

it until it either died or became permanently eligible for special services. I, in turn, would have become eligible to have my deer-in-the-headlights mug shot appear in the police blotter of the local paper. Another stupid redneck bastard gets his. Or, if you prefer, another shaken, stunned, and stunted baby boy comes of age in the richest nation in the world.

I do not have to wonder if any of my students are thinking these same thoughts. I do not have to wonder because, when I step back into the classroom, I tell them exactly what I think.

Usually I was not so moralistic, believing as I still do that it was my duty to teach the curriculum and not to pontificate, to inspire debates, not to weigh in with verdicts. I did on one or two occasions tell my students they were living in a society that valued people of their age, region, and class primarily as cannon fodder, cheap labor, and gullible consumers, and that education could give them some of the weapons necessary to fight back. That I did say. I wish, though, that I had had a simple refrain, some terse slogan I could have repeated day after day, like the Roman senator Cato, who is supposed to have ended every speech by saying, "Carthage must be destroyed."

In fact, Cato's refrain would have done nicely. As it happens, the people of Carthage worshiped the same god their Phoenician ancestors had, a god they called Moloch. When the Romans eventually took Cato's advice, they found within the walls of the doomed city a multitude of clay urns containing the tiny charred bones of children. The Romans worshiped their own version of Moloch, needless to say, as do we if our poets are to be believed. "Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks!" A man named Allen Ginsberg wrote those lines decades before you were born, when your English teacher was a mere three years old. You see, my loves, I am still talking to you in my head, and though I rather hope you're reading something else these days, reading anything actually, here is what I wish I'd said before I said goodbye: *Carthage must be destroyed*—and you, for your part, must learn everything you can about Carthage.

DAVID J. LAWLESS

My Father/My Husband

FROM *Prism*

HE IS PREPARING the evening meal. Fried pork chops, rice, carrots from the garden, and a salad. A couple of rolls from the supermarket.

"Is my father coming for dinner?" she asks.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because your father died forty-six years ago." He has given this answer several times a day for the past two or three years. He can't remember exactly how many times today, but he knows it is becoming more frequent.

"I know. I don't mean that father. I mean my other father."

"You, like anyone else, can have only one father. Your father died." He always answers her questions quietly.

"I mean my father-in-law."

"Your father-in-law is my father, and he died twenty-three years ago."

"Don't be stupid!" she says. "I mean the man who runs this house. That's my father! Where is he?"

"I run this house and I am not your father. I am your husband," he says calmly.

"My husband! You fool! I don't have a husband."

"I am your husband. You are my wife," he continues without looking up from the cooking. "We've been married for more than fifty years."

"Ha! You wish! I've never been married. And I certainly wouldn't

marry an old man like you. Look at you. Gray hair. Big belly. Who would marry you?"

"Come and sit down and have something to eat," he says.

"I'm not going to eat with you. You pig!"

"Then I'll bring it over to you and you can eat while you watch TV."

"I'm not going to eat this garbage!"

"Then at least take your pills. I'll bring a glass of water. You can eat later or I'll save the supper till morning."

"I've already had my pills. You're trying to poison me. Do you know how many pills I've taken today?"

"Yes. And you have to take these and a couple more before you go to bed."

She requires medication on a regular daily schedule for a number of disabilities.

She accepts them, under protest.

"Come up to bed," she calls from the top of the stairs.

"No. It's too early for me," he calls back. "It's only ten after eight. You go to bed. I'll catch up with you later." He continues to read news and articles on the Internet.

A few minutes later she comes out again. "I can't sleep by myself. I need you with me. I can't sleep alone. Come up."

"No. Not yet. Try to go to sleep. I'll come up in a while."

"I can't sleep."

"Then just rest."

Ten minutes pass.

Zzzzz. The sound of the chair lift coming downstairs.

She comes into his den. "Come up to bed."

"Not yet. It's too early."

She sits next to him, holding his arm with both hands and leaning on his shoulder. "What are you watching on the TV?"

"This is not TV. I'm reading things. Here, I'll get you ABC España."

He clicks on ABC and a headline comes up about Zapatero. He scrolls down to an article about Princess Letizia, which she reads. Then to some photos about the Duquesa de Alba, whom she despises.

"Let's go up to bed," she says. "I'm very tired."

