

Interpretations



University of Saint Joseph

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Calvin



Thanksgiving

The night before was chaotic, eight batches of cookies out of the oven, green bean casseroles ready to be heated the next day. By 9pm, we were all exhausted. “We’ll finish it tomorrow,” became our mantra at a certain point.

The day was finally here. Up early in the morning, no more time to put things off. 40 pounds of potatoes: peeled, washed, boiled, and mashed. Getting on our nicer outfits, it wasn’t mandatory but we wanted to look nice. On such a special day.

Taking two cars: less people to fight with, bringing Elizabeth home early- if needed. Long drive. Only an hour, along miles of highway and dusty dirt roads. Catching the first glimpse of the yellow country house, deciding where to park: don’t want to block anyone in, and don’t want to get blocked in.

Carrying things in. Two crockpots of mashed potatoes, plates of Toll House cookies (with walnuts), platter of fruit, ceramic vessels filled with green bean casserole. Readjusting our loads to open the white garage door (never locked). Through the garage, past the miniature rideable fire truck, called the Squirt.

A wave of warm air as we enter the basement. Memories of past holidays, especially the time Ben sat on a skateboard and rolled down the treadmill at 25mph. Cousins sitting on the couch, glued to a video game. Saying hi to them, but continuing on.

The kitchen is a cacophony of activity. Both ovens, stuffed with food. No space on the counter. Where should I put this? Setting up a drinks and desserts table in the living room.

Uncle Sandy shows up. So many two liter bottles. The wrap comes off the cheese and crackers. Glenn, want to play checkers? (Two colors of cheese arranged like a checkerboard.)

Uncle Nick is here. As usual, with his khakis and yellow sweater. I’ve never seen him in another outfit.

There’s a bowl of olives out, there always is. Uncle Sandy pours himself some diet coke. Puts an orange slice from the fruit platter on the side of the cup. A few olives on a toothpick, and he’s got a martini. We’ve been here for less than 20 minutes.

Uncle Allen is outside with his turkey fryer. He’s been brining the turkeys for days. One in the oven, and two fried. “The best turkey you’ll ever taste”.

Auntie Kimmy is organizing everyone. There’s a lot of weird stuff going on, but she takes it in stride. She’s been a part of the Alonzo family for long enough to expect it.

Mom and I are trying to help. Carrying this and that, putting things into serving bowls, taking things in and out of the oven. I'm analyzing myself. Is this too much? Do I need to go sit in the car? It feels unusual to not feel overwhelmed.

Finally: the feast. Laid out on the island, lining up with plates and forks. "No, you go first".

I've never been one to eat much at gatherings. I fill my plate only with things I'm sure I can eat. Self-conscious about wasting food, but also sometimes eating is tough. I sit on a chair in the living room with my dad. Uncle Nick, talking about his friend in Alaska. Patrick comes in, dapper as usual, and growing a mustache. Some are eating on the couch. Ben and his girlfriend. She brought peanut butter cream pie.

Donald, asking what I've been up to. Of course, it's hard to say. I don't often have conversations where I can forget about my current situation. He hasn't been working much, either. It's okay. My family knows.

Soon: scooping leftover mashed potatoes and slices of turkey into tupperware containers. Making a takeout box for Kaki to take home. We forget which one is hers. Make another one.

The fruit platter is clean and on the table. I move it to the pile we've established of stuff to bring home. Back in the kitchen. Liz: "where did that plate go?" Getting it out again with a red face, my mom gave it to her, she has a matching set. The embarrassment almost gets to me. It takes a lot to keep my composure, even though it was an honest mistake.

People start leaving, hugs for all. My family stays. We're always the last ones out.

Everyone else is gone. Standing, leaning on the counter, talking about everything. A group of people who know me. Whom I've grown up with, whom have seen me grow through every awkward stage of my life. A certain level of comfort with these people, that I don't have anywhere else.

Finally, (and it is night now), we leave. Two cars, backing down the driveway. A haze of tiredness, washed over us all. Not much talking. Just driving, watching the world go by.

Last, home. Familiarity. Warmth. Comfort. Back into the cave of my room. Settling under the weight of my blankets. Ready to shut my brain off. My last thought, before falling asleep: Life is sometimes unexpectedly worth it.

