The Opiate
“To hold a pen is to be at war.”

- Voltaire
Editor’s Note

Although the summer usually evokes a feeling of levity, the cover of our second issue possesses a dark aura. There is, after all, something almost arousing about being antithetical to what people expect. Toying with minds and subverting expectation. This is what The Opiate is all about. Do not expect a constant. For that is not what literature—nor New York City—represents. These two aforementioned entities, so enmeshed in one another, have a toxic relationship, yet thrive on being together.

So, too, does The Opiate thrive on bringing you the type of material that no one else will—whether out of fear of breaking a certain mold or a mere lack of taste that deviates from what is au courant. This issue, filled with tales of monstrous villains, murderous friends and mildly schizophrenic delusionoids, is not likely to leave your subconscious anytime soon. Particularly if you’re the sensitive soul I believe you to be as a result of picking up this publication and reading this far. Because, you see, all sensitive and artistic souls are dark-hearted, and grapple with the “lightness” of trying to fit in with the current literary landscape and the population at large.

For those who have still managed to wear their emotions on their sleeve, the world is a hard place. Especially a world that is constantly trying to shovel what they think will sell down your throat. But there’s something to be said for the freedom of the fringe.

Yours very sincerely,

Genna Rivieccio
Although he did not look like one, The Golem was a hero. An accident in space ravaged his body and made him appear a monster, as it did his brother, The Grim. Glen “Gray Hair” Graboyes, a hot shot shuttle pilot, and his brother Reuben, a crackpot scientist, together attempted to travel around the rings of Saturn, backwards and forwards through time. Interstellar raydons changed the identical twins into matching monsters. Save for the distinct scar across Glen’s face, they remained two stupendously different men who happened to spring from the same chromosome. They shared only two things, their appearance and their bold daring sense of adventure. A cataclysmic miscalculation on Reuben’s part, and overly impetuous piloting on Glen’s part, resulted in the interstellar radiation that changed them. They returned to earth, but they did not return as Glen and Reuben. Glen came back the noble and loving Golem, however Reuben’s dark heart grew only shades blacker as he became the murderous and hateful Grim.

Everyday Oliver played alone in his yard. Inside the trailer his mum yelled so loudly at the TV it forced Oliver to gather a handful of toys and make his way to the barren front yard. There the tall dying grass became a desert savannah, a tropical rainforest, a far off alien world, anywhere other than where Oliver was. His imagination carried him off with one consistent feature to his tall tales, a quiet thoughtful hero subdued a loud and bombastic villain. The toys he took would vary, with one exception, he always took The Golem. The Golem was always the hero, Oliver’s hero.

The yelling happened when his mum was alone, as she was nearly all of the time. Sometimes she shouted about those “liberal bastards,” or “those cunt bag Republicans.” He did not know what any of it meant, but he knew if his mum did not like them they must be no good.

Other times the shouting was different, like she was in pain, but enjoying it. That kind of shouting came when the men visited. She called them her “Special Company.” That shouting came at night. He knew it was best to pretend to sleep, trapped in his bed attempting to find quiet in his head. When the Special Company came during the day she never had to tell him to go outside, he already knew it. It was apparent to him by the looks on the faces of the men. There he remained until they left. On those days, even
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11.

The lawn. He would never step
somewhere in the house with
It was a Tuesday,

hose on the engine, but in the
occasions he even got as far
Trans Am. On the rarest of

over the open hood of
company from the Neighbor, a
former Marine turned kindly-

few months, never coming back

as taking a wrench to a valve or

if it was raining, Oliver would
venture as far from the house as
he could go without leaving the

yard.

In the yard he played,
and for the most part he tuned
out the noise. He took The
Golem on adventures all around
the world. In his hands The
Golem traveled deep into the
past and far into the future. The
noise from inside often prevailed,
and he moved farther out into
the yard. On the busiest days he
played almost on the gravel road
that weaved through the trailer
park, often coming to the edge,
but never stepping into the street.

Everyday the Paper Boy would come, deliver the newspaper, regard Oliver’s toys and then be on his way. Other than the Paper Boy and the Special Company visiting every few months, never coming back a second time, Oliver was left alone in the yard.

Occasionally he had company from the Neighbor, a former Marine turned kindly-but-chronic-drinker-next-door. The Neighbor periodically stood over the open hood of his rusted, patchwork-printed Trans Am. On the rarest of occasions he even got as far as taking a wrench to a valve or hose on the engine, but in the whole of Oliver’s short memory no progress had been made.

It was a Tuesday, and it was hot. Oliver’s mum somewhere in the house with her Special Company. The noise forced him to the edge of the lawn. He would never step onto the road. He pulled several bunches of the pebbles from its edge and built The Golem a fortress of rock. A battlefront from which The Golem and his super heroic adventuring friends would enact justice and protect the weak. As he played, he became
lost in The Golem’s medieval journey. The sound of gravel crunching under boot and the smell of garlic and motor oil snapped him out of the trance of his imagination. Returning to reality, he saw a large man standing over him. By adult standards The Man would have been considered short, but to Oliver, as he looked over him, he was giant. For a split second he could have sworn he looked upon The Grim. He was sure he was a

villain, until The Man spoke.

“You best be careful buddy, else
you’ll end up in the road,” he
said grinning.

“Maybe it’s Huey, Dewey or
Louie?” The Man paused. “I
know what it really is, your mum
told me, she’s my friend. She said it’s Oliver.”

Oliver smiled, and
moved The Golem.

“My name, I had to give it to
myself. Your mum named you,
but my daddy named me and he was a villain. I named my name upon the right detail. “You know it’s Oliver.”

Oliver’s hand trembled. The
action figure dropped out. Over
time, the comments expanded
broad greetings and generalities; theyecame open doors. Doorways
through which Oliver refused to
step. Invitations to conversations
the boy did not want to have.

Each day the strange
Man passed, and each day he
passed closer and closer, finally
crossing through the yard. Prior
to that, the only one who would
cross through the yard was the
Paper Boy, everyday bringing
more. Eventually The Man passed
through daily and freely as though he were strolling through a park. The only exception being if The Man saw the Neighbor at his Trans Am. On those days, The Man journeyed at an absurd distance, inconveniently far away.

