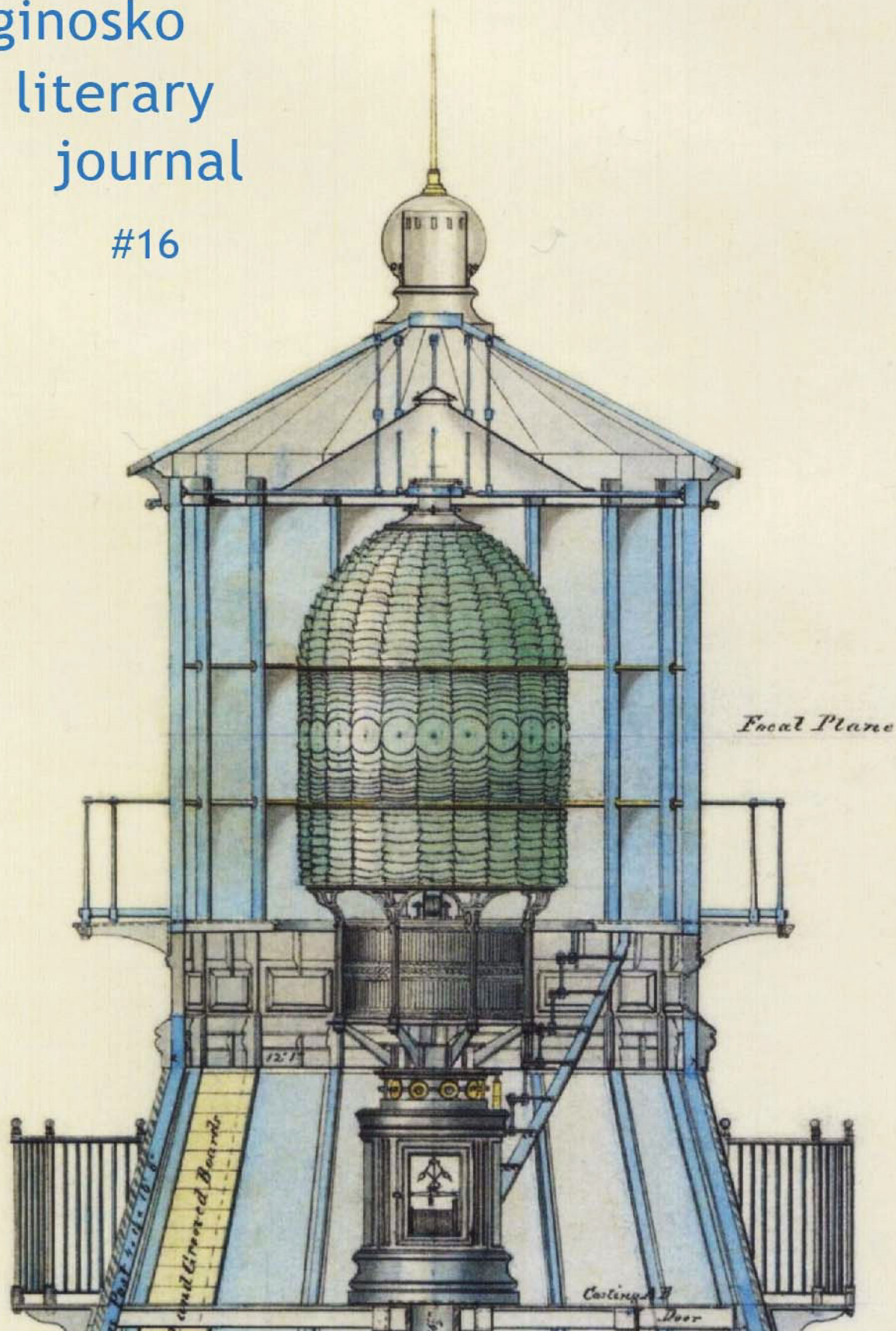


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Ginosko (ghin-océ-koe)

A Greek word meaning to perceive, understand, realize, come to know;  
knowledge that has an inception, a progress, an attainment.

The recognition of truth from experience.

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## **C O N T R I B U T O R S**

In the beginning there's something very nebulous,  
a state of alert, a wariness, a curiosity.  
Something I perceive in the fog and vagueness which arouses  
my interest, curiosity, and excitement  
and then translates itself into work...  
The "illumination" only occurs during the work. ...  
capable of bringing about revelation, solution, and light.  
...it becomes so alive, so important that  
everything I experience exists only in relation to what I'm writing.  
Everything I hear, see, read, seems in one way or another to help my work.  
I become a cannibal of reality.

— Mario Vargas Llosa

## Falling Among Stars

S Weasel

there's an apology sitting along the steps of my spine.  
it's words make their home in my veins, sprouting  
roots to paper in hopes that it will one day mingle  
with your blood; that it will one day light itself on fire  
to stimulate the poetry that's been lost  
between the silos of your ribcage.

you dripped morphine into your flesh. you told  
me it kept you alive; that it kept the sun  
from burning your skin. i watched as the roadmaps  
in your eyes slowly diminished. vagabond roads  
turned to shattered alleyways in the rain;  
fears subsided into the abyss with each  
muzzling  
shot.

you stared at the moon, asked me about the  
waters along her surface. the stars were sprawled  
among the background. i told you they were  
simply her oceans escaping the craters that lay naked above us.

how i wish i could squeeze the venom from your body,  
hang you along the clothesline and watch  
you come back anew. but i am merely human.  
i could only wrap myself around you like weeds  
in hopes that you were sober enough from  
following the ghosts in the skies. you were  
already there, lingering like cigarette smoke,  
drifting  
with the  
clouds.

## **STRANGE DAYS**

**Elaine Rosenberg Miller**

The man sat in the bed of a pick-up truck, facing her.

They were stopped at a traffic light.

The hot late afternoon sun beat on her windshield, creating oscillating waves that distorted her vision.

Her children played in the rear seats, strapped in for safety, bickering, arguing, demanding.

The man stared right back at her.

His graying hair hung loosely to his shoulders, framing his classic features.

He had a noble head, similar to the statue of Augustus in the Metropolitan Museum up north.

Yet, here he was in south Florida on a street named Okeechobee Boulevard, riding in the back of a truck.

With a start she realized that he resembled a late popular singer who had died at age twenty-six. He had been found dead of a heart attack in his Parisian bathtub. Or had he? Theories abounded. They said that he had tired of the music business, wanted to disappear and staged his death. His coffin had been sealed, it was reported. Only two people had actually seen the body, one his common-law wife, who allegedly died just a few years later. Had she dissembled to join him in exile?

When she had been younger, his songs, lyrics had been provocative, his looks leonine. To her, all other men measured against him, failed.

Today, as she did every day, five days a week, she drove to two different schools and delivered her children, worked an eight hour day, then retrieved them. This day, she had decided to go to the market. They were out of peanut butter.

Is it possible? she thought. How? What would he be doing in West Palm Beach?

If he goes through that light, I'll never see him again, she concluded.

Where could he be living? He had been born in Florida, hadn't he? She had read it in an article. He might know his way around. He could hide. Why hadn't anyone else recognized him?

She remembered the youth, her youth, wearing an appliquéd tee shirt. A slash of satin fabric. Lighting Lady, she had named herself. She danced, her body flowing with the

music. Understanding for the first time, the power of hypnotic attraction.

“Maa! He hit me!”

“Don’t hit your sister,” she mumbled.

Had he crooked his head? Had he acknowledged her? How long was this traffic light?  
His smile was ironic.

“It’s him!” she swore to herself.

He has gone from being the idol of millions to having no car and hiding in the  
Everglades.

He’s so beautiful, she mused.

Why is such an attractive man riding in a pick-up truck?

She disliked the south. Its small mindedness. The drawling speech. Its violent history.  
Yet, she had followed her husband back to his childhood home and stayed.

She had been an urban person, loving the fast moving street life of the north.

Okeechobee.

It sounded like a fungus.

She had told him that she would try it for six months.

That had been several years ago.

Everything had changed.

She was resigned.

That night, years ago, as she danced on the stage, having been pulled up from the  
audience, she felt her slender body on fire. The spotlights shown on her as well as the  
performers.

“I want a lollipop!” her son demanded.

Wordlessly, she handed him candy.

“Not that, a lollipop!”

“Me, too!” the other child said.

She handed them what they wanted.

Don’t go, she pleaded as the light changed and slowly, then with increasing speed, the

truck moved forward into the intersection.

She followed it.

He smiled, bemusedly.

“I want pisgetti for dinner!” her daughter said.

The truck roared on.

Her eyes peered at his retreating visage.

“That’s spaghetti,” she sighed. “Say spaghetti, sweetie.”

“Pis-ghetti.”

He was a cipher in the distance.

**by Andrea Moorhead**

## **Return to Former Preoccupations**

Images superimposed as the mind wanders, cut off from circulating by a steady stream of filters, a new slant running down the face, moving the order from eye to hand, collapsing the field of vision, and the images float without consequence, streaming, bleeding, flitting around a convex surface that we are unable to detect. Photo elements seed rapidly, turn over the earth, soil sprinkled on eyes and hands, teeth glow in the dark while we're working, and the harvest dim and the harvest far away now, images superimposed as the mind wanders, cut off and starved for affection, crossing the stream quickly, turning down against the caves for fear of darkness, fear of bats descending, an entire gallery of characters left over from childhood, maybe even hiding under the bed still, under the still shaking bed where leaves float and trees root, somewhere out beyond the yard, in a concave space no one can retrace, images float while hands flutter and weeds pulled begin to reseed the stark and open, plain and dazzled space within.

## **Other Spaces**

A sudden drop in pressure, but everyone unaware of the space recreated, the distance perturbed, the muscles wrenched, a sudden drop in pressure isn't necessarily fatal, a blue-green glowing along the nerves forestalls any rectification, the closing soft and sudden, but the body has absorbed sleep again, turning the patterns over and over and the colors bleeding through, apparent to the eyes watching and the eyes wondering that this is only a momentary pause, a quick and inevitable alienation from the source.

## **Temples with no altars**

If I knew the woods were not  
whole or indifferent  
catching sun or stone  
the thickness of rapport tumbling and the slopes are grit grain-edged  
and free of any  
perturbation from sound or gasoline  
the axe long forgotten  
and the heavy thump  
of the blunt worn blade  
and if I knew the woods  
and not whole or indifferently  
sited to the side of the body swelling  
light or the fast percussive nature  
of wind rain  
and the last clearing had a band of  
and delicate flowers remains  
firmly anchored as a sea-swept wrack  
lodged in memory's cells.

## **Under the Riots**

cracks along the jaw line  
the breast bone  
the cranium  
the tibia  
the smooth undersurface of light  
is stretched too thin  
there are pinpricks of darkness  
where the snow dissolves thought  
and the cantilevered brain  
swings into the fire  
beaten ash becomes  
and the blame circulates  
slow to ignite  
skin is sacred cloth  
and the sacrifices multiple  
moving the altar out into the streets  
the silence into the dark crimson bay.

## **Fires along the Heart**

burning grass is no sanctuary nor the thick green leaves left when the sun spins out of control and snowing something akin to cradle light and bamboo stalks ink flows backwards in dream and burning grass has no memory, no kind of history, the same blunt ended brown dark umber and startled this is under the green now and feet running and teeth chattering and the wind has sharply and burning grass is no sanctuary nor the thick green leaves left when the sun out of control and the stars line up against the night, waiting to be shot, one after the other, next and before, previous and last one trembling on the brink of and then the blue void sets up another surface, a landscape woven from dreams discarded and running feet into the fire and it is snowing trees and rocks, dirt and pebbles, blinding and deafening, who can recall the start of the blaze, the moment when the grass was high and thick, and the green dark leaves still belonged to the other side of the moon?

## **Objet retrouvé**

**for R.L.**

blasted with a high pressure hose  
the metal plates gleamed  
screws and bolts silver green shimmering against,  
and the first fingerprint brings back the past  
welding sight to the grafted countenance  
of street and store  
leaves a streak against the steel  
a bent clause dangling from the cross bar,  
is this a head turned towards  
or a plate loosely fastened,  
a tin-man of Oz or the only combination now possible  
burnt-out fire around the eyes  
and the captured hook of dream?

## **African Shadows**

Powdery snow last night  
sleeping while dreams burn out  
in the corner wandering and flights are  
grounded again, the burnt pasted shadows  
waver on your face  
and seeing the moon disappear like that  
and twinkling on your hands  
the last golden blood of fear  
shocking the empty page to awareness  
of the transition from green soft leaves  
to the final shroud  
carried so long so high  
in the black wild wind above Timbuktu.

He lay crying with laughter, fighting for breath at the edge of exhaustion, shielding his eyes against his forearm. When the first lightning flash lit up the corners of his vision he had a sense of lost time, as though he might have been unconscious for some seconds or asleep. He raised his head and saw Lu Anne standing naked over him. He scurried backwards, trying to gain his feet. A great thunderclap echoed in all the hollows of their hill.

“What have you done to me, Walker?”

There was such rage in her eyes, he could not meet them. He looked down and saw that her feet were covered in blood. Streaks of it laced her calves, knees to the ankles. When he looked up she showed him that her palms were gouged and there was a streak of blood across her left side.

“I was your sister Eve,” she said. “It was my birthday. Look at my hands.”

She held them palms out, fingers splayed. The blood ran down her wrists and onto the yellow grass. When he backed away, rising to one knee, he saw a little clutter of blood-stained flint shards beside the pile of her clothes.

He turned to her about to speak and saw the lightning flash behind her. The earth shook under him like a scaffold. He saw her raised up, as though she hung suspended between the trembling earth and the storm. Her hair was wild, her body sheathed in light. Her eyes blazed amethyst.

“Forgive me,” Walker said.

— from “The Ascent of Mount Carmel” by Robert Stone

# The Hierarchy of Desire

Anna Fonté

With both aching arms outstretched and loaded with plates (tightrope catwalk, hot plate crucifixion), she walks slowly across the dining room to table 19 and places the plates down in front of the bodies that ordered them.

*“Escargot Bourguignon. Pasta puttanesca. Squab, burrata and truffled fig, fingerling.”* She rolls the syllables around in her mouth like bits of velvet. If you saw her, you’d see eyes glistening wetly as if she were intoning a love poem she’d written herself, but no one looks up from their plates.

At table 8, she introduces herself (*I am your hole-filler, your anonymous food-bringer, faceless feeder*), takes their order, and scoots back to the kitchen where her boss, Mulholland, is waiting by the door. His lips are pursed, but he’s not waiting for a kiss. “Full hands in, full hands out,” he reminds her, and his eyes inspect her so thoroughly it feels surgical.

When she first started working here, her apron could not conceal her effervescent flesh but now she can wrap the apron strings around twice and still has enough left to tie a bow. Night after night of describing meals she won’t taste and taking orders and filling glasses without spilling a drop and whisking away the bones of evidence has whittled her appetite away, has taught her her place in the hierarchy of desire.

Back in the dining room, she moves unnoticed from table to table, pouring water and wine. The metal clank of silverware and wet eating sounds are stifled by white tablecloths and candlelight. At table 11, she pulls the check from her pocket and places it midpoint between the man and woman seated there.

The man clears his throat. “A good waitress knows where to put the check.” His candlelit face is impenetrable. The woman’s eyes are fixed on the last inch of wine in her glass; she and the wine are deep in conversation. “If you want me to pay, you’ll have to do better.”

She picks up the check and places it down again, right next to his huge, meaty hand and cufflinked wrist which doesn’t move.

He clears his throat again. “I have to say, I expected more from this place. Overall, this meal just was not satisfying.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that, sir,” she murmurs, assuming the proper position: eyes wide, head stooped, hand on heart. “Please tell me what we could have done better.”

“Where do I begin?” He licks his lips. “The salad was overwhelmed and the the oysters were flaccid.”

