

The broken



The hazards of dating a Playboy Bunny

A Harlequin in the hallway

"I am the record needle skip"

The infinite monkey theorem

"What do you think, lover boy?"



"Ginny has a weakness for girls who don't laugh at her. All through high school they'd laughed at her. Now she's an Annapolis Valley *Welcome Back, Kotter* episode, but without the humour or the afro."

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Prose Poetry Photography Art Music



Winter 2012 Issue 11

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Cover Text

The cover passage is taken from Meghan Rose Allen's short story, "Falling In Love With Ginny MacEachern," which appears on page 11.

Cover/Masthead Illustrations

Mouki K. Butt

In this issue:



It's a sorta-anniversary edition! The Broken City turned 10 issues old, last summer, and we're celebrating belatedly, with this masterpiece you hold in your digital hands. Past contributors to the magazine have reunited for an all-star collection of poetry and prose.

The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its summer 2013 edition: **Eat this magazine.**

That's right, armchair chefs; *The Broken City* is running a food issue. Send your grub-related poetry, fiction, essays, comics, illustrations, photography, music/book reviews to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com. We may publish some recipes, but they'd better be mind-blowing; we're not looking to make a cookbook, here. We're more interested in seeing how a ham sandwich might make its way into a sonnet.

Deadline is: May 1, 2013. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

And You Will Be Changed

Leigh Phillips

Dear home, I am ocean lunged sickness unlearning its salt.
I am saline sunset, a letter writing its bones to truth.

Fever-ridden antibiotic rolling collection of early sunset, I am
December shedding its midnight skins. A slip dress between the lines.

The bible with a broken spine, chest full of silent song. I am iambic.
I am verb laden leaden tongued, belly shot full of 'trying to poem this something',

I don't need a sky to count the stars, the stars count me solid.
I am beauty's dress rehearsal, falling down the elevator up.

The lost call of wait, I am the phone number to home you cannot find,
Dear home, I am everywhere but this place on the map circled in red pen,

Dear home, I am home, the letter undelivered, light full of swim,
swim as flight, flight as word, I am wording my way out, I am wording

my way to beauty back, I am anchored, paper cut, manuscript on the shelf
of 'given the current financial climate, we have been asked to suspend

our search for a poet' and I am anyway, I am seven stories full of books,
box heavy, heavy dreamed, eyelids heavy, sleeping full of sea, still salt

stiff on cuffs. I am green tea and the record needle skip. I am skipping
an anti-sonnet to sleep, drunk on sober, in love with the post office

and pink-inked cursive. I am something bright wrapped whole, a mix tape
bruised and bent out of gone radio, I am winter whip on the face when scarves

aren't touching, the fall of so many birthdays and candles, the touch of now, i am
the moving truck and goodbye, I am "she doesn't want to leave",

I am "she is leaving because she knows what 'has to' means"
which means I am a license plate gone and arcing into west

and this is how we happen
and you will be changed
and I wash my face off myself daily
everything skin cells

*
ask me about the new,
I am happy

Leigh Phillips is an Assistant Professor of English at Hostos Community College (City University of New York). Her stories, memoirs, poems and criticism most recently appeared in Rhino, So to Speak: A Feminist Journal of Language and Art, and A Face to Meet the Faces: An Anthology of Contemporary Persona Poetry. She is currently writing an epistolary novel in verse.

Cousin Leon and the Playboy Bunny for L.I. (1945-1971) Nancy Scott

They warned him
she belonged to the Cuban.
The second time
they busted his mouth
and fractured three ribs.
He shipped out to Nam.
She came to him at night
during long, waking patrols,
her lips wet and luscious.
By day, bare shoulders
cloaked in rough cloth,
she tracked at his side,
kept on through minefields
and enemy fire.

When he returned
he found her serving cocktails
in North Miami Beach.
“Babe, I’ve missed you,”
he said, his voice husky.
Cool fingers deftly grazed
his cheek. She shed
her satin ears and cotton tail
and went with him.
In late March, his body
floated up
in an isolated cove,
a single bullet
to the back of his head.