One day The Man stopped.

“I know your name,” he said.

“Is it Glen? Maybe Reuben?”

Oliver looked away.

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Louie?” The Man paused. “I
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Day by day Indian tried
something new, saying something
about the neighborhood,
cartoons, superheroes, even
Oliver’s mum. With the crossing
always came a kind word, a warm

Indian reached down for
you,” he said.

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greeting, a comment on Oliver’s
toys or the cartoon or superhero

and knew the names of all
the toys! Nothing worked, Oliver
never responded.

Until one day Indian hit
upon the right detail. “You know
The Golem really isn’t the hero,
he’s the villain. The Grim’s the
hero, but The Golem stole his
identity and does evil in a good
man’s name.”

With his eyes as big as
hubcaps on the Trans Am next
door the boy could not help but
retard as the passion for his hero
flared within him.

“No he isn’t! The
Golem’s a good guy.”

Halfway through his
second sentence he teetered.
His stance wavered and the fear of
talking to Indian overtook him.

“Let me show you, back in
my trailer I have the proof. I

had some comic books. All the
original issues. Goin’ way back
in my trailer I have the proof. I
got all the comic books. All the

Like Indian, but he was always so
greeting, a comment on Oliver’s
toys or the cartoon or superhero
t-shirt he was wearing. Oliver
did not like it, Oliver did not
like Indian, but he was always so
polite, and knew the names of all
the toys! Nothing worked, Oliver
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Indian reached down for
you,” he said.

“Maybe it’s Huey, Dewey or
Louie?” The Man paused. “I
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the boy did not want to have.
Oliver yanked it out of Indian's hand, Entranced by the cover, knew the characters, and disappeared into his shed, after the Neighbor parted from them. The days grew colder and more uneventful days, greater memory, Indian's passing became an encroachment a long forgotten with the routine. The moment of the heart of fall, the leaves were orange. Oliver grew comfortable with the comic book with the comic book that read “Here lies The Grim.” The title at the bottom read, “Brother's Keeper.” Oliver did not understand why Indian knew about the action figures, why he knew so much about comic books and cartoons, but again, he battled back his worry for the sake of this strange new closeness.

"Come to my trailer, I have boxes of 'em in my bedroom," said Indian. Indian leaned back and took Oliver by the hand. Oliver extended the comic up to the man, but Indian pushed it back upon the boy. "No, no, you hang onto that. That one's for you."

With the comic book dangling down behind him in his hand, Oliver walked hand in hand with Indian. They strolled out onto the road and down over the crest of the hill. Just after they were out of sight, the Neighbor returned from inside his shed, dragging a soiled gray tarp behind him. Staring at the space vacated by Indian and Oliver, the yard, filled with trash, mostly discarded construction debris, was a virtual river. In the dead of a crystal night, using an industrial steel wire, The Grim strung Oliver up, herding him in the yard, threading a noose of cold metal around his neck. The Grim released him, the wire tightened, slicing into Oliver's thin neck. The pain did not register for Oliver. He did not know there to be new pain, or more of it, only that it continued. It was pain on top of pain. He hung in the breeze, swaying back and forth, the resultant twitching, a muscular reaction. He did not try to escape. As Oliver hung from the tree, his life squeezed out of him. He saw The Grim, doing something to himself. Oliver did not know what it was, but he knew it was bad. Oliver did not know it yet, but he had died, the image of The Grim became his last memory.

The Grim roared in satisfaction and stumbled away, back through the forest and into the corn. The boy's lifeless body swayed in the breeze. The hurtling stopped. There was only one feeling left and it was that of numbness. There was one more thought, “My mummy doesn't know I'm gone.” Then once and for all, nothing.

The boy's corpse hung, swaying, waiting to be found. Suddenly, there was a great bright light. Great columns and colonnades surrounded the courtyard to an ethereal trailer park. The sun burned as though it came from everywhere at once. Everything glowed, the world smiled. Thousands upon thousands of cartoon characters and human sized action figures stood cheering at the center of the courtyard. Oliver noticed his mum next to The Golem, and Indian did not come. Even the Neighbor failed to make an appearance, having given up on the now tarp covered Trans Am. Finally, Indian appeared again, Indian stood far up across the other side of the road, acknowledging Oliver with only the slightest of nods. Paralyzed at the sight of Indian, Oliver stood, regarded him, holding his position in the yard, but not waving back.

As the next several weeks passed, summer turned to fall. The days grew colder and more damp, the papers came later, and the sun set earlier. Indian once again inclined closer and closer to the yard, until he was again crossing the yard, returning to general pleasantries he greeted Oliver, "Hi little friend."

Now thoroughly the heart of fall, the leaves were a dying rainbow of red and orange. Oliver grew comfortable with the routine. The moment of encroachment a long forgotten memory. Indian's passing became the highlight of remarkably uneventful days, greater even than the delivery of the newspaper. One day, moments after the comic book parted from his again unattended Trans Am and disappeared into his shed, Indian stopped in the yard. In his hands, a comic book featured the splash title "THE GRIM AND THE GOLEM." Oliver did not know the comic book, but he knew the characters.

Entranced by the cover, Oliver yanked it out of Indian's hands. It featured a weeping Golem standing over a grave that read "Here lies The Grim." The title at the bottom read, "Brother's Keeper." Oliver did not know what the words meant, but he knew they were beautiful. With greater desire than he had ever before known, Oliver wanted to open that comic book. To step through the doorway of the mylar bag and live in that more vibrantly colored world.

"You like it?" asked Indian.

Oliver responded with a nod.

Indian leaned into the space of the boy, Indian's beard brushed Oliver's cheek. The beard scratched the boy's soft skin just a little, but he did not move away. In the discomfort he felt a closeness he never felt with whoever he was. A warmth that the Special Company nor his mum ever showed him. Oliver thought this must be what it is like to have a dad. In a whisper, Indian asked, "Do you want to see more?"

This time, Oliver spoke clearly, loudly, full of anticipation, "Yes!"

