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# Perspectives

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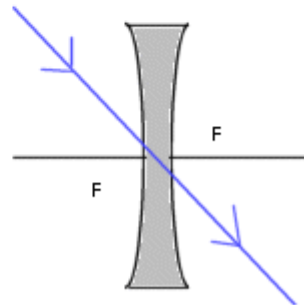
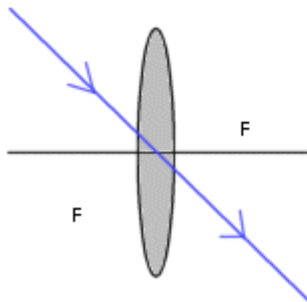
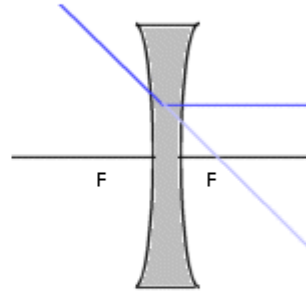
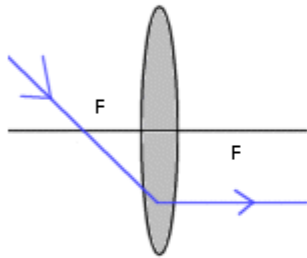
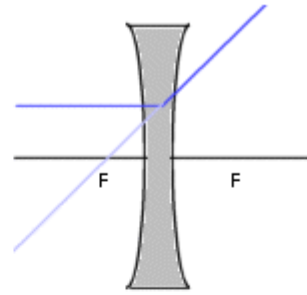
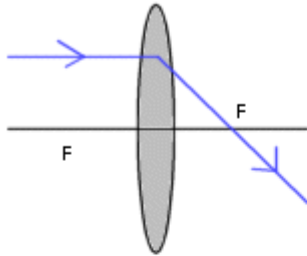
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# Perspectives



## Invisible Fence

Mom and Dad call you “Baby Daughter,”  
We call you “Little Sister.”  
We marvel at your curly red hair, too-big feet and  
bright black eyes that express only joy and

your soft puppy palate that can startle, plead, or  
sigh with contentment after a belly rub.

But you too often indulge a penchant for squirrels  
and not just the ones on our lawn.

So for ten days you growl quietly while through the window  
as the Maintenance Man works the perimeter.

We know you can hear something big take shape  
as metal hits soil, deep underground.

He has kind eyes and a soft southern drawl.  
Finally, he calls us to the other side.

We are split apart by an invisible line: A new collar  
hanging heavy from your neck, you sniff curiously.

Mom and Dad call you “Baby Daughter,”  
We call you “Little Sister.”  
“Come, Maggie!” Maintenance Man calls.  
In total trust, you take ready steps forward.

We flinch as if struck.

## String Theory

Here is the original string theory:  
fingers to yarn make inquiry.  
The yarn years: tendrils extend in all directions,  
resisted by fleshly corrections.  
Fingerslipknots tie and unite  
tiny and tight.

Four spiked needles control chaos:  
twisting and tying,  
forcing, prying,  
coaxing but stopping at any caress;  
Arachne was a governess.  
She forced the frays to form a shape:  
A lace edged shawl: a shoulder's dress;  
Or mittens made expertly effortless.

But no proper physicist will question  
the reality of alternate dimensions  
where string can wind in multiple directions.  
Multiple universe potential means  
a nubby knotted headsconce, unraveled  
becomes a hollow toe overcoat, teeming with seams.

## Machine-Men

My GPS is very often wrong:  
he mistakes my destination for a lake.  
Perhaps if I hinged back his metal face,  
I'd find sinews tangled round a pulsing heart.

Jokingly, my sisters named him Chad.  
And secretly, I always call him that.

As cell phones go, mine is distinctly green,  
and shakes with fever when I get a call.  
He adores the pressing warmth of fingertips  
and refuses to respond when I wear gloves.