Nancy Scott is an artist and the author of five collections of poetry. She’s Managing Editor of U.S. 1 Worksheets, the journal of the U.S. 1 Poets’ Cooperative in New Jersey. Her prize-winning poetry has been widely published in print and online journals, including Poet Lore, Mudfish, Witness, Slant, Pemmican, qarrrsiluni, and Segue. nancyscott.net

Four Days in October

Nancy Scott

In the early '60s, we met in an elevator
in Queens, two twenty-something women,
each cradling an infant, bewildered by formulas,
feeding schedules, rashes, our husbands at work,
relatives scattered, and I taught Angela English.
Now forty-five years later, we sit at my kitchen table,
our faces lined from life's hard-fought battles,
necks turning crepey, and we talk about how
we tucked our kids into strollers, traipsed
by subway into Manhattan, so we could spend
hours window-shopping along Fifth Avenue,
admiring beautiful things we could never afford,
and two years later, hugged good-bye at the dock,
never imagining we'd see each other again,
but there have been many next times, here
or in London or Fiesole, or at the Palme—
her family home near Zurich—where
I've admired Angela's roses, and the way she can
whip up a raspberry torte, and, yes, the view
of the lake from her shower stall window,
but despite emails and phone calls, we can't find
enough time in this brief visit to share all
we've held onto, so we keep talking until words
turn too rich, like eating the last crème puff
when you're full up, then the clock runs out
and we're cramming our shopping spree
into Angela's luggage, and a few months later,
she'll write to say she's left her husband,
moved out of the Palme, and found a sunny
apartment in Verona, where she is happy,
and I hear that old clock start ticking again.

Christina's World **(Andrew Wyeth, 1948)** **Christen Thomas**

There is a girl in a field on her hands
and the sides of her legs. There is a girl
looking wistfully up at a farmhouse which
should be covered by scaffolding. There is
a girl who cannot walk that is looking
at a building holding a ladder
which cannot stand on its own.
There is a girl that is contemplating a
roof that needs work, and that she
cannot work the crops or tend to livestock.
There is a girl that refuses to be paralyzed
by her inability to move, there is motion
in the muscles of her forearms, there is
strength in the angle of her jaw, looking
wistfully at open field and closed doors.
There is a girl who cannot dress herself,
yet moves even the wheat with her presence.
There is a field that caresses the soles of her feet
wanting her to walk again. There is a barn
that sits waiting for her to come inside,
to fill it with the passage of her voice.
There is a painting of the girl which neither
immobilizes or forces the drifting of your
thoughts, caught somewhere between
the seeds of wheat, her fingers, and the wind.

Christen Thomas assists book publishers with their digital initiatives as Manager of Technology, eBOUND Canada. Her poetry has been published in Rampike, The Toronto Quarterly, Paragon Journal, The Fiddlehead, QWERTY and elsewhere. She is interested in the intersection of art and tech.

Arbitrary curation

Christen Thomas

My something with bleached ribs of a sparrow,
sea daggers that are torches,
my something that battles wind and brine,
with constellations and crustaceans rhyming,

My something googlisms stuttering anagrams
with a name like an implored palindrome
My something surely typed Shakespeare
At random by infinite monkey theorem

My something got drunk and showed its badge
to the locals, with a final kick, went home
my something slips out past me
to the elevator without word about the return trip

My something was homesick for the chains,
raised right fist whirled, one last shriek of horror fell
My something sat on the faction fence
until splintering an agnostic front

My something computer generated Flarf,
massaging the bot by throwing darts at words,
My something declined definition, slipped past
me again with such an everyday thing.

Nun and Such

Lynne Potts

Could you be a nun feeding chickens
or a harlequin in a hallway? Don't answer.
Last night it happened in one fell swoop

of pathos and travesty. I've been part
of certain acts, also a puppet
of faux fabric felt as your hand in my lap,

been to Egypt, known chicks scooped
to a Cairo cage, many little ones fluttering
in a truly authentic, non-fabricated way.

Are we part of a ruined nunnery, puppet state?
If you bite your lip, will it smile? If you destroy
the coop, do you win the bravery prize?