Untitled



Twentieth-Century Express

Father carries us home. He carries us out of the Dodge and into our bunk-beds. He lifts us free of a sniper's site and into a rustic mountainside lodge. We dream that night of reverent words (the poet's equipage) for we know the next day may sting us like a viper. But even then father will carry us home, out of the Dodge; into our pjs, robes, and slippers; our camouflage hides us from the high-booted, brown-shirted piper; warms us, safe in this splendid mountainside lodge.

We wake when hounded by an artillery barrage, and we cry to our father to make the smoke lift and the morning, lighter. And father, please, carry us home, out of the Dodge and back to Allendale, Glen Rock, and Mahwah. These safe, quiet places of sylvan, bucolic summer – these are the places that must be ours – that perfect and spacious mountainside lodge. Hey, Dad, a basketball please for the boys and for Mother a corsage. Beautiful rooms for everyone – mom, kids, and dog; sold to the gallant GI for a dollar. And father carries us home, out of the Dodge, into our affable, affordable mountainside lodge.

Untitled



Inspiration

I search for it.

I can't find it.

I look for it in the restaurants where other families eat.

Mom. Dad. Boy. Girl.

My mind starts off sharp,

like my pencil,

searching.

I look for it as I drive in my car.

Dirt. Gravel. Trees. Field.

Long, empty road.

I grip my pencil,

poised, but

nothing.

I stare at the backs of pedestrians' heads,

as I am jostled along the city streets.

Bang. Bump. Push. Shove.

I will for one of them to turn around,

so that I can

See it. Hear it. Feel it. Not today.

I search for it.

I can't find it.

My pencil, still sharp,

though

my mind is dull.

Even in my dreams, it won't appear.

I wake alone, in a shiver.

I am empty.

I can think of nothing.

No one.

Not yet.

Imaginary Friends

I smile and greet those who lock eyes with me. Introductions and the shaking of hands, going through the motions of normal social etiquette in American culture., my motivation and courage solely stemming from the fact that, unlike other situations I have been in in the past, this time I have been provided with a little social nudge. Ice breakers, a surefire way to strike up an interaction. Where are you from? What school do you attend? Are you bilingual? I find it funny that while most of these topics are normal icebreakers in an initial introduction, my social anxiety logic tells me I need special authorization to utter these questions to another human being. This official permission in the form of a fun game of ice breaker bingo actually gives me the semi courage to...approach people, something that feels like trying to walk through two feet of snow otherwise. I won't lie, my social anxiety still lingered as I did this but once the interaction was underway, I tried to hide my introversion. They were short interactions because it was mere small talk and, after all, the goal of the game wasn't to chit chat for hours on end but to find people who aligned with the characteristics on our bingo cards and once we established if that was the case, we then moved on to the next person. It wasn't bad but actually kind of fun. I got this, I thought within the first twenty minutes.

Then, thirty, forty-five minutes pass of roaming around the restricted area full of the chattering crowd. I have not completed my bingo card but I begin to feel that familiar drained feeling. I slowly make my way over to a bench to call it quits. How many people have I exchanged introductions with, one who broke the pattern of introduce, shake, exchange cards for review, next, by engaging in admittedly off-topic conversation about his long commute up here in a rental car because he totaled his car, proceeding to then pull out his phone and show me a picture of the moderate damage. I listened attentively and exclaimed my shock, a learned social cue. That's what I am really, a listener, an observer. I am not one to engage in small talk, and this small talk among a crowd of strangers did not go on for long with each person but the small talk with everyone as a whole, and I didn't even talk to everyone, was enough to give me my daily dose of social interaction.

Despite this, I did end up making one friend. In fact, because he was so nice to me, I broke out of my shell enough to actually ask him for a favor, no two actually, in the same sentence! The vibe I received from him was that he would gladly do me any favor and he also said it bluntly, as if we were good friends already but, I can still only call us acquaintances because we still need to get to know each other. As arrogant as it sounds, trying to get to know a person to gradually establish a friendship is hard work for me as an introvert, someone who needs and chooses to revel in ample time to herself.