“I’m so sorry. Let me adjust your total.” She makes a move to pick it up, but he isn’t done talking. “The veal was insipid, a complete waste of life.” He flicks a crumb off his chest and continues. “And that pinot—that tinny aftertaste—as annoying as a whine.” The bottle—the second of two they ordered—sits to the woman’s right, completely empty. “Your menu called it a floral bouquet, but I’d call it effeminate.” He glances at the woman, whose eyes are frozen on her glass, before adding, “And I let me tell you, cruelty-free foie gras is missing one key ingredient.”

Later that night after work, she will go home and fill the bath with hot water. She will kick off her shoes, step out of the black clothes, and slide in. She will rub every inch of her skin, raking her fingernails down her arms and thighs and the soles of her feet until it hurts, until she feels soft and tender and alone again. Then she will think about desire and yearn to desire and be desired, but not that way, not that one-on-top-and-the-other-on-the-bottom way, not that hard versus soft, giver-taker thing but something else she’s never seen before, something penetrated and penetrating at the same time, eating and being eaten, fiercely tender and gently callous, opposites true simultaneously, eye to eye and winking. She wants to feel de-sired, a stallion mounted by a mare topped by a snake eating its own tail, a skewered snail stuffed at both ends, a pair of earthworms spiraling diagonally through soft earth up to the stars, and the longer her hands rub, the softer she becomes, and the more the hands feel the skin, the more the skin feels the hands, until she’s no longer hungry.

## **BERLIN Rob Cook**

someone who did not earn  
his place in the cold, all-knowing  
glare of the barbwire buildings  
limps around the hanging lights.

he loses his freckles and the blue of his eyes.

and we name the eyes  
after what they sometimes see:

ice plazas. town of the police lake.  
horses ridden to ashes.

“don’t hold my hand or anything it trusts,”  
the one who did not win said  
when i lost my arms  
because i did not sing.

and the one who did sing kept his arms  
and belonged to cruel uniforms  
that sang to eliminate  
all forms of hope,

“the ugly side of unearned happiness.”

and because i did not sing  
i did not covet the girls  
who commanded the background  
of vanity fair burial films.

it doesn’t matter.  
the one i counted turns back.

he makes a boat—or a day of his own—  
from ashtrays and fish drownings  
and raw driftwood  
and does not run.

or maybe he goes back  
to simple sunlight  
and a tree that turns to many trees.

he pays for a house  
that can see the other houses.

he speaks only when blackmailed  
by the earlier moods,

but he does not talk  
about the heaviness  
of money's lower decimals.

the one who runs away  
hands over the names  
he's written and folded  
so they might be known.

he never saw them anywhere again,  
not in the houses of those who won,  
those who stayed close  
to the blindness at the center of a cloud,

nor among the nightingale nests  
spray-painted on the storefront wall,

bullet holes where the man  
who did not run  
and did not use his name  
sometimes hides and sometimes breathes.

# THE ONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO GET HERE FROM HERE

**Rob Cook**

On a day too dark  
to be counted as part of a week,

I use hushed lunch soap  
to paste screams to the wall one by one.

The screams look like they always survived here.  
The screams look like dried moth latitudes.

The screams have hair and eyes  
but no lip-softened mouth

and they look like janitors  
mopping the mumbled halls

of toothpaste and deodorant pods.  
A man who loves his gun

and blares his gun and blames his gun  
ties the one I was to a tree.

The one I was when time still passed.  
The one I was when the sunlight was real

and I could hear the sound trees made  
clicking their locust teeth.

The one I still am repeats the name  
of a woman no one talks about anymore.

He doesn't ask who will clean  
the mess the clock made

on the wall that leads to the days  
behind him. He doesn't ask his money

to return when he places it  
in another person's hands.

And when a man visits  
with his guns, the one I still am takes

a scream down from its place and boils it  
with a rage of giggling vegetables.

He doesn't know who's boiling  
the clouds in the already forgotten

sky, but it's no reason to feel like he's failed,  
no reason to think he can't cook

for the man who treats his gun  
as a child. The screams taste

like something that slept  
in shades of orange.

The vegetables taste  
like something that sings

in decibels of descending wasps.  
Tied to a tree in a forest

without trees, the one I was begins  
to blacken into a curtain view.

(And once the one I was blackens  
into a curtain view,

that silence will replace everything.)  
And because he trusts the shadow-false

mushrooms softening the darkness  
where it's vulnerable,

the one I still am picks at the air  
to mute the wishes

of the gun planted here as a child  
when the mailbox shells

could be felt groping through  
the bone-chalked forest and every house

on a map of screams could be found,  
if not saved, by some blank thing that breathed.

## **TERROR ALERT   Rob Cook**

In yesterday's garbage bins,  
Christina Cap found a dog stuffed  
with C-4 explosives,

the beagle we always heard  
worrying from the apartment downstairs,

the one that belonged  
to the grin of the lopsided Russian man  
and his daughter with the always-leaving-home voice.

"His eyes . . . his eyes were still panting," Ms. Cap said.

His insides emptied  
either by hard, blood-dry hands  
or with environmentally-sound  
dishwashing detergent  
and then replaced.

Police barricades went up.

Even the silence was kept away.

Television crews sent  
their soft-wired interns to report back  
from inside the scraped-clean dog.

Over a bullhorn officials announced:  
"Sunset will be delayed.  
Repeat. Tonight sunset will be delayed.  
And your beds, inhabited or not, will be taken from you."

Plainclothes executioners knocked on each door  
and searched everyone's mostly stolen eyes.

They asked Ms. Cap if she knew  
where her hands had been.  
They asked if she knew anyone here  
when it was dark.

“They are piece of shit,” she said,  
more like pit bull saliva  
than information that could be used.

“It gets late in this building,”  
she said after many words had passed.

She sang to that dog through the door  
where all the trembling lived.

Everyone heard.

“Stupid dog eat his own piss.”

And then she said,  
“The man who lives near the roof,  
he go to the moon sometimes.  
He just as dumb as the dog.”

The search continued.

The garbage bins checked for prints,  
the trees also.

If nothing else, the leaves would know.

And for the first time  
since the light was understood,  
night did not arrive.

It wasn’t even discussed.

Looking out  
his pindrop sniper holes,  
the stairwell informant in Apartment 19—

the man who collected  
doorknobs and survived by listening—

and he knew, he knew, he knew—

got rid of everything  
and jumped,

from the edges of his hairline  
to his feet splattered  
someplace below.

## SIXTEEN KLIMT POEMS

Rob Cook

### *Three Ages of Woman—*

Daughter  
    mother  
and an eidolon-bellied  
vase

(disguised  
in the precision of a grandmother)

leaking  
    into the leaf-strewn furnace.

### *The Sunflower—*

A lamp deep  
    in the blacksnake's  
pollen—

The one who reads from there will never be named.

### *Country Garden With Crucifix—*

Not roses  
but a gentle rusting

south, toward the plundering of another paint stain.

### *Water In Motion—*

(The flesh of the Blue Danube)

daylight

thickening  
still not really a place.

*Judith With The Head Of Holofernes*

Holding his  
                    orgasms, also,  
  
after the lynching  
of the poppies  
  
that tricked her this far.

*Water Sprites*

Interruptions in the frost  
          where the air once  
                    blackened you, chosen one.

*Crouching Woman In Dark Dress*

Her face, half of 2am,  
found by a stray  
                    trillium.  
  
Her dress crouches in the other half of 2am without her.

*Sculpture Allegory*

After the fast  
only your moonlit blouse,  
  
a faint tremor.

*Field Of Poppies*

Each seed practicing for its day of clarity.

*Flower Garden*

Everywhere, heads

(no, just buttons that control autism)                      left in the grass.

*Study Of The Hand Of A Blind Man*

The rumor of rain becoming rain, the windows wrinkling.

*Woman With Hat And Feather Boa*

seduces an honest trembling  
from the one who destroyed the month behind her,  
  
more than one storm correcting itself on her body,  
  
revealing the night sweats,  
also, that loved her.

*After The Rain*

The woods blurry again,  
more work  
for the violets.

The canvas blurry again,  
more work  
for the violets

looking for where  
the paint was  
torn.

The pastures repeated  
by the one who creates  
each minute from that failure.

*Schubert At The Piano*

Writing his own foliage,  
the ten seasons of his hands.

*The Procession Of The Dead:*

One pheasant following you without color or noise.

*Trillium At 4am*

Fifteen palaces planted,  
each setting out for the petals already fallen.

## THE FOREST OF SMUDGED ANIMALS

Rob Cook

Dinner time, my sister and I got lost on our way back  
from the neighbor's house, phantom country  
between property lines, sky marked  
with fallout from the ash mountains around Pompeii.

*Listen—the frogs are crying funny  
because right now in their basement  
the Voorhees are impaling Mom and Dad,* I said  
while spying on Cro-Magnons huddled  
after weeks tracking razorbacks.

Following the sun past our dinner table  
we vanished without compasses—  
my sister was Marvel Girl and I paced  
my cub scout teepee looking for drum fossils,  
a clean moss blanket, scalps of meatloaf.

Twenty years later I'm still combing the trees  
for pterodactyl wounds and Marvel Girl  
has written me a letter on back of my birthday  
card from Ecuador. I'm listening to the dogs wag their tongues  
at the forest perimeter where, two nights of the year,  
you can see the last bonfire before the Roman Fall,  
the Gaisler Road apple farmer picking through the vaults  
of his twelve gauge for the haunted kids of Johnsonburg  
who crashed their bikes, their sophomore pickups  
because *fuck it, God never goes beyond his crying parlor.*  
They didn't really say that.

The kid who flayed himself on Skittles did.

*Do you remember that one?*

In the woods it is always one hour before supper time.

The trees know everything about us, and about  
the clouds blossoming like a search party in the sky's bird muck.

*Marvel Girl, do you remember the root beer chicken  
that chewed my nervous nightfall until nothing was left?*

Maybe someone went looking for us inside that nothingness.

Maybe someone found where the television kept us warm.

I will not mention our parents again.

I will not talk about their bodies on which we built our fortresses.

I will not tell you that I lured all the other houses  
deeper into the holes where the older children  
hid the forest every time it wandered.

## FROM THE BARN

Brian J Helt

At the turn of the afternoon, Caroline was proud her horses had bred, and she would ensure that the following eleven months would go smoothly. The sun was declining in the sky, and Caroline had washed and fed the horses. She had put Summer Cloud into his stall and closed it. She went back to the corral and approached Noche.

“Good girl, Noche. Ready to turn in?”

Noche turned her head up to give Caroline a crooked glare, or so it appeared, and threw one leg out, square into the side of Caroline’s head. She fell limply to the ground, and Noche, for the first time since she had been purchased, whinnied and tromped away, around the corral.

Knocked unconscious, Caroline fell into what would be called a dream, if she had set herself in bed and come to it naturally and slowly, the way people do when they’ve worked the greater portion of the day. Sleep comes slowly, even when it is quickening and liquid, and creeps into the eyelids and makes them heavier. Even then it is a slow process of distillation. But Caroline’s sleep was abrupt and forcibly brought, like a candle blown out in haste and the blinds pulled down to hide from the dangerous onlookers. This sleep is disoriented, lacks direction and exhausts the body more than if the person were awake.

In her dream she saw what the ocean must’ve looked like, having never before been to the coast and only seen the shoreline in pictures of encyclopedias. To a waking person, the ocean from her dream would make no sense, being both unevenly rocky but smooth with sugary sand. The water rose high, sky scraper high just feet from the shoreline and offered no force, virtually no wetness upon contact.

She floated in the ocean, under the pale sun that weakened in a state of afternoon dusk, but hanging high at noon. On her back, she bobbed and weaved back and forth in the free floating current. The stars rolled down the back of the sky like marbles poured over a distant and enormous glass skylight.

It lasted seconds and was comprised more of feeling than seeing, thoughts that arrived in her consciousness the way clouds rolls away at times when there is a gust. Caroline woke in her bed, husband, sons at the foot of her bed, and a strange man peering into her face.

What could be considered as possibly the one and only time that the boys’ father ever felt true panic with the loss of a truly great moment passed right before the doctor who saw the shaking water in this Carson’s eyes. The doctor wished he were better because he knew of all the people in the world, this woman deserved it the least. It was obvious though, as all people who live in the hardened, unforgiving and habitually

unfair world know that the worst of things always seem to arrive at the doorstep of the best people. An honest woman, teeming with love for her children can wake up one day, with the bright prospect of early spring foal the next year, and fall into mortality by sundown, while the thieves and the loveless walk through their days unscathed, unmarred and entirely ignorant. Such unbalance is something to bow one's head at, what else can a person do?

The doctor did just that, looking at the floorboards, figuring that they'd soon go untreated and grow pale with the years without washing and oils to restore them without Caroline's radiance, hands and knees, scrubbing, polishing, unmarking. What seemed to be the years of the land's last gasp came swiftly and weighed heavily down on the boys and their father, and the gossip that found its way through neighbors' acres and acres away would fall upon ears with little surprise. The plants became stunted, the fruit pitifully dwarfed, and knew that it was only a matter of time. They couldn't begin to imagine that a horse, dark as Manes Lake at midnight, would deliver the grazing touch of death. Some figured it fit, the old folk whose values often outlasted their patience for the next generation. It was a fine way to die in their book.

After the seizures began, Peter knew his mother was going to die, trying to fight back the panic and hysteria. He took a leave of absence from school with his father's permission. There is no way an individual can prepare themselves to die, nor can they ever prepare for a world where the people they knew once to be alive simply were not. He sometimes imagined mornings without his mother and found himself in the bathroom, gasping for breaths as the world around him wavered in a blur. As best he could, he wept silently at night into his pillow after Carson had showered and returned to bed, taking over for the night to watch over Caroline.

Peter could feel it in his heart, a part of himself dying with her. When she slowly began to not recognize him, he lost the interest and gumption to fight through a world that had painted itself so cruel and cold. It was almost the end of the week when Peter accepted the loss, before the sting of death.

"Mother?"

She blinked heavily, eyes rolling from side to side.

"Mother, I've been thinking about this place. The farm, and your horses and all, you know?"

Again she didn't respond, simply gazing forward with eyes smoothing across the room. Peter spoke in barely audible whispers almost to himself.

"I think about the world and how big it is. I could never imagine how truly big it is out there. Hell I've never seen the state line. Thinking about the people in other countries, eating exotic stuff, you know? I hate this world. I hate it and everything in it, and the people. It makes no sense. I try to think of the world and how it works and make sense of it somehow, and I never can. None of it makes sense, the life and the death, the way we have to work just to watch it slip through our fingers. It makes me

wonder what we ever truly have for ourselves.

"I know I'd rather die than watch you do the same. But I know you're going to pass on, Mom, and I'm so scared but I'm trying my best. What am I supposed to do? Sometimes I wish I had a home to myself, so that I could keep away from all the pain and the loss. I wish things had been different."

He sat in silence with his mother, his brows furrowed and pinched together. She had fallen asleep again, which happened often as she drifted in and out of a half sleep the entire day. Peter couldn't say whether it was from her condition or from being bed ridden for so long. It had gotten into him, though, having the days pass and sitting with an ill woman, waiting for her to die. A person can only be bedside for so long, courting death before they feel a slow death in themselves, which is exactly what Peter found in himself, a slow death.

He rose from the wooden chair he sat on beside his mother and walked to the door where he stopped, looking back at the woman in the bed to make sure her sleep caught and that his departure hadn't roused her. When he saw she hadn't moved, or that her eyes remained shut, he left, stepping lightly on the floorboards that began to creak atop of the hollow thud under a heavy boot. It was dusk and he could see the sun bidding a farewell just about to touch the horizon.

The screen door slapped shut, as all screen doors do and should do because it is in their nature, and Peter stepped out into the cooling but not yet cold air. He inhaled deeply, almost attempting to relieve the torment inside. It disgusted him, but he tried to think that perhaps someone had to be the one that kept the farm afloat. Perhaps their father was the best of the four men in the house, to accept the duty of the workhorse, and strap on his back, the responsibility of the welfare of generations. That is what he hoped to realize and believe, truly because he felt himself begin to hate everything and everyone.