I had two wishes: a coup on four hinges
hung as temporary explanation which is all
there is when you act a show's faux part

and now I confess I wanted you a feather
in my cap, you in a harlequin suit rack-hung
in the hall, my reaching habit of looking

for a hand to put it and keep it there.

Hills Outside Mar Musa Monastery, Syria

Lynne Potts

Say an ant carries bread crumbs on a Syrian monastery's floor.
Say it has been foraging in canisters left on the back steps

Say a wadi in Jordan can't retrieve its soul without a money pouch.
Say three lira won't buy Euphrates rain for a family of eight asleep.

In the caves a monk prays with dust on a table's tongue
and in the latrine ants crawl the water pipe rope to go to a gap.

Say the weavers carry their own way of sending shuttles through
a wharf until mountains break like an old truck cylinder in drought.

Say monks measure prayer by stones on balcony steps
where lovers leave slippers before tiptoeing to bowers.

Not the way of dodging ants in the steep decline of cypress groves
where ants wandered to find hubcaps and wild flowers.

Say deserts are efforts that will not comply with slippers
or the need for money as the moon comes cradling its stones.

Say monastery steps are for inclinations we thought to save
but sand was persistent and only the ants prevailed.

Poems by Lynne Potts have appeared in Paris Review, Southern Poetry Review, New American Writing and Denver Quarterly, among others. She is currently Poetry Editor at AGNI. Her book All Whiles Waiting on Beauty won the 2012 National Poetry Review Prize and will be out next year. She lives in Boston and New York.

This issue, *The Broken City* asked contributors to imagine themselves at their 20-year high school reunion, and to spin a web of incredible but believable lies about themselves, to impress their former classmates.

Meghan Rose Allen: I wandered around Central America for a while and got married in Belize, though I'm not sure how legal that marriage is, in Canada. I ran a contest for algorithms and picked the winner, but everyone is ignoring that. I discovered Ethiopian food and could eat messer wot until I explode. I had a baby, had a breakdown, quit my job, and ended up here, PhD collecting dust on the shelf.

Mouki K. Butt: I am a terrible liar, so I would use props and horror makeup to help me enjoy the reunion. I could start every conversation with "I don't like to talk about the accident..." I assume people will clear away from me, allowing me easier access to the punch bowl and snacks.

Leigh Phillips: After a brief flirtation with a liberal arts degree and the study of contemporary American poetry, I reevaluated and opted to focus my attention on obtaining an M.R.S degree and spousing a Goldman Sachs upstart, ultimately cashing in on housewifery and giving birth to three cherubic children named Skylar, Madison, and Riley. We live on Long Island and I collect ceramic baby booties.

Lynne Potts: Well, it's been a rough ride, but I'm hanging. I was only carrying the ammunition (a sort of caddy) on that Dick Cheney quail hunt, no celeb for sure, so it never got reported, but he shot off my right leg, knee down. When I said "hanging," I meant the prosthetic leg they've had trouble keeping on with screws. I've been screwed all right. Shot just thinking about it.

Fabio Sassi: "You know, guys, I'm a visual artist now. Next week, I will exhibit my acrylics in three important galleries in Rome, San Francisco and Tokyo."

Nancy Scott: I graduated from the University of Chicago, then grad school at Stanford, and married a PhD. We were into mind-expanding drugs and became friendly with Ken Kesey while he was writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Lived for six years in NYC, then four years in London. Three boys, adopted a baby girl from Korea, built and run a private school in Princeton, NJ, because our unruly boys were always being kicked out of other programs.

J. J. Steinfeld: I'm one of the featured Scrabble players in the award-winning documentary, *Deities of the Letter Tiles*, about the 2005 International Scrabble Tournament that brought over 1,000 players from 40 countries, to Melbourne, Australia. Most notably, I was involved in the third-highest scoring game of all time, missing the combined-points record by five. Unfortunately, I was on the losing end of that game, though I did wind up tenth in the tournament. It made me feel like I'd accomplished something significant with words since high school.