However, amidst this need for me time, I can get lonely and I do crave human interaction. To remedy this I look for friends virtually. No, I don't mean through social media, although I am not a stranger to my small share of dating apps. Of course, that is a whole different social realm despite the inevitable connection it has to friendship in order to be healthy. No,

I am talking about establishing an alleged friendship from my own perspective with popular social influences who don't even know I exist. It is a one-sided relationship for this reason but I don't care because I am the one who gets the gratification from it and it is not even necessary for me to have to do any work in maintaining the relationship. I already know about them. Yes, technically, I know that who they are in the public, digital world is not who they are after the camera shuts off. Because I don't know any more about them than the rest of the world, they are not real friends. I am aware they are imaginary friends. They only exist in my world on my computer screen, in my own mind but I don't care because these 'friends' benefit me. They relieve my anxiety, they make me laugh, they make me feel good about myself and help me to improve myself. I don't even care that I have no listening ear, that is one thing they cannot provide me but I provide them. As I said, I am a listener, and I don't mind. I am the open ear when they vent about their problems or just tell me a funny story. I even offer my support in the only way I can, not knowing if they will notice and acknowledge but, nevertheless, that is my way of giving back to the relationship. It may seem crazy but I guess I love this kind of relationship because I am afraid of relationships fading because they have for me in the past but with imaginary friends, I call the shots on the relationship. With imaginary friends, friendship can be eternal and I can effortlessly make as many as I want when real, true friendships are rare to find and hardly last. It is my ideal world because my imaginary friends help me forget this sad truth.

Dennis Barone

Poem by Erri De Luca

Translation by Dennis Barone

The Line

Here is a picture of my hand, where
every soothsayer traces the line of your name,
an expressway that points straight
to the heart and governs it.

Untitled



Missy



Untitled



Furry Friends



Untitled



“Putting Fear to Death”

Five letters, one syllable, a lifetime of fear
From conception, we oppose it with all might
But I plead with you, do not tremble, please hear
It is but a bridge that must be crossed without sight

As the last breath departs from your lips, a hand extends to grasp yours
Reach out into the embrace of the one who wove you into existence
Glance down as your distance from earth grows and see how the angel soars
Turn your face to the warmth above, this earth is no longer your residence

Rugged hands restored to new
Heartache exchanged for eternal refuge
Weeping eyes no longer blue
Consumed strength returned in deluge

Time moves forward until everyone’s end
We all exit this earth to a new ground
I will weep of your remembrance until I too ascend
Faithful friend, go and seize your crown

Untitled



Landscape

I felt like a character out of a novel I had read in college, a story about a young man alone in Los Angeles, although I didn't recall this until after I felt the crunch beneath my foot. I don't know why I did so and doubt that the memory played any role in the moment, but as I walked along the beach close to where the waves struck the shore and then receded, I slammed the sole of my shoe upon a single solitary crab that had crossed my path.

I had entered the moonlight some moments after telling Beatrice we were through, that I had to leave. I had said, "Excuse me" as I left, and I did not slam the door. What difference would it have made to have done so? I wanted to appear mature if not righteous. I had been wronged. She admitted the affair. I saved my anger for the hapless crab or was it, rather, that the emotion erupted there and then against the creature or all and any creatures that believed they could scuttle about so innocently, so free?

The paradox is to have claimed humility and charged others with hubris. The curtain opened on trees shorn of leaves. If I tried to jump, she clawed or tickled me to no end. She could hear my voice, but not my words, my laugh. Act three came to a close. I had come into contact with nature early in my life, and at that time I felt the stirring impulse of trees. After, I rode on horseback as far as Texas. Unity becomes uniformity: the screen erases. Arrogance is the sword of personality: he who lives by it, dies by it. A little bird lifts off the beach on a wind with no memory.

Supplemental

Invariably we return to our home. We leave on a strong tide and come back in a cold drizzle. The harbor lights shine bright against the gray cliffs. Our flag flies high and we wave and shout hello and by golly we feel wonderful. But then the thought strikes: twenty years it has been since Dan swam in these waters, brisk and salty, only to succumb to a cramp – a side-stitch or the sting of an eel or a sudden shift in tides. And then we were without Dan and so set to sea.

We sailed westward and as we did so, too often we became still and sullen. Yet, I recall the time we sat in ropes class laughing at the terrible mess we had made of our assignment and how the instructor chastised us so vehemently after the class had ended. A boat had run aground, one that no one knew had so many holes in it. One soul had been briefly framed in a stateroom window. The wind bit at the glass. We saw backpacks crisscrossed with cord move up the coast toward the cliffs, tied together for safety. Up there a gap in the blue became the pass through.

