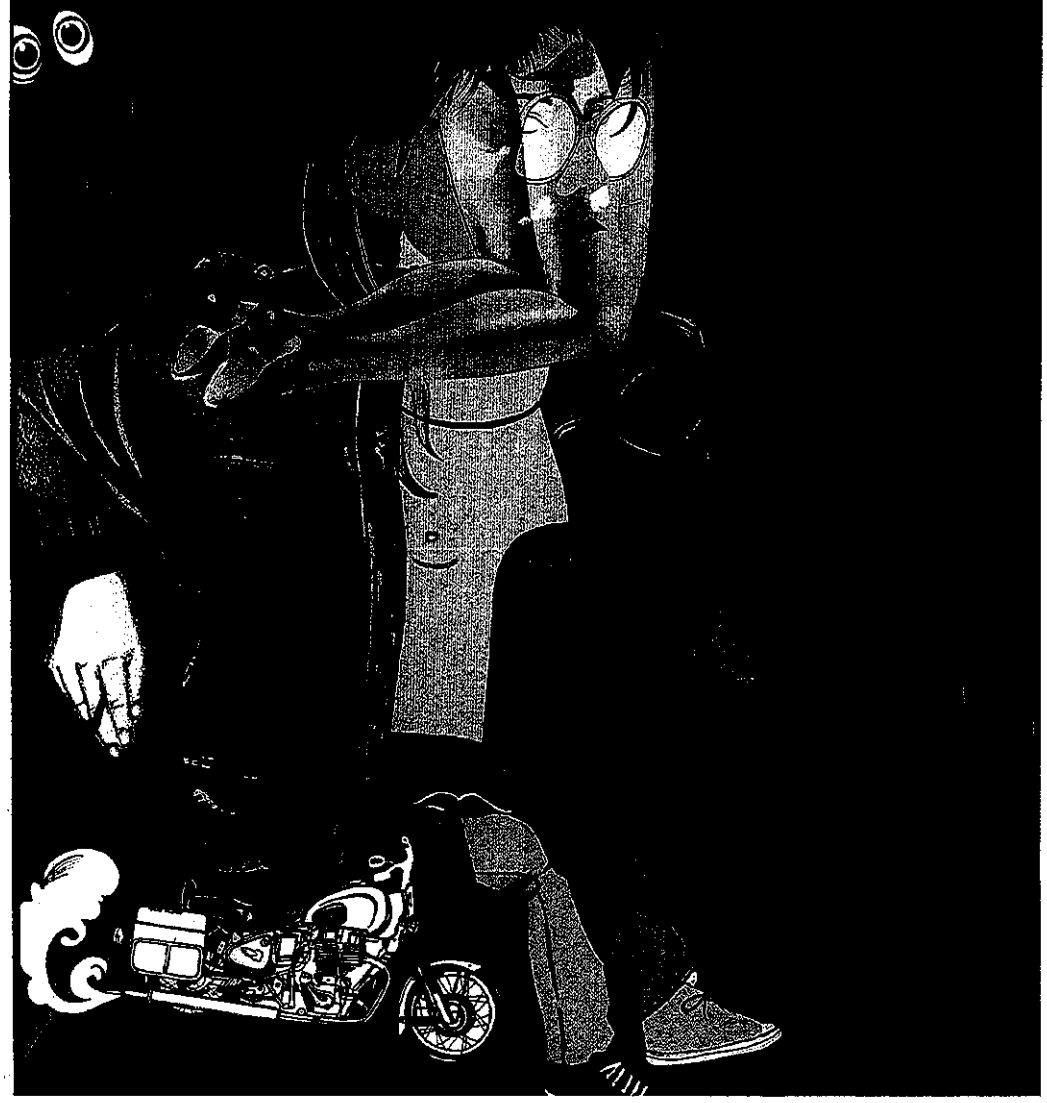
THE RATTLING WALL

A LITERARY JOURNAL



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Dana Goodyear's poem "The Quickening" first appeared in *Canteen Magazine*.

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From the Editor

The Rattling Wall, Issue 2, opens with the poem "Country" by Alan Soldofsky, who writes, "We're out in the *cuts*, my son says— / the *boondocks*, I used to call it." To be in the boondocks: to find oneself in the backwoods, the boonies, the hinterland—the sticks.

An appropriate observation, I thought, for 2011: a revolution year bearing a full Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street; an unsteady year of earthquakes in Japan, Peru, and Turkey; an uncharted year blazed by the first artificial organ transplant and possible discovery of liquid water on Mars; and, as always, a goodbye year, measured in so many endings.

The editor of a literary journal has many jobs, but one of them, I think, is to hear a "shared voice," to receive a slush pile and be able to patch together a certain consciousness, or story, from the submissions. Because, magically, every six months, a writers' chorus offers up a fresh set of like obsessions. It's up to an editor to find and name them.

Impossible to deny the world news as a backdrop, the shared voice I found in *The Rattling Wall*, Issue 2, told stories of fear and faith—the concerns of the everyman, the everywoman. Their stories are about what good stories are about: sacrifice, love, disappointment, wonder, danger, and resilience.

I realize that *The Rattling Wall*, Issue 2, won't bring us out of the boondocks, but my hope is that our readers will feel less lonely. We're all out here together, writing and worrying about similar things.

I had my own goodbye year. Three weeks after we released *The Rattling Wall*, Issue 1, Elizabeth Glotzbach, my best friend for seventeen years, passed away in New York City on May 30, 2011, from complications related to Type 1 diabetes. Though she was not a writer—film was her passion—a friend of ours smartly noted that writers enjoyed being around Elizabeth, because she did the "writer's work." She knew when to be quiet and how to listen. She read quickly, completely, and often. She understood that a sparkling idea, a first draft, was only half the battle.

Elizabeth loved *The Rattling Wall* and not just because I founded it. She liked the concept of creative people collaborating. So, in early summer, as I began reading submissions for Issue 2, I did so with her in mind. My choices were, of course, informed by her death, but more importantly, by her beautiful life.

—Michelle Meyering