

Inkslinger

Fall 2013

DESIGNER

Haley Martin

COVER PHOTO

“Arles” by
Nathalia Kane

EDITORS

Abby Hodgins
Ian Heisler
Kelly McBride
Matthew Edwards
Thomas Harlander

EDITOR'S NOTE

Thank you for reading *Inkslinger*.

The *Inkslinger* staff has spent many hours considering and discussing these pieces over the semester. We are quite pleased with the selections we have for you this Fall. We did not have any particular theme in mind when we made our selections, but now that the book has come together, I cannot help but notice a certain commonality among the pieces featured here. These stories, poems and photos speak to me of our natural, human desire to find a sense of belonging in this world. We seek to find it through the beauty we observe, the relationships we form, the memories we cling to. And oftentimes—amidst these pursuits—we learn about what it means to be in relationship with the Divine.

When I consider the stories that our featured artists are telling, I am struck with an overwhelming sense of our need for relationship. Whether dealing with the purity of nature and friendship or the tragedy of isolation, the stories told here show us that the bonds we form with each other, the earth, and with God play central roles in our search for hope and meaning.

The *Inkslinger* staff is pleased to help showcase the talent that exists in the Biola student body. We are confident that you will be impressed by the thoughtfulness and creativity of these writers and artists. Our hope is that as you journey with us through this semester's edition of *Inkslinger*, you will find yourself pleasantly drawn in to the world of art and story.

Abby Hodgins, *Editor-in-Chief*



Unplug

Dylan K. Simmons

CONTENTS

Eureka —Jessica McBride.....	6
The Footpath —Paige Harris.....	7
Of Math and Poetry —Hannah Schaller.....	8
Said Hamlet to Horatio... —Hannah Schaller.....	11
Hidden —Nathalia Kane.....	12
Trenches —Claire Zasso.....	13
Pigeons after Rainfall —Brooke Arvidson.....	14
Greetings —Caitlin David.....	18
Moments of Clarity —Caitlin David.....	19
Two Pennies —Caitlin David.....	20
Lost —Julie Marmion.....	21
Transit —Dylan K. Simmons.....	22
Introspection —Leanne Bergey.....	23
The Pink Wellies —Victoria Van Vlear.....	24
Closet Down the Hall —Clarke Edward Andros.....	28
Budapest —Scott Hubbard.....	30
Moon —Scott Hubbard.....	31
Luca Scopazzi's Guide to Door-to-Door Sales —Ilima Kung...	32

Eureka

Jessica McBride

Golden hour settles into England's nest,
but always I am restless, rushing impatient toward the point
which ripples in the heat beyond eye's reach on the roadway.

I am your daughter - born of the interstate, of overripe sunshine,
and of pioneers whose great West met the Pacific,
yet still seek out the limits of silicon and the soul.
I am heir to your spirit which never settles,
chasing down heat-hazed horizons.

Oh, that all my loves were one,
and I not parceled out between them
like oranges waiting in crates to be shipped.
I have imagined him with me
as the wheat lay warm on the hillsides
or the wind played waterfall with cloud-swept tree limbs.
Choose one city and leave the rest behind;
love one soul and renounce all others.

You told me when I was young I could have everything
but in each opportunity I feel denial's half-welcomed weight,
more disparate pulling and longing.
I belong to one lovely place, and not the other.

So I depart the Old Country, richly burdened
with shadows of medieval churches and green-sodden meadows.
Let them be found again by more of the world's wanderers –
I return to my love and my golden California.

The Footpath

Paige Harris

The bleary traffic invaded my mind,
Swirling the smoky haze of indecision,
Driving grit in deep and leaving me blind,
Leaving me a course set for collision,
No rest, No joy, No hope, No precision;
Until Realization, for then, I groan,
Seeing as all the dust needs revision,
The pulse of Freeways I see as a stone;
Simplicity beckons with old dirt roads,
A slower rambling, a peace-full stroll,
A white way of delight, not lacking goads,
But full of purpose and rest for my soul;
Though far this wand'ring sojourner may roam,
Guided by the Ghost, I will, at last, come home.

