



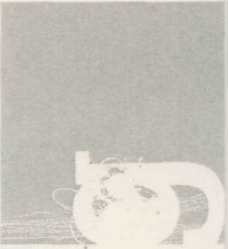
the
 apple
 the apple sits alone on the table
 naked and shamed like an innocent girl
 stripped against her will without hope
 of rescue or redemption no young
 prince to set things right
 the apple core alone
 on the table remembers
 when life was whole
 remembers
 Golden Delicious
 skin and sweet
 tissue beneath—
 juicy flavorful
 luscious firm
 a naked lonely apple
 sits alone on
 the table discarded
 no longer of any use to the
 one who enjoyed
 the savory fruit and sweet tears offered
 a lonely apple core stripped of itself
 nothing left but the seeds
 to grow

[Jordan Michelson]

Counting

While counting the sand,
 I looked for you in the pile.
 Still you slip right through.

[Tara Yi]



Glue
[Jessica Porter]

I love the way glue feels, so creamy and sticky. I love it when my fingers get stuck together and I have to rip them apart and the glue peels off like leaves of papery snake skin. The best is when it rips off a whole layer of real skin and then I bleed and maybe get to wear a couple of Band-Aids. Then people will ask what happened to my fingers and I can say I lit them on fire.

"You haven't moved all day," my mother says to me when she comes home from her new job at Albertson's. "It's dark out here. How can you even see what you're doing?"

Why does she have to talk to me? My mother thinks she knows everything about me just because I am the fruit of her loins and came out of her womb. She doesn't even care when one of my collages blows away in the waft of air from the front door, so in honor of her, I create an extra special collage out of dirt and some of Chief Lalooska's fur. Chief Lalooska is the cat who lives next door at Frankie's. He always sits on our railing during the day and sometimes jumps down next to me to sniff at my glue. Now that I think about it, that cat sniffs an awful lot of glue. I'm surprised he's still alive.

I have forty-seven Elmer's Glue Sticks, six tubes of Ultraloc Super Glue, and eight bottles of regular liquid school glue. Actually, ignore everything I said before about how I love liquid glue, because now that I think about it, I really prefer glue sticks. I ask for them for Christmas and my birthday because my philosophy is that you can never have too many glue sticks. When I run out of glue, bad things happen. I don't really want to talk about it.

To make my collage, I smear my hands with liquid and then walk down the porch steps and kneel in the dirt, wiping my hands until they are completely brown. Then I smear some more glue on the paper and make brown gluey handprints across the page. I catch Chief Lalooska and rip out some of his hairs because he doesn't mind. He scratches me a little, but I figure that if he really minded,

he wouldn't keep coming back and sitting with me on the porch. I squeeze out some super glue and scatter his gray and white hairs on the gluey dirt.

My mother comes back outside. "Dinner's ready, sweetheart," she says in that annoying, condescending way. She glances at my dirt collage but doesn't say anything about it, probably because she knows it's of her. I'm sure she can see herself in it because I've gotten so good at these things, being out of school and all. My mother probably feels exposed and filled with anguish, but of course she doesn't show it because deep down inside she's cold-hearted and cruel.

I come into our trailer and wash my hands in the kitchen. Luckily, two fingers of my right hand are glued together so I can work at pulling them apart while we eat. That way I won't have to look her in the eye. I say "eye" and not "eyes" because my mother's left eyelid is droopy, and she almost can't see anything out of it. I sit down at the table in front of my plate of macaroni and cheese, the homemade kind. Macaroni and cheese always makes me think of glue, that's why I like it so much, and that's why she always makes it for me; probably to get on my good side so I will stop making collage pictures of her. Actually, my mother doesn't have a droopy eyelid.

The best collage I ever did of my mother was made out of a bunch of crumpled-up pieces of used toilet paper. I left the collage for her in the bathtub, but unfortunately she flushed it down the toilet and then gave me a potty-training lesson. And then there was the collage I made out of a pillowcase and Chief Lalooska's turds. Actually, I was kidding about the potty-training lesson. She didn't really do that.

"I hate macaroni and cheese," I say.

My mother sits down in her chair. "What do you mean you hate macaroni and cheese? You loved it yesterday," she says. She looks sad, but it's an act. "I got a free gallon of ice cream at work today," she says to change the subject. "They were giving away all the stuff that's past date."

"What kind?" I ask.

"Neapolitan."

"What's Neapolitan?"

"Chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry."

"All mixed together? That sounds disgusting."

Her droopy eye opens a little. "No, not mixed together. In three separate sections. Do you want some?"

"I only want the vanilla," I say. "Because it's the color of glue." Then I rip my fingers apart.

My mother jumps up from her chair and takes my hand. "Sweetie! Don't do that! Oh my God." There is blood running down in between my fingers. She grabs a paper napkin and sticks it on to stop the bleeding.

