

now is a cool time.
the sky won't let itself go just now.
outside is thick.
it feels like waiting to repair
for my muscles to hang from.
the correct amount
I'm a little bit sad inside.
doesn't matter where you cut
in the full love.
the bed takes my back because I'm
that love is just fucking and sympathy.
why haven't scientists proven
I had to do it slowly because my back.
listening to holes by mercury rev and
keeping my headphones in
I managed to get undressed

DANIEL MUTCH

Listening to Holes

What you have been holding together will fall apart. And they will call it progress. They will look back on the family you made of them from the perspective of their new family and say, 'What could I have been thinking?' They will say, 'How many years of my life? They will say, 'When it finally broke, I could not know it, but that was the best thing that ever happened. Invaders scale the barricades. You, alone in your bathroom, at the sink, before the mirror's long ask. It is impossible to get away from anyone for long enough, least of all yourself. Years later, they will still find things you gave them, a drawing, a book, a postcard, appearing now free of context, ghosts, pieces of dirt. They will have new words for things, new meanings for the words they already had: a clean split in their mind between the living and the useful. Which end of history are you? Let others acknowledge what we already know: this corpus will stiffen into meaning only when it is dead. Take this blue pain, now cake it on your pale face. Make yourself something other than this world.

JAMES TADD ADCOX

Edward the Confessor, Patron Saint of Kings and Difficult Marriages

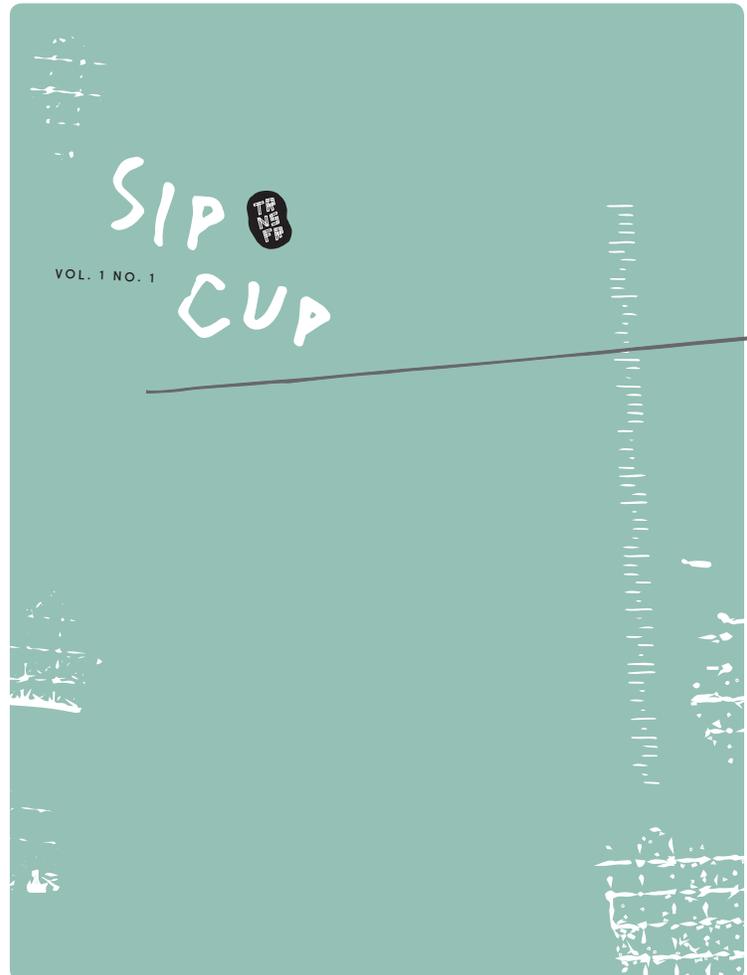
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from The Wagners

JOHN COLASACCO

From the outside of the house, it looked like an important window. It was oval and ornate and located in the exact center of the building.

From the inside, though, the window was harder to find. They only stumbled upon it while cleaning out the previous owner's junk from a closet on the second floor.

One evening, a stranger with a dirty beard came knocking at the back door, asking them for money.