Of Math and Poetry

Hannah Schaller

“Math, not poetry,” you say –
you could use an ampersand.
Both signs of numbers, signs of letters
dream of infinity spanned.
Both run on tangents that appear
in formula like neat-bound proofs,
but prove in their long-plotted forms
that their ambition breaks the roof
of grids, of speech, of space and time,
of all conceptualized or rhymed.
Both measure lines in feet, both body
nothings forth upon a grid
of lines, or syllable-bound schemes
that shape unbounded fullness with a lid.
Parabolic pentameters
(see, they fit perfectly)
archtangential trochees also
try to sound the soundless sea.
“Petals on a wet, black bough”
are spiraled like the Fibonacci shell,
all whorled “in a vortex,” vertigo
of “men and bits of paper” in grey Hell,
like looking down an asymptote
of down a limestone wishing-well
from infinity’s height.
Plots bend a story-line to arches;
plotted points draw curving paths
upward for maximum extension,
height of pathos, poet’s flight,
then sloping in precise denouement
from the “partial ecstasy.”

Infinity approached, foreshadowed
in this line's ascending curve,
met with dip-diving lark descent
as that songbird falls from the sun
it cannot touch – but oh, its warbling
sings a song of happy yearning
for that fairer light. The line
of flight curves up to touch its glory,
until, ray-struck, the pierced lark cries
its signal to mankind: “Thus end
all linear progressions, all attempts,
of man to touch the single Light Divine” –
all signs have limits, math and rhyme.
Both promise more than they can show
to human minds. Both strain their eyes
to see past mortal bounds into
an endless sea of meaning; sea
of value, or perhaps its smallest dew.
We mariners but build our castles
from nuanced numbered heaps of sand –
Sand, similarly like the stars
innumerable, the countless grains
then bodied forth in flesh, were measured
by the Poet-Singer David
into rhyming lines, verse-numbered –
the lines that fell for him and for his pen
in beatific places – lines of men
and lines of meaning, one inclusive series
of ancestors that by all God-breathed theories
begin at Adam, “ex nihilo,” void
of self-contained being, a nothingness –
and end at Christ; nay, are there pulled, there sucked

by infinite potential. All in all,
and in all things. Point of both first and last
is Him through whom time gained present and past,
and whence the future flows. These brother lines
(of humankind and ever-birthed time
that Psalms saw in a single Person met)
find both beginning and an end in Christ,
anchoring Adam's infinite regress
in infinitely positive reprise.
"The still point of the turning world" He is,
both point and movement, where all things derive
their being and existence. He, the song
that perfectly proportions everything –
the height, the depth, the length, the width thereof –
in which all meets as in a ring, a sphere
whose center all-pervades, but whose
circumference is neither there nor here.
In endless God, in math, in poetry
all things begin and all things find their end;
negative infinity gives birth
to positive, whence all words tend
and also numbers, if given their head.
Positive conjunction links
two doubles of infinity
that strive for God's essential fullness:
Math and Poetry.

Said Hamlet to Horatio...

Hannah Schaller

Dogs in the alleyway bark dissent
at apparitions of pure scent
that humankind's dull nostrils cannot sense;
they roll in grassy ecstasy
communing with olfactory beings
that mediate the secrets of essence.

There is more in heaven, as birds know,
than felt by us who dwell below,
transfixed by feathered chevrons flocking North.
Attuned to earth's magnetic field,
thrown into space by ores concealed,
geese apprehend th' invisible import.

On earth, the honeybee in flight
seems lost, to our small-spectrum sight,
blind to ultraviolet tapestries
that give the bee a patterned course.
Of flowers and color, the bee sees more
than is contained in our philosophy.



Hidden
Nathalia Kane



Trenches

Claire Zasso

Pigeons after Rainfall

Brooke Arvidson

Before Mr. Thimble had even taken a seat on the wooden bench, the pigeons had already congregated in a semicircle and were bobbing their heads up and down in anticipation. The sky was still gray from the earlier rainfall, but the pigeons and Mr. Thimble didn't seem to mind a little dampness. In fact, the change in weather appeared to have made two of the pigeons even more desperate for a midday meal, and they began to peck at the old man's shoe laces.

"Shoo!" Mr. Thimble said. He waved the anxious pigeons away from his neatly polished shoes. "Have a little patience, my friends." He hung his cane on the back of the bench and opened up his brown paper bag.

Now, the pigeons had begun to hop excitedly from one foot to the other. Some pecked each other to get a better position in the semicircle where the food was most likely to be tossed. A pigeon with only one leg was shoved to the very back of the semicircle.