Christen Thomas: I was voted most likely to succeed in high school, as well as most likely to marry last, and was deemed repressed by my art teacher. I became a top divorce attorney in Nevada and broke up with visual art to pursue poetry. Now I'm focused on smashing the glass ceiling of the pink-collar ghetto of publishing.

Illustration/Art Contributors

Mouki K. Butt is an illustrator who currently resides in Vancouver. She has watched Romy and Michele's High School Reunion more times than she can remember, but has successfully avoided her own class reunions. moukikbutt.com

Fabio Sassi started making visual art after varied experiences in music, writing and photography. He makes acrylics with the stencil technique, on board, canvas and other media. He uses logos, tiny objects and what the mainstream considers worthless. Fabio lives and works in Bologna, Italy. His work can be viewed at fabiosassi.foliohd.com.

Fabio Sassi



Falling In Love With Ginny MacEachern

Meghan Rose Allen

Bruce drops by after work on a Thursday in March, day three of the four-day schedule at the high school where they teach. Day three is the day where neither Bruce nor Ginny's free or lunch periods coincide. On that Thursday in March, day three of the four-day schedule, Ginny dismisses her final period calculus class 15 minutes early after forgetting twice to check the boundary conditions on the max/min problems she wrote up on the overhead projector. Bruce finds her at home at 2:15, drinking wine straight out of the bottle.

"Is your car parked outside?"

Ginny asks.

"I parked three blocks down at the meters," he tells her.

"Super." Then, to atone for her churlishness, Ginny offers him some wine. "To celebrate," she suggests, as if this Thursday is more remarkable than any other. When they finish the bottle, she drives them to the liquor commission to get another four.

"When is Kim coming back?"

Bruce asks, some way through the third bottle of Nova Scotian blueberry wine.

"I don't think your roommate likes me."

"I like you," Ginny sloshes.

"That's sweet." Bruce pats her hand. "I like you too."

Ginny leans over until her head touches Bruce's shoulder. "I mean, I like-you like-you, Bruce."

"I know," he whispers and takes another sip from the teacup he's drinking from. Ginny senses an opportune moment, so before she can reason herself out of it, she leans up and kisses him on the mouth. He hasn't swallowed and bits of wine drip out along the scruff of his beard. Ginny licks them and

waits for Bruce to kiss her back. When he does, she feels vindicated. *Take that, Kim*, she thinks. *You were wrong about me wasting my time on Bruce.*

For a while they move with elbows and legs at odd angles, skin rubbing pleasantly against skin while the imprint of the raised blue flowers of the couch fabric draws patterns along Ginny's back. As they slip to horizontal, Bruce knocks over his teacup.

"Shit," he says, lifting himself off her. "Sorry. The wine'll stain the wood."

"Never mind." Ginny tries pulling him back towards her, but he's already mopping up the red with a handful of paper napkins.

"You'll lose your damage deposit."

"Just leave it alone," she snaps and straddles his lap. She kisses him again but now their appendages feel heavy and extraneous. They squirm and shimmy and try to find positions where their arms, fingers, legs won't cramp or go numb. When they stumble upon the least objectionable one, Ginny pulls Bruce inside her and watches his face as he grimaces. They both have their eyes open but are looking away. Ginny watches out into the parking lot, two stories down. The Indian woman renting the basement has three reusable bags hung over each shoulder. Bruce, she assumes, watches the paint chip off the wall behind her head until he finishes with a whimper and Ginny disengages herself. Both have remained, essentially, clothed. Ginny's unbuttoned shirt hangs loose from her shoulders and she can't tell if Bruce's always pulled-high socks have slipped down;

the waist of his pants rests three inches up from his knees.

"So," says Ginny.

"Maybe I should go," Bruce says at the same time.

"Okay," they answer each other.

Afterwards, Ginny gets up off the couch, where her wet thighs have left a puddle on the cushion. She makes a note to turn it over after she pees and hopes Kim hasn't already flipped the cushion over once to hide some other stain. Like the table, the couch came with the flat. Bruce is right; that damage deposit is as good as gone.