He was carrying an old metal snow shovel with him.

He was hoping to be paid a few dollars for shoveling the snow.

It's impossible to guess what you might do or say if you knew it was our last night on earth.

There's an old datebook somewhere with your name written in it, marking a meeting that took place more than twenty years ago.

The girl writing poem after poem senses that something important is happening; you sense it too; there's a chance it might swallow her alive.

Two boys scribble frantically on the wall in black crayon. They don't stop until they've made a solid oval there, bigger than both of their heads.

While no one's looking, one of the boys leans in and kisses the stain, leaving a black mark on his lips.

In one of the university offices a boy has bitten his tongue. A woman walking down a hall hears about this and feels the texture of the paper she's holding a little more precisely. At the end of the day a few people might stop at the apple tree near the main road pouring out good crisp apples this time of year. Still, very few stop compared with those who pass by and don't know about it. Their nice dinners are sometimes made uneasy by peripheral worries, creaky floorboards, and pink kids bikes. A girl with a helmet on fills her shirt with handfuls of grass, advancing toward a corner of the yard where a knot of snakes have made their nest underneath the roots of a tree she occasionally draws in pencil. Tonight the tree will be covered in ice. The father who planted it in the yard will come out and have a look. Why is it this and not something else? he will ask, with his hair showing some of the curl it had when he was younger.

I am not sure if I am supposed to help the boy with his hand glued to the table.

He is writing me a letter with his free hand. I am looking over his shoulder while he writes it.

We are wearing clothes that always belonged to us.

I feel myself not knowing something as simple as a little bag of ears.

A dog sees me, and yet the situation remains imperfect.

Somewhere someone unknown to me takes a fistful of my hair in their hands.

A dead man dangles from a rope, counting out my mother's money.

Someday the person knocking on the door will stop knocking and just break in.

Glitter Gulch Pee Break

JAMES MCMANUS

Mook and Mope, digesting scorched onions
and garlic and something dead-meatier
in seats one and three here at Binion's,

believe they know how to play poker.
Hung over, card dead, I hold
my breath, shiver

between them, and fold
my umpteenth unsuited deuce-five.
(Bad luck that one cuff of my Levi's is rolled?)

Outside, on the break, I breathe in 112
sweet-skunky degrees, squinting at what
could be my granddaughters, mermaids, or elves

in, seriously, I mean, not much but
sunburn,
war paint,

Electric Daisy pasties, and knee-high Elmo-red fur
leg warmers as they sashay on by, vaping weed,
or zipline above me, howling banshees, a blur.

Down to eleven big blinds and not having peed
yet, or been mowed (or mown) down by ISIS,
I head back into the cryo-AC, desperate to find

a big hand to force my small stack to its crisis.

Spirit Guide

BRETT BIEBEL

Alejandra's father was in Nebraska by himself for a while. She must have been four and five years old. He lived in a trailer between Grand Island and Kearney and spent his days butchering dead cows. He did it so much he couldn't shake hands at the end. His fingers were permanently curled.

When she got to high school, they rented a house near the highway, and she found a box of letters he'd sent back home. They mentioned canned food and space heaters and hiding next to the Windex during raids. She asked him about that part of his life, and, because she always wanted to know everything for certain and for sure and forever, she recorded his response on a cassette tape she keeps in a drawer by her bed. The thread is unspooling a little now, but if you find the right recorder or an old enough car you can still hear her wondering how he managed. How he survived and kept them together for as long as he did.

His answer is choppy. It sounds half-serious. You have to filter out the static and be careful with the translation. What he says is most of the raids were orchestrated. Political. They got advanced notice, and the diving into cupboards was nothing more than a game of hide-and-seek. For the others, he developed a strategy. It was one he'd recommend to this day. Find yourself an Indian, he says. Mine was named John, but they called him Running Tree, and we met in a bar off a Route 30. He taught me to bowl and play darts and curse in Lakota, and that was essential for blending in. They see you with Mexicans, they think Mexican, and then la migra gets called. But they see you with Indians, they think Indian, and what they do is laugh. They buy you a drink. And most of them don't even bother to see you at all.