"Not yet. It's early. I want to watch the news. Here. It's time to take the nitro patch off your shoulder."

"I already took it off."

"When?"

"Before supper."

"It's not supposed to come off till eight o'clock. It's supposed to be on for twelve hours. From eight in the morning till eight at night. It controls your irregular heartbeat."

"It was itchy," she says.

She clings to him throughout the night. Her fingers and feet are always cold. It is the effect of metoprolol, a medication she takes for heart failure that draws the blood from her extremities. He is always warm, sometimes sweaty. They have to arrange the bedclothes to suit each of them, and he has to leave his feet sticking out because of the heavy blankets and duvet.

She wakes him at four thirty in the morning.

"Are we in Spain?"

"No. Canada," he says.

"Is this Madrid?"

"No, Calgary. Go to sleep."

"Why are we in Calgary?"

"Because we live here."

"Why?"

"Because I came here for a job."

"Are we going to stay here?"

"Yes. Go to sleep."

"Why don't we live in Spain?"

"We have pensions here. We have medical insurance here. Because taxes are lower here. Because our children live here. Because we have a house here. Now go to sleep."

"Is this our house?"

"Yes. We own it. We had it built for us thirteen years ago."

"I don't remember. Are we married?"

"Yes. We married over fifty years ago. Now go to sleep."

"I don't remember. Where did we marry?"

"In Victoria."

"Why in Victoria? Why not in Madrid?"

"Because in those days we couldn't afford to travel to Madrid"

from Vancouver to marry in your parish church, so we went to Victoria to marry in my parish church. Do you remember?"

"Sort of."

Pause.

"Do we have children?"

"Yes. Six children."

"Six! That's a lot. What are their names?"

He lists their names and the cities in which they live, their wives and husbands and children. It is almost a nightly ritual, a middle-of-the-night ritual. "Now go to sleep."

She pulls close to him in the bed and holds him tight.

He makes her a cup of coffee in the morning, passes her the morning newspaper, gives her an iron pill, and puts the nitro patch onto her shoulder.

"Can you give me the telephone number of my father? I can't find my telephone book."

He has hidden all telephone directories and phone lists because she has phoned so many people, numbers, and directories all over the world in the past year or so, asking for the telephone number of her father. It became too expensive and her sisters in Spain grew exasperated at receiving phone calls in the middle of the night.

"No. I can't. Your father died forty-five years ago."

"Then give me the number of the store. I'll phone the store."

"There is no store. Your father sold the store before he died."

"He died?"

"Yes. In 1964. Do you remember? You went to visit him in Madrid a few months before he died. He had this growth on his neck, remember?" He draws a line down the side of his neck. "It was cancer. He died a few months later."

"Yes, I remember. My poor father! Who looks after the store?"

"Your father sold the store before he died."

"Who has the store now?"

"I don't know."

"I have to go there. I have to open the store."

"No. There is no store. We live in Canada. There is no store in Madrid."

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She goes to the front door, opens it and looks out, then comes to the kitchen, where he is preparing the evening meal. This is another ritual. She goes to open the front door several times a day to check whether her father or husband is coming.

"Is my father coming for dinner?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because your father died in 1964."

"I know that. I meant my father-in-law."

"Your father-in-law was my father. He died in 1985."

"No. No. I meant my other father."

"A person can have only one father. Your father was Emilio. My father was John. They both died a long time ago." He has made this statement so many times over the past few years that the entire dialogue has become automatic and predictable.

"I know that. I mean the man who looks after this house."

"I am the man who looks after this house. I am your husband."

"My husband? You wish! I never married you!"

"Yes you did. We married more than fifty years ago."

"I never married anyone."

He goes to the mantel and takes down a silver-framed photo from their wedding. "Here. This is a photo of our wedding. Here we are. Just married. Do you remember?"

"That's not you. That's my husband. Give it to me! Don't touch it!" She snatches it from him.

He points to the photo. "That's you . . . with me . . . in the church . . . in 1958."

"That's not you, fool! That's my husband."

"Well, I must admit that I've changed over the past fifty years. But that's me."

"That's my husband. Wait till he comes home. He'll throw you out."

He is making her a cup of Nescafé as she settles into the sofa early in the morning to watch TV.

"Where is your husband?" she asks.

"I don't have a husband," he says. This is fairly routine in the morning. "Men don't have husbands. Men have wives. You are my wife."