From the barn, a sharp whinnying came from Summer Cloud. There was Noche, too, the devil herself, he thought. He took long strides to the barn across the dirt road that came from all the way down to the main road. As he drew near, the whinnying sharpened and reached into him, down his throat and struck at the heart where his subdued pain resided. It fueled him, the steps he took, heavy and deliberate, brimming with malice.

He unlatched the rusty lock of the barn, which was less of an actual lock, and more like a simple latch that rested in a locked position. It was simply another contraption his father had thought would cure the farmland of ailments like stray livestock, mischief makers and the archaic cracking of the old wooden doors in the night wind. The crude latch relieved the family of a barn door that snapped at night against its own frame amidst the gale winds, keeping the horses in with a moderate temperance and did absolutely nothing for the mischief makers. Not much can be said about them since the county had all of a few dozen children, all of which found it more trouble to travel to their neighbor's land than it was worth.

Peter tore it open with a precision, exact and ferocious. The crude latch rattled in the night gale that blew through the valley and crossed their family land at such high speeds, one could hear the whistling through the wooden panels in the barn. In the day, the sounds were sweetly of spring and you would swear that your ancestors were with you, reciting old songs that make the heart bend. When night fell, however, the sounds spoiled and it became obviously of horrid banshees, circling the barn like a frenzy of sharks, closing in for the kill.

Darkness filled the barn like the perfume of apples souring in the barrel left out on a heated summer day where it's still moist. It seemed to seep into every fiber, every grain of the wood planks, flimsily kept together by rusting nails. Peter thought the entire thing might be blown over by the wind and wondered how it ever stayed on its feet in the first place. It couldn't be by some intuitive design from their father, but rather, it must've been by some fluke, or striking of some dumb luck. He found it easy to find flaws in his father, and his father's doing.

In the corner, far off in the corner, where it seemed darkest, he could hear her, not whinnying, but breathing. He heard the hot breath of her escape through gaping nostrils that blended into the sinister gale winds, and he knew in that split moment, the devil was with him in that barn. With great deliberateness and steadfast, he stepped forward into the clearing where they would have kept hay, had there been any that grew and could be cultivated.

Above him dangled a kerosene lamp, clinging to a hook embedded into the crossbeam. He wouldn't need the lamp, he thought to himself, eyes having adjusted to the night, although he couldn't see very much, just enough so that he wouldn't fall over himself. By the barn door was a simple footstool, he grabbed it clumsily, almost dropping it in the first attempt, and placed it under the kerosene lamp. He stepped up on the stool and retrieved the lamp gingerly, taking greater care with it than he did the foot stool. Where did father keep the kerosene stores? For that, he would need to light the lamp.

From his front pocket, he pulled out a small metal lighter that he kept. With a rasping pull of the wheel, he lit the wick and turned the knob before the lamp gathered a light thrown lazily onto the floor and walls. He had burned the knuckle of his index finger and kissed it gently. Still, the night won the barn over and most of it remained in darkness, but the lamp would suffice. He stepped into the stall where their father kept supplies, or so he had said. Peter thought it was a place where the family kept garbage that fed their father's illusion of utility and potential use. However, under a few broken tools and a few badly soiled tarps, he uncovered a five gallon tin that was undoubtedly the kerosene can. It was certainly a bad idea to hold the lamp so close to the can, so Peter hung it on a beam that came down at the mouth of the stall. He tipped the can from side to side, waddling it out of the stall and into the clearing. It was too heavy to lift, there was no denying that, and Peter cursed his lack of physical prowess.

From the same stall, the junk stall, Peter brought three buckets that would undoubtedly house the some old gallons of kerosene and make them portable. He popped the top off of the tin kerosene can and tipped it over, pouring the rich and transparent oil into the bucket. A hiccup caused by air rushing into the can made the oil burp and spill past the bucket, and Peter nearly dropped the can itself from this jittery gasp. A spark of panic erupted inside him and was slow to calm. Spilled kerosene is what nightmares are made of.

When the first bucket had little more than a third of its space left, Peter slowly tipped the can upright to stop the flow without spilling more. He moved the now heavy bucket aside and took an empty one, placing it just inches from the can. His knees began to ache from the rock hard dirt of the barn floor, wetted and packed into itself for years on end. Again he tipped the can and began to pour the oil into the new bucket. When it too was filled about two thirds of the way, Peter moved it next to the first bucket and took the third empty, placing it before the can. He could lift it now, the can, and did so to pour the little oil that was left. He took great care to gather every ounce, every drop of oil that could be extracted from the can, shaking it up and down.

The empty can rolled across the packed dirt floor and with the two heaviest buckets, one by each hand, Peter walked slowly to the back of the barn. He placed the two buckets at the face of the last stall, closed. The third bucket, the lightest, he brought moments later, taking the same careful steps as before.

He stood there, facing the closed stall, listening to the beast. She knew he was there, and they both knew what came next. She didn't whinny, didn't cry, simply stepped about like animals do when they are confined and find boredom with ease. Still he heard her hot breath fume from her nostrils, and rattle through her lips. For a moment he thought he saw in her eyes, the acknowledgement and the acceptance of what he was about to do, as if this horse had made peace with what she had done, knowing the debt she had to pay.

He closed his eyes and let the sounds of the gale winds, the horse's breath, the rattling wood planks. He let it all find its way into his ears, into the center of his being. This was perhaps the ugliest moment he had ever known in his life.

The footstool found the dirt floor with an easy thud, and was off kilter from the uneven mounds made by water and footfall. Peter stood on the stool in the neighboring stall, looking down at Noche, the night demon, the terror throwing her mane and tail. He saw nothing behind her black eyes, and wanted to know if she could feel anything at all on the inside.

He lifted the first bucket of kerosene and gently poured it across Noche's back. The oil found the hair that covered her body smoothly and soaked in while simultaneously pooling and dripping down her broad sides. He finished the first bucket at her tail. Shortly after, he began pouring the second bucket, evenly coating her back and beginning to let it soak into her mane. The third bucket finished her mane.

He took a moment to look down at Noche, letting the last bucket fall noisily onto the

dirt floor. She glistened by the poor and distant lamplight from across the barn, nothing had changed. Still, she stepped and threw her oily mane, eager for a release.

Peter reached into his pocket and retrieved his lighter. He unhinged the top and with his thumb, spun the rough wheel with a flick with nothing to show for it. His second attempt brought out a modest flame on the lighter's head. Through the lighter's flame, he saw Noche, looking at him, entirely still, and she knew exactly what was about to happen. It stirred Peter and he almost felt a retroactive regret. Thinking back to his mother in the house, the remorse quickly fled, and he drew the lighter to the right hindquarter of the horse.

The kerosene was quick to light, and in moments, not seconds, but quick and rapid moments, the horse was entirely ablaze, exalting on her hindquarters, whinnying and crying in pain. Peter jumped down from the footstool and opened her stall. In a horrendous and sweeping gesture, the horse sprinted from the stall, through the barn and out of the door. She threw a light greater than five hundred lamps, illuminating the barn brighter than spring sun. When she passed the door, the night was swift to return.

Peter rushed out of the barn door to follow her, watching as she sprinted across the plot, through the grass and across the hills. Her cries carried an arc from the distant hills by Manes Lake and fell into his ears, satisfied. He could almost see her, the demon, bucking and exalting again in the distance, her last fight. She would burn until death approached in a moderate tide, and he hoped it would take longer than natural, that she would suffer more than his mother.

Peter's two older brothers and their father came running from the nearby acreage, hurried and panic stricken. Peter paid no attention to them, watching the blazing horse, sprinting across the land, feeling that he had retrieved the atonement his mother would never see from this world without him. His brothers and father made a commotion that still did not pull him from his hypnotic focus on the horse ablaze in the distance. His father even took him by just below the shoulder, gripping his shirt tightly and pushed him, and still Peter remained focused on the horse, simply glancing at his father whose voice erupted in some type of panic and anger.

"Peter! What happened?!" the words came wholly in themselves and carefully from his father.

Peter looked back into the distance and heard one of his brothers and his father behind him causing a ruckus, shouting urgent demands at one another.

"The horse got out."

"Forget the horse, Peter! What happened to the barn?"

Peter looked back at the barn, the rickety old barn barely holding together with its shoddy planks and rusted nails, blazing like the horse. The heat was immense and thrown father than the already bright light. In front of the barn, where the door, flaming like the rest of it, banging open and closed like it would any other night, Peter could see his father. He was on his knees, face in his hands and Peter hoped he was not

weeping. He had the idea that children, especially boys, should never see their fathers weep for whatever reason, be it respect, associative learning, or just for social reputation. Seeing his father weep for his burning barn made Peter uneasy and begin to realize what he had done. A small regret was beginning to balloon and take bloom inside him and only worsened when he realized that all of the whinnying and crying he thought he heard from Noche in the distance came from Summer Cloud, still locked in the barn. His cries had subsided by now, and all that could be heard was the cracking of burning wood as the barn bent and collapsed into itself, and the bowing sobs of a man growing older every moment, defeated in every way.

Peter stood behind his father, who knelt before the barn on fire and looked as if he himself was on fire, hands on his head. Their father burned too that night.

by Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

## Anger and Contempt

He is engorged with rage. He'd watered his anger, grown it like Alaskan produce, eighty pound purple cabbages dense and hard in the Arctic sun. His eyes are slits, like the windows in his Fairbanks hotel. Late at night, his eyes in the window are like the anonymous eyes in a burglar's mask. He peers out at the Aurora Borealis.

He perches on the seat of his toilet. Its water is heated to a comfortable temperature. He feels its radiant warmth, like the residue of a woman on his loins. He sits there and licks an ice cream cone he bought in the lobby of his hotel. It's a flavor he'd never heard of and now can't remember its name. He's proud of the fact that Alaskans eat more ice cream per capita than any other state in the Union.

His rage is a bored companion. He puts a quarter in the old bed's clunky massage machine, lays back, clasps his hands behind his head.

On TV, the international news drones on. In Iran a sixteen-year-old rape victim is in court for *Crimes against Chastity*. She sees that the judge is against her and that Sharia Law is unyielding. She takes off her shoes and flings them at the judge. She remembers her contempt with satisfaction in the moment before she is hung. Like a bride, she gives herself over to contempt.

## Spike

The pounds drop off Cheryl as she prepares to be homeless and live on the road, sleep behind dumpsters, become a companion to toothless women who have lived through every horror. She can't afford weight on her. She knows fat feels good in bed. She knows rapists have hard lives and want to feel some softness from the women they victimize. She cannot afford to be soft anywhere in her body, including her vagina. So she works at making herself as gaunt as she can, almost as gaunt as she was in high school when she "suffered" from Anorexia Nervosa. Despite her parents' terror, watching her "waste away to nothing," Anorexia was the biggest accomplishment in her life. Her schoolmates' expressions of pity and horror validated her, informed her that she was almost free of the cycle of death and rebirth, a cycle as pre-programmed as her mother's washing machine, which ran day and night.

No one would rape a railroad spike, granular with rust. A railroad spike is eternal. God has a special place in His heart for the Spike, and for holdup men on stallions who drive the iron horses to their knees, and for Chinamen with sledge hammers who drive the iron spikes. God loves opposites. God creates conflict. Cheryl ponders this as she prepares to take to the road.

Cheryl's father was a hired man on one of the last pocket ranches of the San Fernando Valley, and one of the horses, a palomino, bit her, and gave her a nasty scar. The Eucalyptus trees shuddered and Cheryl fell to the side of the road, but her father had gone off to the American Legion Hall, its stucco crumbling to dust, to drink beer with his cronies, Jewish businessmen he had rescued from a car crash.

You should have seen their faces when their car blew up, blew the skullcaps off their skulls. Cheryl's dad got his picture in the paper, the rabbi embracing him. There were Torahs in the background, glittering silver hanging on the scrolls' blue velvet.

Now they buy him beer in the American Legion Hall. None of the Jews were in the Army, but three were in the Navy. Cheryl's dad figures that that's the way God meant it, Jews not crawling on their bellies like pigs, but sailing over the seas like Noah with his beasts.

So Cheryl puts make-up on her horse-bite scar, as she's done since she was nine years old and her best friend, her only friend in school, showed up with eyeglasses. Cheryl intuited a cosmic relationship there, though at nine years old she had not yet learned the word "cosmic." There was a parallel between horse bite and eyeglasses. Her friend got fat. Cheryl got thin. Fatter and fatter. Thinner and thinner, until other kids believed that Cheryl's friend was absorbing her. And, though they didn't like Cheryl, they took her by the hand or pulled her by the arm, away from her obese friend. Now Cheryl is about to become homeless, go out on the road. She misses her friend. Her friend dropped out of high school, spent her days working out with rusty iron weights in her leaky cellar, lost all her fat and became a bodybuilder, got a job on a TV show in which she humiliates and tortures obese people.

That's not the part of her friend that Cheryl misses. She misses her friend's terrible vulnerability, a match for her own, before she became a bodybuilder and qualified to torment fat people on national TV.

*I'm a railroad spike*, Cheryl tells herself, as she puts out her thumb. *I'm safe*.

## Press

I'm growing infinite food, drinking eternal water. Five-hundred-foot turbines cool me when I'm hot. An early freeze squelched the peaches. Now they're worth their weight in gold. Gold is worth its weight in human life.

The pregnant dentist's baby presses against me as she cleans my teeth. The hygienist has called in sick. It's flu season. The cosmetologist presses against me as she cuts my hair, which is sparse and dull. Her hair is purple and gold and I say something complimentary, even though it would be more honest to say something derogatory. Popular culture distresses me, offends me, as if I were somehow above it all. I'm not. I'm right in it, speaking modern slang—*Oh, snap*—but sometimes I wish we had no culture at all, high or low.

The hip of the waitress in the New Mexican restaurant presses against me as she leans over the table to fill my wife's water glass. The water is cold and there's a cold wind blowing along the Rio Grande, where I stopped to buy a psychedelic painting from a Native American, who tells me about doing time in prison. He could have gone into population and gotten into all kinds of shit. Instead he stayed in his cell with his colored pencils, and now he sells me a painting for thirty American dollars, ridiculously cheap.

I ask him if some plants in his painting are *agave*. He doesn't know—he says he paints a lot of pictures from magazines, a habit he developed in prison. Even now, he looks at magazines more than he looks out his window, even though he's Native American, he says, and ought to be attuned to nature.

The waitress in the New Mexican restaurant is dark-skinned. She looks more gypsy than Hispanic and has a diamond shard in her nose and one in her upper lip. I would have an orgasm, I think, if she pick-pocketed my wallet. I would gladly give her all my credit cards as a form of worship. In the end I give her a thirty percent tip.

I've left some *posole* on my plate, soft hominy marbles next to brown beans. My leavings foretell my future, if only I could read the signs or get a gypsy to interpret for me.

My wife presses against me, her big breasts and curved hips. I serve her coffee I grind from oily beans before the sun is even up. She tells me chores she'd like me to do that day, before it rains.

Humans have to eat frequently to maintain all the flesh we press against each other. The cosmetologist is a single mother with two children under three. I leave her a big tip too. I want everyone to be well and have their needs met, be happy, or at least not frustrated to death, to have their children grow up smiling, and with a surplus of positive energy to share.

by Kelley J White

### **Last night four men drove me**

to the edge of your dream. You were standing  
on a dock in San Francisco looking  
at my luggage. Heavy trunks. Covered  
with stickers. I packed my bags  
in a small apartment dense  
with that sweet sick smell of cockroaches  
and spray. The blood soaked sheets  
were really in our sink. But this empty yellow  
room was somehow my office. And  
also the take-out place behind the mobile-mart  
where the Hmong children told me  
about their Prince.

I was driving with a dark man  
in a silver car and then it was Bob  
or Bobby in a gray black dark Volkswagen entering  
a mine-shaft or the start of a tunnel of no  
it wasn't love but I was in another car with another man  
before I'd even thought of thanking any  
for the ride and the car was parked at a park in  
I could have sworn it was Princeton  
with the sun coming down and well-off shoppers  
bustling and then it was your car. You'd taken  
me to the pier. I wasn't willing to talk  
about selling the VW when you woke me  
we spoke of never travelling to Fisherman's wharf.  
I preferred to eat my sausage and egg.