Saying it the way he would have said it if his dad asked him to go for an ice cream, wherever and whoever he was. Indian noticed Oliver. Oliver wanted to inch away, to flee the image of The Grim, and The Golem, and his son Hero II, even Vigilance. All of 'em. I know all these things, Indian's lifeless body swayed in the breeze. The hurtling stopped. There was only one feeling left and it was that of numbness. There was one more thought, “My mummy doesn't know I'm gone.” Then once and for all, nothing.

The boy’s corpse hung, swaying, waiting to be found. Suddenly, there was a great bright light. Great columns and colonnades surrounded the courtyard to an ethereal trailer park. The sun burned as though it came from everywhere at once. Everything glowed, the world smiled. Thousands upon thousands of cartoon characters and human sized action figures stood cheering at the center of the courtyard. Oliver noticed his mum next to The Golem,
together calling him over to them. Picking Oliver up, The Golem cheerfully heaved him onto his shoulder. Overhead, several fighter jets darted by leaving a wake of fireworks that read, “Happy Birthday Oliver!”

A whimper on the wind the boy stood. He looked up, there he saw himself, hanging from a tree, snow upon his shoulders, the ice preserving his body. He knew he was dead and that was okay. He knew what dead bodies were, they were corpses. He was kind of like a superhero now, Corpse Boy. He glided above the snow. Watching himself as the leaves trickled down around his corpse he wondered, “How did I die?”

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Joey In Vermont
David Rice

JoeyDrag him across the campground and into the lake with the others. I drift along, watching. It’s always the same brand of paper towel wadded up in their necks. The gauzy dryness is the worst part. It’s all I remember from when it was me, The Widow still in the trailer, covered in my blood, sitting where she’d sat when he walked in on us, cutting that first honeymoon summer short.

We grew into this together in Northampton, MA, where we first saw our future diverging from that of the species, heaving off what we called then the Tyranny of the Ordinary to found a thousand-year dynasty at whose outset we would soon stand. We would be the ur-fathers of a line of heroes that would define the entire coming era, perhaps the last in the earth’s history. We spent our nights between nineteen, when we first knew it, and twenty-one, when we knew it was time to leave town, at the bar of the Hotel Northampton, where the Strip meets Main St.

They carded but the bartender could see we weren’t like the others and left us alone. We sipped heavy scotch and sat till closing time, purging from our thinking all confusion and instability so that whatever had taken a chance on us would never have reason to doubt.

Old men in thick coats took up the rest of the bar, drinking themselves through the bottoms of lives they’d brought to no fruition in all the time they’d been given.

We left to find The Widow the year we turned twenty-one.

That New Year’s Eve, the Hotel decked out with party lights and an ice sculpture of the digits of the coming year, we caught, in the snow falling against the windows, a glimpse of the world as it would be in a thousand years, free of all mediocrity and lassitude thanks to the thing that was in us and would filter through The Widow to find expression in our children. Even if we didn’t live long enough to see it, we would die knowing we had passed it on.
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sounded like cheers of farewell.
chanting at midnight, their voices
no such Bud Lite sign exists in the
the bar under a flashing blue Bud
and the crowd approached mania,
As the snow fell harder
she'd been living with and the real
The Widow's trailer at dawn, our
Then he stormed back into
sidewalk.
boy holding out his hands on the
lonely and exposed and Joey hit a
or twenty or even yesterday. We felt
in our shared mind, suddenly
cousin or uncle.
I went back into the swarm of
As soon as we saw her
under that flashing blue Bud Lite sign, alone and waiting. Joey and I went back into the swarm of beggars outside, to see which of us would be the husband, which the cousin or uncle.
We waited, but no answer emerged. There was tension, an unwelcome flood of something close to anger at the faltering vision in our shared mind, suddenly weaker than it'd been at nineteen or twenty or even yesterday. We felt lonely and exposed and Joey hit a boy holding out his hands on the sidewalk.

Then he stormed back into the bar and got in The Widow's face and barked, “I’ll do it” without making sure I was behind him.

We took the Pan to Springfield the next morning and committed to that ruined city for six months until we found her at a bar and grill called Theodore's, near the highway onramp.

We left Springfield in The Widow's trailer at dawn, our mandate having enveloped her life just as it had ours. She left the man she'd been living with and the real estate office where she'd worked.

We regarded her from the futon in back as she drove up I-91 to Vermont.

The wedding was held at a luxury inn in Brattleboro. It was June, the three of us and a Justice of the Peace. I signed as Witness.
The ceremony ended quickly and we paid the bill with cash from the savings account we’d closed upon leaving Northampton, and cruised to a campground fifteen miles further north, where the honeymoon would occur.

After The Widow parked the trailer at a spot with a view of the lake through the trees, Joey and I hung the rain tarp over the picnic table and waited while she showered and combed her hair.

We took stock of how far we’d come, strainning for a vision of the future through the trees, but all we saw was the lake, night settling over it.

Joey looked at that and I looked at him. He sent off a kind of warning signal, like an eel's electric charge, so I looked away and back at the trailer, which The Widow was now exiting, her clothes sheer and suggestive.

Something in me wanted to fare at the sight of her, alarmingly more so than it had in Springfield, but I shook it off on the walk to dinner.

In the dining hall, the food was served cafeteria style and there was a comedian by the condiments area, talking on and on about his time at Vassar.

We left when he finished his set.

We made our way across the grounds to the outdoor hot tub, slit off the foam cover and our clothes, and settled in.

Exposed to the Vermont summer sky, Joey and I scanned the stars, dullest and more numerous here than in Northampton. The Widow closed her eyes and lay back.

They finally had sex after this. I fainted around a grove of picnic tables. Someone had carved BUTT CENTRAL into a tree, with an arrow pointing at a pile of cigarette butts balanced against the trunk.

I looped around the rest of the camp in case they weren't done, passing the archery and air rifle range and the climbing wall, and a pile of canoes plastered with weeds on the lakeshore.

When I came back they were passed out, on far distant sides of the trailer's foldout bed.

I slept on the futon under the side windows, and I can't say I slept well.

This became our routine.

After two weeks, we added mushrooms.

We ate them in the cafeteria, shuffling into the hot tub just as they came on, our stomachs filling with gas and our skulls molting like soft-shell crabs. I felt my chest hair expanding away from me, and I felt hemmed in by my position here in Vermont, defenseless against whatever was coming.