"Survival of the fittest, eh?" Mr. Thimble chuckled. He took a whole slice of bread out of the brown bag and tossed it to the one-legged pigeon in the back. The pigeon snatched up the bread and began to awkwardly hop away from the other birds until he gained enough momentum to take off into the air. As he frantically beat his wings to lift him higher, the weight of the bread eventually became too burdensome, and the pigeon was forced to release it.

"Ugh!" Mr. Thimble exclaimed. The bread hit him squarely on top of his fishing hat. He reached up and detached it from where it had stuck to one of the decorative fishing lures. "Dumb birds," he muttered under his breath. Mr. Thimble took the other three slices of bread, tore them into small pieces, and tossed them to the remaining pigeons.

The sun was finally beginning to peek through the clouds, and the first rays fell on Mr. Thimble. Feeling the warmth of the sun on his stiff body, he leaned his back against the bench, pulled the fishing hat over his eyes, and began to sleep.

~~~

A loud snort awoke Mr. Thimble with a start. He looked around and discovered a younger man sitting beside him on the bench. The man was holding his own brown bag and was smiling at Mr. Thimble.

“Who are you?” Mr. Thimble asked skeptically.

The younger man laughed a little and answered, “The name’s Jonathan. Did you have a nice nap?”

Mr. Thimble didn’t recognize the man, but he immediately felt comfortable. “Well, I suppose it was nice. I don’t rightly remember falling asleep. Did you wake me up?”

“I believe you were startled by your own snoring,” the man replied and smiled even wider. He took out a piece of his own bread and began to feed a few of the remaining pigeons. The man seemed just as comfortable as Mr. Thimble, and he handed him a piece of bread from his own bag.

“I must be getting old, Jonathan. One minute I’m here with my friends and the next, I’m sleeping on a public bench. The name’s Tony, but most folks around here call me Mr. Thimble. Kind of backwards if you ask me. Makes me sound older than I really am.” Mr. Thimble stared absently at the piece of bread.

Jonathan stopped smiling and stared intently at Mr. Thimble. “My dad once told me that you can’t help getting older, but you don’t have to get old.” He watched Mr. Thimble as if his response to the statement would reveal something important.

At first, Mr. Thimble merely continued staring at the bread. Then, a smile spread across his face and he looked over at Jonathan. He pat him on the back a couple times and said, “Your father is a wise man, Jonathan. My kind of man.”

Jonathan stared and waited a few more seconds, but Mr. Thimble was finished talking and had begun to toss bread to the regathering group of pigeons. The lures on his fishing hat gleamed in the sun as the two men sat together side by side.

~~~

The traffic light changed from green, to yellow, to red. The walk signal lit up on the opposite side of the street. Jonathan stepped into the crosswalk, walked halfway across the street, and stopped. He turned around to see Mr. Thimble standing on the edge of the sidewalk staring intently up at the traffic light where a group of pigeons had perched.

“Is everything all right?” Jonathan walked back and stood next to Mr. Thimble. The light changed back to green and cars began whizzing by.

Mr. Thimble lifted his fishing hat and scratched his balding head. The wrinkles around the corners of his eyes creased as he squinted up at the pigeons. He let out a sigh. “I don’t know if I have any friends.”

Jonathan appeared confused. “What do you mean?”

“I just don’t know. I can’t think of a single friend. There was Joe... or was it Lou... I just can’t really remember.”

“Well, you are my friend. You and I, we get along pretty well. That makes me your friend too.”

Mr. Thimble smiled and laughed. “Well that’s one thing I know now!” He pressed the crosswalk button and