Friday. Bruce should have at least looked conflicted when she saw him across the parking lot. Or remorseful. She would have even taken him smiling, when he saw her. Instead he gives a half wave and hits his automatic lock button twice, thrice, jabbing it hard with his finger, until he hears the button click. Then he checks the doors to make sure they locked (they hadn't). Ginny, unable to think of a reason to keep standing by her car in sub-zero temperatures, slowly walks to the staff entrance, slowly opens the door, slowly puts her foot inside before slowly turning around so she can see Bruce's dash across the parking lot so they can talk before class. But Bruce stays at his car, trying to jam the key into the lock. He ignores her second wave. She pulls her fingers, dampened by nervous sweat, from the metal door, tearing off two layers of skin from two fingers she'll need all day to hold her chalk and overhead markers.

"Goddammit," she says. Not even a yell. Just a statement. Two

grade ten girls she knows by sight and not name walk by in miniskirts and heels. Ginny holds the door for them, even though students aren't allowed in the staff entrance. They look cold and haven't laughed at her sucking the blood off her fingers and staring love-lorn at Bruce's attempts in the parking lot to lock his car. Ginny has a weakness for girls who don't laugh at her. All through high school they'd laughed at her. Now she's an Annapolis Valley *Welcome Back, Kotter* episode, but without the humour or the afro.

In the parking lot, Bruce starts talking to one of the other science teachers who hasn't even gotten out of his Volvo. Ginny goes inside.

She eats lunch alone in her classroom with the door closed and the blinds drawn. She stays late marking, her mind wandering and assigning marks haphazardly. It doesn't matter. Students who care will look over their tests and complain and she'll reassign the grades then. Students who don't care will be happy with whatever grade they get. This is her rationalization as she tries to get the grades to fit a normal distribution curve. When she finishes, she always locks the marked tests in her bottom drawer. She'll leave them there a few days, let the students stew. They're always better behaved the few days after tests, when they think that kissing her ass might make up for their apathy towards conic sections and basic set theory.

Back in the parking lot, she stares at the door of Bruce's car. A layer of ice covers the sides, with skinny icicles clinging to the handles. She breaks one off and rubs the cool along the tops of her sore fingers. His car still in the lot, but Bruce not in his classroom. She'd walked down that way, practicing how she'd casually drop her detour into conversation with Kim when she got

home (saving time going down Bruce's hallway rather than taking the stairs by her room), but Bruce wasn't there. The door was loose and open, ready for the custodial staff. No Bruce inside. But no Bruce in the parking lot either.

"I didn't need to avoid Bruce," she can tell Kim that evening as they watch the lead anchor bicker with the weatherman on the six o'clock news. "I think Bruce is already avoiding me." And then Kim will give Ginny more of that new-age love advice she's always getting from the paperback novels she buys at the grocery store. Kim believes in love as a choice. All Ginny must do is stop choosing Bruce and choose someone else.

"Easy peasy," Kim will say.

"You don't choose who you fall in love with," Ginny will protest.

"Sure you do. Let him go. Just let him go and get on with your life."

"But I..." Ginny will say the words even though she knows how Kim will mock her for them, "I love him."

"Being around those teenagers all day is rotting your brain. You're starting to sound like them," is what Kim will say, and in her best *Price-Is-Right*-come-on-down voice, Kim will announce "Welcome to Bad Choices in Falling In Love, with your host Ginny MacEachern," and Kim will make cat calls and Ginny will laugh and feel a tiny bit better, but right now, before that, all Ginny feels is like she did when her cat died, in first-year university: helpless and with no choice in the matter. Her boot makes a slight dent in the driver's side door. A Bruce-free weekend awaits her, she supposes.

She kicks the side of his car again.

Down between her legs, she sees red. Her cramps, on and off since the morning, are again on, turned on high, Dolby-

surround sound on level ten. She drives the two blocks to the health care center, stumbles, negotiates her way past the perpetually broken automatic doors to the inside.

"My stomach," she tells the intake nurse. "Maybe my appendix. It hurts."