"No stop! I want to save that for later!" I yell at her.

What a waste of blood. I could have made a terrific sunset collage with all of it. But it's like this with most things. She wouldn't let me keep my teeth either when they got knocked out. And she threw away the large chunk of skin that came off my knee when I jumped from that moving car last June. That was right after I ran out of glue for the first time. Luckily, my birthday is in July, and I got a lot of glue sticks from my mother and Frankie while I was in the hospital. Although it was the worst birthday ever because I had to spend it with my leg in traction and a gigantic bandage wrapped around my head.

At the hospital there was this girl in the bed next to me; I think her name was Clarence. No one believes me that her name was Clarence, but it was. I never actually saw her because the white curtain was always pulled around her bed, but she talked to herself all the time and said the strangest things. Once she said, "Tomorrow I am going to marry the red goblin," and I wrote it down because I thought maybe her parents would want to know in case she actually did it. I don't know what was wrong with Clarence, but whenever she got visitors they would ask her, "How many fingers am I holding up?"

When I got out of the hospital I made a collage dedicated to Clarence. It was done with bandages in the shape of a wedding veil above a red construction paper goblin, although I don't really know what a goblin looks like. I think my goblin looked a little like Satan. In the collage, the goblin was dancing underneath the wedding veil, and there was a talk bubble coming out of his mouth saying, "How many fingers am I holding up?" It's the second best collage I've ever made.

I think Neapolitan ice cream is the best thing I've ever tasted. It's like a collage of vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry. It's like the

collage I would have made if I could have saved the blood that came from my fingers.

* * *

Frankie lives in the trailer next door; he's actually the person who got me started on collages. It was a few years ago. I distinctly remember it was the day my teacher Mrs. Robbins came to our house to talk to my mother, and I remember my mother telling me to go next door with Frankie.

Frankie was in his room reading *National Geographic* when I came over. I don't remember exactly, but he was probably reading about scuba divers because he wants to be one someday. He eventually wants to buy a yacht, store up on lots of food, and float out into the middle of the ocean, so he can scuba dive with the sharks. Frankie likes fish in general, and when I came over that day, he had out a pair of scissors and some glue and some paper.

"My mother hates me," I said, when I came into the room.

"Oh," said Frankie.

He's such a wonderful person; he doesn't even care that I have a terrible mother who has only one ear and a droopy eye. He doesn't care that I only have four fingers on my right hand.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Reading," said Frankie.

He's so honest. He would never lie to me about anything, and that's why I love him so much. Most people, when they hear that my best friend is Frankie Fergusson, say something like, "Wasn't he the kid that ate the sixth grade hamster?" And then I tell those people that the hamster had cancer and was going to die anyway. Frankie was merely administering hamster euthanasia.

"Want to help me make a collage?" asked Frankie after five minutes of me standing in the doorway watching him read his magazine. He's so good looking, after all. I could have watched him sit there all day and not have gotten bored. Actually, I have five fingers on my right hand.

"What's a collage?" I asked him.

"It's something really cool," said Frankie. "You cut things out of magazines and glue them down to make a picture. There's the stuff over there." He pointed at the glue and scissors and paper. "Go for it." Then he went back to reading about scuba diving and sharks. Actually, now that I think about it he was reading about cobras.

"What magazines can I cut up?" I asked.

"I don't know. You'll probably have to get some from the store."

"Okay," I said.

On my way out of Frankie's trailer, I ran into his mom walking across the lawn. "Is Frankie working on his art project yet?" she asked me.

"Yeah," I said. "He's hard at work."

"Good," said Mrs. Ferguson.

I walked to Albertson's and bought three different magazines: *Marie Claire*, *USA Today*, and *Cosmopolitan*. Then I came back to Frankie's and made my first collage ever, while he finished his *National Geographic*. It was a great moment in my life. But unfortunately, I don't have that collage anymore, because it got eaten by a panther.

Here's the truth...sometimes making collages all day can get a little boring. But I consider it my duty to the world as an artist. If I don't keep making my collages, people fifty years from now won't be as enlightened as I know they are going to be when my collages are famous.

I consider myself the Van Gogh for the new generation, except Van Gogh didn't make collages; he painted. But in art class I learned that Van Gogh failed at everything he tried except for painting, and that no one liked him very much while he was alive. I guess that's kind of like me, except I wouldn't say that I've ever failed at anything. I just don't like doing a lot of things. I don't like a lot of people. And one thing I've learned about the world is that most human beings don't want to be friends with a girl who has a horribly disfigured face and only four fingers on both of her hands.