watched as the changing light cast a green, yellow, then red glow on the pigeons.

~~~

“Here we are Mr. Thimble,” said Jonathan as he helped Mr. Thimble up the steps of the porch. On the far side of the porch, a woman with braided grey hair sat in a rocking chair. She watched the two men but showed no intention of getting up or greeting them.

Mr. Thimble turned to Jonathan and gave him a firm handshake. “Jonathan, my friend, I have enjoyed your company. Let’s do this again sometime.” He turned and walked in the front door of the house leaving Jonathan standing on the porch.

Instead of heading home, Jonathan pulled up a second rocking chair next to the woman and sat down. Neither one of them spoke a word for a few minutes as they rocked back and forth simultaneously.

The woman looked over at Jonathan with half a smile. “How are you, John?”

“Just fine, Ma. The weather finally cleared up. Dad was in a good mood. It might have been because of the second bag I brought for the pigeons.”

“It wasn’t that, John. It was you. It’s always because of you whether he realizes it or not.”

Jonathan thought about this and smiled. He and the woman continued to rock back and forth, back and forth.



# Greetings

Caitlin David

---

“How are you?”

The eternally recurring question  
of implied matter but infinitesimal meaning.

To which she charmingly replies, “Oh, I have  
the winsome worm; I find existence in the movement  
of the bus that leaves on time, of the clocks that run  
too straight for sanity.

Lo, the mottled evening calls—  
I must not rest my feet. Night is alluring but  
not sweet enough for me. I crave the higher things,  
the manufactured lights, the half-digested lines  
of someone else’s tale to wile the seconds.

I have not caught up to last month but I might  
catch up to two short years ago  
when someone asked a question—  
but I soon forgot his name.”

# Moments of Clarity

---

Caitlin David

the lightning moment, when  
you didn't get the lamp switch that stays on but  
rather the flash you thought you saw but can't track  
where it went, the way it lit your mind an instant  
and was gone.

the thunder moment, when  
you didn't get the divine whisper but  
rather the word you thought you heard but can't say  
what it meant, the way it hit your mind an instant  
and was gone.

the sea spray moment, when  
you didn't get the salty mouthful but  
rather the mist you thought you tasted but can't name  
how it felt, the way it bit your mind an instant  
and was gone.

# Two Pennies

Caitlin David

---

With a sidewise glance the Lincolns never meet my gaze,  
these two pennies sitting on the seat—  
this copper-nickel coin couple cradled in my car  
with no excuse or reason to be there.

Perhaps they hitched a ride with me en route to Mexico,  
perhaps they ran away to join a band,  
this copper-nickel coin couple cradled in my car,  
with no excuse or reason to be there.

They stalked me to my house, hiding quiet in my bag,  
where they scared away the quarters and the dimes;  
this copper-nickel coin couple cradled in my purse  
with one excuse or reason to be there:

loose change, more change, change I see and don't,  
change to lose, change to hold, change I want and won't.

# Lost

Julie Marmion

---

Honeysuckle. The crisp memory of a summer afternoon.

Two eights and a colon. The butterflies from slumber awaken.

Woodcreek. Racoons and dancing shoes. Avoid the noose, Barney.

Octopus tree. Forsaken roots, the path unknown.

Stinging Nettle. No tears aid my longing eyes.

A foreshadow of the world to come, a bleak appointment divinely undone.

Cicadas and lightning bugs. Nature comes to life.

Rumbling engines. The fragmented earth below, a past forgotten.

Home. The smoldering monument of hope.



# Transit

---

Dylan K. Simmons



---

# Introspection

Leanne Bergey

# The Pink Wellies

Victoria Van Vlear

---

Mary Roberts was the kind of woman who might go silently unnoticed almost anywhere. In her mid-thirties, she was of average height, had dull, medium-length brown hair, and equally uninteresting brown eyes. She maintained that her only good feature was her nose—petite, thin, and properly British.

Her neighbours on either side would not have recognized her if she bludgeoned them with a stick, but this had nothing to do with her appearance. She never went out. Groceries were delivered from Tesco on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and she bought everything else she needed online. It wasn't that she *couldn't* go out—she simply chose to stay at home. She liked her townhouse, had no family to visit on holiday, and decided there was no other good reason to leave. Her old university friends had long ago stopped inviting her to events—which Mary preferred. She enjoyed studying people, but only from a distance. It was far too much trouble to engage personally.

Every morning without fail, Mary dressed in business casual attire—usually a white blouse and black cotton trousers—and sat down at her laptop to translate instruction manuals from one of five European languages into something understandable to the general English-speaking public. She worked strictly from 8:00 to 19:00 hours, with one half-hour lunch break at 12:30. She kept the indoor temperature at precisely 21 degrees Celsius, and always wore a sweater. She was never ill, had perfect vision, and slept for exactly eight hours every night.

~~~

It all began with the pink wellies. They were a little too big, and the girl's heels popped up with every step, making little

squelching noises like a suction cup being pulled from a window. The first time she heard them, Mary was sitting in the faded white chair at the breakfast table, the steam from her tea warming the bottom of her chin as she read through the new emails that had accumulated in her inbox since the night before. She pushed out from the table and crossed to the front window, just in time to see the boots walk by. They were accompanied by unruly red hair streaming out from under a black beret, and a green polka-dotted backpack, slightly unzipped. It wasn't raining just yet, so there was no unfurled umbrella, but Mary had no doubt that the umbrella would be pink, too. With a disinterested humph, she turned away from the whole ensemble and went back to the table to reclaim her tea.