A sickly boy behind a backlit screen;  
eventually I'll text his epitaph.

Untamed, my sewing machine swallows  
whole lengths of fabric webbed in tangled thread.  
His needle won't discern my cloth from flesh:  
I feed him fabric while avoiding teeth.

His deep hum rumbles through my nervous hands;  
he thinks that I am far from in control.

But the thing about men made from metal and wires,  
is that I am the one who pulls the plug.

## The Trial Sequence

### I. Student Struck By Car, Then Ticketed

You were the thing I least expected  
on a drizzling, lazily lit afternoon. My thoughts  
too, were dimmed low in the grey day. All eyes  
were on your form, suspended in the air  
for minutes, haloed by the flat grey sky,  
filling my vision completely.

When you finally landed, the world tumbled too.  
I couldn't look at you, I called 911 instead. They  
attended to you like ants circling a corpse. They saw  
what I was afraid to look for- the marks on your head,  
the dull open eyes, useless but for reflecting the sky.  
They snipped your shirt with mincing, careful clips.

I wish you could have seen the woman as  
she emerged from her car. She was weeping even then  
and didn't stop for hours. She leaned her dolorous head  
against the ruined vehicle, strangers, the telephone pole  
that your body had hit; she was hoping to be held. I think  
she thought it was her fault.

But I know it was yours. I saw you- the way you  
looked side to side at traffic, the way you  
braced your body like a spring, the way you  
leapt out  
like it was what you had to do.

I didn't know you, but you demanded so much of me.  
It was the first time I had had to call 911,  
the first time I talked to so many police,  
the first time I had to testify  
in court.

## II. In the Courtroom

No drone or hum, but a definite thrum: this is humanity.  
A cough, a yawn, a sigh fill the space between blinks.  
Criminals and citizens share temporary innocence.  
We wait in polished pews like those of a church  
awaiting our judgment.

One by one, the judge calls our names.  
He beckons me forth like a king would.  
I am made to swear to him.

Plaintiff, you're a little rich white boy. Can't tie your own tie.  
Like a porcelain figure, one tap would knock over  
your whole façade. The legal system loves you  
and the birds of death fly in your favor.  
Precious moneyed child, they will see to it  
that it will never be your fault.

I sit agitated in the midst, when next to me  
a doe-eyed girl gives a long lashed stare. I explain  
what I witnessed to her muddy heels, her excessive gold  
hoops coiled around earlobes. "What did you see?" I asked.  
Frosty aqua lids eat at brown eyes like acid.  
"I'm no witness. I'm on trial."

With sharp finch eyes and a piercing beak,  
the lawyer resembles a Venetian plague doctor.  
Her long-beaked death gaze awaits.  
Her words are shrill, are staccato. She berates  
me for my words, she objects, she strikes me  
from the record.

### III. After Court

Outside the courthouse,  
through the tunnel of the metal detector,  
ice sheets slick the sidewalks: You have  
to watch your step.

A grey day rolls out chaotic- gum the gaps  
with naps and phone calls, with tears.  
Today I know that your meaning  
is not my meaning. My existence  
cancels out no alternate universes.

In one scenario: "I saw him run out  
in front of the car." I saw him leap. I saw  
the woman driver weeping, her sobs  
shaking the street for hours.

In yet another: an angel-white student  
struggles across the street, swiped away by a  
drunk driver. "She could've been going 80 mph;  
we don't know."

But I know

Perspective is a kaleidoscope. It tilts  
in favor of its holder.



## The Disbelief Set

### I. I Swear:

The water was clear as a contact lens  
But you could hardly see the coral  
for its reflection of the clouds.  
We splashed the mirror images feet first:  
within, it felt weightless and warm as air.

