

Albert Castanza has not worn his wedding ring for sixty days. He has placed it next to his late-wife's own, which lies in a velveteen capsule. Handed down from her great grandmother, passed on from each generation to the next. The box should not be on his bedroom dresser. It should not have her ring within it. There is an unfinished essence in its placement, stalking Albert with each step. Without the ring, his left finger feels farther from the heart. He shivers at the cool iron grit when the brisk air of expired frozen dinners lofts on his face; smells the scent of diamond in her lavender perfume she never emptied; feels the individual shape of the shank within the permanent indent left on the chair she would grade papers; cuts like the bookmark in the pages of the novel she never finished in time. The ring now hides in the back of a dresser drawer, forgotten and deserted.

Albert has just turned the ripe age of sixty-eight, but has aged double in the last two months. He knows a myth- no, a tendency- that true love leaves the Earth in pairs. He often wonders why he has not died yet; imagines how he will die. Ideally, he would prefer to go in his sleep, having God reveal their identity in a dream, and take him by the hand, gently leading him to her.

Most of the time he can be found staring longingly at birds in the sky, but he would never label it "birdwatching". The tweeting chirps of the birds make him happy; the soft, natural sound. He wonders where they go. Migration is a private, comatose experience. No way to track the process casually. The mystery provides curiosity, but turmoil as well. He finds some form of meaning in poetry from their behavior, for instance:

*The receding feathers of Blue-jays / May they regress another day / On the branch to my house /
Chirping, chirping- I sway / Until the sun dims down / And all who view those Blue Jays /
Succumb to the Moon / And it's fiery shade.*

He often puckers his lips after the sensation of a profound discovery. It also keeps his mouth clean- a condition carried on to his residence. There always seems to be a vacuum ruminating the premises at all times. Routines of dusting, spraying, wiping- rinse, wash, repeated. The laundry machine is stuck in a spiral; washing rags whose sole purpose is to be reused with cleaning fluid the next day. Albert keeps a home resembling a newly refurbished rehab facility- medicinal and professional. The only dust within the home is the remains of Elaine Joyce-Castanza which lies inside a clay jar on the top drawer of his living room bookshelf. Beside it are two family photos: a reminiscent wedding dance, and an early family photo.

There is one mess: the unfinished manuscripts for novels, poems, and plays hidden in the basement filing cabinets. The abstract nature of the prose feels illiterate without the final, finishing thoughts. They line the walls of Albert's mind, punishing him for an aborted existence. There are also sticky notes laying limp through the maze of perfectly-kept countertops, stating thoughts or plots:

I am the face the electrical outlet makes.

When will love, love me?

Have Joyce be found in the laboratory... rabbit in left hand, hat in the right.

Sleeping Ankle Cocaine Burnout Paradise

On March 2nd, Albert experiences a momentary lapse of reasoning. While suctioning the floor, he feels the symptom of an iron deficiency that has increased with old-age. Straight lines become grandiose swirls, dizzying and jarring. His hands shake, each finger prying off its grip. Albert meshes with waves of vision, swaying to and fro. Until- an abrupt stop.

A bang on the head; a shower of dust; a terrible nightmare. The bookshelf topples, leading Elaine to coat Albert and the living room floor. Ash carries down, scattering like snowflakes through the beaming sunlight of the windowsill. Fragments of pottery litter his figure, dirtying his forearm with harsh apricot clay. Blood begins to toil down his arm, growing viscous as it conjoins with dust. Deep breaths clog his lungs; Albert wheezes for release.

Then, just for a moment, behind the glance of God, and within the eyes of nobody but Albert and Elaine- a sensation. She provokes his bloodstream, coats his larynx, and saturates his palms. Established and known, through a subconscious understanding, a presence is felt; empathizes past the point of natural human intuition. His eyes roll to the back of his head. He can clearly see a bright gray dusting over his dark red innards. Hands scramble over the carpeting for a foundation to stay upright. He cannot see the surrounding room; his pupils a blank-white canvas. Claws for a nearby wall, bumping into the recliner.