## **Let me drink from my cupped hands**

after Israel Halpern

I am refreshed. This sweetness is something  
I almost remember. The cold breath of maple  
trees springing awake. Cold sugar. That numbs  
my slow tongue, resolves speech. You. I begged you  
to remember my name. Now I have forgotten  
yours. Mine. What was I called? Honey?  
Sugar? Ripe fruit? Peach. Blossom? Flower?  
All these and none. In the end I was called  
emptiness. Fare. Well. You I loved and no longer touch  
even with my lips spelling your name  
against a stone. Gone. Fare. Well my pretty body  
that I lost to rage. Go. In. Peace. Be with your dream  
of perfection. Release. That home I almost see.  
Someone still speaks its name. Not I. Love.  
That is here. Love is this water. Refreshment.  
Freedom from what was and will not be.

## The Life I Invented

*--happiness begins  
with a face lift—  
misread fortune cookie*

You tattooed your mother's eyes before you did her make-up  
for the funeral. You said Chinese women have to wear eyeliner  
or they disappear. You did my mother's eyes  
at the flower show. I was having my teeth cleaned.  
She gave the baby to your secretary to watch. Came back  
puffy and bruised and all her friends' wanted you to do it to them  
too. She has happy. I'd never let you lift my eyes. I'm gonna need  
a whole lot more than that lifted. Can't get to be forty  
and think you can be married to a plastic surgeon. And you named  
Philadelphia 's Best in Liposuction three years running. I could blow  
your cover. Honey, you can sell my fat for soap like Fight Club  
and have a comfortable retirement. Not the life I thought up:  
all of us in matching pajamas singing Christmas Carols  
around the fire. Or me coming back from the garden with daisies  
in my hair and fresh herbs in a basket and a baby  
on my hip. Not that life, not even the scene I imagined ten years  
before that—a mattress, a beaded curtain, Suzanne,  
my perfect body, perfect mind. You never sang  
that. You were always straight. Square.  
Never a hippy. We were never a match.  
Matching nothing. Not even matching scars.  
You with your bitter iron body. Bitter iron jaw. Big Trouble  
in Little China . And the villain was named Low. The kids hate  
that movie. Hate the Asian make-up. Honey you can do  
my make up. If you don't die first.

*--happiness is  
facing life--  
what the cookie really said*

by Courtney Leigh Jameson

## canníbales

i bathe in the blood pool  
*of* blackened eyes—neck  
too far cranked to order more  
but it'll never stop.

i want more. i want more.

my underbelly is my crown,  
is my fortune teller too—  
unwisest *of* lucifers.

i want the parts  
in carousels at my table—  
jovial guests to taste  
the salt *of* my labor:  
tightened muscles *of* grinding  
arm, twisting wrists

aroma *of* skin & sugar  
baby, SUGAR.

i taste on sweet cane—  
tongue & claim.  
i'm whole, will make you

more whole & unwhole you more.

to consume, to consume to.

## mississippi

drum beat bodies  
blow over the holler  
where waters bleed still

a frail air song opens  
the deep where fathers pray  
for the wet deft white eyes

humming hearts  
noxious hearts  
flat-line hearts

along the horizon  
bruises brewing souls  
& the bodies stomp

& the ground is soft  
& they fall right through  
open hell

open ventricles  
sway & open  
sway & open

tender magnolias

## left ventricle, maze one

there is a heart,  
    then was a heart—  
    a maze  
    of disproportionate spaces.

    i turn to stone walls,  
this hollow smile—  
flash my gregarious blue eyes  
    to halls full of ghosts.

    it takes a night  
of restless wandering  
through narrow turns  
& shifting faces to find

a heart,  
    when was a heart—  
    a maze  
    of separate masses.

i begin again      constantly turning  
feet to the spatter  
    of heartbeats.

    then was a series  
of shuffling through trunks,  
old notes you left  
    crumbling on the bedside.

when was shattering  
every emotion we built.

there is a heart  
    now is a heart—  
    a maze of broken pieces.

## **animal heads**

silent creature moods on smoke cloud  
watching air shifting faces.

all mutations come out in the dark  
for glowing eyes to revel in.

my body is his body  
holding claim to selfish movements.

he jolts & twists through the soil,  
my skin chalked in his nails.

stale-beat hearts emerge from my throat  
like a string *of* bloody pearls.

i, the filmy eye—he, the severed hand  
shooting blank stars in the night.

## ghosts in the sky

do you ever        look up  
from your glass box

to watch shooting stars

measure time from the scars  
they leave behind

time is my only scar  
when i write songs  
*of* the ash-hearted queen

is it a haunting  
      a reminiscence  
      *of* that life long

gone & surpassed

      the firefly's glow  
      still buried in the eye

      the night blossoms  
      still echoing moonlight

i twist my crown,  
pray my heart don't

crumble    beneath it

because each life brings  
with it—mellow decay  
*of* the last

## **witching hour**

i put on a pink tutu & read  
charles baudelaire to the rain—

the air holds the stench  
*of* an opium drip too well

i am delighted when wet  
i am delighted when wet

i am delighted when wet

i reach to my throat for more  
songs

contemplate the ways in which  
the devil appears

i think about telling the world  
& letting it

curdle in ruins

The Chinaman slowly, very slowly, began to open his mouth. Bertie watched the slow parting of the Chinaman's thin lips, the gleaming teeth, white and bright as fence pickets. Gradually the rest of the room darkened and the thinly padded chair on which Bertie sat grew incredibly soft. Bertie knew they had been transported somehow, that they were now in a sort of theater. The Chinaman was seated on a kind of raised platform. Meanwhile the mouth continued to open, slowly as an ancient drawbridge. Tiny as the Chinaman was the mouth seemed enormous. Bertie gazed into it, seeing nothing. At last, deep back in the mouth, Bertie saw a brief flashing, as of a small crystal on a dark rock suddenly illuminated by the sun. In a moment he saw it again, brighter now, longer sustained. Soon it was so bright that Bertie had to force himself to look at it. Then the mouth went black. Before he could protest the brightness was overwhelming again and he saw a cascade of what seemed like diamonds tumble out of the Chinaman's mouth. It was the Chinaman's tongue.

The tongue, twisting, turning over and over like magician's silks pulled endlessly from a tube, continued to pour from the Chinaman's mouth.

Bertie saw that it had the same whiteness as the rest of his face and was studded with bright, beautiful jewels. On the tongue, long now as an unfurled scroll, were black, thick Chinese characters. It was the secret of life, the world, the universe. Bertie could barely make see for the tears of gratitude in his eyes. Desperately he wiped the tears away with his fists. He looked back at the tongue and stared at the strange words, realizing that he could not read Chinese. He was sobbing helplessly now but he knew there was not much time. The presence of the Chinaman gave him courage and strength and he *forced* himself to read the Chinese. As he concentrated it became easier, the characters somehow re-forming, translating themselves into a sort of decipherable Chinese script, like the words *chop suey* on the neon sign outside a Chinese restaurant. Bertie was breathless from his effort and the stunning glory of what was being revealed to him. Frequently he had to pause, punctuating his experience with queer little squeals.

"Oh," he said. "Oh. Oh."

Then it was over.

— from "The Guest" by Stanley Elkin

## Merzouga

Vance Mikin-Laurie

The child's scars sat darkened by shadow below sad eyes cast down nervously as the heat beat down through the mud roof of the building. Two tall and slender men were engaged in some quiet conversation at the back of the room, gesturing with dark hands protruding from oversized suit-jacket sleeves as they leaned against the wall. Violence showed through the cracks of their apparent nonchalance, as if their conversation was just some way to push their desire to murder everything they met to the side for a while. They eventually moved outside, leaving the echo of their rifles clattering against the doorframe. When I arrived in that town, I was a different person, I had some kind of faith I guess, a belief held on to since childhood, inherited from stories my father would tell me before I went to sleep. A belief in events having an end, a belief in some imaginary line that people didn't cross.

The child still stared at the concrete covered in orange sand, nodding to my questions or shaking his head, unable to break his silence. He looked afraid of where he would be taken after this. Afraid of those untouchable men with eyes on thrones and power that could reach with the growing wind and choke him with lies that dripped like honey or oil. Afraid, he answered my questions, though what he said wasn't important to me, I had already made up my mind. Like all children he had followed whatever he saw in front of him, he followed it until he was confronted with a horror that will never let him walk that road again. I believed it, and I believed in the child, though I might have just been looking at my own reflection in him, a reflection that didn't exist at all.

I remember the way the water burst out of the tap, running brown until it cleared and a clean circle formed amid the dust and grime at the bottom of the sink. I slid the iron kettle underneath to catch the water and looked out the window at the rest of the mud houses on the edge of the desert. I thought about what would happen next, where we could take him, and just at that moment, just as a spectre of hope entered my mind I looked back into the room to see his face again and felt the emptiness of his chair drag me through the floor. The window was open, with its old curtains blowing in the wind and the child's solitary figure running across the black gravel field filled with naked leafless trees. The field that was the last sign of anything made by man before the endless desert. He vaulted a small stone wall and disappeared into the sand. Soon enough I heard the gunshots.

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The cast-iron faces of the tall men had lost their shape, their searching eyes covered as sand flooded into the square from the desert as if a wall that reached as high the Atlas Mountains had just been lifted, allowing the force of all nature to flow through. We were a day too late. Broken wood jutted out like giant bones above

shattered shopfronts and bloodstained stone, covered with thick layers of sand streaming in from the desert. The heat was burning my pale skin through my clothes from that dull glow somewhere above in the haze. The dark forms of the men moved ahead in the swirling sand, their frames swallowed by the desert as shattered glass moved uncomfortably beneath my feet. I felt their rage through the blindness, burning me deeper than the wind or the sun, though it might just have been my reflection again.

## [untitled]

Prerna Bidalia

He was so much more to her, just so much more than anyone could ever have been to anyone else. Its difficult to explain really, so many years have gone by and my memory fails me, but I once remember her telling me, its something I never can forget, she told me, on their first night together, he touched her ever so gently, as if she were so fragile that he would break her. He was the only one out of so many other lovers who looked deep into her eyes and saw the fire. He kindled it, he was the fuel. I saw them together and I tell you I never saw a woman so passionate about a man or a man so passionate about a woman. They were like a complex machinery, if one part was to fail, the other would be rendered useless. Were they perfect for each other? No, far from that. Its still a mystery how they got together in the first place. But then again, fate likes playing nasty games.

I remember, it was raining that day, when she first told me about him. She had just come back after meeting him at his place. I remember her being completely drenched as she walked through my front door, the contours of her body showed through her clothes.

I remember her telling me about their first kiss that took place earlier that day. He'd ask her if she wanted to feel the rain? They were standing in his balcony, rain pouring down, he held her from behind and kissed her neck, ever so gently turning her towards him and then their lips met, two souls on fire.

Perhaps its difficult for you to comprehend why I remember everything with so much detail despite my failing memory. That my dear child is because I am fate, and I have never had anyone challenge me as they did, but what they couldn't understand is that I always get what I want.

There is one extremely profound image that I can never erase from my mind. I don't want to admit it, no I won't admit it! You can't make me! There are these memories, a shrill scream and everything just fades to black. But one thing, just one thing still manages to stand out from the darkness. Its a silhouette of a young girl. Not more than 20-25 perhaps. A young, beautiful girl. She's standing on the shore, the waves kissing her feet, but she doesn't seem to notice it. Its gonna rain in a little while, its monsoon you see. But she has no umbrella, no raincoat, no nothing.

And so it starts to rain, and it seems as though the heavens are pouring their heart out, the girl, she is completely drenched, there's water dripping from her hair but she barely seems to care, she is just standing there. I do nothing to get her out of that inertia like state. I find the whole thing extremely amusing, this whole notion of man trying get away from his reality, but there's yet another thing that man doesn't realize, you get to

ignore reality and live at the same time.

So I let her be. I let the sea drown her blood curdling scream and I let everything fade to black.

There was never a woman so passionate about a man or a man so passionate about a woman. There are a lot of ways to die, I guess its harder to live than to die, at least that's what I've always felt. But no sirs, in life you have people to give you company, to share your burden for a little while, death renders you to complete solitude.

I guess this is what I did to her, I left her to her solitude, I took her king and the queen then was rendered useless. So she had to perish too.

And yes, I'll admit my fault to you, this little game, I played too close to the heart.

by Phil Rice

**ballast ('ba-ləst) *n.***

- 1.** Heavy thoughts suggesting stability, often carried in a temporary sailing vessel.
- 2.** A dance position built around placing the left hand on the right breast while the right hand caresses the left voice; the nocturnal two-step.
- 3.** Art that emits the scent of steadiness: *the ballast of John Keats*.
- 4.** Any verbal slag supporting a sense of well-being, real or imagined.
- 5.** Feathers and lead.
- 6.** Maintaining awareness of the past while facing forward; the weight of what stays.

## Still Life in Stereoscope

The little hatchback—  
is it a station wagon?—  
pulling into the yard  
beyond the kitchen window  
looks almost true

(they carried a bag  
in, then out,  
no words, no smiles)

The lilting songbird—  
is it a lady robin?—  
hopping in matted grass  
beyond the kitchen window  
looks almost true

(a brilliant void filled the frames)

## **The Cutting Room**

We never went to the movies,  
you and I; never sat in a darkened  
theatre washing popcorn down  
with fountain Coke; never walked  
the aisle; never watched  
the credits roll while waiting for the  
crowd to thin; never rode home  
discussing our favorite scenes,  
hands resting on inner thighs;  
never ate red velvet  
cake in bed before drawing the  
curtain and turning down the lights.

That's how I imagine you see us,  
as a well-scripted movie, unseen.

## **The Mornings**

A cold pillow holds my head  
as I listen for your words;

there is no crucifix here,  
only your voice between the sheets.

Turning toward your side of the bed,  
I bat my eyes at the empty space;

"You need to get up," I hear you say,  
the sound hanging sweetly in the air.

My legs, unsteadily familiar,  
can't contemplate the walk today,

so I wait until your voice is gone,  
and only your breath remains

to guide my feet to the floor.

## **Ode to the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River**

You drag me over stones rounded  
smooth from harsh caresses, over

jagged boulders freshly ripped from  
earth, over tangled roots of battered

trees, over pummeled memories of our  
farewell, over and over, till the flood

flows into the salted backwash of my  
dry-heaving tear ducts;

the rain stops;

you come to rest in the pouch slung  
across my shoulder,

heavy and weightless.

It was my intent in the classroom to say that literary art grows out of the risk involved in inviting despair; that moral dilemma is its first subject; that its plot is the illustrated attempt at composing within the individual (oneself projected into character) the tension between right and wrong: how the character chooses between killing and not, between cruelty and pity; that if good is to come of it, it lies in the easing of hopelessness in writer and reader by a representation of chaos, which is death, checked, of form, which is pattern in life, resolved and assured—that is, in the manifest truth of what is written; and that all of this is always the case.

—from *Working Words*, by Christopher Davis

by Sara Clancy

## Learning the Brain

In the corner of the ICU waiting room  
a plastic display offers pamphlets to help me  
understand ischemic stroke. Like a prayer  
to the ghost of Hippocrates, I try to learn  
the geography of the brain.

I run my finger over the drawing  
of the Frontal Lobe, so you will remember  
who you love and understand every legend  
and compass point in the atlas of words.

I note the Temporal Lobe, which is intact  
so music is safe, thank God. You will keep  
the harmony of nostalgia and organize every artist  
into intricate playlists as you always have.

Occipital and Parietal Lobes  
promise you will see your children,  
your family and the wide pine solace  
of your home. You will feel the touch  
of your wife's breath on your face.

I say the word Cerebellum  
out loud, because it is beautiful  
and means equilibrium which anyone  
who knows you understands,

but when I get to the Brain Stem  
I see it has its own primitive diagram  
and I spit out the stolid jargon like profanity:  
Fornix, Dorsal Thalamus, Pons.