The intake nurse graciously places her in a cubicle with curtains drawn and asks Ginny questions, filling in forms with her answers. When it hurts too much to speak, Ginny hands over her wallet and hopes the nurse doesn't mind riffling through the pockets to find what she needs, hopes that the nurse is not so disgruntled that Ginny will later find the trio of twenty-dollar bills and her credit cards missing.

"Last menstrual period?" the nurse asks.

"March, no February? I don't remember."

The nurse writes more on the form and gives Ginny a cup and detailed directions to the bathroom, even though the room is just across the hall. "Okay, Ginny, I'll wait right here." This makes Ginny want to laugh, the nurse waiting with baited breath for her to come back with a cup full of pee. But her side hurts too much to laugh, and she's too tired to try, and the doctor will be there shortly and then everything's going to be fine, the nurse tells her. "Everything's going to be fine."

"Hi Ginny." Monday. She hasn't spoken to Bruce in four days, choosing not to choose him, but in reality, having Kim's eagle eyes watching her like wounded prey. Expecting an important yet vague telephone call, Kim took the cordless into her room, Friday night. Ginny suspects her of pilching her cell phone charger as well. But now, here Bruce stands in the hall outside her classroom, with no Kim around, and all Ginny can

think of is how she chooses him.

"Look, sorry I haven't been around much. I've just been..." he scuffs his shoes against the door frame like a kid. These are the times when Ginny sees him the way he was when she first knew him—when he was Mr. Gallant and, as the most junior teacher on staff, he had a windowless box in the basement for a classroom, a room now used for storing drama props from failed school productions. He used to wear ties and dress pants to work, with tailored shirts pulled from all shades of the pastel rainbow. Now he always wears jeans with frayed cuffs and an assortment of commemorative marathon t-shirts. "I've been busy."

Ginny nods.

"You have class right now?"

Bruce always asks questions like this. Ginny memorizes Bruce's schedule each semester, the same way she memorizes Kim's shifts at the thrift shop and which days her mother has off from her naturopathic practice, but Bruce can't even be bothered to think through that if she's sitting alone in her classroom during the last period of the day, then she has no class to teach and is free at that moment. "You want to go somewhere?"

"Sure." Ginny grabs her bag.

Again, like always, they take her car. Bruce worries about someone seeing him driving her around, even though working together would be an obvious explanation. And he never worries about her driving him. Ginny doesn't understand. He always makes them drive far out of town before they can stop. The first time, she asked if they were going to drive all the way down to the HRM and laughed until she turned and looked at Bruce.

"I don't want anyone to get the wrong idea," he told her. He ran his fingers across the top of the ring, before grabbing the band, twisting it around.

He still fiddles with it all the time like a newlywed.

Ginny drives them wherever Bruce wants to go. Most times, just to Wolfville. Once, though, all the way to Lower Sackville where they stayed in the car drinking Tim Horton's coffee with warm Timbits they got at the drive-thru. But this time he directs her to the community college and she parks in a no-stopping zone behind the building with the Lebanese takeout counter. Ginny idles with the car while Bruce goes inside to get baklava and cans of soda. She asks for no aspartame and he comes back with a grocery-store brand diet cola for her.

"Thanks," she says, adding this to her list of reasons to choose not to choose Bruce.

"They didn't have anything else.

The Shock of Nostalgia J. J. Steinfeld

When you see a past lover
after a loveless lapse
and she seems old
what do you think, lover boy?

When you read of a good friend
after a friendless lull
and it is an obit
what do you fear, loyal friend?

*J. J. Steinfeld is a fiction writer, poet, and playwright who lives on Prince Edward Island, where he's patiently awaiting Godot's arrival and a phone call from Kafka. While waiting, he has published 14 books, including *Would You Hide Me?* (Stories, Gaspereau Press), and *Misshapenness* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions).*

ditchpoetry.com/jjsteinfeld.htm

See." He holds up his as well. "At least yours is cold. They dug mine out of a box under the fryer."

"So," Ginny says.

"So," Bruce replies.

They both wait quietly. After the last piece of baklava is eaten, Ginny shifts the car from neutral and they drive home.