Elle? He leans on the ottoman.

Howarewethoughttheonethehow?

Elle.

Albert's left leg twitches. His fingers shake uncontrollably. Something leaves, like waking up from a dream. Mass transition of reality. Perspective impales upon his head. Eyes roll back into place. Sinks to the floor, laying in a bed of ash.

A tear streams down his cheek. On Albert's lap lies a picture of his wedding day, embracing his wife. He scrambles with quivering hands for any piece of paper. Grabs a copy of *Wuthering Heights* in panic- the bookmark on page 176- and takes out a pen from his shirt-pocket. Though his hands shake with divisive intensity, a focus is put from ink to page. He writes, without thought, like an other-worldly presence is controlling him:

Souls may split at the seams / And hearts can depart / But between the two / They're never apart. / They hold, they dance- / And through the pain / The bursting blood pumps / Down, down, down into me.

Albert stands up and looks at the mess in front of him. The poem, the urn, the shaded carpet. He puckers his lips, tastes lavender. Albert falls back down to his knees, not out of weakness, but rejuvenation. With the flick of his finger, he wicks his thumb into the ash, and lays her remains on the tip of his tongue. She enters him once again.

Albert smiles.

He does not clean the mess for the next two weeks, or enter the room at all. Instead he lets her remnants seep between the wool spools of the carpet floor, pollinating the furniture. There is something indescribable to the effect it protrudes. The smell, the wisping movement-like it has a life of its own. With thoughts and feelings and memories; reasoning and guilt; logic and creativity. Some subconscious standard left stranded on the floor.

When something so magnificent is found, space is necessary. It clears the mind from the clouding cemetery of anxiety; where discovery is laid to rest. The nervous excitement folds internally, left to simmer until boiling over. Hesitation to retrieve the reward, due to the expense of risk.

Albert takes a deep breath. Peeks from the kitchen, past the hallway, into the natural-lit expanse. The sun is setting, evolving from white to a dimming red. Hands grip tightly on the door frame. The speckling remnants of his wife bubble on the ground; an effervescent radiance glows. Popping and bursting, toiling for him. Jaw traps- eyes widen. Goosebumps rash his arms,

well down his back. He can feel someone- no, *her*- standing in the periphery. Swallows down a nervous gulp.

He inches towards the spectacle, emphasizing the weight on his toes. A staunch fragrance of aging flowers hide the acrid exuberance omitting from the ground. He shivers, but loosens his shoulders. The accident of a fortnight ago comes slowly into view. Elaine has remained, though seems to have spread like fungal spores; a vacuole-being adjacent to an amoeba, oozing from inch-to-inch.

He leans down, harnessing his hands to the collapsed bookshelf; gripping so tight he can feel splinters penetrate his fingernails. Breathing becomes a conscious chore. Al stares at the mess. Grains of his wife; a white-gray holiday. A bubble of ash slowly forms before his eyes. Albert trembles, unable to move. The boil grows, creating an air-pocket from seemingly nothing. Until, abruptly, it fulminates in his proximity. Embers erupt in every direction, glazing Al's torso. Seeping through his every orifice. He inhales the subconscious through his skin, interjecting images, broadcasting thoughts, hearing visual frequencies.

A complete hijack of limbic functions. Albert possesses itself out of the living room and into bed, floating like a specter. Hands clenching in an arc, toes curled upwards- unable to move. He unclothes himself, laying naked where he has lain betrothed for forty years. Eyes peeled to the ceiling, a deep vermillion. Swallowing down spit- a feeling prolapsed: knowing a reward is to be handed imminently. Euphoric anxiety enters his mouth. Albert forcefully tosses to the side, laying his hand on the empty carcass of sheets. Running his hand through the curves of fabric, weaving his fingers inside the folds. His thighs gesticulate, veins pump pure heat. The other hand tightens on the pillow, pulling at the filling.

“I need you.” She echos within.

“E-ell.” He chokes.