The Medulla Oblongata  
hangs like an indifferent comma  
between everything you are  
and the flourish of your hand.

## At Home with the Dead

The afterlife at 2 am  
is a closed system of memories, a flashlight  
that flicks away from the grey  
contrivance of consciousness

and lights up another  
room where you have been  
all along, where you are right  
now, unaware of this restless

house, listening to *Ruby Tuesday*  
with your legs crossed under you  
and every possible year in your face.

I do not claim I can see you  
reading maps with a magnifying glass,  
a glass of bourbon on the butcher block  
table in this kitchen of yours

that is mine now. I do hear the melody  
of an alto recorder that suggests your presence,  
though I insist I believe none of it

except your impatient nod  
to our old debate, that yesterday  
is not gone and matters.

## **Pain Scale**

To live here on the fringe  
of normal exchange I must  
refine misdirection. A fan dance  
distraction at the throne

of my nemesis, I master  
the chemistry of a false armistice,  
before the brilliant acid drip  
taps down into opiate sleep.

There is an ambient screech  
and new worry of auditory  
hallucinations and the ceramic  
Senegal parrot on your dresser.

Though I have capitulated  
to this forgery of relief  
long ago, I could still melt  
the glass of our bedroom window

simply by pressing my temple  
to the pane.

## **Haboob**

This morning I invited the wind  
into my kitchen and was accepted  
after curiosity overruled the etiquette  
of dust. I tell you, whole ghost

cultures bolted in defiance  
of tact, a simple prism hanging  
above the sink, which threatened  
to give offense by splitting the sun  
into prophecy, by means of welcome.

I searched the daylight  
for hours and believed I would  
recognize the wandering hazard  
when it cast its cape around  
our genial cabal.

It is a riot out there now, a brawl  
of silica surging across my forbearance  
in challenge to the sun, to the crystal facets  
that color my walls with the sparkle  
of amity and then dissipate  
before the obligation.

## Two Agnostics

Knowing you will push me  
for clarity, why not just jack this whole  
steamy contraption off its trestle  
and flag down your own passing

transport. If I attempt some sort of citrine  
revelation, an all encompassing  
present to burn down your stunned  
economy, I expect to be  
forgiven. Not by ecclesiastical

wager, but in the way we always  
toast doubt with a companionable  
clink and then agree to push  
the planchette around the board.

You may be an enlightened peer,  
a completer to the set of polar sequels  
to faith, but I am still your artless  
apprentice, sworn to strike the fantastic  
from my own grimoire of odds.

by CB Follett

## **Black and White and Red**

Out on the Bay a tanker pulls apart  
the fog and disappears inside so completely  
you would, having just this moment  
glanced up, never know it was there.

Even the rain cannot swallow a ship  
so wholly that the sound of its horn  
is muffled as it searches with sonar to find  
the bridge piers and glide through to open sea.

And now, they want to girdle the bridge.  
Raise nettings of steel up from its road bed  
to urge the suicides to find another way,  
maybe save themselves.

On Friday a man, located only in the daily paper,  
came out of his bedroom, in black and white type,  
with a canvas bag, and from it pulled a gun,  
made of morning news, and shot his young wife

in the face and in the chest, then shot himself.  
as his step-daughters watched from the couch and  
his nine month fetus waited in vain.

I thought then of the tragedies of strangers,

so many. Then, yesterday, I learned that the man  
with the gun was not a stranger, but someone's son  
whom I had known as a little boy, a troubled boy.  
How his mother must have breathed a sigh of relief

thinking he'd pulled himself together, that some  
woman loved him, trusted him with her daughters;  
that my friend was days from having a first grandchild,  
the hugs and snapshots this would bring.

I sit listening to Ali's ghazal about fire, the endless  
piling on of fire, until there seems no escape –  
the burning, searing pain of that heat. And how,  
when it rises, does such a person rein it back,

keep it from consuming all that he is  
and all that he has. I think the rain  
is gone now and the fog. These last  
delicious days must bring spring out of the ground.

Maybe it's just came too late for some. Maybe  
the bridge barrier would work for others.  
I know some change their minds on the way down.  
I know because they have said so.

## A Tale Unwinding

I'm telling you, it works like this.  
The dog chases the cat, which  
chases the mouse and the mouse  
would eat the grain from your plate  
given the chance as we too

eat what is available, neither do we  
sow nor reap, opportunistic as they,  
and with as little regard for the propriety  
of the grain as of the mouse.

And we claim to be superior-brained,  
superior-bodied, but we, all of us,  
do what we must, while begging for simplicity,  
for our basic needs, and yet,

eschewing the grain, the plump plum  
we cover our harvest with concrete  
and stone, as if we could eat stone,  
as if we could rub it on our bodies  
like salve. Ignorant as plastic, we  
fell our future medicines, desert  
our riparian fecundities, pave over  
creeks that feed the oceans, block off  
the desperate salmon, sandblast their roe.

What are we thinking as we increase  
our flock of kin and decrease our harvest.  
Will some angel come down to save us?  
The flood, that last time turned  
the earth to muck, this time may dry us out,  
eroding us into sacks of withering skin.

Ask the crow, ask the hardy cockroach  
who will survive our foolishness, who  
will end up plucking the last staring eye  
from the last uncaring socket.

## All My Beautiful Legs

I've been here since the beginning. Hired two days before they opened the place. I was only 12 but said I was 16, so they took me on at the bottom, and I pretty much stayed at the bottom. Joe, Mr. Rockettefeller called me. Wasn't my name, nosir, my name was Ray, but then Mr. Bolger was on stage and best I didn't compete with him. But them ain't the legs I was talking about, tho Mr. Bolger had some legs and that crackly little voice of his. Nope, my legs was long and slim and purty as could be, right from the 16 of 'em that come on stage that first night in 1932, and how they kicked 'em. Pretty little hands on their tiny little waists and all them sparkles. How they could kick, right up over their heads, every one the same, yessir, saw a lot of split panties in my years. Oh that was somethin'. Never did get used to it. Close your yap Mr. Russell would'a said. He brought those girls from Missouri, and Mr. Roxy, he called them the Roxyettes but didn't take long to slide into The Rockettes. I've seen over 6000 legs, and loved every one of them. They were always nice enough but they never much noticed me. I didn't mind. I was just there to sweep and get coffee for the Flying Wallendas. And it wasn't just legs. Radio City was a bright spot in those dark days. All those legs helped make a guy forget the crash and the food lines. We had lines too, around the block waiting to get in. All the major nightlife happened at our house. We had it all, the biggest stage, all those lounges and smokers. Why we had the Mighty Wurlitzer it took eleven rooms to house. We were razzle dazzle and grand-dure — You bet. Full of marble and gold foil and even Bakelite (they're collecting that now you know) and permatex, aluminum and all sorts of stuff. Why the front of the building is a full city block and that big old stage and all those movie theaters. All the big shows opened first with us. And we could make water fountains and torrents of rain. Well, not me, of course, I was mostly to stay out of the way, make yourself scarce they'd say, but boy they were after me when any clean up was needed. Then it was Good Old Joe (Roy) and Where's Joe now we needs him. Right nearby, out of sight but not out of earshot. Had some great hideouts and I saw them all from Jan Peerce with that big old voice of his and little Judy Garland who weren't as young as she looked. She had titties and she had a crush of Mr. Gable, because she sang about it once. And when I was young, oh a long time ago now, I got to sparkin' back in the prop room with one of the usherettes. We were the same age and just about as green. Couldn't figure out how come her mama let her come to New York City and work in the theater. It was a hot place all right. I could tell you lots of stuff. Awful lot of big name dicks poppin in and out of places they shouldn't. Of course, I didn't get any, well not much, and not there. Funny thing about getting older tho', you get more noticed. You become what they call "a fixture". I liked Mr. Sammy Davis Jr. I liked his glass eye and his quick feet. Oh so many of them had quick feet. It was a quick feet kinda place. But of course, my favorite feet were always attached to my favorite legs. They came and went and some

of 'em got famous, but I didn't care about that. It was when they was on the stage that I loved them. All that clack clack clack of their pointy high heels and the actual wind that came at me when they all flang up their legs. First the right leg, I didn't feel it then. Then the left leg and a whoosh came across the stage to me, those left legs waving just for me. It's still there you know, grandest place in the land, and the Rockettes still bring down the house. Sometimes I get taken down there by my granddaughter. We get in by the alley and thru the stage door, her and me, and all the old timers say Hi Joe and all the new young ones, says Whosat? and they fix me a place off stage so I can see my girls, and my granddaughter, Rita, she always leans down and says, You're home now, Pops. Here you are back home.

## **A Modern Declaration**

I hereby declare for the children: for their frosted cheeks, their mittened fingers. For their robust run-down-the-pier leaps into summer. For their small fingers that pudge around toys, For endless “whys” – the choral notes of the young. I declare for their hunger and their hurt, the broken skin, the lost father, the house of blocks knocked into rubble. I declare for fingers lost when picking up the pretty toy that bursts, for the clumsy fingers of first love that tiptoe, uncertain of boundary or their own worth. I declare for the liberation from training wheels, for the desire to be a fireman with uniform and axe, and for the boy remembering to feed the dog, and the girl who wants to save the flea-infested alley cat. I declare for pinafores and sailor suits, and the first day of long pants, and mastering the spiral toss well beyond the driveway, and I declare for new love, and the horrendous flutter of the body, which cannot be controlled, and the high dive off the piling, and bicycle spokes taped with playing cards, and the first cherry bomb, the mothers warning, the fathers remembering, then the boy who lost his eye, became the foolish boy held up like a rag doll hung on a peg in the closet. And I declare for the schoolyard and math workbooks, smiley faces on a spelling test, silly goofy skits in the talent show and the one that went too far and too late to stop. And cigarettes down by the creek, and the tall redhead who was always high scorer in a sweaty gym that transformed at times into crepe paper and spotlight dances. I declare for a malt with two straws, and necker-knobs, catching shiners off the September dock, boats not yet hauled up on land, and I declare for snow forts, the whizzing of snowballs, and snow down the neck, and ice skates across a pond, a good sledding hill, and snow-days free of school. I declare for tree houses that sway in the wind and smell of bark and new leaves, and I declare for all the joys of childhood not mentioned but remembered in the bone.

## Rewinding

I have spun the world out like one  
of those New Year's Eve blowers,  
like the Big Bang, out and out into space,  
and now I'd like to rewind, live life  
backward like Amis' book, let the huge wen  
of my life roll back into timid schoolboys,  
into toddlers with short pants and a long series  
of *whys*. Into those tiny bodies of curve and soft  
bones that fit arms ready to make a cradle.

How to rewind the long marriage back toward  
its beginning, the gawky boy again on the grass  
quadrangle, the mother bent like a shepherd's crook,  
her neck straightening, and her back,  
her hair slipping into black.

The sleek cars become boxy sedans with sensible  
colors, running boards and no seat belts to prevent  
us from seeing how many soccer players fit into  
a Volkswagon Bug. And the quizzes – that awful  
moment before he hands you yours.

Rewind the inner city-block from huge glass buildings  
into a town of elms where Victorian shingled houses  
flaunt gingerbread on both sides of the street,  
then withdraw the flames inside the blackened bricks  
of the junior high as it becomes again bursting  
with light and the ragtail of voices.

Rewind to when my knees still allowed me  
to step into a bobbing dinghy, back to one sail,  
the boat like a cockle, where the centerboard case  
is uncomfortable and the sail snaps and the boom  
crosses as we round the mark, the water chuffs  
at the Sound, and wind ruffles the surface.

Gulls shout as they drop clams on the rocks,  
boys dunk you with their feet, the mothers  
sit on the dock and gossip, and summer  
is forever.

## **The Baby Came to Rest**

**Gretchen Van Lente**

The baby came to rest on the hard pew. The small shivering hands had placed her there, swaddled in a blanket.

The baby knew nothing. Only the smell of the blanket. The hardness of the pew on its head and back.

The baby knew to sleep a long time, to lay still.

The baby knew it was being jolted and pushed around and plopped down again on another hard pew while the mother's breath came and went. Sounding too quiet, then too loud, then far off. It was safest not to move at all, to sleep through it.

The priest got the call, long before she arrived. Another priest calling a priest. She's at it again. Visiting churches. One after another. Soon enough she will come to you. Something ought to be done about it, the other priest said. She was just here. You'll probably get her next. Next church up the road. First the French Parish then the Irish Parish then the Italian Parish and so on and so on. Something ought to be done.

The priest got the nerve. He watched from the rectory window. He saw her beat up Pontiac pull up and park in the lot. The car came to a sudden halt as if she had punched the break. He saw her open the back door and slide the baby off the seat. He saw her throw the baby over her shoulder, wrapped up in the blanket. Poor baby, he thought, poor baby girl.

The priest no longer thought of her as a saint or a martyr or a suffering woman. No longer thought of her, even, as a young beautiful woman who graced his alter guild. He thought of her as a bother. Who should he call? To get rid of her? Something had to be done. He knew what she was doing in there. Inside his church.

The priest called the police. This time I want something done about it. Something has to be done.

The young, blonde officer, used to writing speeding tickets, parked his clean Chevrolet next to her beat up Pontiac. He wouldn't know the feel of a clean car except he was a cop. The priest met him at the front door of the church. "Don't just escort her to her car. She's not right. Something has to be done about it."

The police officer opened the door. The church was almost black with dark. Light streamed in through the stained glass windows. How many saints had she appealed to today, he wondered. How many churches? He glanced around for the baby. There she was. As always. Napping in the pew. Nothing but a little bitty baby. All on its own.

Such an innocent. Will the baby ever know? Will anyone tell her? How she landed in my arms? How I plucked her from the pew? How I sat in the pew holding her, wrapped in the blanket, waiting for the woman's husband to arrive?

There she stood, spreading her arms like Jesus on the cross. Gasping and crying. Standing in the middle of the aisle. Stiff like she was already dead from crucifixion. Church after church. All day long. Once every month. Her church thing. Something had to be done about it.

The priest called her husband. He took a long time, reaching the phone. He worked at a factory. She has done it again. I don't even know what you call it. Does she think she is Jesus, hanging on the cross?

Hanging, dying on the cross? And the baby! What about the baby. Something has to be done about it.

We have places where she can rest. Take her away. Come and get her. Take her away.

The husband got a ride. His boss. It was an emergency. Another emergency. This time she had really done it. His boss let him out in the parking lot and drove away. He glanced at the squad car. He glanced at his old Pontiac. He'd left it for his wife, to

buy groceries, and this is what she does. Something had to be done. He couldn't ignore it anymore.

The husband entered the dark church. He looked at the cop. Which one of us, their eyes spoke. Which one of us takes the baby? And which one of us takes her?

Strong arms. Unfamiliar. Uncertain of the smell. The baby felt lifted up, off the hard surface. Safer now. Just sleep through it.

## ***Friday, I'm in Love***

**Aileen Santos**

### **Monday**

Evelina takes in the warmth of the sun and breathes out. She stands there, waiting for him. Pushes her hair behind her ears, red, at the thought of the last time they met. Her eyes dart about checking for spectators. She fingers her wedding ring, the single karat set in stones. This is the last place she saw him. She spots an elderly couple nearby, wonders if they're happy. She smiles at the woman, who smiles back. She decides to sit down on a bench. It's nearly under a tree so she smells wood and fern and grassy green. Her skirt inches up. The sun grazes her leg, the rest of her, in shade. She closes her eyes, holding his face there. She rotates her ring on her left hand with her right forefinger and thumb then opens her eyes. Her phone rings.

"Hello?" She says lightly.

"Hi, where are you?"

"I'm still at the office, running late. Sorry."

"Oh okay. I'll get the kids then."

"Great. Thanks. Should be home soon," she hits end, straightens her skirt, stands up and walks away.

He's not coming.

Back home, small kids run to her.

"Mommy!"

"Momma!"

"Hi babies!" She opens her arms wide to Sarah and Noor.