That afternoon, when the wellies came squelching back the other way, Mary brought her tea along to watch. By this time, the rain had been falling steadily for several hours, and the wellies seemed to enjoy plunking onto the pavement and sending squirts of water in every direction. Mary could no longer see the girl's wild hair because it was blocked by an umbrella—pink, as she had guessed.

“I knew it,” she commented aloud.

Delilah, her roommate, was the only one around to hear the declaration. She flicked her white tail and turned her feline head away to indicate that she wasn't interested in umbrellas of any color.

Mary glanced over at her companion's perch on the top of the easy chair and smirked. “Admit it: I am an expert at deciphering people—not that you care. My cleverness goes unappreciated.”

Delilah's only response was another flick of the tail.

It became part of Mary's daily ritual to watch the pink wellies walk by. Not that they were always pink wellies—often they were black patent leather slip-ons with bows at the toe, and

every once in a while they were purple converse trainers. But the pink wellies were Mary's favourite. She never tried to make contact with the school girl who wore the shoes, but watched her walk by with an affection that grew daily. Mary began to feel that she knew the girl, and was somehow part of her simple world of playtime and arithmetic. It became important for Mary to see the girl cross the pavement in front of the window. When she didn't come, Mary worried that she was sick or hurt, and however much she tried to convince herself otherwise, she was never able to get much work done on those days. On the weekends, though Mary's schedule never changed a bit, she missed the anticipation of hearing the shoes outside.

Mary only made contact with the girl once. It was the beginning of April, and the morning had started off drizzly. The sun had fought its way through the clouds by midday and Delilah was now luxuriating in the warm spot it created on the thick carpet. Mary was on her third cup of afternoon Earl Gray and was slowly working her way through the latest *mode d'emploi* from a large French sports company. She was deciding whether *tourner* should be "turn" or "rotate" when she heard the familiar squelch outside. She had been listening closely, for it was a quarter hour past the time the girl usually walked home from school. Mary was up and across the room almost instantly.

The girl was wearing the pink wellies today, and was not alone. She had walked part of the way home with her shy friend—the one who wore the glasses—and the two were chattering merrily as they came up the pavement. They stopped just outside the front window, and Mary watched silently as the children said their goodbyes and parted. The girl with the glasses continued down the pavement while the pink wellies turned to cross the street.

Mary must have made a sudden movement, because the girl paused, her attention drawn up to the window. Mary gasped

audibly and shrank back into the shadows of the room, heart pounding. She instantly regretted her decision. For weeks, she had imaged herself as the receiver of a smile, a wave—anything from that bright little face. But it was too late—the pink wellies had already turned away. No, not too late. She could still walk outside and say hello. She reached out for the front door knob, her eyes never leaving the pink wellies outside, but hesitated, glancing back out at the pink wellies.

Mary saw the Volvo a split second before it hit. Before she knew what she was doing, she was through the door and out into the open air for the first time in four and a half years. She was kneeling down on the street next to the Volvo, ignoring both the hysterical driver and the stones that dug into her knees. The image of the pink wellies peeking out from under the car would be permanently scorched into her memory like the brand of white-hot iron. The boots looked odd, one twisted over the other at an unnatural angle. She shoved the thought aside and dragged the girl out from under the vehicle.

There was blood everywhere. It was hot and sticky, running in dark rivulets into the cracks in the street and smearing onto Mary's pale skin in bright blotches. She pulled the girl's head into her lap and brushed aside the flaming hair to look at her dear face.

The girl's eyes fluttered open and focused on Mary. She opened her mouth and a small rasp sounded in her throat. Mary leaned in closer, her average brown eyes locking with the girl's startlingly-beautiful green ones. Then the eyes ceased to see, staring in vacancy where a soul once lived.

Mary realized that she did not know the girl's name. It was suddenly extremely important—the most important piece of information in the entire world. My God, she thought. I don't know her name.