I felt the fish scatter, their scales brushing  
my limbs, the confusion that followed.  
My breath caught hard in my chest  
thumped down by a bolt from the sky.

beside me slumped the *King Kamehameha*,  
her wooden sides split, her belly disemboweled,  
as water gushed into her body. Right then,  
Dad swam to the wreck, dragging her metal engine,  
Glistening hideously like intestines.

Why do I keep telling the story? Because  
the sound of the words leaving my tongue  
is just as real to me as the thunderclap feeling  
of a lightning bolt on salty wet skin.

## II. The Immigrant

“Last night, I have a dream.  
I swim one, two, three seas.  
It so easy, like birds. Like flight.”

Grandma can't swim. Her buoy of a body  
is landlocked for life. Her short shoulders  
span no shores. I used to think

Grandma was a mermaid. I saw her  
passport photo: long wavy hair made dips and swells,  
rippling around determined eyes. Once,

Grandma boarded a ship, chin raised.  
The ocean made an island out of Italy.  
For weeks, she saw its absence on the horizon.

“Yes, it just a dream,” she nods, returning  
to her knitting. But behind her seaglass blue eyes  
I can almost make out a fishtail.

### III. The Trinity

It was a miracle in a sprig of parsley. The herb  
passed through parched lips, tangy as grass, and as fresh.  
Your youthful mouth, made old by typhoid, swallowed water weakly.  
Your mother kept the pitcher beside the home's only featherbed.

Your mother tried to kill you once, you know. She made it  
no secret- she had seven daughters, and did not desire an eighth.  
She tried many things. They said if she ate raw eggs it would kill  
you- one yolk would push another out of the belly. But you lived,  
and you kept a baby chick, *Sioccono*, as a childhood pet.

That night you dreamt of a flowering tree, standing stark among the  
olive orchards in the rural landscape. You know this place well-  
when the Americans dropped their bombs, you were thrown  
straight out, legs sprawling under modest dress, apron almost  
empty of cherries. This time you know better than to climb.

You see *Zia Mela* there, from the afternoon. She had burst through the  
door, her apron full of herbs, her eyes wild and heavenward. "I have seen  
*il Santo dei Santi*." She tells of a farmer down the mountain who, as he  
emerged from his bomb shelter, saw the Father and Son in his parsley patch.  
Your mother had no medicine, for doctors were rare in wartime.

So she fed you the parsley, her unwanted baby girl. And the next morning,  
the fever was down. You snapped awake to blinding sunshine  
and the astonished faces of your mother and aunt.

## A Stroke of Good Fortune

It had been too warm a day  
for an elderly gas station attendant. He hadn't  
had the time to scream or fear, to wipe his brow.  
He just dropped dead, nozzle still in wrinkled hand.

Nobody came to bury the body. It lay  
in the morgue, cleaned of gasoline. They came  
to us, his landlords, and we buried him here. No  
one knew his last wishes.

When we tried the master key in his lock, we found  
treasures stacked from wall to wall. Just a small tunnel from kitchen  
to bedroom. Things carefully crammed in every cranny. The man had maps  
and toys, miscellaneous antiques, valuable and common  
goods. We began to sort piles: twenty milk bottles, thirteen miniature  
cars, tens and hundreds of watches made from plastic and gold.

We took what we wanted. Underground, the man would not miss  
His DVD collection, or cassette tape library. We took without reason.  
We didn't know what to do with the dragons. We picked the dagger  
shaped one, for variety. The other seventeen lay unused,  
between the five teddy bear mugs and the forty-six toothbrushes.

We found his diary underneath a pile of dolls. "*January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1986,*  
*Today I found a Porsche model car, and two candles at*  
*the flea market for a dime each. Pretty soon I'll be rich.*"  
We churned through his nest with more vigor after that, but  
somehow failed to find anything of real value.

We sold the rest at a yard sale. The furniture alone  
paid his debt to us. People marveled at the piles, the stack  
of antique maps of Europe, the dozen shaving kits.  
When it was over, we painted the walls, cleaned the carpet,  
and a young couple with cats moved in.