"Don't be stupid! Where is your husband? Did he go to open the store?"

"There is no store."

"Don't be stupid, I said. Did my father go to open the store?"

"There is no store. Your father sold the store before he died. Many years ago."

"My father died?"

"More than forty-five years ago."

"He died?" she says. "Why didn't anyone tell me?" She begins to weep.

"You told me. It was a long time ago."

"I don't remember."

He hugs her. "I'm sorry. It was a long time ago."

"I don't remember. I don't know what's wrong. I don't remember things." A tear runs down her cheek. She clings to him.

"I know. Don't worry."

"I'm losing my memory."

"Don't worry." He gives her a kiss.

He wakes in the middle of the night. A few years ago he put in a night-light so that she could get up to go to the toilet without having to stumble or run into things. The bed moves and he can feel her sitting up. He can see the shadows cast on the wall by the night-light. She comes around to his side of the bed. She runs her hand gently around his head and face.

"Who are you?" she asks.

"Your husband."

"You're not my husband. Are you my father?"

"No. Your husband."

"You're not my husband. I don't have a husband. What are you doing in my bed?"

"This is my bed. Our bed," he says. "Come back to bed. Come back to sleep."

She turns on the main lights, picks up her walking cane, and starts to beat him.

"Get out! Get out of here!"

"Stop that! Stop it!" He wrenches the cane from her hands. "Now just settle down and come back to bed."

She leaves the room.

Zzzzz. He hears the chair lift going downstairs.

She'll settle down in a while and come back to bed in an hour or so, he thinks. She usually does. He drifts off to a fitful sleep.

"Excuse me, sir."

He wakes up. There is a police officer standing over his bed. Then he sits up, startled.

"What is it? What happened?"

"We had a call about an intruder."

"What?" He rubs his eyes. "An intruder? My wife called?"

"Yes, sir. She says you are an intruder."

"Aaaagh!" He gets out of bed and puts on his slippers. "I'm sorry. My wife is sick. She has Alzheimer's and dementia. She gets over it in a few hours. I have medication for her but it is impossible to give it to her when she is like this. Maybe I can get you to give it to her. She won't take it from me when she's in this state."

"Sorry, sir, we can't do that. I'm going to have to ask you for identification."

"Okay, okay, okay. Let's go downstairs. It's in my office."

They pass the living room where his wife is sitting and talking with the second police officer.

"Are you all right?" he asks her as they look up.

"Yes," she says. "I phoned them to come." She had phoned the operator, who had put her through to 911.

"Come with me," he says to the first officer, leading him to his den. "Please come inside. I want to close the door."

The officer hesitates.

"I have to close the door. I can't let her see where I conceal the papers."

Reluctantly, the officer enters and allows the door to be closed.

"Now, what papers would you like to see? I have to keep them under lock and key or she will take them, hide them, destroy them. I keep everything locked up. My wallet, my money, my glasses, my watch, my driver's license, passports, marriage certificate, birth certificates, the whole works. What would you like to see?"

"Passports would be fine."

He takes the key from its secret place, opens the filing cabinet, and produces the passports.

The officer takes the passports to the living room.

"Is this you?" he asks.

She looks closely. "Yes."

"Is this your husband?"

She looks closely again, hesitates, and eventually answers, "Yes."

"Good," her husband says. "Now can we finally get to bed and let these people go back to their work?"

"I'm sorry," she says, tears forming in her eyes.

He leans over to kiss her and she clings to him.

He returns from his daily five-kilometer walk, sweating slightly, and takes off his shoes.

She comes into the hallway. "Did she leave?"

"Did who leave?" he asks.

"That woman. That fat, ugly woman."

"There was no one in the house today other than you and I."

"There was a woman. She was here this morning."

"No woman. No one. No one has been here. Just you and I."

"She came in while you were out for your walk. She said she was the cleaning woman. She said you hired her. You asked her to come. She had the key."

"No. No cleaning woman. No one was in the house."

"I told her to leave. She went upstairs. My pearls are missing. I can't find them anywhere. She went into the kitchen and made a sandwich and a cup of tea. I told her to get out. I told her I would call the police."

"I think it was a dream."

"No. She was here. She was impertinent. Where are my pearls? I think she took one of my handbags."

"I'll look for your pearls and your handbag," he says. He has been through this little scenario before in a number of variations.