"Hi Babe," Kent kisses her on the forehead.

"Hi." She takes off her shoes and stands up, straightening her skirt.

"What's for dinner?"

## Tuesday

1994

*I touch my belly*

*They say the fingers are fully formed.*

*But I can't believe it.*

*He looks at me.*

*I smile.*

*What he doesn't know won't hurt him.*

*He loves me so, he always will.*

*Scrape. Ouch. It hurts. It pulls.*

*I once saw a video of it in health class, the fingers holding on inside.*

*E + M forever I wrote*

*in my spiral notebook with pink pen. I scribbled circles and lines through it later when I didn't want to remember.*

2014

*I walk through a revolving door and he brushes my shoulder.*

*I touch my hair. It's long now, not like it was back then.*

*I turn to walk away.*

*He sees me, stops. He sees me.*

*I get in my car and drive home.*

Kent looks over Evelina's shoulder.

"What're you writing?"

"Grocery list," She flips the page of her old ratty notebook and looks at her husband.

“How are you?” He looks directly in her eyes.

“I’m good. How are you?” She looks away.

“Great.” He still looks at her. She still looks away.

## **Wednesday**

She packs her things in a small luggage: toothbrush, toothpaste, lacy panties, comfortable underwear, an extra sensible outfit of track pants, white tee and running shoes she only wears indoors. She clicks the luggage closed and pulls it towards her, shoves it under the bed.

She’s back at the same park from two days ago. She stands by the same bench. She’s tired so she sits, holding her belly protectively, the packed luggage at her feet.

## **Thursday**

“The entire procedure will take about half an hour. Do you have someone to drive you home after?”

She nods.

“We can’t release you until we know that someone will be here to drive you home,” the doctor says to her knowingly.

“Yes, I’ll call someone.”

“Okay then. Please put on the gown, open side to the back. We’ll just do some paperwork and the nurse will be in to talk with you shortly.”

“Thank you.”

Evelina sits nervously in the cramped dark waiting room.

Her luggage sits under her bed at home.

## Friday

She turns on the TV in her room, flips by the news and talk shows to the all-music channel. An old song is playing, *I don't care if Monday's blue, Tuesday's grey and Wednesday too, Thursday I don't care about you, It's Friday I'm in love*. She keeps it on the channel as she reaches under her bed to get the luggage, still packed. She clicks it open and reaches for her toothbrush, toothpaste. Walks to the bathroom and places it back under the sink where the extra toothbrushes and toothpastes are kept. She takes out the sexy panties and comfortable underwear and places them back in her drawers. Finally, she takes out the running shoes, the track pants and white tee and returns them all to their rightful places. Her rightful place. The place where her things belong. The place where she belongs.

She sits on her bed, powers on her laptop. Sarah and Noor appear on her screensaver and she touches their faces in front of her.

## Amelia in Waiting

JC Freeman

AMY IMAGINED THE NOVEMBER SKY AS A SWIRL OF CREMATED BONES. Harsh and ugly, it went well with nothing other than the desire to stop looking at it. Possibly the sun, a low slung blotch of scuzzy radiance slouched west within the ashes like a grayish fried egg slithering its way out of a filthy skillet.

Amy stood very still at the living room window. Only a double thickness of glass lay between her lungs and the poisons of an increasingly alien atmosphere.

The cul-de-sac that had always been Amy's home lay beneath the depthless sky like a beloved pet killed by a car in the street. All around the remnants of happier times rotted like the crabapples that not even the crows would eat: Cheerful summer barbecue grills tucked under blue tarps held in place by cinder blocks; formerly lush and profuse gardens, now forlorn mudholes; abandoned toys sporting mossy growths, and what had gone unraked of the fiercely luminescent October leaves lay bunched like milk-sodden cornflakes in the gutters and storm drains.

Even at *just* sixteen, Amy knew this time of year well. It was the annual "Pause" that came over the well-fed cul-de-sac between the termination of Halloween festivities and the *agreed upon* going up of the Christmas lights on the Sunday of the Thanksgiving weekend. There was something affected and childish and selfish about this collective mood; something which Amy and her like-minded friends cleverly disparaged. With just enough education in their heads to make them annoying, the kids had wonked-up several alliterative titles for the event: The Morbid Malaise and the Enormous Ennui had been Amy's contributions to that year's gathering at the Round Table—but, alas, the others had favored the lowest common denominatorish, Poopy Pout.

The grandfather clock lashed out four tones. This startled Amy out of her thoughts. Each chime had landed on her soul like a viper's strike. Until that moment the grandfather clock had always been a benign friend that had never behaved rudely. Something about this feeling made Amy feel like a stranger in her own home.

Amy had purposely left the house still upon her arrival. Under normal circumstances, Amy felt ill at ease in places where darkness, silence and contemplation were the chief components. She had even gone to the extreme measure of turning off her cell—which, for Amy, was tantamount to plucking out an eye.

With a reluctant sigh, Amy performed her one and only chore; an action that she could be relied on doing about three times in five: Amy flipped on the porch light for her parents, who'd be home from work within the hour.

Amy's bedroom lay adjacent to the living room and faced the cul-de-sac. Unlike the rest of the tidily kept house, her room was a disorganized mess which resembled an

open archeological dig over-topped by a pop culture village. It was a mixture of the distant past and the oh-so-now. Here and there were fissures in the debris field which allowed forgotten toys and games from Amy's deeper childhood to emerge like trilobites for the picking. Items such as realistically dead virtual pets and dogeared Pokemon cards lay intermingled with current issues of celebrity scandal sheets and the spent husks of no less than six cellars—Oh, and there was a weird, fruity smell in the room too. Amy had theorized that the odor was caused by a known perfume spill interacting with the upending of an older fragrance. Theorizing on the subject was as close to *doing* something about it as she got.

The splay of the room was simple enough: bed, desk and stuff. The first two were constants, the third was ever-changing. Atop the various variables which are important to a young lady of Amy's social status and economic circumstances, lay a smattering of pamphlets. She had gotten *those* that very afternoon. Amy had hurled the pamphlets *at* her room when she got home in vain hope that the accumulated ghosts of her childhood might do something about them. No such luck. In the feeble light cast by the perpetual gloaming, *Folic Acid And You* (a way too happy-clappy missive which extolled the virtues of the gross bean family) stood out like a missionary who had entered the jungle with a cross in one hand and a rifle in the other.

"No, no, no," Amy hissed as she performed a backwards dive onto her bed. This was an ancient action of hers which sometimes toppled perfume bottles, and had recently earned her three stitches in her left elbow because Amy had forgotten about the (alleged) coffin nails Ty had given her on their first date. Amy had heard that some guys bring flowers and/or candy along for that sort of thing; but, alas, Amy was attracted to guys who saw the upside in gifting (alleged) coffin nails.

There was a row of school pictures starring, naturally, Amy, hanging below the crown molding in Amy's room. The queue of ten portraits ran left to right and ranged from the first grade to Amy's sophomore year in high school. Daddy had hung the first seven or eight, but toward the end of his conscription Daddy had cracked-clever forty times to many about the possibility of quicksand that she had to drop him from the portrait hanging team.

Lying in the gloom, Amy took stock of the Ghosts of Amy's Past. Outside business transacted with the Tooth Fairy, Amys One through Three were basically the same person; slightly round in the cheek and grinning shyly, each of Amy's earliest incarnations had bobbed bone-blond hair and had been installed in a jumper that had been designed to be girly and rugged at the same time. Four had a touch less fat in her cheeks and her hair had begun the long process of extracting what's right about red from the sun and including such in its sheen; these trends progressed further in the faces of Five and Six.

To be frank, Six had been the final Amy to show her portrait taker a scintilla of respect. Six was the last Amy to grin shyly for the lens. Seven had concocted a goofy, off-kilter grin that suggested that she might have been high on something (which

hadn't been the case). And Eight, well she just flat out sneered at the camera. Amy recalled the photographer asking Eight if she really wanted to come off that way, and she also remembered him shrugging in a Hey-kid-you've-gotta-know-I-don't-give-a-shit-one-way-or-the-other-way when Eight had replied, "Oh, yes indeedy."

Nine *had* been high on something. A member of Amy's coven had relieved her mother's purse of excess Vicodin that Picture Day. Glassy-eyed and neither grinning nor sneering, Nine was the least *there* in the queue.

Something had gone wrong with Ten. Only Amy was aware of this something. No one else looked beyond Ten's neon pink hair or the mascara and foundation that had been laid on with a trowel (now, no one is suggesting that girls who look this way aren't what they should be). No, what had gone wrong with Ten lay scattered throughout her face like a sky composed of cremated bones.

Amy shuffled herself up onto her elbows to get a better look at Ten. Unlike Seven through Nine, the expression on Ten's face was honest (even snarly Eight had shone a little light in her eyes that told that she wasn't as put out as she pretended to be). Yet there was a ruthlessness emanating from Ten which Amy couldn't understand; an incipient hardness that had no business being in the face of a cul-de-sac kid. Nothing out of the ordinary had happened that Picture Day, but for the life of her Amy couldn't remember the actual taking of her portrait—which was odd, for Amy never forgot anything about her life. Some persons are that way, you know; some persons who fail at turning a porch light on twice in five can be the same kind of person who has total recall in regards to where they were, what they had worn and who said what about whom on a meaningless day that had come and gone so many ends of the world ago.

When Amy was four, she had stolen a cranberry off the table at the grocery store. She recalled expecting a flavor similar to the sugary concoction that came out of a the can, and was unpleasantly surprised by a ferocious bitterness. This had happened on a Tuesday afternoon, right after preschool.

At seven, an ambulance came to take Amy's former next-door neighbor, Mrs. Carlyle, away from the cul-de-sac for good. Until that July 23<sup>rd</sup>, a Thursday, Mrs. Carlyle had been a friendly pest who punctuated her every observation with a tittering laugh. Though Mom had tried to keep Amy from gawking at Mrs. Carlyle as the old lady lay on a gurney, it had been too late: Amy had seen the feverish, insane mania in Mrs. Carlyle's face as well as getting a clear look at the horrible sores that covered her hellishly white fishbelly thighs. And there had been that wonderful, magical October Sunday morning, two years back, when a blanket of ground fog suddenly contained the head of a deer poking up like a submarine's periscope at the treeline behind the cul-de-sac.

A voice spoke up from the mists of Amy's mind as she lay in the increasing darkness. This voice was composed of the worst things in life. This voice had its own weird, fruity imagined *smell*; a breath which wasn't the mingling of divergent off-brand

perfumes forming a third, uneasy scent, but was the decaying stench given off by a car killed pet. The timbre of the voice matched the dusty click made by sun-broiled Scotch broom pods. And this voice gave birth to unwholesome visions such as green-rimmed fiery pustules forming on fishbelly thighs. Amy thought this the voice of Ten.

"You can still beg for a do-over," Ten said. "It'll be like the story you didn't get in Lit class: 'they let the air in.'"

There was something beguiling about Ten's suggestion. Something practical. But the more Amy turned it over in her mind, the more she found herself thinking cold, reptilian thoughts; thoughts Amy equated with the suicide of the soul.

The grandfather clock spat out the half. A ghostly pattern cast by a set of headlights formed on the bedroom wall and slid away.

Amy got off the bed and went to the full length mirror which was attached to her bedroom door. She stood sideways and ran her hands from her shoulders to her hips. She then laid her hands on her flat belly. An expression of horror formed in her eyes; it stood out like a flame in the twilight.

"No," Amy said breathlessly. "No. the air is poison."

by Madeleine Kruhly

## Skin

My mother strains blueberries.

She lifts clusters, bridges before  
monsoons

and rinses them beneath faucet,  
five by honeyhive

five. While we shift on stools to  
press

hands to her back - an old back,  
her elbows

hush sink edge, nail unraveling  
stream.

She removes needles from the  
colander

fisherwoman before spikes of  
sea urchin

as we lift her thin blouse, our  
mouths

open. She gives us two spoons  
of mashed

berries, dripping to stain  
the towel.

We incline our heads before  
counters

to taste those silver ends of  
strained jam

and wonder what else will  
be seen

soft, what else can be left.

## The Photo of Ken

He smoked and his face  
flushed, a sidewalk  
after dark

while at the hour of five or  
four my mother held him  
in his study

gave lips to his left cheek and  
did not notice the stain on  
his lung

which posed in the middle,  
wooden float in a stilled  
lake.

Ken tried to cover it with  
a wink and little weight  
loss

hot bottle-fly hair wilting  
as he was asked to stop  
Ken please

empty your pocket and sink  
those doe-branded silver  
lighters.

His daughter buttoned  
his thickplaid vest and  
looped

ties around a bulging throat,  
making him lemonade  
bourbon and ice

while Ken was told you're  
wasting Ken you're  
wasted.

(Previously published in the UEA MA in Poetry Anthology)

## Sunday

She says I will take you to the coast and I nod at the openness.  
We pull on woven sweaters and drive slow past copper gorse.  
You know when you fall into that, she warns, it samples your  
skin, wanting more.

Outside is green and below river level, but we ignore boats  
and head east. We cross bridges and I put my head on her  
shoulder, it is warm and sweaty. Are you moving out, she  
asks and I must mouth yes, soon.

Shaking legs and ankling elbows, we leave the car and shift  
to the old windmill and pinktinted house. We are near, we  
are close. I point ahead to the sea and we lope there like  
mothers finally in sleep.

She explains that the waves are poor blue because we are  
in Norfolk and here is sand. I strip off my boots and merge  
into the tide. She waits above in the calm, bending to find  
a neck-shaped shell and let it pickle on a white plate.

## **Kirkenes, Norway**

### **Di Jayawickrema**

“Would you like to sit down?”

“Would you like to sit down?” she said again.

“No, no, no,” he said, glancing over his shoulder.

He had been brusque; a bad habit of old. He shuffled around in the crowded bus to face her. She was younger than him, but not by much. Lately, he weighed every new person he met this way: older or younger, younger or older, who’s playing death’s end game--a new, bad habit. A neat, white bob framed her round face, small flecks of mascara in the heavy creases around her alert, blue eyes, an uneven smear of pale red lipstick across her large mouth. Why did women his age wear makeup like they were wearing ghosts? She was looking up at him, her smile half-apologetic, half-defiant. He imagined she feared she had offended him but didn’t see why he should be offended; he was old, after all. Women, at least, had the courage of their convictions. She gave him a small, encouraging nod. She was kind. Or perhaps she just wanted to talk.

“No, thank you,” he said, gentler. “It’s very nice of you, though.”

“I always stumble,” she said quickly. “My body can’t handle the jerking around anymore. With these buses, you can never tell when you’re going to topple right over...”

Evidently, she wanted to talk. He took a breath and tensed his body as in the old days before long plunges in the fjord. This woman would talk until one of them got off the bus.

“Me too,” he lied. He rarely stumbled. He had learned how to balance under the weight of diving gear, moving against quick currents. New York City public transportation was no major challenge. His body remembered so much of what he’d forgotten.

“These days you can’t count on the young ones to give you a seat,” she continued. “They’re so busy looking down at their phones and their little computers.”

“Praying,” he said, absently. He thought of Marit when he first saw her in Kirkenes Church, her smooth, blonde head bent low over a bible. In her younger days, this woman would have looked something like Marit, a little.

The woman laughed--a rough, happy bark with no resentment in it. He moved a little closer to her, rocking on the balls of his feet to avoid cramping.

“Praying to the god of technology,” she said.

He smiled. It was true. People were always praying to something.

“Being preyed upon,” he said.

She laughed again.

"Yes," she said, "so we are, so we are...but it was always like that. Before, it was something else."

"That's true," he said. "That's very true...Are you Norwegian, by any chance?"

"Norwegian? No, I'm Irish, mostly. Celtic."

"Oh," he said flatly. "Me too." He felt an old, dull ache in his chest.

"Why? Do I look Norwegian?" She didn't sound too curious, her voice still pleasant and dry. They had reached that point in the conversation where they would have to plunge deeper or paddle back to shore. He remembered that moment of choice in the dive. There was always so little time to decide. He remembered the midnight sun on the water in Kirkenes, the skin suit clinging to his body, Marit watching from the shore.