When Joey and I closed our eyes we saw the high ground of the mountains surrounding the lake, looming down and framing us in. The longer we looked into that dark that seemed even darker up there since it was more immersed in the night, the more we came to feel at the bottom of a steep drop, in the hot center of a volcano, peaks framing the sky on all sides.

We saw wildmen roaming those peaks, looking down on us. They made their solitary way along, on some errand that suffered no definition, perplexed to find us so far below.

But by late July, Joey was spending the bulk of every day alone by the archery and air rifle range, swamped in his own thoughts, which cranked in our shared mind without coming clear to me. He got his lunch from the commissary while The Widow and I ate in the dining hall. Sometimes, when we picked up beer at the commissary after lunch, we'd encounter him by the microwave in back, slowly eating crackers and jelly with a spoon.

Usually, she unloaded the beer in the trailer while I waited outside, then we both downed the lake until evening.

But on August 1, while she was carrying the six-pack and I was carrying a new can of repellant and six apples, The Widow invited me in.

It was mid-afternoon, and I could dimly hear Joey's thoughts far off in the camp, angry and confused.

She and I sat on the unmade futon, drinking two beers apiece and looking at the apples. The afternoon dimmed out behind the drawn plastic shades. I could feel how much pain she was in, and her desire to ask me something that might relieve it. I focused on containing those words in her throat, but still I saw a kind of darkness raining down on us both as if a trapdoor had been opened overhead.

This turned out to be the door to the trailer, and that darkness was Joey, standing there quiet and furious, bugs swirling behind him, the trailer creaking on its wheels as he shifted from foot to foot, a campfire cracking at a nearby site. He looked carefully over our four empty cabs, the two full ones still slotted into the plastic six-pack rings, our posture on the futon, our bare feet touching. Then he looked it all over again, like he might glean more the second time.

Then he'd seen enough.
He dragged me down to the lake, rocks from the beach stuffed in my pockets, paper towels wradding my throat and covering the whole inside of the trailer.

The dryness of that quilted paper was horrific. When it got wet in the lake, it tasted like bile exiting my stomach.

As I sank, steam pouring from my corpse, she and Joey packed up the campsite and drove away, three weeks before the end of the season.
“I could feel how much pain she was in, and her desire to ask me something that might relieve it. I focused on containing those words in her throat, but still I saw a kind of darkness raining down on us both as if a trapdoor had been opened overhead.”

My first winter in steam is long and sad, and I know it’s the first of many. It doesn’t feel shocking to still exist, though it’s no relief either.

I drift over the campground throughout the late summer and early fall, watching as the maintenance and kitchen crews depart and the facility is winterized. I watch the comedian fight to get paid.

Being in a valley, there is no ski season. The generators are put on Hibernate, just enough to keep the pipes from bursting. Then everyone is gone.

I drift around, my steam loose, up from the lake and back down at night, getting used to my new situation as the days shorten and a different Vermont lake and back down at night, getting used to my new situation as the days shorten and a different Vermont

I contemplate wintering in the kitchen, where the pipes groan, but some mix of Hotel Northampton visions and a new set of steam-insests sends me back to the lake, where my body lies on the bottom.

I drift one last time over the frostbitten facts of the campground and then, just before the solstice, settle into the water. I make it most of the way down before it freezes me through.

The winter passes without my managing another thought.

I thaw in late March, drift alone across the thawing grounds until May, when the staff returns. I’m at the property line at dawn on June 1 for the start of the season, the trailers rolling in. Joey and The Widow among them. I drift along in their exhaust all the way to the campsite, invisible in the humid reek.

They drift along the pipes groan, but some mix of Hotel Northampton visions and a new set of steam-insests toward the hot tub, at its hottest tonight.

Last year we joked that it loses a degree every night over the course of the summer, and I still believe this is true. They dip in, and I dip in with them, melding with the steam off the water in the cool night. We all three look up at the stars and I breathe the chlorine and their sweat and hair.

I drift along the tub bottom, past The Widow’s feet, between her legs, pressing right up to the thin fabric of her bikini bottom. The two of them no longer bathe naked, as the three of us did. Nor do they risk taking mushrooms. I press up to Joey’s suit and follow his body up to his head, turned up at the sky with his eyes closed, his hair gray like they’re covered with soot. His hand loosely supports a beer bottle in the water above his belly and I can almost see him searching the summit for those wildmen.

Afterward, they stagger back across the grounds, tipping from the heat, hands on their temples, and fall on each other in the trailer. Joey’s suit down around his knees, The Widow’s pulled to one side. I hover by the door until it’s over.

I’d planned to drift back to the lake and stay there until morning, but when I see The Widow rushing to the bathroom, cupping her crotch and trembling, I decide to follow her. She’s in the shower by the time I drift past Joey, already asleep with his wet suit tangled around his ankles and his penis stuck to his left thigh.

I watch her standing to the side of the water, one hand still bunched up between her legs, the other on the floor, eyes red, almost bloody, adjusting the temperature dials with her other hand. I find it poignant that she takes such care to get the water right.

Then she’s under it, scrubbing hard between her legs with a bar of soap, her back to me, sticking the soap inside, groaning, scratching at the enveloping skin with her long blue nails, uprooting hair, tearing at Joey’s spurt like a nest of red ants.

I watch in sympathy, feeling that pain in me.

She bites the linoleum wall of the shower.

Then I’m steam again, drifting back through the trailer, and she’s toeling off, walking to bed, again cupping her crotch but not in pain anymore.

This sets the summer on its course. I follow them around every day, then into the hot tub at night, then hang back as they have their sex, never less sad than the first time. Then I visit The Widow in the shower, drifting back to the lake before dawn to regenerate in myself what I’ve spent in her.

Her skin changes early in her pregnancy. The asheness lifts, the worry lines smooth out.
Joey, seeing it, lets go completely.

I’m hovering by the AC unit when he presses her against the wall as she’s dicing hamburger buns. He spews berry breath up her nose, staring at her rejuvenated skin and hair; his gut pressed hard against hers. He reaches around her throat and demands to know whose it is, only releasing her enough to say a name.