"She took them! That bitch!"

"Don't worry. I'll find them. I'll get them back."

"You can't go out like that and leave me alone."

"I was gone less than an hour and you were lying down when I went out."

"You can't leave me alone."

A search turns up the missing handbag. The pearls are inside, wrapped in Kleenex.

*

"Are we in Madrid?"

It is four thirteen in the morning, according to his bedside clock.

"No. This is Calgary. In Canada."

"Why are my paintings on the wall? This is Madrid. I bought these paintings in Madrid."

"This is Calgary. Those are prints you and I bought at the Prado. We had them framed and brought them to Canada."

"I bought this furniture in Madrid."

"No. We bought it at Thomasville when we came to Calgary in 1996."

"I bought this chandelier on the Gran Via. It was a good price."

In fact, he had bought it at an antique auction in Winnipeg in 1968.

"Okay. Go to sleep now."

"This is my mirror. These are my paintings. This is my chandelier. This is my chair. This is my lamp. I bought them in Madrid."

"Okay. Let's go to sleep." It is all nonsense, of course. She often inventories the furniture, the china, the silver, and other household items, claiming that they are hers and stating that she bought them in Madrid. Most of it they bought in Canada, but he wants to go to sleep.

"I need to go to my sister's house in the morning. You can drive me, can't you?"

"No. I can't. Sorry. Tere lives in Madrid. We live in Calgary."

"I'll take a taxi. You have to give me the money. I don't have any money."

"You can't take a taxi to Madrid. It's thousands of miles away and across the ocean."

"Where are we now?"

"In Calgary. In Canada."

"Why are we here?"

"We live here."

"Why?"

"Because I came here for a job."

"Are we going to stay here?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"For the rest."

"Why don't we go to Madrid?"

"We have a house here. We don't have a house in Madrid. We would have to sell our house here and all our furniture and buy a house and furniture in Madrid. It would cost us a fortune."

"We could live with my parents. They have a big house on Claudio Coello in the Barrio de Salamanca."

"Your parents died many years ago. They left the house on Claudio Coello in 1959, soon after we were married. Go back to sleep."

She remains sitting up for a long time staring into the shadows at the wall hangings and the chandelier.

It is five o'clock in the evening. She is watching TV in the family room.

"Here are your pills for your heart and your blood. And here is a glass of water."

"I've already taken them," she says.

"No. Not these ones. You have to take them at five o'clock."

"Who says so? You are not my doctor."

"All your doctors say that you have to take them."

"I've taken enough pills today. I'm not going to take any more."

"Sorry. You have to."

She takes them reluctantly.

Later she goes to open the front door and looks out for a few minutes, leaning on her cane, then comes to the kitchen, where he is preparing the evening meal.

"Is my father coming for dinner?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because your father died many years ago."

"What? My father was here this morning. What are you talking about? You fool!"

"Sorry. Your father died."

"He died? My father died?" She breaks into tears. "Why didn't anyone tell me? I loved him. He was such a wonderful man. So clever. So educated. He had a doctorate. He taught at the university."

He feels humbled and honored. He knows she is talking of him. Her father had never gone to university. He holds her gently.

"Where is my mother?"

"Your mother died a long time ago."

"You mean both my parents are dead?"

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"Then who are you?"

"I'm your husband."

"My husband? I never had a husband! I was never married. Who are you? What are you doing in my house?"

"Like it or not, I've been your husband and you've been my wife for more than fifty years."

"You fool! I've never been married. Never."

"Come to bed," she calls from upstairs.

"No. It's too early for me. It's only twenty past seven. Go to sleep. I'll catch up with you later."

Zzzzz. She comes down on the chair lift.

"Come up to bed. I don't like to be alone."

"It's too early. Then you'll wake me up at four thirty in the morning and ask all kinds of questions."

"Come up. I've made the bed. You can sleep with me in the big bed."

"I sleep with you in that bed every night. We've slept together in the same bed for more than fifty years."

"Really? In the same bed? That's not possible."

"Yes it is. We've been married for more than fifty years, and other than a few business trips and visits to your family, we've slept together every night."

"Are you my husband?" She sits beside him.

"I certainly am. Are you my wife?" He asks playfully.

"I don't know. Are we married?" She folds her hands around his arm and smiles.

"Yes, we are. For a long time."