The Closet Down the Hall

Clarke Edward Andros

my father's bones they whisper
like a bird's address from sky
to a closet down my hallway
where their answer slowly dies

photographs of innocence
and illusions of the same
sit beside a ticking clock
and a polished wooden frame

silver filament, a broken heart
decide a fate that's dear
to an old soul who's paid his toll
left looking in the mirror

I don't know if I'd take the time
or pay what's asked of me
to find out what he wishes now
insight has its fee

and I see it now what he wore
as if it was a price
to a man back in 63
a direction would suffice

my father's bones they whisper
of the ones who'd come before
telling of a passing age
through the photos in the drawers

what we envy now they hated then
for in time it came to change
advantage once, it is no more
their ideals sent to hang

and a fateful cry for something more
proved willing to endure
a rising pose and flashing frame
gave way to action pure

but dirty then is dirty now
an image has its flaws
a generation plagued with fear
these frames attempt to draw

it seems fickle now to try and see
what pain they must have felt
for I know not what they went through
what hand they had been dealt

and my father's bones they whisper
about the victims we saw fall
speaking to the painful truth
from the closet down the hall

Budapest

Scott Hubbard

It is impressive in the daytime;
A pincushion of brass domes and vaulted spires.
Below, within the folds,
Men and women rush to and fro
Under watchful equestrian eyes.

But now it is the night
And the daily display of old-world grandeur is past.
The stately palaces and the stern statesman
Soften their gaze under a paler light.
The women and men stroll
Toward the river, to gaze
With contented longing
On a flowing sidewalk that no foot will ever touch.

It calls to my mind those sea raiders of old,
Those kenning-crafting Northmen,
Who set their wave cutters on course for the shadowed wilds.
How they must have looked when from the fierce fray
Flushed with sword spoil they returned,
All fighting façade faded from their faces,
To their homestead hearths and waiting wives.

But that thought doesn't help,
It only makes me long for my own hearth
And to see your face again. Because right now
I am so far away. In Budapest of all places.

Moon

Scott Hubbard

Night's cupped hands receive
A single trembling teardrop.
Sight frozen in time.

Luca Scopazzi's

Guide to Door-to-Door Sales

Ilima Kung

As soon as I come out of the bathroom, I see my two slices of Wonderbread on fire in the toaster oven, another tragic attempt at breakfast. I peel off my thick grey socks and muffle the flaming bread, fanning the smoke that has permeated my mom's small kitchen.

Suddenly, I realize that this is the first time that Milton's Fire Resistant Socks™ have actually served their true purpose. I have to add that to my sales pitch. Once I had the thought to suggest to Milton that we sell our entire stock to the local fire department so that the helicopter could dump them into the next forest fire. Just kidding. I don't even know who Milton is, or even if he's a real person.

After trashing the charred black bread, I open the window, pull my socks on, don my crisp white collared shirt, and watch the "How to Tie a Tie" video again on Youtube. Much fumbling and choking ensues until I stop in front of the mirror to make sure that I am presentable. My sleeves swallow my lanky arms, but it will do.

Don't forget the smile, Luca.

I put on the same smile that I will wear for the next nine hours—no betraying cracks or seams. Grabbing my briefcase, I slide the window shut and squeeze out the door.

~~~

I walk to where I left off yesterday: the corner of Boxelder Boulevard and Cornelia Street. This week has been particularly slow. I'm seven pairs behind, and it's difficult to

convince people that they absolutely need flame resistant socks. It's not my ideal job, but when a guy approaches you at the mall offering you work even though you are fresh out of high school and have no work experience and your entire college fund is going to your older brother, I had to accept. At least I'm not selling knives. But even though socks are not a threat, I am always a threat, no matter how much I smile or how polite I am.

Many times I've wished that things could be different, that I could just walk up to people's doors and get to know them and hear their stories—like the woman with the wispy hair whose eyes were red from crying, or the disheveled man whose living room was filled with grand pianos. Or even those picturesque dinner scenes, with the dad at the head of the table, the mom near his side, and the kids squirming away from broccoli. I want to be greeted and invited in like an old friend. There's so much story behind those doors. I ache for it, but my job requires me to be detached to some extent. Excessive compassion and curiosity are frowned on.

I look up. 25689 Cornelia Street. Narrow driveway, broken blinds, balding grass. I walk around the lawn, although it needs some help. People get defensive of their lawns. There is no doorbell, so I open the screen door, knock on the wood three times (with the knocker) and take a couple steps back out of respect for personal space. After half a minute, the door swings open, and a guy not much older me (but much beefier) stands there.

“Who are you?” he asks.

*Who am I? I'm Luca Scopazzi, second son of Angelica Scopazzi the hair stylist, high school graduate, employee of Milton, seller of socks, and intruder into your personal life.*

I rocket into my sales pitch—skipping my name because no one really cares that I have an insanely Italian name—all the while convincing myself that the man needs



these socks for his own good, but he just doesn't know it yet. When I finally finish, the man smirks, almost genially, I think.

"Seriously? Socks? Get a life man." The door slams shut.

"Thank you for your time," I say to the door.