He knows where to hold her. She knows what to touch. This time from inside the source itself. She lowers from his abdomen to urethra. Albert shakes with profuse intent as she inserts an unyielding force. She coats his throat in carnal desire, bursting vessels of blood around his neck. His shoulders pump in blinding sensation, then cool back in erogenous circulation. Biceps tighten with gripping claws, chest squeezes past the seams of skin.

Elaine transfers her energy through wisps of ash inside Albert. Traveling simultaneously from head-to-heart and back again. Every touch Albert provides is felt through his own skin, penetrating Elaine herself. She can feel everything she gives to him, and vice versa. He bites his tongue with vivid intensity, the taste of warm iron coats his taste buds, but this is not any iron, it retains the musk of his wife's.

Albert bleeds Elaine.

One pupil remains his natural brown, the other forming green around pulsating rings of red. Fingernails sharpen with beautiful elongation. Hair regresses inward below, outward above; the strands pulling in-and-out like a marionette dominated by their master, dancing to the song of mutual elation. Nipples morph into gracious messengers, spawned for sucking and relief. Every vessel bursts through a heart pumping twice as powerful. Each feeling enhances from the sensitivity of two souls.

They feel a momentary pause before ejaculating. The flushing of blood and spit and life incarnate. Clawing through the skin, past the heart, and into something deeper. Pumping, panting, bursting, landing- at the same exact time. Albert cannot control his reflexes, tensing his back straight up, like possession from the devil himself. His throat gags entirely on his

circulation, eyes twisting completely as to view their skull, legs and toenails folding upon themselves.

Then, a pause. A body leaving from its corpse. A silence. Ash dilating; settling down softly. Blood transforming from pouring to streaming rivers of gush. Cords cutting and slipping back into place. Hair revolting down from electric wiring.

“Hhhggggggg.” She gasps through hallowed air.

“God.” He responds.

Albert puckers her lips, taking deep breaths through his filling chest.

They lay on the bed, sheets scantily covering their genitalia. Heaving, panting for oxygen. Feeling the constraints of the human form; not enough holes to provide air for two. They grasp at the linen, feeling each and every fiber of the bed’s surface. Elaine contorts the sides of Albert’s pursing lips- forming a smile, a pact: *To love, and be loved. To be one. Forever and ever.*

Preserved, contained, cherished, adored; inhaled, injected, and ingested- small doses of euphoria. Scrap by scrap, a human and their cells. Sculpting within its host an industry of vessels from ash and dust. A newborn of sixty-six casting oneself into life:

There is a lunchbox-sized tupperware container with a sticky-note-label “E” in Albert Castanza’s refrigerator. Inside the case are cubes- mostly transparent- with intermittent speckles of gray. It contains a mixture of a digestible algae-composite substance and the remnants of his dead wife. He puts it in his Arnold Palmer or her Friday wine. Sometimes she melts twenty of them in a pot and cooks penne.

In the pantry, behind cardboard boxes of mac and cheese, there are mason jars with a concoction of saltwater brine and Elaine. Cucumbers saturate into pickles. Albert eats this on her mid-day walks, or between chapters of his manuscript.

Kept within a vintage aluminum case, Al keeps paper and nicotine. She rolls tight cylinders of Elaine laced with tobacco. The feeling on his lips injects notions of pure beauty into their bloodstream.

A blender remains on the clear countertops of the kitchen foyer. Every morning Al blends his wife into a shake and brings it to the patio with him. She watches the birds- the bluejays especially- as they begin to land on tree branches from their winter migration. They chirp beautiful melodies, perhaps recounting their excursions to a far-off land.

I wonder how Elaine felt? The day she died- and left.

It washell. Echoed with the essence of pain.

Albert's hands begin to shudder. He's still getting used to sharing thoughts.

No matter where I go I am not me.

What was beyond? Wh-where did you go? Albert questions. Curious, frightful.

It didn't matter. No it didn't. They did not have me for there you for me.