"Do we have children?"

"Yes. Six."

"I don't remember. Tell me." She puts her head on his shoulder and closes her eyes.

He rhymes off the names, cities of residence, spouses, and grandchildren's names.

"Yes. Now I remember."

They go up to bed. He gives her her nighttime pills.

At 3:30 A.M. he hears her get up to go to the toilet. She comes back in the semidarkness and runs her hand across his face.

"Are you my father?" she asks.

"No. Your husband."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Come back to bed."

"I thought you were my father."

"You don't sleep with your father. You sleep with your husband. Come back to bed."

She crawls into the bed and clings to him. "I'm losing my memory."

"I know. That's all right."

"Don't leave me. Don't ever leave me."

"I won't."

"Promise?"

"Promise. Now go to sleep."

She pulls as close as she can and kisses him.

He is in the home office, his den, when she comes in from the family room.

"What are you doing here?" she asks.

"Checking a few things on the Net."

"This is my father's office. You have no right to be here."

"This is my office."

"You liar! This is my father's TV."

"This is not a TV. This is a computer screen."

"My father bought this."

"Computers like this didn't exist when your father died."

"I bought this table for my father." She is talking loudly and aggressively.

"You and I bought this table in Madrid fifteen years after your father died, and we brought it to Canada," he says.

"I bought this chair for my father."

"You bought this chair for me, for Christmas, two years ago."

"These are my paintings. I bought them in Madrid," she insists.

"Your sister bought them for us as a gift when we were in Madrid in 1971."

"This is my bookcase. I bought it for my father."

"We bought it at an auction in Winnipeg, long after your father died."

"You liar! This is my cabinet."

"This was our daughter's cabinet. She left it with us when she moved to Ontario."

"You lie! You lie! Why are you wearing my father's slippers? That is my father's shirt! I bought it for him. You have no right to wear it. What do you think you are doing here? Get out of my house!"

She storms out of the room and returns quickly holding a framed photo of him sitting beside Mother Teresa. "This is my father!" she proclaims triumphantly.

"That's a photo of me. Your father was never in Calcutta. He never met Mother Teresa."

"You're a liar!"

He remains silent as she continues the outburst. Eventually she goes to the family room to pick up the phone. She forgets what she was going to do or say, puts down the phone, and turns on the TV.

They lay in bed for an afternoon nap.

"My hands are very cold," she says.

"It's the medication. Bring them here. Put them under my shirt. Under my arms."

He unbuttons his shirt and brings her hands in. Her fingers are yellow and her hands are like ice. It takes a few minutes before they come back to normal.

She has congestive heart failure and takes a large number of medications to control it.

"Don't ever leave me," she says.

"I won't."

"Did we ever marry?"

"More than fifty years ago."

"I don't remember. Do we have children?"

"Yes. Six."

"Tell me their names."

He rhymes off their names, their spouses, their cities of residence, the names of the grandchildren.

He prepares a coffee for her in the morning and sets out her medication.

"Where is my father? Did he go to open the store?"

"Your father died forty-five years ago. He sold the store before he died. There is no store."

"He died?"

"Yes. You remember the growth he had on his neck? It was cancerous."

"My poor father! I loved him. He was a beautiful man. Very educated. He was the president of a university. He was very intelligent."

He feels humbled.

"Is my mother coming?"

"No. Your mother died in 1986. In La Granja. Heart."

"Oh, yes. I remember. She had a bad heart. Then I am an orphan."

"Yes. Sorry about that. So am I."

"Your father and mother died?"

"Yes."

"Were they very old?"

"Ninety-four and ninety-three."

"Where is my husband?"

"I am your husband. Here, give me a kiss."

"You are not my husband. I never had a husband."

"Yes, I am." He taps his cheek and leans toward her.

She kisses his cheek and they both smile.

-self & wife in
300 years.

-Rep.
(Narrator)

ALAN LIGHTMAN

The Accidental Universe

FROM *Harper's Magazine*

IN THE FIFTH CENTURY B.C.E., the philosopher Democritus proposed that all matter was made of tiny and indivisible atoms, which came in various sizes and textures—some hard and some soft, some smooth and some thorny. The atoms themselves were taken as givens. In the nineteenth century, scientists discovered that the chemical properties of atoms repeat periodically (and created the periodic table to reflect this fact), but the origins of such patterns remained mysterious. It wasn't until the twentieth century that scientists learned that the properties of an atom are determined by the number and placement of its electrons, the subatomic particles that orbit its nucleus. And we now know that all atoms heavier than helium were created in the nuclear furnaces of stars.