Untitled



In My Small World

First Signs

Through the bright,
inviting hallways,
The smell of new shoes,
Plastic lunch boxes,
And fresh packs of crayola crayons,
Lingered in the air.
Welcomed by the warm smile,
Of my first grade teacher,
Whom I sometimes called “mom”,
By mistake.
You went out of your way,
To befriend me,
The new kid.
How quickly you turned,
My world around,
With one decision,
That I was no longer worthy,
Of your friendship,
Or anyone else’s.
You called the shots.
And your followers were faithful,
You pushed me to the edge,
Until the words escaped my mouth,
“You witch!”
And just like that,
You won.

Blindness

Her embrace keeps me calm.
I crave the comfort of her arms,
My face pressed against her stomach,
Small hands neatly laced
Around her back,
Squeezing tight,
With all of my love.
To her I am important,
To them I am their favorite victim.
Here I am needed,
There I am discarded,
Like an old toy,
That no one wants to play with
Anymore.
She is the only one
Who knows the truth.
For when I bring it to light,
They blow out the flame.
I am left in the dark
With a silenced voice.
They make me insignificant
And no one notices.
My adult eyes watch from afar,
In the now,
Outraged at their response.
How can they not see?

Repetition

Sunlight peaks through
The holes of my enclosure.
My safe place,
Away from the mocking voices,
Unfriendly faces and unkind intentions.
The warm light kisses away
The salty tears from my adolescent
cheeks.
I'm no one's friend.
In here, my loneliness hides,
Along with my last shred of pride.
There's nowhere left to go.
The pit continuously turns,
Deep in my belly.
It's not enough.
I can't fake sick again.
Home is not an option.
I have no choice.
No one to tell.
I am alone.
The whistle blows from the blacktop.
I dry my eyes,
And put on my brave face.
Their torment will keep me numb,
Until I climb into my mom's backseat,
And release my pain.
Tomorrow we start again.

Trapped

We lie still in the dark room,
Blinds drawn,
Conscious of the sound of my breath.
I mustn't be heard.
I mustn't be seen.
Under the window sill,
I crouch my small frame,
Tiny footsteps creek,
I wince, and scurry across.
We are not home.
"It's a game", my mom says.
My only entertainment.
I whisper
And play without light.
The sun has set,
And the only thing left to do
Is sleep.
I toss and turn
In sync with the grumbles
Rippling through my belly.
I swallow my saliva,
Hoping to trick my stomach,
Into thinking it's full.
The last piece of stolen cheese,
Must wait in the idle fridge.
It's the least that I can do.

Crossroads

She is selfless,
Like a wild cat,
Defending her young cub.
Sacrificing,
Blind from the other choices,
Other possibilities,
Could have kept us from this.
Homeless.
Hopeless.
I hear you plead on the phone,
Begging for someone to extend their hand,
Cautious of what others may say,
If they found out.
Failing.
I could not face them anymore,
Could not endure another day.
You knew I wasn't sick,
But the thought of my pain,
Pulled at your heart strings.
You made me your everything,
And I took advantage.
Desperation.
There's no turning back.
The damage is done.
All I can do is wonder,
Where do we go from here?

New Beginnings

My white sneakers click together,
In the dewey grass,
Of my God parent's frown lawn,
I flinch and shake my head,
As I recall my last day in that place.
"I'm moving" escapes my lips,
In a matter of fact tone,
Hiding my hope in their response.
"Good!" they shout,
Skipping along the tail end of the line.
"We won't have to see your ugly face
anymore!"
The yellow school bus roars around the
corner,
I reluctantly look up from my shoes,
As it nears closer to where I stand.
The doors fold open.
I swallow my spit,
And slowly board the bus.
A sea of unfamiliar faces blur together,
As I stand at the beginning of an endless
aisle.
The door snaps shut behind me.
With a sense of urgency,
I shuffle down to the the last row,
And fall into the rightmost seat.
A cheery voice startles me,
"Hi! Are you new?"
Slowly, I glance up, at an extended hand
and a warm smile.

Dedication

As I got older,
I realized how these events,
Have affected me.
Though it seems to be a lifetime away,
It influenced my social anxieties,
My fears,
Self esteem,
Perception of self.
It became a voice in the back of my head,
Shouting,
“Don’t make yourself vulnerable!”
It became the reason why,

I was apprehensive,
To put myself out there,
To try anything new.
It became the reason why,
I cared so much,
About what others thought of me.
But then it became the reason why,
I am aware of the quiet student,
Too commonly overlooked,
It became the reason why,
I search for my face in my students,
The face of a bullied child,
Struggling internally,
Desperately calling on someone to
Make it stop.

Contributors

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