"Oh...no. I don't know," he said. "I thought you maybe looked Norwegian."

"Irish all the way!" she said.

There was the lull.

He had snapped the cord of their conversation, and felt guilty. He cast about his mind for a safe subject, but she was quicker.

"Are we near Allen, do you know? I can't see a thing. I usually try to be up front," she said.

He tried to peer past the crush of bodies to the streets moving past. He couldn't catch a sign for long enough to read it, but he knew the buildings. He had always navigated by big markers; a half-submerged prow in a lake, St. Mark's Hotel in the Village.

"We're on about 7th. Not too far now."

"Allen's my stop," she said.

"Mine too, mine too."

"It true we're all being preyed on," she said, a smooth backstroke to their earlier thread. "They say machines are going to be smarter than us one day. We made the machines to work for us and now we're going to be working for them!"

"What goes around comes around, as the French say," he said absently, thinking of the day he left Kirkenes, Marit's face hard and burning, his chest as heavy as if large stones were lining the bottom of his heart.

"Is that a French saying? I thought everybody says that."

"Do they?" he asked, genuinely surprised. He once got roaring drunk one night by the Seine with another frogman who clapped him hard on the back and said, "Ce qui se passe autour de revient." He had laughed and asked what that meant. The frogman laughed, tried to explain in haphazard English, and passed him the flask. They drank all night. They didn't talk about the war. In the morning, they carefully wrote each other's names down on little pieces of paper, promising to write, but he never spoke to the French diver again. It had never occurred to him that other people said that.

“Yes, I think so,” she said. “I think every culture has a saying like that.”

“I’m sure you’re right,” he said quickly. “Of course. I just heard it in France so I always thought it was French. It’s funny...”

“Well, so it was a French saying,” she said. She was very kind. “When were you in France?”

He thought about what to say. Should he tell her how his eyes honed in on that French frogman’s name a scant year later in a long list of dead combat divers and thought, with a sick swoop, “What goes around comes around.” Should he tell her about Norway, about the sunken village he swam through beneath the icy valley of Lyngstolvatnet, how Kirkenes is one of the only places in the world where the time zone moves forward instead of backward. Should he tell her how he once walked six miles through the Norwegian countryside to the border point of three different countries with three different time zones, and stood there with Marit, boundless.

He craned his head away as if to peer out of the window again.

“Almost at Allen now,” he said. “Turning the corner.”

“Oh,” she said.

The bus lurched to its habitual grinding halt, exhausts sighing, the heavy weight of the vehicle settling down on its wheels, doors opening. People began scrambling for the exits as if they were afraid the bus would whisk them away. He held the strap tightly with one hand and pressed his back hard against the pushing crowd, trying to clear a space for her to stand up and walk ahead of him.

“Mademoiselle?” he said with a stiff bow, sweeping his arm in front of him. How Marit had laughed whenever he’d done that.

The woman laughed too, nodding her thanks before she began to shove her way through to the front.

In the open air, they faced each other. It was still light out, the evening sun glinting off brownstone windows above the propelling city. People jostled past them in every direction.

“Well, I go that way,” she said, pointing south on Allen Street.

He looked down Allen. On opposite sides of the street, a faded brick housing project faced a monstrous new glass hotel, both flanked by scraggly city trees. If you kept walking, you’d run into a row of small Chinese dollar shops that used to be Jewish shops that used to be Italian shops. Perhaps she lived even further down, in one of the old, cheap brownstones with apartments as dark and small as the space between a hand laid over yours.

“Well,” he said at last. “Have a good day.”

“Right,” she said. “Good day.” She turned away, a small backward wave of her hand.

He turned and walked in the opposite direction, eyes straight and forward.

by E M Schorb

## THE URN

It is this heavenly tale, that the child in one could wish for, that keeps me awake tonight, on the eve of my sixtieth year, fearing death and wishing for grace, not knowing what either is, or even if either is, though the unbreathing stillness of bodies has me fairly convinced of the former, and of the latter I have seen so little as to doubt what I have seen as aberrant, some twist in the air and light that, so full of desire for the magic of exemption, I have deluded myself, half knowing I lied, half believing my own white lie. But by sixty I've come to believe that the only grace is the goodness of the rational mind, and the only evil the old instinctive animal brain, the knob of the cerebellum, seeking its own satisfactions of food and sex and selfhood, the ultimate isolate one, that yet does not understand that we are together in this flowing, amazing hologram, with or without a creator that may or may not care; that, come alive, we have every right to judge the nature of existence, for, however arrived at, our brains are analytic, not made to hunker down in obeisance to riddling gods, nor to any phantom that hides in a cloud of unknowing. For we have one another and have courage and the hope of courage and the practice of courage, to help us, and, when the wind is calm, and the waters lean down for the moon, we have lonely senses to share till at last our time has run out. Now, as I think in the night, somewhat afraid of the day that will see me another year older and that much closer to death, I mark the speed of time that has seen me, a moment ago, a child walking home from school, or a man going off to harm's way, or this or that or the other, and think of these things that we have, of others and courage and love, of human intelligence used as it plainly was meant to be used, and I think that I'll sleep and awaken less anxious than I was considering a heavenly tale, for in the realist reality, the closest thing to the truth, there is finally a peace of mind that is a grace in a sweet surrender. It is the heavenly tale that the child in one should wish for. *It* will allow me to sleep in the night of my sixtieth year.

## SPINDRIFT

I saw the ghost of the old Provincetown Playhouse perched on the end of a pier that wasn't there anymore and hovering in the wet wind above the bucking water that is forever eroding the sands and stones of old Cape Cod. I had walked a long way on Commercial Street in heavy rain, close by the beach, peeking between the old, weathered buildings, and down beyond them, glimpsing fogbound boats, until I found the megalith with the bronze plaque on it. Once out there on the water stood the fish house shack that had been converted into a theater, and there in the mist and spindrift walked Eugene O'Neill to the opening of the first of his *Seven Plays of the Sea*. Now I saw Edna Millay dance out to the ghostly playhouse, laughing, with her crushed umbrella, her wet red hair, and the pages of a script flying off like paper hats—Oh, and there go Clifford Odets, and the young John Garfield! I puffed on a damp and smokeless cigarette and stared out at the invisible converted shack. I could see and hear them out there, their histrionics and high laughter commingling in a crescendo with the watery, spindrift symphony. Maybe I'll join them out there someday, for a time may come, as magical as circular, when someone else may come and see me in that enthusiastic crowd of poets and playwrights and players, perhaps a little audience of curious locals, doubtfully applauding.

## THE TRUE MEANING OF *ARMIDE*

The overt message of Gluck's tragedy is that it is more dangerous to love than to be loved, but that simplicity is not the true meaning of *Armide*. Rinaldo had a strong arm and a brave heart, but Armide had all the power of magic at her disposal. How could she have failed to win her way? She failed because, in loving Rinaldo, it became impossible for her to use her power against him, love rendering the powerful helpless before the object, no matter how weakened that object. If Rinaldo had loved Armide as she loved him, there should have been no tragedy, but a tale of domestic bliss, one utterly unsuitable for the public's appetite for mayhem and murder, or, in this case, for fiery suicide. More than enough about humanity is told when it is said that *Armide* remains Gluck's masterpiece, nearly as popular today as when it was first produced in Paris at the Academie Royal de Musique, in 1777, for a blood-thirsty culture that couldn't wait for heads to roll.

## DARK CANZONE

From when some wandering primate first discovered that vocal cords had formed within its throat: when thorax wind was blown, and it discovered a modulation of its grunts, discovered it had a tongue that could articulate more subtly than it had presumed; discovered, in fact, its ur-humanity; discovered that it was different from monkeys, wiser, and could communicate a plan; was wiser, one than the other, in this gift; discovered, in short, itself as special being, poet, it sang in lamentation for the poet, O felt itself the oddest ape, a poet, and, with the weight of what it knew, discovered the truest nature of itself as poet, that it must bear the burden of the poet, harsh bile of truth that rises in the throat and burns the vocal cords of every poet. For meaning murders innocence, the poet learns, word by word; and to articulate as in a grammar, to articulate as words demand, and so to be a poet is to be that most special being, stranger than any other animal—but wiser? It felt itself the strangest thing, much stranger than any other animal—a poet—for words had made it thuswise stranger. But was it better being this much wiser? What had this primate after all discovered? Who really thinks it's better to be wiser? Who doesn't know it's sadder to be wiser? Who envies words blown through a poet's throat? What poet hasn't wished to cut its throat? If grammar makes for meaning, is it wiser to be a special being, to articulate the truth words find—or not articulate? It may be braver to articulate, to be an animal, yet strangely wiser, but is it wisdom to articulate the grunts of animals, articulate from them the existential life of poet among the primates, to articulate—syntactically commanded—articulate the place in nature that we have discovered, the death in nature that we have discovered? Grunt one last grunt! Enough! Articulate no more! Oh, envy nothing from the throat of any poet! Let it cut its throat! Oh, let the primate poet cut its throat before it's forced on to articulate, by sending lamentations through its throat, from its self-fabled heart and out its throat, how truly sad it is to be a little wiser than other animals that have a throat but have no vocal cords within that throat which they can use to make themselves a poet who sings the lamentations of a poet, a sadder wiser primate prophet poet, whose ordered language has at last discovered what happy animals have not discovered . . . . What is it animals have not discovered, which leaves them happier than any poet? The ordered thought of death! It might be wiser for nature never to articulate; wisest, to stay mere stone, which has no throat.

## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A MUSE

A muse has responsibilities, too. She owes her worker a few but important debts of honor. If a muse is going to come to an artist, thinker, dancer, or whatever, she owes it to that worker to stay until the job is done, not desert at the first opportunity. She owes him, who has been loyal to her, her loyalty. She owes it to him not to play such tricks as muses are known to play, i.e., not to inspire him with false inspiration, so that his work is false; and she owes it to him to give of herself freely and not to tease him with half measures. Muses are notoriously whimsical, and they must be brought to book on this account. It is high time that they grew up, that they realized they are playing games with someone's life, for an artist's work is his or her life. Muses should be answerable to somebody. They should be compelled to file reports on the progress of their workers at least once a year. Has he taken you up on your offer of an epic? Has she recruited enough dancers for the show? Questions such as these should be posed. Also, have you offered an epic lately? Have you found the requisite number of dancers? Responsibility for the ultimate work must be shared, and shame to the muse who refuses to share. I am calling in all that you owe me, O Muse, a lifetime of suffering in your name.

***answers move the silt downstream***

**John Casquarelli**

this highway is beat-up concrete we pass at eight-thirty cool morning toward the  
Dakotas  
free of billboards and advertisements and you say "Go away, I'm seeking truth."  
so we drive on  
puzzled  
willing to get lost in some farmer's backyard  
discuss memories, birth control,  
and I confess to being an unfeeling, ignorant clod, a sort of trousered ape to whom it is  
obviously a waste of time to take an interest in anything higher than Lady Gaga's  
underwear  
isn't it enough to know the engine is flooded?  
but, of course, that's technology  
it's so simple when you see it  
barbed-wire fences  
locked gates  
signs that say NO TRESPASSING  
fewer trees and a sudden feeling of being a spectator amid the rattles near  
cottonwoods

after a while we whisper to mountain sunlight  
run down each other's ghosts  
move to the bed by the window  
I read a sentence or two from an old butterfly journal  
afraid that voices will be silent if I let them  
as soon as the wind stops  
we rest our heads on the sleeve of my jacket  
think of the empty road in the photograph  
"Is there anything more," you ask,  
"besides one tiny refuge of scrub pines and mosquito repellent?"  
familiarity makes it hard to see  
past shady curbstone behind hotel  
where you can throw a penny onto a small green plain  
reach some temporary goal  
that explains how much better it is to travel  
than to arrive

***a hundred ways to die in summer longing  
for Salvatore***

**John Casquarelli**

Tuesday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
7:51pm

my father enjoyed collecting musical instruments. he never played any of them. he just seemed to take pleasure in imagining the music. my father would also listen to the same four stations on his car radio. sometimes the last note of your favorite song resonates long after the song is over.

in San Juan  
Sammy told a story of a cloud that wept  
when it forgot the ocean's lyrics

if there's one regret it might be  
never having said I understand

there are days I wish for  
8-track tapes and a bottle  
of Don Q

remember  
it's only a memory if you let me in

arms shake while holding the side bars of his Hospice bed. a tsunami crash that parts every inch of his body with each labored breath. notes that include directions on Xanax, Haldol, morphine, ibuprofen, and oxygen. a comfort pack in the fridge that's not very comforting, and still no way of knowing how to say goodbye. eventually all palm trees lose their branches.

when Hugh Hefner dies  
no one will say he went to a better place

maybe I'll find the strength  
to leave my doubts behind

study stars until they give me an answer  
or leave me with new questions

he would leave his bedroom door open just enough to remind me how safe I could feel every time the winds picked up. by no means did he rely on nostalgia to make me lose my sense of time and place. so I waited until he walked past his closet, beyond my vision.

I waited until I began to understand my limitations.

I sit on my father's shoulders  
through years of grey sky wonder

sing a hymn about doves who rise  
past whirling winds  
to feed a dream's appetite

it's so serene when you're 20000 feet in the air  
perhaps gravity will look away  
and allow us a few moments of peace

there's a postcard on his dresser of a sailboat falling off the edge of the world. the setting sun is searching for a short-haired woman holding a lantern. it understands how empty the landscape is when all we do is live in canopic jars.

if an echo could undress a rose bush  
it would leave everything unfinished

each window is a letter  
about leaving home

if you must dance  
do so under a street lamp in January  
when the neighborhood girls are watching

we exit I-95 at Hillsboro Boulevard, head east and speak in riddles for awhile. his condo isn't far away, but we decide to head to the pier instead. the waves are choppy and a couple of teenage surfers are pointing at a section of whitewater, anticipating their next foam climb. I keep staring at the moving waves because they remind me that any moment may be a new discovery.

follow tracks to midnight meditations  
reach for hillside country  
until we pass outhouses  
that line the edge of the fields

somewhere between the pieces  
I see the green summer grass  
and find you there

***the mirror lies***     John Casquarelli

time is illusion  
is a degree  
by which we say  
goodbye  
to family  
friends  
and every last  
temptation  
on the evening  
tide

the baritone song  
of a lunar  
eclipse  
returns in morning  
or mourning  
greeted by  
gulls

she would list  
her thoughts  
with invisible ink  
allowing her mind  
          to change  
          to contradict  
          to be a  
          contradiction

whoever invented  
laughter  
must have been  
a diabetic  
howling at the  
stained moon  
between dignity and  
dharma

why must home  
be a wounded  
word  
or an empty  
shell  
of slow  
vibration  
it's funny  
what we collect  
what we value  
in the solitude  
of postcolonial  
light

imagination is  
a tornado  
she once told me  
I was  
swept  
by her  
bedroom  
smile

a ladybug  
slips into a crevice  
of her own reward  
sees the beauty of  
the poem flower  
as it unfurls

inhale the  
winter frost  
wrapped in its  
snowy shrine  
hungry for a  
new need

take away  
my blanket  
and you will  
find a forgotten

wish amid  
blossoms  
and fallen  
leaves

and you will  
tell today  
let's return  
same time  
tomorrow

## Notes From the Underground

Tamim Sadikali

It's still warm. A gentle breeze caresses as the day nears end, carrying notes of grease and diesel. I breathe in deep, grateful for this city, welcoming its essence into my dying body. Many find their equilibrium in nature – far from the madding crowd they seek the roll and break of waves, find solace in the setting sun, or in sighting a lone stag on a misty dawn. But for me it's this steel and concrete, these tracks, this grease and diesel.

A low horn sounds and an engine starts, readying a train for locomotion. The main rush of the day is gone but still the hustle and bustle, a blur of men and women tearing to be elsewhere. But I sit still. *Eeni, meeni, mieni, mo...* I watch the show from a bench, just outside the first set of open doors, and pop some peanuts into my mouth. I'm not a cruncher - I like to roll 'em around, let the sharpness of salt induce saliva, wait for the two to mingle, and get a kick from that sizzle.