The history of science can be viewed as the recasting of phenomena that were once thought to be accidents as phenomena that can be understood in terms of fundamental causes and principles. One can add to the list of the fully explained: the hue of the sky, the orbits of planets, the angle of the wake of a boat moving through a lake, the six-sided patterns of snowflakes, the weight of a flying bustard, the temperature of boiling water, the size of raindrops, the circular shape of the sun. All these phenomena and many more, once thought to have been fixed at the beginning of time or to be the result of random events thereafter, have been explained as *necessary* consequences of the fundamental laws of nature—laws discovered by human beings.

This long and appealing trend may be coming to an end. Dra-

DAVID J. LAWLESS is president emeritus of St. Mary's University College in Calgary, Alberta. He was its founding president after retiring as president of St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. He also served as vice president (academic) of the University of Manitoba. He met his wife, Maria-Pilar Ruiz, who was from Madrid, Spain, while he was a graduate student at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. They were married for more than fifty years and had six children. Maria-Pilar died suddenly in 2010 after a lengthy illness. Dr. Lawless is the author of textbooks and research papers in psychology. This is his first published work outside his professional field. He was born in Victoria, British Columbia, a long time ago. He now lives in Calgary and is an avid vegetable gardener.

ALAN LIGHTMAN is a novelist, essayist, and physicist, with a PhD in theoretical physics. He has served on the faculties of Harvard University and MIT and was the first person to receive dual faculty appointments at MIT in science and in the humanities. His essays and articles have appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, the *Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *Granta*, and other publications. Lightman's *Einstein's Dreams* was an international bestseller and has been translated into thirty languages. His novel *The Diagnosis* was a finalist for the National Book Award for Fiction. His latest book is *Mr g*, a novel about the Creation as told by God.

SANDRA TSING LOH is a contributing editor at the *Atlantic*, a frequent commentator on public radio, and a monologist who has performed several solo shows off-Broadway. Her books include *Depth Takes a Holiday*, *A Year in Van Nuys*, *Aliens in America*, and *Mother on Fire*. Her next book, tentatively titled *The Bitch Is Back (or Menopalooza)*, inspired by this essay, is scheduled to be published next year.

KEN MURRAY was a family doctor and clinical assistant professor of family medicine in Los Angeles until his retirement in 2006. He is a regular contributor to *Zocalo Public Square* and was adviser to "Weekly Briefings from the *New England Journal of Medicine*." He was a contributor to the seminal book *How to Report Statistics in Medicine* by Thomas Lang and Michelle Secic. His volunteer activities in water quality led to his sharing in the 2011 U.S. Water Prize.

FRANCINE PROSE is the author of more than twenty books. Her most recent is a novel, *My New American Life*. She is a distinguished visiting writer at Bard College, a contributing editor at *Harper's Magazine*, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

RICHARD SENNETT teaches at New York University and at the London School of Economics. His most recent book is *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Co-operation* (2012).

LAUREN SLATER is the author of *Opening Skinner's Box: Great Psychological Experiments of the Twentieth Century*, *Prozac Diary*, *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*, and several other books of fiction and nonfiction. She publishes regularly in *Elle*, *More*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and *O Magazine*. Her most current book is *The \$60,000 Dog: My Life with Animals*, to be published in November 2012. This is Slater's fourth appearance in *The Best American Essays*, and she served as its guest editor in 2006. Slater lives with her family on Sitting Rock Farm in Harvard, Massachusetts.

JOSE ANTONIO VARGAS, a multimedia storyteller, is the founder of Define American, a media campaign that seeks to elevate the immigration conversation. He has written for *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *Atlantic* and covered technology, culture, HIV/AIDS, and the 2008 presidential campaign for the *Washington Post*, where he shared a Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Virginia Tech massacre. He's working on a memoir inspired by his essay "Outlaw."

WESLEY YANG is a contributing editor at *New York*. His writing has also been published in the *New York Times*, *n+1*, *Bookforum*, and *Tablet Magazine*, among others, and he has won a National Magazine Award. He lives in New York and is working on his first book.