Are you saying-

This is Heaven. We are living on God's plain nothing else. Elaine responds, through stuttering sighs. *This has been but a blessing. Allowing me to inhabit you. Not normal nono. But a special deal with God they must've heard me. Oh how I yelled for you when I left.*

I love you Albert I missed you.

Albert swallowed down another dose of himself. She could taste herself entering him. A skeleton of ash.

Days pass. Elaine infuses Albert through each passing moment. The more she is swallowed, her thoughts develop; taking up more space. Ideologies unveil themselves, scattering into Albert's wholesale psyche, and conceal remnants of his past. Time that was once focused on story plots and poetic stanzas become muddled with Elaine's ponderance on classic literature and Shakespearean critique. Ideas fuse, thought by thought, ash by ash; two brains, two bodies-forming into one. Not enough space is built into the human form to contain two.

12:04 am. By the fireplace, they
read.

*"The gray church
looked grayer, and the lonely
churchyard lonelier. I
distinguished the moor-sheep
cropping the short turf on the
graves."*

Swallows, sighs. Shallow hidden
attempt of contempt.

*"It was sweet, warm weather
- too warm for traveling; but
the heat did not hinder me
from enjoy-"*

Turns page.

Elaine- a sip?

Yes.

Grabs tea. Sips.

“...ying the delightful

scenery above and below:

had I seen it nearer August,

I'm sure it would-”

Avoiding thought. Surface level

ambiguity.

Al, I can read something else.

No, no. It's okay. I'm enjoying it.

Feels past the guise.

That is just not true. This

hurts past the point of

acknowledgement.

Acknowledgement? It's okay. It really

is.

Did I not use the right word

for you?

No, I-

Pain in the middle, past the heart.

I'd thought you

wouldbehappyIwas back.

Closes *Wuthering Heights*. Puts hand
on thigh.

Of course I'm happy.

Happy.

You can finish the book so read it.

It feels like rocks with you.

I'm sorry-

Sorry.

I feel like rocks to you.

Cheeks blush red.

No, it's okay. It's my promise

too.

Gentle thigh rub. Opens book again.

The anger is softened to sadness or
something deeper. Getting stuck in
the throat before it can reach
the soul.

The invasion of privacy quickly escalates. Whether in the kitchen or bedroom, pantry or lawn, thoughts do not hide from one another. Every sexual urge from one is ingrained into the other; every insult (controllable or not) is directed like a boomerang back-and-forth, hitting both as a result; every chemical inclination to sleep or exercise is balanced with the other individual in consideration. Time is not in control of itself anymore, but acts as a shared compromise between

two. A snowball effect of joint boredom to anger and back again enlarges itself without any hope of halting. It leads to moments of mind-numbing stasis, until both (attempt cordially) to agree upon one action. Usually sleep.

One morning, Albert pulls out a sheet of paper, beginning to draw a diagram. Elaine already knows what they will be drawing. It charts out each hour- minute- of every day in the next week:

- *7am-7:45am: Breakfast - French Toast w/ ~~Strawberries~~ Blueberries. Read newspaper on porch (if weather permits).*
- *7:45am-8:45am - Walk. Route past Edgewood Street to ~~Penokin light point~~ Chippewa Nature Trail.*
- *8:45am-9:30am: Bathroom - Use toilet. Shower (save water. keep it short. okay). Hygiene products.*
- *9:30am-11:30am: Write daily poem. AT LEAST one page to the story of Joyce's Federal Embankment.*
- *11:30am-1:00pm: Lunch + Nap. Let thoughts roam free, silence the crowd. ~~Meditate?~~ Wait, yes... MEDITATE.*
- *1:00pm-3:00pm: Attend house chores (according to what is necessary). Garden, cleaning, dusting, etc..*
- *3:00pm-5:30pm: Elaine runs the ship (damn right I do). Bronte hour; Tales from Chaucer; etc. (uh oh) (Oh please you'll love it)*
- *5:30pm-7:00pm: Dinner + Catch-Up. Spend full period debating ways to improve life. What would make next week better? What is going well? What needs to change? ~~How to reach the kids?~~ Etc..*