She says nothing, and it turns out he doesn’t need her to. He takes the paring knife from her hand and tramps out, barefoot, in search of a sacrifice.

I still understand Joey’s reasoning, though I can barely hear his thoughts anymore.

He runs to the nearest campsite, where a couple is roasting marshmallows, hits the woman across the face and goes straight for the man, shirtless, buff, tattooed.

In short order the man’s neck is as ruined as mine was last season and out at the end, a new body sunk in the lake and a new baby growing in The Widow.

I couldn’t watch, so I took a lap around the campground, watching strangers on their honeymoons.

This year, it takes only a day for Joey to see she’s pregnant again. The saddest thing about the rage he flies into is how much effort it requires. He looks exhausted by the knowledge that if he doesn’t kill someone there’ll be truly nothing for him to do.

So he tells The Widow to take the baby into the bedroom and cover her ears with a pillow while he follows him out the door and watches as he kills this year’s man.

As I watch Joey drag him to the lake, I feel something like camaraderie, like we’re again working together, sharing a grim clarity about what has to be done.

Joey kicks him into the water, jeans full of rocks from the beach, and I watch the body sink, eventually to find its way to the bottom, where mine is by now decomposed.

Joey and The Widow leave that night, their summer again cut short. The burgers she’d been cooking remain as black hives on the grill.

Another winter, another term in ice, shared now with a new body but no new man in steam since this one has no further part to play.

I decide I will. I feel far enough from the days of divination to put off wondering whether it’s right, and she seems to enjoy it as much as I do, whatever she believes it is.

Life that summer takes on a kind of normalcy, all the problems addressed for the time being.

The years go on, boiled down to repetition. Joey and The Widow and I now have a proper Catholic family, seven girls and six boys, the trailer heaving as it rumbles in at the start of each season and out at the end, a new body sunk in the lake and a new baby growing in The Widow.

Joey looks inordinately old now, closer to his 50s than his 30s, and the children look frightened. The Widow looks better. I can see the rift widening.

I recommence with her in the shower that night. Her sex with Joey beforehand was so awful I couldn’t watch, so I took a lap around the campground, watching strangers on their honeymoons.

I can see that our arrangement is close to over.

I follow Joey across the grounds at the end of the summer, my progress as slow as his as he lumbers through the weeds, tearing handfuls of sweat off his skin and throwing them onto his shoes. I hear him telling me that he won’t be back. This is what it’s come to, I hear him thinking, and I think, I agree, hoping he can still hear me.

Somewhere we’re still nineteen at the bar at the Hotel Northampton, but not here. I perceive this thought without knowing if it’s his or mine.

The next summer, The Widow returns without him.

I listen to her speak to our children, waiting for her to refer to Joey in some way that will reveal if he’s dead or simply gone, but she never brings him up.

I watch her drink, but less this year, and more comfortably, like she’s no longer sucking it down just to make way for more.

I wait for her to shower, but she doesn’t that night, nor the night after.

On the third night, I crawl into bed with her, running up and down her body in search of the old friction, but she’s cold to the touch, or I am. And dry.

My steam will not take shape.

As I continue to drift over her, my attention nervous and diffuse, I can tell there will be no more children. Perhaps there don’t need to be. The ones we have will move through the world on their own terms, telling themselves whatever they want about the reason they were born, or facing the prospect of a life without one.

I drift once more over The Widow’s sleeping body, letting a few droplets of myself linger on her skin until they’re absorbed, wishing her well. Then, diminished, I float away, back to the lake, ready to never see her or our children again. All of them, as far as I’m concerned, will drift into the world Joey drifted into, the world of the living I suppose, and leave me here with all the ghosts of Vermont.

As I settle back into the lake, ready for winter though the air’s still warm, there is relief in letting the last of my body go. I tip into the nonbeing I’ve lingered too long on the cusp of. No more sex, no more violence. Maybe no more time. Certainly no more desperation or fear.

THE END.
The previous spring, Sebastian finished college. In the days following he locked himself in his room, studying and reading to prepare for graduate school. Sundays, his father Michael invited him to Costco but he never joined. Sebastian didn’t like fluorescent lights. Michael was a neurosurgeon and he operated frequently, often late into the evening. When he arrived home after dark, he wondered if Sebastian had eaten yet. Aside from a missing can of tuna or a few less lentils in the pantry, it was impossible to tell whether he had even left his room. Those nights Michael came home early, he prepared cod, salmon or sole and tried to engage his son in conversation. When Sebastian did open up, it was with psychobabble about energy fields and beauty, power and the will to create, with insinuations about Michael valuing “dirty lucre” more than love.

One Saturday afternoon, Michael walked to Sebastian’s room to ask him what he wanted for dinner. The shag carpet muffled his footsteps so that he went unnoticed in the downstairs wing, but this time he wished he had been heard. From down the hall came a crescendoing song. Was he reading Finnegans Wake aloud? He knocked lightly. The chanting stopped. He knocked again and without a response, opened the door to find Sebastian sitting cross-legged in a circle of books. He wore only boxers shorts and his hair needed to be combed. When he stood, the front fly squared up, it was with psychobabble about energy fields and beauty, power and the will to create, with insinuations about Michael valuing “dirty lucre” more than love.


Michael retreated through the dark hall, the hair on his neck prickling. The look in Sebastian’s eyes, his unawareness of his exposed nudity, his sitting in his room reading all day—abnormal behaviors, indeed. And worse, he had not yet scheduled his GRE test.

The next day Michael saw his psychiatrist of fifteen years, Mark Rosenfeld, a shortish man with small eyes and round cheeks. He combed his thin gray hair straight back and wore expensive suits and gold-rimmed rectangular glasses. He had written two books on bipolar disorder, which Michael had always thought he might have had, but Rosenfeld assured him that he was not manic. Over the years, their relationship had nearly ripened into a friendship beyond that of doctor-patient, but something professional had held them back from spoiling what they had, and limited their exchanges to Thursday mornings.

Michael mentioned Sebastian’s avoiding eye contact, his sitting alone all day. Rosenfeld listened quietly, fingers steepled, brow low. When Michael finished, he broke the silence, “It’s possible that he’s manifesting symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia.”

