

## THE ANKLES

Touch your leg: find your ankle. You push against the firmness of the fibula, the tibia, the anterior crest, the medial or lateral malleolus. You squeeze the extensor hallucis, the extensor digitorum longus, the peroneus brevis. The bony lumps? On the inside, the distal knot of the tibia. On the outside, of the fibula. But the ankle? It has always been our weak point. Not exactly flesh and bone. It does not bear the weight of the spirit either, as the ancients found when their idols collapsed at the point where the gold bodies met the feet of clay. Remembering Achilles, Roman soldiers realized courage could not win everything, and gambled with the ankle bones of horses. But luck depends on a convergence of outer circumstance and inner readiness. You still have to stand on your own feet, make your own way. With each step, one leg swings out while the other tries to balance the body's weight, which starts to plummet forward as the stepping leg nears the end of its arc. No matter how precise your math, the random still confronts you. Rocks shrug off feet. Holes hide under curving grass. The ankles flex, pivot. Each day rolls one sun, each night one moon. Your calf muscles begin to ache. Your breathing becomes ragged. You slide on a muddy ledge, brace yourself just in time. If you're still standing at the end of your journey, consider the workings of fate and chance, then give thanks to where it is due.

## ORIGINS

### Bobby Pin

Though quickly adapted to the practicalities of wig fashion, the first short, u-shaped metal hairpin was a present from a court wit to Marie Antoinette, who was heard to complain that she missed the singing of crickets in winter. By placing the pin in her hair near her ear and rubbing the two metal legs together, Antoinette could produce the rusty squeak that pleased her so.

### Suntan Lotion

Noticing the dilated pupils and beads of sweat as excited courtesans watched a rug, an hourglass, and a grape turn to gold, King Midas's jealous brother worked to perfect a sweet-smelling unguent that would temporarily lend his skin a deep golden hue.

## Eyeglasses (Dark Lenses, Western Culture)

Afraid of falling into priestly arrogance, Pope Julius II had his eyeglasses tinted black as a reminder that all on Earth see as through a glass darkly.

## Hearing Aid

The world owes the modern hearing aid, which fits neatly into the ear, to Dr. Luis de Cordoba, a Chilean specialist, who was suddenly inspired by the sight of his six-year-old son holding a seashell to his ear in the family's Santiago apartment and claiming that the Pacific was particularly loud that day.

— Mark Cunningham

Opelika AL

PROSE POEM, JUNE 22, 1994, 4:53 PM, ROOSEVELT AVE.,  
CITYBOUND F TRAIN

across the tracks, waiting for the outbound train, a woman, 30 or 35, dark hair, dark glasses, beige colored net shirt, staring into the window before me, eating a green apple. I stare back, she stares into my eyes. she looks away, turning her head to the far wall, twists her body, pivoting on hips, shifting feet, arching her back so her breasts stand straight out, highlighted, turns so that her right breast, small, braless, is pushed forward, isolated, as if staring at me, as if she were naked there, offering. she moves her legs apart, moves her hips, rotating. as my train starts to move, she turns back, grins with her lips tight, seeming to ask how I liked it. I smile with lips closed, nod my head slowly. she pushes her tongue out and licks her lips.

## THE THEORY OF TRANSPORTATION

statement of the problem

the problem has always been found in the question of  
how to get from here to there.

schematic

you are here at the start. mark this spot and note  
well. in the future, you intend to be at some other  
spot off in the distance.