- 7:00pm-7:45pm: *Night Walk (if weather permits) OR fire-side meditation.*
- 7:45pm-10pm: *TV or Movie. ~~Masterpiece Theatre.~~ They're showing Arrival on BBC, let's do that.*
- 10pm-Sleep: *Read Wuthering Heights OR Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?(I wish we liked the same genres) (I do too.)*

The list goes on for months, renewing itself each Saturday night. Days incur small (but fair) changes, sometimes through painstaking debate or intuitive agreement. Time flows in peaks and valleys. If, for say, Elaine does not get enough sleep one night, 50% of the body feels frail; morning walks become cause for torture. Or, if Albert feels a particular sore one day, Elaine has to endure each pin and needle from the inside-out. In addition, the primitive side of the human being is not made to be observed. Uncontrollable urges and spontaneous acts of violence strike the mind at any moment. Albert learns to turn a blind eye to Elaine's intrusive thoughts of varying malice. Elaine forgives and forgets Albert's pleasure-fantasies of younger women. They understand that is not who they are, but a false fragment of their design. Random passing memories fly by like a soaring bird, occasionally landing for hours of observation. They annoy, encourage, dishearten, and every other verb known to man simultaneously.

Albert has just completed a second draft for his book. Elaine finishes *Wuthering Heights*. Cicadas screech from bushes ranging miles away, sounding peaceful by the time it reaches the human ear. Every cricket and every bustle of leaves is reverberated through the sliver of open-air left upon the window sill. Dust gathers on the nightstand near the Castanza's bed, inching past the dresser's crevices. Infects the clothing, laying still on decade-old shirts. Both their eyes have sunk inward from stress; spines begin to curve with lack of proper posture; fingers quiver

backward from sheer worry. There's a certain melancholia to the atmosphere. The moonlight shines past the veil of a thin curtain. A light breeze tickles the nape of their neck.

Then, a snap.

Albert jerks upward from his rest, waking Elaine. He struggles for breath, clawing at his throat.

Al? Albert? Are you okay?

Chokes on thin air, gasps for release.

Albert! I-

Exhales.

Sleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadis

esleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadi

se-

What?

sleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadis

esleepinganklecocaineburnoutpara-

Her words wisp away, void of meaning. The force- the will of Albert's passion overtakes any semblance of control.

Sleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadis

esleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadi

se-

Elaine is suffocated in immense,
rapid thought. Her veins send
subconscious signals, like electrical
wires, trying to connect. They sputter
out to no avail. Blocked, clogged
tunnels of blood.

The world transforms to strokes of
watercolor.

*...sleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadisessleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadisessleepinganklecoca
ineburnoutparadisess...*

They rise- quite literally- from bed. Feet levitating past panels of light, illuminating from the night sky. They pass the bedroom door, flying down the hallway. Passing pictures of weddings, reunions, guilds, clubs, choirs, vacations, friends, pets, holidays, memories- *memories, memoires*. Body falls to the floor, limp. Then, broadcasted- like a projection- in the lining of nerves surrounding the skull: *The birth of their twins; falling from the ladder in the frozen-dairy section Konvience Kart at 12; reading Huckleberry Finn the first time; father throwing pans after a yelling match; watching Jersey Boys with father, looking into his teary eyes; father dying the next day; mother embracing after the first and last of her open-mics; meeting Elaine past the shallow gap in the non-fiction section of the Penokin Local Library, her smile radiating past the fifteenth pretentious biography about Voltaire; Elaine's beautiful lace covering her legs on the*