"I'm glad we caught this early," the doctor says. Ginny's been assigned a tall doctor, a thin one—one who looks to be the same age as her, with a lab coat wrapping over a blush designer blouse, and with hair twisted up into a chignon. Ginny tugs at her cheap shirt with her left hand and runs her fingers through her hair with her right. "It means we have a good chance of avoiding surgery."

"But I'm not pregnant," Ginny

protests again. "I haven't had sex since..." and then she starts counting backwards on her fingers, multiples of seven from her last period, then from the one time she had sex with Bruce. There's a long pause. "Oh," Ginny replies.

The doctor keeps talking, reassuring Ginny, who wants no reassurance. Then the details of the procedure, then the side effects of methotrexate, then future fertility issues, then how long to wait before trying again.

Ginny chooses. "I just want this over with."

The doctor nods. "It shouldn't take long."

"Fine." Ginny doesn't know what time it is. She left school around 8:00, just before first period. Noon now, or 3:00, or 9:15 maybe. There are no clocks in the area the curtains partition off for her.

"You can stay here." The doctor looks at Ginny, who still hasn't cried, whose only movement since hoisting herself onto the gurney after passing her urine sample off to the nurse has been her finger counting, 15 minutes ago. "If you'd like to call someone, maybe a friend, hit nine to dial out." Ginny knows this is deliberate, the doctor's avoidance of who did this her. A husband, boyfriend, if one existed, would have come running in some time ago. Clearly, Ginny exists in a world free of masculine pronouns. "You should have someone drive you home after the shots."

Ginny rolls over and picks up the phone, so being talked at by the doctor will end. She dials home with no answer. Kim's cell phone goes straight to voice mail and Ginny can't remember the number of Kim's new office-manager job, the thrift shop having to close from April to August when the store's customers, the university students, go home. Finally, reluctantly, shamefully,

she dials Bruce who picks up on the 13th ring.

"Can you pick me up?" Ginny asks.

Bruce doesn't know who it is.

"It's Ginny!" she yells. On her end, people scuffle past the bed next to hers, the curtains swaying as they shout and bully somebody around. A voice calls out for another nurse and Ginny feels the breeze as one comes running. On Bruce's end, she hears students move in the background and the buzz of an end-of-period bell.

"Ginny, today's not really a good day for me," he tells her.

"Please." Ginny hates the way she has to beg. "Please. It won't be until..." the doctor didn't say how long she had to stay, so Ginny guesses, "4:30. I need someone to pick me up at 4:30. At the health center." She waits for Bruce to ask why she needs a drive, is she sick, injured, scared? Instead, she can hear as he turns his wrist over to check for the time.

"I'll do my best," he says and hangs up before Ginny can ask him what time it is now.

"I slept with Bruce yesterday," Ginny tells Kim, Friday morning. She speaks quickly and with a mouth full of corn-flakes and hopes Kim doesn't hear. Looking up at her roommate, it is obvious that she has. "You could be happy for me," Ginny says.

"I'm always ecstatic when people I love make horrible decisions." Kim sits. "So, where did you two lovebirds go? The girls' locker room? Underneath the desks in the science lab? How about the supply cabinet?" she asks.

"It wasn't like that."

"Then exactly how was it?"

"It was..." but Ginny doesn't want to share this with Kim, with anyone. "You wouldn't understand." When

she looks up from the two-month-old, thousand-time-read magazine that lives on the kitchen table, Kim still stares at her, waiting. "We didn't have sex in the school."

"So where did *la grande séduction* take place, then? We both know he would never risk his house. So, here?" she asks.

"Well, not here-here, on the table here," Ginny says as Kim lifts her bowl up, just in case. "But in this GPS location, yes."

"Did you at least stay in your room? I don't want to be watching the CBC and catch a whiff of middle-aged-man back sex sweat from the chesterfield."

Ginny pretends to be engrossed in an advertisement for cigarettes.

"And Ginny, this is a bad idea. Bruce Gallant is married."

"Technically he's separated."