Yes. Sebastian’s behavior had been intensifying for years: his lost sense of reality, his spending more and more time alone, which when pressed about, Sebastian called an exploration of consciousness or, “A Search for Truth.” Rosenfeld had sat with Sebastian throughout his childhood, not weekly, but now and then as Michael saw fit. He had told Michael that Sebastian’s withdrawal from social situations was normal as a consequence of not having a mother. But now, in his twenties, it was clearly worse than either of them had expected.

Together Rosenfeld and Michael drafted a plan.

The following night, Michael invited Sebastian to Ringside Steakhouse. During the meal they discussed the purpose of art. Michael argued for the functionality of fashion and architecture while Sebastian invoked Kant’s idea of aesthetic ideals for their own sake, which led Michael to momentarily doubt whether he was doing the right thing by taking him to the hospital (after all, could a madman recite such a logical argument?). But by the time they arrived at Good Samaritan under the pretext of Michael’s make it back, Sebastian was absorbing a collected Kierkegaard and had not met his father’s eyes since his last bite of steak. Michael reminded himself that and Rosenfeld had agreed upon a selfless action with everyone’s best interest at stake.

He told Sebastian that there was a young patient who had been shot in the head in a gang fight, that it was worth seeing so that he could know how lucky he was. If Sebastian was suspicious, he did not show it, but once inside, when he saw Rosenfeld, he turned to run. Two male orderlies closed in on him. Michael began to sweat.

Sebastian’s wail echoed down the hospital corridor, “Can’t you let me be me?”

The fourth day Rosenfeld clapped away from his son, whose eyes flashed with the desperation of an animal caught in a trap. Rosenfeld clapped him on the shoulder and said, “We’re here to help.”

“Fuck you,” Sebastian spat. Each nurse grabbed one of his arms and began to pull him away. “You’re a liar,” he shouted at his father, “A fucking liar!” and in desperation, spit at him too. Michael shook his head. Sebastian broke down, crying that they were making a mistake, that Michael had betrayed him. “I’m the healthy one!” And with a look on his face like a dog headed to the pound, he threw a glance over his shoulder and said, “You’ve been living wrong the whole time. You hear me? You’re the ones who are crazy!” The nurses pulled him along, unresisting, shaking his head and sobbing.

When his goofuswents away, Michael looked at Rosenfeld, who shrugged and put an arm around his shoulders.

“I’m sorry,” said Michael. Rosenfeld sighed. “Now we can begin to help him.”

For three days, Rosenfeld called Michael after Sebastian’s sessions. His diagnosis was mild paranoid schizophrenia. The disease was early in its manifestation, though if left untreated it could worsen rapidly. Would he have to take care of his son for the rest of his adult life? He was not there enough in the wake of his wife’s death; he was too life? He was not there enough in the wake of his wife’s death; he was too

The Opiate, Summer Vol. 2 — Chapter 2 - Daniel Adler

Sebastian’s Babylon: Chapter 2 - Daniel Adler
called Michael and said, “He signed out. He knew his legal rights and said he wasn’t dangerous to anyone including himself, that he didn’t need medicine. I wrote him a prescription for Aripiprazole in case he changes his mind. When he comes home, just apologize. He’s upset with you most of all.”

After all Michael had done for Sebastian, from paying for his college to letting him live rent-free in his childhood home while he prepared for grad school, he should be more appreciative, should understand that Michael had his best interests at heart.

Rosenfeld continued, “Tell him you’re sorry you lied, that you noticed he was acting different and you wanted to help.” Michael restrained himself from asking the question on his lip: What if he doesn’t respond?

But Michael’s worry was unfounded. Five minutes later the doorbell rung. Behind it stood Sebastian, soaking wet. He walked past his father, meeting his eyes briefly, looking scared and hurt, his gaze dirtied by burst blood vessels.

The wind picked up and howled over the roof. The fir tree’s boughs waved faster, harder.

“Why don’t you dry off? By the time you come back the coffee will be ready.”

She smiled and half-expectantly Sebastian to resist. But he nodded and rose. When he came back downstairs, there was no more mention of the hospital. After that, everything returned, more or less, back to normal.

Sebastian’s hospital stint was the proverbial wake-up call he needed. While he seemed more guarded, he was willing to engage Michael openly, to discuss topics in the physical world, such as current events, as well as ideas. One afternoon Michael suggested they get out of the house, drive to a café downtown. Sebastian smiled and agreed. They sat across from each other at Coffeeshouse Northwest for a couple of hours, both of them reading until Michael had to make rounds. Sebastian’s eyes flashed when he said, “That wasn’t part of the deal,” but he didn’t make any other complaints.

A month later came the deal,” but he didn’t make any other complaints. Sebastian’s hospital stint was the proverbial wake-up call he needed. While he seemed more guarded, he was willing to engage Michael openly, to discuss topics in the physical world, such as current events, as well as ideas. One afternoon Michael suggested they get out of the house, drive to a café downtown. Sebastian smiled and agreed. They sat across from each other at Coffeeshouse Northwest for a couple of hours, both of them reading until Michael had to make rounds. Sebastian’s eyes flashed when he said, “That wasn’t part of the deal,” but he didn’t make any other complaints.

A month later came the

“One can’t always control others, though one can always control oneself. Pharaohs, kings, dictators and presidents alike display a great ability to deal with change despite vicissitudes. It was Sebastian’s lack of self-control that worried him.”
In a fit of adrenaline, he stood back screamed and swore at her and at him just above the knuckles. He wanted to commune by mentioning his own loss, but he refrained; it would have been unprofessional. All he’d wanted was to move on. For some reason, watching her cry helped him grieve. 
He noticed that he was sliding and unlock when she would call so they could take her to the hospital director for the best treatment in the city. Yet the fights had been unprofessional. All he’d wanted was to re-marry anytime soon. Monroe took her to the hospital, worrying about it in his mind as he had walked the hallway that led to the operating room. He told her he had been watching her cry helped him grieve. 
He had paid little attention to that. It was that he wanted success more than anything else. After that, perhaps that day had been the first of sleeping together asked when they could walk there from the hotel. It was warm and still sunny, though past eight. The walk was maybe ten minutes, but he complained because she was in heels. 
As he walked down the stairs, he heard the bolt and chain slide into place behind him. He felt his front pocket for his car keys and swore; he’d left them on the kitchen counter. 
He knocked and knocked. 