night they went to Aunt Joyce's anniversary dinner; Elaine meeting mother and father; dishes of pasta Marcus used to cook, until they then too, passed away; Elaine cupping hands, they feel frail and gaunt; the smell, the smell, the smell of the residential housing hospital- the scented pit of death embodied; Brie and Mart slamming the door; leaving- never, no, never coming back- pointing their fingers with vengeance, like swords to armor; the Northern Cardinal from the leftward branch into a house rooted within the tree; watching Murder, She Wrote as an attempted family-unit to the boredom of everyone except Elaine; the flakes of snow on the dead American Basswood branches, finally seeing the beauty in the graydead stark finishes of their trunk; speckles of ash whittling past the grills of the ventilation system, a fungal growth to a once pitch-white carpet; bubbles in the bath as Brie smiles daddy; bubbles in bong; bubbles pang and pop from the surface of Elaine's wishes; bubble- slap! the cheering commence!; holding her soft hands, you may now kiss the bride, the white veil beautifully masquerading the wax figure of his love, betrothen, wide doves burst with song, mother and father smiles holding hands under the pine-wood benches of the local Church and her eyes, her eyes are this beautiful watercolor shade of green and brown, and smile behind the cloak of her guise so elegant the ring the ring the ring through the finger it sing it sing it sings so loud to take off the curtain and touch the woman of living dying believing becoming a husband it feels like seeping and flowing and becoming the trees and birds and ash and stone and grass and world and-

They lay on the ground. Eyes melting. Mouth gaping. Arms proven immobile, opting to lay in static-shock. The sensation of embers scattering from limb to limb; atom disintegration. The smell of ash.

“Albert.” Elaine gasps for air. She feels her heart attempting to stop, yet continuing to pump. Reaches her hand out to a chair- nothing. Stares into the dim blue ceiling of the kitchen

walls. *This pain is done- already has, and will be.* Elaine recognizes the pain. Hands sickly shrivel, chasming. *Let go, Albert, let go.* She understands- the peaks and valleys, the living and dying.

It's okay.

Elaine takes off their glasses, sliding them on the floor. She manages to turn her head towards the windowsill. Attempts to gaze at the stars;

...sleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadise...

little dying suns. A tear of a wisping white-cloudy substance streams down her cheek. It peels

...sleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadise...

away her skin, burning the ground on impact. Sizzling past the hardwood furnishing, into the

...sleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadise...

core below. Numb exhaustion defines her every source of passion and power.

...sleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadise...

All she can do is lay on the ground.

And feel her husband burn away.

The clear whistling jeer of a vibrant Blue Jay wakes Elaine. Swiveling her head mere inches, they meet eyes. The bird stands on the kitchen counter, staring blankly at her. The opaque pulsating pupils of the Blue Jay clearly reflect the red-shot eyes of Elaine; both optic glares, a halo of dread and blood. She groans in pain; rotting flesh scrapes against her frail bones.

The sun sets, then rises once more. Concealed to the harness of the floor, Elaine begins to imagine vines puncturing her wrinkled skin, connecting to her veins. Blood fuels the growth of her garden, replacing sunflowers with arms and zucchini for legs. Dirt slowly seeps her into the

ground. Trees grow in her wake- the seed is but her life, gone away. She imagines the trunk she becomes, growing through hundreds and thousands of years, until it breaks the seal of gravity- passes the plane of clouds- and finds Albert, alone, in whatever place he has gone to. That will be the day they meet again.

2:36 PM. Elaine stares at her glasses, directly reflecting a ray of sun. It forms a beam of light that punctures the wooden base of the nearby countertop. Smoke begins to form in the wake of the gleaming streak. The Blue Jays scatter at the scent of the dying nature, flying to nearby perches. Under the smoke, dust forms. Elaine observes. Ponders.

It is muscle memory, without thought, like an other-worldly presence is controlling her: she puckers her lips.

Elaine turns away from the glasses. *Sleepinganklecocaineburnoutparadise burnout burning burn my ankle to cocaine it sleeps until paradise upon the skies skies skies is GodplainEarth is here nonothingelse.* With all her power, she crawls on the floor, pulling herself to the living room. Muscles tear and stretch in pain. Veins pulsate with the threat of stopping all functions at a moment's notice.