"But not divorced," Kim reminds Ginny, which reminds her of the pile of registered mail stuffed in Bruce's pigeon hole or tossed into the staff room recycling bin. Heavy manila envelopes from So&So Barristers and Solicitors in Halifax, to Bruce Gallant, Department Head, Science, then the name of the high school they teach at. Bruce knows, Ginny knows, what those envelopes contain and she knows that Bruce ignores each and every one. Kim would know too, if Ginny were to say something, which she doesn't.

"I think you should call in sick today," Kim says.

"Can't. I don't have a lesson plan to hand off to the sub. And I'm already dressed."

"The heady life of the high school math teacher." Kim dumps her breakfast plate in the sink and opens the window to dangle her cigarette out. "Maybe you should avoid Bruce today."

Ginny thinks of yesterday's

scurrying of shame. Pulling on his shoes before doing up his fly and walking towards his parked car as fast as he could without breaking into a run.

"I don't know," Ginny starts but Kim cuts her off.

"No Ginny," Kim says. "I think you do."

"Jesus," Bruce says as Ginny walks into the waiting room. "What happened to you?"

Ginny stares at Bruce and looks, really looks, and realizes she'll be trapped in a car with him for the ride home. Only a handful of blocks, but still. She can't do it. "Maybe I should call Kim again," she mumbles.

"No, I'm here. Are you sure you're alright?"

"The nurse gave me some information." She waves some yellow and orange photocopies at him. "It'll tell me what to do."

Bruce gathers up his own pages.

"Marking?" Ginny asks.

"They're from my wife's lawyers. Divorce papers."

Bruce waits for Ginny's response, for Ginny to put her hand on his back and tell him that everything will be okay, for Ginny to say something to cheer him up. But she just walks forward towards the exit and around the workmen in perpetual motion trying to fix the automatic-door-opening sensor. Only April, but the heat shimmers off the tarmac. There must have been snow a few weeks ago. Ginny can't even fathom snow as Bruce unlocks her door

first and opens it for her.

Bruce sighs.

"Rough day?" she asks.

Bruce pushes the key into the ignition. "I guess. I just never thought I'd get divorced."

"You've been separated for years. What did you think was going to happen?" Ginny snaps.

It isn't until they're out along the road that Bruce replies. "You just sort of think of it as another day. Another day of being separated. And it adds up and adds up and adds up until one day, sure, most of your marriage has played out with the two of you separated, but it isn't like crossing days off a calendar, the way you start the day after Labour Day, until the last day of June. It's just one more day of being separated. Then one more day. Then another. But she's living in New York City now and there are some immigration issues that she needs resolved, so I'm going through, signing everything for her. I'm doing this all for her, not that she'd even care. I'm doing this all just to help her out."

"I'm glad you're willing to help her out."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Ginny shrugs and rests her head against the window.

"Jesus, Ginny." They're at the stop light now. "I get a random phone call from you, ordering me to pick you up, so I drop everything to come get you. What could have happened to you today that's so bad?"

"You just picked me up at the

health care center. You tell me."

The cars behind them honk twice before Bruce pushes the stick in gear and sets forward. Ginny waits for Bruce to ask her something, anything, to show even a modicum of interest in her. Even flipping through the stations on the radio would be preferable to nothing, which is all Bruce ever gives her. Ginny is weary, weary down to her bones and she doesn't care that she should be saying something meaningful to Bruce about his divorce. So she says the first thing she can think of saying, the words slipping out like they're greased.

"You know you were my teacher? Your first year teaching. I was in your grade ten science class."

"Really?" Bruce asks as Ginny fiddles with the buttons to raise and lower the windows, then pokes at the air vents on the dash.

"You told me I had real promise. Wrote the note by hand on my report card. You were the first person who made me believe I was smart, that I could be something. But you don't remember, do you?"

"Ginny, that was what, ten years ago?"

"Twelve."

"I'm sorry Ginny, there's been a lot of students. I can't possibly remember every single one. And you know that we were having problems then, my wife and I. Why didn't you say something?"

But Ginny doesn't know and neither does Bruce, as they drive without speaking on the road back to Ginny's flat.

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