

PAINT BY NUMBERS

Malachi McIntosh

1. is for the red that makes the scene. The red of his cheeks and her cheeks as their mouths hang open and pant for breath. 1. for the tail lights in the landscape below them, the top deck of the bus humming on as a 1. sports car flashes past. And 1. is for her eyes and insides, twisting. 2. is for brown – everywhere over him: his shoes and scrunched socks and zipped-up jacket, and under the arcs of a few of his nails. He’s shaking, softly, his hair all 3., grey, like the spaces on her face that aren’t flushed 4., pink, or fighting with make-up swipes of 5. A patina of 3. under her eyes makes her face, drains away from all the other colours above the tight line of her clenched 1. mouth. They carry shopping bags, 6. plastic crumpled at their feet as they pant and pant to chase their own breath, his body slumped, still shaking with an endless tremor, while she sits straight and looks both at him and past him and fights her own breath. ‘He almost drove right off,’ she’s said. ‘Well, I was running,’ he’s said. ‘And I looked back and I couldn’t even see you.’ His skin, unlike hers, is more 7. than 5. because he’s older, the tremor in him settled now but still there, quaking away. ‘Me in my shape running for a bus.’ ‘And I looked back and I couldn’t even see you.’ His eyes now are too small to paint, while hers are wide, with no colour you can find to match. There’s a hand of hers that’s held away from him, tight and hard against the 1. word he’s just said, a syllable gone too quick to fill in. Everything below her face is shining colour: an 8. coat, 9. shirt, two earrings a bright pure 10. and a 10. band on a hidden hand turning 3., but he doesn’t see any of it. He stares instead out of the

bus window and she looks ahead, at you. 'And me in my shape,'
he's said. 'And all this traffic.'

CHORES

Jeff Nazzaro

Susan returned home from work with groceries one evening to find her husband on the sofa, half a bottle of Scotch he'd always said was out of his price range on the coffee table next to a book she thought he'd finished months before, and no glass. On his lap was a handgun she'd never seen; on the curtains were his brains.

She walked slowly towards the mess, face contorting, but when she saw the cat perched on an arm of the sofa, intently lapping at a knot of tissue, she screamed and swung the grocery bag, one of the reusable nylon bags her husband had implored her to use. In her adrenaline-charged shock of horror and disbelief, she swung too hard and the wine bottle inside the bag struck square in the head and killed the cat.

On the counter in the kitchen, under an empty cat-food can, beside the sink full of dirty dishes, was a note scribbled in pencil on a sheet of college ruled paper that read: 'Sorry about the mess. Took out the garbage and fed the cat.'

Naturally, everyone assured her that the suicide wasn't her fault. And after she assured them that she was okay, they all said the same thing, something like: 'He didn't have to kill the cat.'