Michael arrived at midnight. His mother microwaved a plate of food and gave him an ice pack for his hand. Twelve hours of sleep later, she told him to leave his wife. But there was no point; the least he could do was be there as she died. He drove back to Brooklyn to make rounds. It was already evening when he left the hospital, worrying about seeing Stella when he arrived home. But as he opened the front door she pulled a tray from the oven. "I hope you’re hungry," she called, "I made lasagna." 
Stella lasted three more years, largely thanks to Michael’s calling in the media director for the best treatment in the city. Yet the fights and drunkenness persisted. All the more Sebastian spent with his mother, which had influenced him to take her side. That was the last time he had lost control of a situation with a woman. It wasn’t that he was a control freak, though Stella used to accuse him of it. It was that he wanted success more than anything else.

As he took the exit to PDX. His son was staring out the windows; those same broad palms and short, square-tipped fingers curled into loose fists. He had paid little attention to that. It was that he wanted success more than anything else. 

"Get there safe. Let me know what happens. Call me." 
"Okay." Sebastian said aloud, and entered the rotating glass sheath without looking back. Michael watched him disappear and got back in his car. He thought about making rounds, whether to have tuna tartare or filet for dinner. He wondered whether his girlfriend of three years, Ming, would want to take a trip to Europe. Sounded the next day in his Ceo's or if she preferred the high desert. Sebastian was gone again. At least the asperity with which he sold Gloria’s land was reassuring. 
Michael kept his foot off the accelerator as he passed the "Welcome to Oregon" sign. Ahead the light was red. He came to a stop. 
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**The Opiate, Summer Vol. 2**

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Father and son aren’t supposed to lead him into hostile accusations. Sebastian, start him rambling, or a too-eager exhortation could delude him, especially Sebastian. One can’t change despite vicissitudes. It was that he wanted success more than anything else.
The sun had lost its light-tight-ropes
in the amber of the acne soap,
I wash my face;

and slowly soapy residue
attracts, with cracking dry skin clues,
my fingers.

Our fluids dry quickly in that way;
they evaporate across the grain
of our knuckles
and lips, whose movements crack their varnish;
thus sex is an inconstant artist
whose friable
medium has memory enough
to forget for you its obscure stuff;
so I scarcely
remember to even wash it from
our green and white striped sheets some months,
or me, some days;

or I forget complete occasions
drying as I withdraw, that cravings
newly spawn.
What she asked me
Zeke Greenwald

“And was it loud on your commute?
Your thoughts sobbing, forcefully nude,
stripped before sunbathing made them want to?”

“Or, regretting having ferberized your muse
who shrieks for solace every night:
wakefully thoughtless, brake shrieks might
contend with her for your despite?”

“Still early morning’s maquillage
beneath your eyes glossed on to gauze,
distant and departing railroad lines
lend lovely smoke to your sleepless eyes.”

How Can I Help?
Matt Nelson

Is there anything left to make?
Dinner smells good but so does your hair.
What would happen if we let it burn,
left the apartment with our shoes in hand
leaving the hurt of not showing up
next to the invitations, the peephole dry as a well.
I promise you, once we get to the first beach,
the second one will sneak up on you.
Everywhere today the sun is the color
of the boardwalk. Everyone agrees
that if the boardwalk was a color
this would be the color of the sun,
which you can walk on.
And if the throng of Easter
shall separate our diversions?
There’s no doubt we’ll meet again
like two pieces of a wishbone
scrapped and buried in the trash.
Olga Poems
Laura Sims

Olga, you linger
and cling
to the hive, to that
dirty unworthy metropolis.
Girl, you go
strutting around.
Like a slattern. Doggy.
Effete. The world
brings plague
to its smelliest squirrels while you
nosh
down at Wing Stop. Take a
fetus-like look
into space; now sit
with the blood
and the triumph
of brain. Abide
in that place. Down the yellowbrick road
we were Pilates and
trilobites
once we were wholly
divine

Olga Olga Olga your Zoloft is mine
I love you
like Emma. I love you like
Pride. I love you like Jane Austen
dollars, I love
to insert you in snide
conversations with fuckwads
-slash-
colleagues of mine. Alas
we are not
metatarsal, we bones
we belong
in the hands. Muscled shut
you’re shinola-won’t-
grease-you-back-
into-my-life. Mrs. Darling
my privy
you’re privy
to all whom the jillions
despise

Olga, your kung pao
chicken is here. To lay
waste to your bowels. Grab
a glacier! Embrace it! Its surface
aglitter
with shit from the birds
of the centuries. Drink
the deep blue. Find it
cooling, steady. Let it
irrigate all
your canals, let it
shower
you
out
until only bare rock
and your ironclad
gluttony
thrive
Olga, I cannot

stop seeing faces in leaves. Here’s a bearded old goat. There’s Napoleon
Three. And look, it’s my dear dead Maman. She left me
this terrible gift—see it drip on the Andover rug
If you tasted it, Olga, I swear, it would be
honeyed blood. How it fomented this
storm in my brain. And disquiets
the beasts. I see them
out there in the leaves—
an army a-bristle
with helmets
and hand cannons,
musket blades
gunning
for me

Olga, my phone

repletes me. I’m not
the same man I was
moments ago. I’m the man who, unfurling,
lay down in the leaves
like a leaf, like a winking
and ludicrous
tool. I’m the man who took
worshipful snapshots
of you and the sky, your face framed
in blue. I’m the man who caresses
the man who entreats I’m the man who the man who

considers our love a goat
stroking
endeavor. Lay down with me,
lady, in clover
and show me emoji

Durance of High-Values

Paige Taggart

A sad mystery would be having the candle
held too tightly around your mouth,
having the sea
spill into it and seeing kelp and things
grow in there, red thick mosses and
antique mandolins filling the air with what
they know and the vision they trust
as the things that slash and fear are near
you