“Hgggghhhh.” Elaine gasps for air, transitioning from the kitchen's smooth tiling to the increased traction of the carpet floor. Each spiral of wool rips at her skin, trying to connect upon her. The birds follow her to the room, perching themselves on chairs and lamps, windowsills and shelves. She pulls, *pull pull*, to the basepoint of the bookshelf. Sees the white beauteous glow of her wedding dress, embraced by her husband. She kicks her one-working-foot against the shelf. Yells in agony. *MayyoumaynotpleaseGodohplease.* The photograph wobbles forward, topping over onto Elaine. The Blue Jay's watch in curiosity, questioning her. Elaine inches toward the gas-fueled fireplace with grand resolve. She loosely throws the wedding photo, like a stone (for

minutes) at the knob, turning it inch-by-minuscule-inch until a wave of warmth touches her arm. The birthing blue flame of fire begins, reflecting in the pit of her eyes, around the optical halo of red. Stares at her wedding photo one more time.

Then, Elaine tosses the photo into the fire-

Something Old.

The wedding day: the gown, the smile, the connection- simmered down to nothing but ash. Elaine cups the remnants in her hands, she stares at the speckles- like the salt sprinkled on the bread of her consummation- then closes her eyes. Puts her nose into the pile. Inhales.

She begins to levitate over the ground. The birds squawk louder, *louder* than the longing of her romantic affliction. Elaine flies to the kitchen, leaving a trail of blood in her wake. Gasps for air, as smoke suffocates the room. The fire from the countertop has infected the table; chairs begin to melt foundation-first. Alongside the flames are beautiful embers floating in the atmosphere. Elaine flicks *their* her hand in the celebration, collecting the ash around her, shoveling it into her larynx. Amidst the festivities, Albert's manuscript swirls in the spiraling torrent of smoke and flame. Pages smolder quietly, leaving a microscopic residue. Elaine tilts her body to the floor (the bottom of her feet now face the ceiling), licking the scorching ground of her husband's final work-

Something New.

Pivoting upward, Elaine shrieks in pleasure or pain or a combination beyond the two. Fires blaze upon her hair, their skin, his eyes- shedding the skin of their current form. Albert's body melts off the bone, to a pool of white dots now pouring like rain from all angles. It fills the crevices craters cavities of Castanza- infusing from a used body-

Something Borrowed.

Safe, warm, in the center of the storm, Elaine hovers in complete control- feeling unknown sensitives pit upon her void expanse of a body. She hears shrieks from around the wall of the surrounding tornado- the dying chirp of Blue Jays. *The sacrifice to a cause / An elemental reject / To capsule's applause / Thank you, Thank you: The rest is ours.*

Concocting within the meltingseepingloving loving gyration- the scope of which, so personal it takes up the everythingeverythingeverything of a lifetime- Blue Jay's simmer back into the dark. Seeping into Elaine, fusing from the memory of Albert-

Something Blue.

The soft crumpling flames inch past the doorway, now dissolving the bed and all else to nothing but dust. Foundations wither to the eve of their conception, reverting back to the beginning of time themselves.

Herhis hand punctures the air with intensity, breaking the planes of God's Earth and all that reside upon it. Elaine moves to his dresser drawer- shaking. She opens the cabinet, without real intention or thought. Control is lost in the wind and fire behind. Her hand reaches past old garments, until touching a soft, satin square. Sheheshe pulls out the velveteen capsule of her ring she thought was lost months ago. Opens the seal to an exhale of dust, inside lays the diamond ring of her wedding day. Heshe takes it out.

Her hand extends itself outward. Fingers stretching, preparing itself. She takes her right hand, and fits the ring placed onto her left hand; fourth finger. And, with that, the final pact is enforced once more. Elaine looks at herself in the mirror, the glass reflecting waves of radiating heat. Her bustle unhooks, setting aflame in near seconds. They form a smile, and whether it was Elaine or Albert, it did not matter. The figure is formed, and set in stone. The vow is promised, as love- forever mourned.