It's true...I don't have any thumbs. I learned at an early age how to hold a glue stick between my pointer finger and my middle finger. That's why Frankie is the best person in the entire world. That's why we are going to have six children some day. He loves me just for who I am. I've made a lot of collages about him; most of them are pink and white and red, but I never show them to him. I'm saving them up in a box under my bed to give to him after we're married.

My mother doesn't understand a thing about Frankie. She is so ignorant and dumb, probably because she has only one ear to hear

with and only one eye to see with. I am nothing but a fuzzy, muffled blur to her. All she can do is smile at me and make dumb comments like, "How come Frankie never comes over to our house?"

My mother doesn't know that Frankie is a genius, and geniuses don't have to follow the expectations of society. Frankie really is a genius. He made it into the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the loudest belch in the Western Hemisphere. If I am the Van Gogh of collages, then Frankie is the Beethoven of belching. People think he's crazy, but really he's just an unappreciated genius.

"How come Frankie barely says anything to you?" my mother asks me.

"What do you mean?" I say.

"He barely talks, except to his cat," says my mother.

"Yeah, well, we talk through our brain waves," I say. "We connect more deeply than you'll ever understand."

My mother looks at me like I'm the craziest person in the world. Then she kisses me on the head and goes into the house. See what I mean? She doesn't know anything.

It's the same way with my collages. My mother doesn't understand those either; she just buys me the glue and sometimes pretends to like what I've made. But once she went out of her way to be nice and put one of them up on the dining room wall. It was the collage I made of Chief Lalooksa out of cut-out magazine pictures of cats that I arranged in the shapes of the letters "C" and "L". Amazing, I know.

Actually, I'm not disfigured at all. I look pretty much like a normal person, but when I was born, I didn't have any thumbs. It was my father's fault; he didn't have any thumbs either. My father also had webbed fingers that looked like a duck's feet. He should have been one of the X-Men.

His name was Rupert, but I think he should have been named Glue-pert. Wouldn't that have been fabulous? He was an artist, and that's why we live in a trailer now, because he didn't make any money.

Actually, I really do have thumbs.

And I love glue.

Mary Cassatt at the Louvre

[Corin Faye]

I walked into the room and saw a lady in a black bustle dress going around the corner. There were others in the room, but I couldn't really see them—I only saw the end of her dress disappearing around the etched wall, her figure long and elegant, her small hand grasping a closed, slender umbrella like a walking stick. Her whole figure, moving with symmetrical and angled motion, gathered into itself the dark recesses of her clothed contours; she was a woman in a black dress leaning on an umbrella, her face turned away and her hair concealed by a fashionable hat, passing me by at a supercilious and elegant slant.

I followed her around the corner and found myself suddenly touched by wind and fresh air; I shielded my eyes and, glancing up, found myself confronted by a wispy, withdrawn woman clothed in white, holding her parasol up against the sun, her veiled face gazing down on me with obscured wonder, the wind blowing her creamy skirts against her legs and filling them with the grassy air. The light radiated from around her, barely suppressed by her parasol.

"Excuse me, madame," I said.

A large gust of wind made me turn and shudder, and I tripped away a few spaces and landed in the middle of a café—a café suffused with golden gaslight and steam. Two young women, dressed in a color of black that reminded me of dark chocolate, were sitting at a table; one of them saw me, put her hand to her mouth, and half-smiled at me in an artless, childlike way. I nodded and, had I hat, would have tipped it. She was wearing a hat—one that came down around her damp brown curls; her round, full face, friendly and inviting, tilted slightly towards her friend, who bent down and, avoiding my eyes, made as though to whisper in her ear.

Were they talking about me? I did not feel indignant—they were jovial. I saw them suddenly leaving the café, going out into the rainy street—*May I join you?* The round-faced girl smiled and stepped out into the sidewalk, just before a crowd of innumerable

June, Cut Bank Montana

[Beth Carlson]

My cheek-bone rests against my fist, elbow denting the rubbery maroon door ledge. I stare out the streaked windows at the rows of green shoots and alternating dust rows.

Dave strides bowlegged and booted, leaning down every several paces to test a flag leaf between his thumb and forefinger.

I think about how the roundness of his fingers has flattened into a callous.

He hunches his body forward as he walks back to the truck, mouth in a dash. We lurch into reverse and he throws his arm over the vinyl seat behind me. The back tires bounce down the bank and onto the road, sending up a puff of dust.

"How much longer 'til they head?"

"Two weeks."

The dust spirals off the tires behind us so I can see nothing except my own face in the rearview. Dirt clogs the crevices bordering my nose and flows down to my chin. A raw pink band across my forehead marks where my hat rubbed.

I force my fingers into my knotted ash blond hair. Only my eyes look pretty now. They turn bright blue in the hard sun. Bright blue like sparks from a welding rod.

[e s s a y / c r e a t i o n]
[n o n - f i c t i o n]