A diamond mouthed shark aching to be by
your side
only brings you closer to the sadness you
envy, invaded
with porcelain, cracked roughage and the
assuage
of night, I am taboo of senses, heavy mud
dragging
me through the day. I am body and warm,
am wanton light
and traffic, hollow grid of what comes
next and the elements that provide them, I
have been proven
wrong, have slugged through thick grins,
falsified
and decoy, pillow and rock, the kid hid, the
dolphin
died, this aquarium is muted, it’s a
transitional
phase of accompaniment, of companionship

A room to offer where the devices are left
on all day
so that the fluorescent fish shine through the
glass
endlessly like a seizure of freedom, mini
scarp for the mold, it’s oxygen
replies, hello, I am present, not president of the
manual for exploration or rapid causes in high
and lows of what is so damaged, it’s pain
pains
Distressed Blue Linoleum

Paige Taggart

Paper plates on the Q train

A method of take it or leave: irresolute

People telling you what to do and how to behave leaving you presently blind in search of the closest thing that doesn’t so closely resemble your life

The hardest part: ownership

Being an only daughter comes with a breakdown in defense classes that askew protocol towards more violent temperaments and less mediated ones

Just wanted to talk it out

But the hog totally hogged the light

If you wanna train the beast to be more languid, lay him out in the sun

Feed him milk from your teat like an animus divinity

Each washing off weathers the skin

The sky is pale grey today and I don’t feel hesitant about a single thing

I’m all like fuck ya locomotion, go for it baby!

Nerves bottled up in a pink capsule

Swallow the whole network

A bird bending over in the sun makes a rococo sculpture

If you are hesitant to imagine this then you are deep in the precut throttle of the bandsaw

About to get chopped

the $5- poem

Larry Jones

A shuffling statue, on a platform, one Sunday morning down the shore, roughly handsome, shaggy and surly, smiling and greeting me “Good morning... do you have a dollar? Partied too hard, too late last night....” Would that he had been partying with me, but no it had not been he, or anybody else in particular. I did not have a one but a five I high handed him with “This is your big day!” But the day so far this Sunday morning, not so far from Asbury, to New York Penn Station, this morning so far had been mine, the petition to me and not another, I the one who had been blessed, returning his smile with a silent nod, tracking down his jean, the track, smiling at him, smiling at Red Bank, wistfully departing for another car.
Prayer for New York City 2070

- A hundred years hence, ... \(^2\)

Larry Jones

January 13, 1970 TWA flight 90 now sighting the City now descending down the west side of Manhattan, no twin towers but there the Chrysler and State Buildings.

I often consider such a reconnaissance as this across some thirty years of walking around up/down and around some fifty or so miles of town.

Often think to go sit outside some sidewalk bar/café, to think on one great New York song or another, yes to sit and sketch away as the natives parade the day.

Then maybe in the morning think to drop into a chapel, drop down onto my knees clasp hands mouth words and devoutly pray that nations might someday so unite as this City of the Empire State indeed the entire World alone upon an elevator with a young Dutch poet madly necking and groping one hundred two stories.

\(^2\) “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” Walt Whitman
Passing something off as one’s own is generally the name of the game when it comes to art. For centuries, writers and musicians alike have stolen from their forerunners to recreate and repackage a concept or idea that’s already been done at least ten to ten thousand times before. Considering the current landscape with regard to the masses’ level of interest in literature, particularly the classics, it is thusly no surprise that Lana Del Rey, goddess of new-fangled goth, has adopted a number of well-known authors’ words as her own.

The scribe toward whom she possesses the most fondness is, by and large, Vladimir Nabokov. Quotes from his famed Lolita appear often in the lyrics of her songs. In fact, one of her own track titles is “Lolita.” Being that Del Rey’s early shtick from the Born to Die album era consisted of cultivating the youthfully innocent air of what Humbert Humbert would call a nymphet, it makes all the sense in the world that she would croon, “I know what the boys want, I’m not gonna play,” as part of a persona centered around Dolores Haze.

On the same album, Del Rey continued to showcase her nepotism for Nabokov with another song called “Carmen.” In this sultry tale, most of her inspiration is culled straight from Lolita, including lyrics like, “It’s alarming, honestly, how charming she can be,” that compare very similarly against Lolita and Humbert singing, “Oh my Carmen, my little Carmen/Charmin’ Carmen.” Del Rey also throws in a Tennessee Williams allusion for good measure by crooning, “Relying on the kindness of strangers” in describing her version of Carmen.

Her obsession with the deceased Russian author seems to know no bounds once again on “Off to the Races,” a lovely little ditty about sinister love in which Del Rey chants, “Light of my life, fire of my loins, be a good baby do what I want.” In Lolita, it goes, “Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul.” Not too striking of a difference.

While Nabokov’s Lolita may be Del Rey’s primary source of expertise in landing her a job as an English professor, she’s also familiar with other beloved authors that might save her from being arrested based on charges of Nabokov necrophilia. The title of her sophomore album, Ultraviolence, for instance, reveals that she’s at least read some of Anthony Burgess’ A Clockwork Orange. Or maybe it’s Stanley Kubrick who has truly been serving as her literary guru (he, too, directed the film adaptation of Lolita).

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Elsewhere in her canon, Del Rey references Walt Whitman’s poem, “I Sing the Body Electric” in her very similarly titled “Body Electric.” The theme of Whitman’s original work, which appeared in 1855’s Leaves of Grass, explores the unavoidability of bodily awareness, how ignoring the beauty of the physical is to cut out some of the most key pleasures of one’s life. Apropos of this, Del Rey features the song in her thirty-minute short film, Tropico, a three-part opus that recreates the events of Adam and Eve being in the Garden of Eden and subsequently being cast out—very Miltonian indeed. In the same video, Del Rey mellifluously voices over the most famous lines from Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl.”

In short, Del Rey is a relentless regurgitator of masterworks in literature. Does this make her an impostor for wielding these words as her own? Or is she a brilliant and humanitarian twenty-first century artist for repackaging these novels and poems in a way that appeals to a new generation seemingly incapable of opening a book (literally, it’s all about reading via a screen now)? Perhaps the answer lies with the next songstress who succeeds Del Rey in her genre, and begins redesigning the Lake Placidite’s lyrics as her own, never realizing Del Rey already reinvented them in the first place.