~~~

As the day crawls along and its colors fade to the oranges and lavenders of late afternoon, the briefcase becomes heavier in my hand.

32416 Magnolia Street. Broken sprinkler, blue paint, potted cacti. I knock, and it's only then that I notice a wooden sign to my right that reads: "Solicitors Will Be Shot."

Before I can run or even wrap my mind around being shot on some trigger-happy fool's porch, the door swings wide open. A lady with more wrinkles than a prune eyes me up and down. She smokes a cigarette and wears that black stuff on her eyelashes that my mom puts on every day. I'm petrified, wondering where she is hiding her gun. Before I can say a word, she grabs the crook of my arm.

"You came just in time, Sonny," she rasps. "We could use some tight skin around here." She pulls me into her house. I don't struggle but hold on tightly to my briefcase as she careens through hallways and around corners. I clear my throat as we enter a brightly lit room.

"Excuse me ma'am, but I'm just here to..." I stop short. Three equally wrinkly women glance up at me from around a table.

"That's Scarlet, Milla, Elizabeth, and I'm Dina. There's four of us, but it's better with five. Know how to play poker, Sonny?"

“I’m a bit rusty.”

“You can’t be as rusty as these ol’ bones,” Elizabeth slurs. *Is she drunk?*

They sit me down as Scarlet shuffles and deals. I marvel at these women and their nimble, veined hands. Scarlet, Elizabeth, and Dina swig Bud Lights as Milla sips red wine, and they talk endlessly while playing their hands as if the game is second nature to them. Scarlet complains about her children and praises her grandchildren, and Dina reminisces about her days in the Flaming Vipers Motorcycle Gang. I look over to Elizabeth, who laughs hysterically at her card hand as Milla stares at her, appalled.

They talk to me too. They laugh at my jokes and at my generation. I feel at ease.

They ask me about my family. I tell them that my mom works at a hair salon in the next town and that my dad left us when I was three and that my brother goes to the university. I tell them that I’ve been selling door-to-door to help my mom out and to hopefully go to the university someday. It’s been a long time since people have asked me questions like that.

“Damn shame,” Scarlet purses her lips and shakes her head. I brace myself for a scathing comment.

“Shame your father didn’t stick around,” Milla finishes for Scarlet. “You’ve grown into quite a fine young man.” All four women nod in agreement. The moment cuts me, or rather, opens a gash that I forgot was there and at the same time patches me up again. My smile crumbles for a second, and I realize I’m bent over a bit.

Scarlet nudges me. “You okay? It’s your turn.”

By the end of the game, I lose all my chips, but I’m on good terms with everyone and hope that they might buy some socks from me until Dina asks, “You got cash?” I’m speechless.

I thought they were only playing for the fun of it, not actually gambling.

“No, I don’t,” I start, and they all exchange glances of incredulity.

“Well Sonny, that’s the whole point of poker,” Dina explains.

No matter how much I will myself not to say it, I do anyway: “I have something else though.”

~~~

On the way home, my briefcase is the lightest that it’s ever been, completely emptied of Milton’s Fire Resistant Socks™. I smile as I think of Dina, Scarlet, Elizabeth, and Milla all wearing the socks and sitting around their tiny poker table. Then I realize that it’s the first time I’ve actually smiled today. Not the smile that I put on this morning, but the smile underneath that one. I know I’ll be fired. I can’t believe I’ve lost my job and even the socks off my feet because I couldn’t disappoint four poker-playing grandmothers. They loved the socks. The built-in rubber soles were perfect for keeping them from slipping on hardwood floors. Kudos to Milton.

The last speckles of sunlight disappear as my feet scuffle up the driveway to my house. A quiet hum in my mind keeps repeating itself: *I am Luca Scopazzi, second son of Angelica Scopazzi the hair stylist, high school graduate, lover of strangers and stories and too curious for my own good.*

This time, I know myself more for who I am than who I am not. Except that I still can’t play poker to save my life.