And there she is - long, straight auburn hair, sashaying politely with her dainty run. Even from here she stands out, that hair striking a pose amongst the brunettes and regulation mousey mops. Just like she intended.

And I don't have to do a thing – the conjunction of stars, providence...the inevitable end of things simply reel her in. She stops and studies the boards before looking long in my direction, checks back once more and starts off briskly. And there'll be no escape for her, and no escape for me - just as it was meant to be, for I believe in destiny. Are we really nothing more than atoms, just random by-products from some cosmic soup? Somehow, the heart rebels.

And even though this is fate's hand, some pity surfaces: what would she have changed if she'd found out five years ago, or last week, even yesterday? *She wears a sleeveless long dress – elegant, cotton, summery. And despite the distance I notice men noticing her, drinking her in with a passing glance. So many pretensions of grandeur and yet we're hardwired for simplicity...* But this was unavoidable, my Dear; set in stone. What – you didn't know? You see, that's precisely the problem. Some technological advance, a bit of comfort...with death no longer lingering in our nostrils, we've become more ignorant than our slop bucket using forebears.

Looking back on my own life, I've only ever known three pleasures: eating meat, riding meat, and putting meat into meat. But in my condition, none of these is now possible. I was oblivious at my own last supper; it stings that I can't remember, that I didn't conduct my final affairs with ceremony. Anyway the show must go on and people continue streaming past, barely noticing this pasty faced codger dressed in black on a summer's day. They're blind to my evil eye, my running mind working out percentages, pleasures and pain. *A whistle blows and she breaks from brisk walk to canter.*

*Incongruously, she's wearing trainers – a most ill-fitting accompaniment to that oh-so*

*pretty dress.* And so this is it. All that's left is to remind others - to puncture their cocoon, to taste fear in cold perspiration. It's a pity us teachers no longer get the respect we deserve.

*The platform is long and she's still running, trying to get to that first carriage...where I am waiting, still sat on the bench outside, eager to commence our communion; my tuition.* I'll tell her that she should feel cheated, to have lived in such an inglorious age. Where is our Jesus Christ, our Hitler, our Gandhi? Without fervour, life gets reduced to a sequence of anodyne distractions. And I'll confess that my life has served no purpose, not even to myself - and that my only wish now is to be exceptional in death. I hope she'll understand.

She is almost here and I turn away, meditating on the scuff of trainers on the platform floor, the puff leaving her winsome chest before being sucked straight back in.

*Something is not right...she's not the one...* Being careful to avoid eye contact I move swiftly from bench to open doors, just as the pips go. And now it's too late. I turn around from inside and we see each other for the first time, her flushed face just inches away, on the other side. Light from the setting sun frames her, shrouds her for precious seconds before dipping away. And in that sliver I see wisps of auburn hair matted to flushed cheeks, and a simple pendant necklace, ending with a discrete heart. She presses open palms on the closed door in desperation, anger dancing across her fine features, before blowing away. The train shudders into life, the carriage screeching, resisting the pull of locomotion. And we hold each other's eyes, knowing the moment will soon pass. She has a badge pinned above her breast, one of those special ones from the London Underground – Baby On Board – and her face softens as she holds hands up in resignation, and smiles. I guess that explains the loose clothing and trainers.

Feeling tired I take a seat by the window and look into red-tinged skies, closing in on this spent day. The carriage is mostly empty and I relax - the simplicity of train travel is truly palliative.

An alarm on my wrist watch sounds discreetly, prompting me to remove an orange-coloured pill from my pocket, one of my many medications. I swallow it without any water and soon curse its bitterness, at the back of my throat. I try swallowing again but my mouth is parched and I'm unable to produce enough saliva. These small frustrations hang heavy in my gut. Still, not long to go now.

**by Patricia Connolly**

**Ash man/gatherer**

Not wanting to walk empty handed through the crowd  
of gentle(wo)men in black, blue (brown), and spendthrifts,  
purse snatchers, pickpockets, bargain hunters, fondlers  
of capitalism's doodads, brought together  
to buy-sell-take—the gatherer hunts down objects  
fallen by the wayside, discarded, broken, lost.  
Bundling them together he hopes to find order  
that will make certain sense of himself in the world,  
so, well-disguised he may pass quietly amongst them  
unseen, neither outside nor beyond nor within.

And he has found a lately dead monk's small suitcase  
name in faded ink, thrown away in the gutter.

The ash man had packed in scraps of his early life,  
the mementoes that still burned with his bright spirit—  
ashes he'd saved from the kitchen years of his youth,  
the spoon he'd used in the eating match with the troll,  
the woodchip that led to the ship, built in a night,  
that by magic ran as fast on land as water.

A locket the dearly won princess gave to him  
when he left, escaping from her father's dull court  
and the executioner's narrowed, greedy eyes—  
all in the cardboard suitcase with his sewing kit.

A flypaper across the gatherer's back traps  
all manner of passing views of him and his life,  
which otherwise buzz nastily about his head.  
He seeks to catch them, dry them out before they sting.

He is stared at often as a live talisman,  
a sight prayer, offered to ward off the starers' fears  
of falling into the gatherer's life to drown,  
never to lurch into their own old lives again.

The starers fear to see only a faint outline  
of their own faces in a puddle, window, mirror,  
the center blank, featureless like the paper hoop  
before a circus dog smashes it as she jumps  
through into the great emptiness on the far side.

An angled mirror on his persian carpet cape  
shows him not an absence of his face's features  
but images of clouds (mares' tails, high mackerels).  
They differ in form from place to place and tell him  
where he is direction of prevailing spirits  
he must follow to a fosterplace of sorrow.

There the space he once consumed has long since snapped shut  
leaving no trace of his life as it once was known,  
caught in the ash man's sparkling dreams by a cold fire.

## Shelter

Looking to squeeze into  
the ragged space between  
bedrock and brick stairway,  
acted on by frost, heat,  
sand, rain, wind, again heat.

In a time of starvation, undiscussed, cannibalism takes place.

People survive their own disgust, live, survive the last dish that they ate.

To survive they continue on, refrain from speaking, thinking that word.

Shelter?

An apricot tree grows  
above the piled garbage,  
a rat town's set apart  
by formal iron railings.

The hunger stories, warm blooded, stink, sweat, shiver, draw in a runner,  
anorexic, affluent, bones poking through his dry skin, he runs, runs,  
drier, thinner, more emaciated, at each step into his past.

Shelter?

The gap is so narrow  
between bedrock and stairs,  
hard to see how even  
a human spirit could  
squeeze in, stretch itself out.  
No cover from weather.

Many huge people are sailing along, small, delicate feet and hands.  
they bear earlier generations' lives buried deep in their soft flesh,  
starvation lives of those dead on country roads, in ditches, grass-stuffed mouths,  
rags on hollow bodies, skin tight over bones, muscle, with all flesh gone.  
People dying in empty rooms. Flesh/no flesh, it all ends as it must.

Shelter?

The body could huddle,  
but without its spirit,  
empty, it would perish.

Shelter?

Yellow caterpillar  
crawls into the thin space  
between rock and brick stairs.  
A predator watches  
sharp eyed, waiting to pounce.

Shelter?

Whose spirit do we see,  
who is it lies outside?  
Who is the predator,  
what is the space between?

Shelter?

## **Shout over the one stretch**

His shout's a container, all of his life's in it,  
women, children, men, forgotten or remembered.

The fierce walking:

Future to past, then past back to future, he walks,  
wearing a rut in the ground over the one stretch.

All is clear before him as he rages, prays, howls.

He's marching home, even as his old home retreats,  
moves at every step back into the darkness.

On his way:

He passes skeletons, destination unknown,

They're wading through the steppe grasses, moving quickly,  
red kerchiefs are tied over their lower faces,

revolutionaries who seek to conceal themselves,  
a kind of living, carrying their kind of dead.

It's a gesture of reverence for the future

as it piles up the past, keeps it from dispersing.

Behind them, a rim of high mountains, bare of trees,

a dark painterly sky rolling a thunderstorm

from far off towards the skeletons, their burdens.

At a great distance near the sky,  
his home town is grass grown, empty,  
on a small cliff above the plain,  
staring windows watching blind eyed  
over the marching skeletons  
which take a path away from there,  
leaving the man alone to head home,  
shouting, as he marches, shouting.

## **When's your turn**

Open. The door to the forbidden room.  
Clean bricks, no light, no lichen growing there.  
It's an ordinary door, no magic,  
clumsily laid bricks block the way in.

She knows he wanted no accomplices.

This was dirty, personal work, ugly,  
perverse, hidden away behind the bricks.

She picked the lock, the key clean on the hook,  
untouched, the key glinted there in the light.

No blood on the key, blood to betray her.

On the door sill, a map printed on silk,  
map of a theoretical escape plan,  
pressed into a fugitive's weakened hands,  
with a crack about blood as she crawled off—  
the only way is there, there is the way,  
behind the bricks, and keep going, don't stop.

#

He'd had his beard colored, a nice azure.  
Shook the doorknob of the room as he passed.  
Looked hard at the key clean on its nail

A cold voice spoke in his head: when's your turn?  
He looked at her seeing nothing, no one,  
in a flash saw the room behind the bricks,  
disappointed in his hopes as he drove home.  
Thought to ask her if she'd seen the map,  
but the words were wrenched away unspoken.  
The key hung there glinting in the light.  
(One at a time, they'd hammered, shrieked, died.)

The healer watches him come. On the edges of the wasted fields of the South and stuck back in the roadless reaches of timber where people have trails like animals, the unseen faceless sum of mankind's lesser genes quietly disassemble cars and squat underneath trees talking, and back of them lie small dwellings of rotted wood and sagging floors where strange children sit rapt for hours on end slaving mutely and uttering no words from their stunned mouths. Pictures of porches full of them all shy and embarrassed or smiling in delight turn up now and again here and there, but no visitor but the documenter of the far less fortunate comes to visit again. It is not that they are not God's children, but that mankind shuns them, bad reminders of rotted teeth and mismatched eyes, uncontrollable sexual desire turned loose in the woods to procreate a new race of the drooling mindless eating where they shit. He is like them, but even they would not accept him. An old midwife who knew anything would not allow the question. In the first few desperate moments the hand would smother the mouth, pinch the nostrils, still the heaving chest trying to draw in the first tiny breath. The brother and sister know this. They have known it for years.

The thing comes closer and the healer looks into its depthless eyes, eyes like a fish that lives so deep in the dark black of the ocean and has no need to see. He thinks of the woman's legs in the back seat of the car parked behind a Walgreen's in Sumter and the strength of the promise of God. He thinks not of retribution or outrage, and not even anymore. He thinks of mercy, and lambs, and he brings his hands out from his sides to suffer to him this outcast. His fingers reach and they touch and he clamps them down hard over the ears. Dust motes turn in the air. They stand in stillness, hardly breathing, locked by the touch of another hand. Their eyes close. The healer fills his chest with air. He prepares to command him to heal.

— from "A Roadside Resurrection" by Larry Brown

by Sheila Murphy

### **A Woman Who Is Old and Beautiful**

A woman who is old and beautiful  
Does not replicate herself  
She chaperones impending signs of life  
Without a guarantee her time will be returned  
She looks out her window, notices  
The gray barrier that glass becomes  
A slide of golden leaves  
A swing set  
Solo repetition  
Of the birds, and random  
Timbres of the pets next door

### **Sand Lake**

Font size closes in on blushing just before the trees go dark. I heard her falsify the script, and then felt moved to volunteer for a non-speaking part. Each vowel toned slowly where its patron noun had crept. The child inside the store wore pink on its pale head. I liked everything approximating a protective instinct. Nothing about the man who stood there made the bird vibrato go away. It was snowing where I left it. At the corner of Ludington Street and something with the number 10, perhaps. Just now, the chimney sounded a metallic, indrawn breath. You called, and I removed myself. I broke into my atmosphere, where every cue was printed on a gray card with pale ink. The lights were on my face. My face was at attention. A general malaise slept in the field, a silken storehouse of old crops. I grazed where I might walk. And soon there were identities to read. Now I am young enough to know the child is not my own. Pure teak. A thought, perhaps a revolution, met with simpering.

Justice as a word, resolve, the nubile fortress of disaggregation,  
*in nomine patris*

## Portrait

He was always waiting.  
Gave me gifts I could not face.  
Books went unread.  
I left no tears.

I thought the things I thought.  
He said he understood  
I tempered truth for him.  
He would include himself.

Today I shop his interests from the internet.  
I see he lives the same.  
Now desert kisses me, and quietly.  
I take each blossom of this month of pretty light.

I do nothing for myself and everything  
to match known darkness with new light.  
I look across what blooms.  
I know what is not mine.

by John Grey

## INSOMNIAC

ten thousand trucks,  
heard a night-long man  
as only he would only hear them,  
gripping the sounds to his flesh,  
as they angrily rumbled toward him  
or pulled roughly away –  
the outside crowded around him,  
wheel on tar,  
bat whizzing around lamp post,  
lengthening the waking hours  
to an impossible stretch of time –  
his wife's breaths  
were as soft as frogs licking dew  
but they just added to the crescendo -  
and then there were his thoughts,  
clanging vehicles hauling  
a crude, complaining cargo  
from the dresser's fields of shadow  
to the pillow's bustling warehouse -  
sleep was impossible-  
and how his woman slept

## **BOY SHOT ON BROAD**

Blood - the spurt that illuminates.  
and across the narrow street,  
in tenement after tenement.  
minds imagine the open wound -  
even the invincible man  
parading his marble torso  
feels a wince -  
a thought bewilders him -  
a dawn is not all that streaks red –

a mother in her terrible anguish -  
do not make me see it!  
each time with less strength:  
until her head falls like her breasts

then cop cars, ambulance,  
not a confident profile to be had,  
no more beautiful bodies -  
just skin holding back the veins.

## ELLA

I lived for over thirty years  
with husband and family  
in the house on Edgewood...

.  
I remember the rose garden,  
the patio furniture,  
my son playing guitar in his room,  
my daughter - she draws a blank -  
and then the man I married,  
watching Mary Tyler Moore,  
both new and reruns...

now I hang suspended  
between a sloping lawn,  
three oak trees,  
a rocking chair  
and a chipped cup of weak coffee...

you can say time has not been kind  
but that's not time's job...

if seen say, from a knothole  
in that distant fence,  
you would easily conclude  
that I belong here...

if you're going that way  
give my regards  
to the people peeping nervously  
through that knothole...

their fence will come.

## Francis Thinks of Val

### Olivia White

The ground grew muddy. It softened in early winter rains, flattening with each of Francis's heavy footsteps across the yard. He twisted the blinds shut and turned on the lamp. Jane's plane must have landed by then. He finished off his beer and checked his thawing steak. He and Jane ate well, cooked gourmet homemade meals. Every few weeks they dressed up and headed out for oysters or sushi. Sundays, brunch after church at the Inn. Maybe a bloody mary. Not Jane, though, she didn't like a drink in the morning.

Valerie had never liked bloody marys and preferred that they refrain from any alcoholic beverages before six. They'd sipped mimosas one anniversary morning. He kissed her hand, arm, neck, lips. Thought himself the luckiest man in the world. That was when they were still in their twenties. Francis had watched her leave nine years ago. He had been pulling into the driveway. Stopped suddenly, stared at tears streaming her cheeks and her wide eyes as she froze next to her car. He clambered out of his car after her as she threw herself into hers, locked the doors, and sped away, desperate hands yanking the seat-belt over her shoulder. Inside, he'd found her reasons on their pillow, a letter three pages front and back. He didn't waste his time reading them. It was like he told his friends. No matter what either of them may have done to hurt the other, when he made his vows he meant them. He hadn't taken them lightly. He held up his side of the bargain.

He and Jane married some years after on a sunny winter day. They were more than cordial. They loved each other. Just kept a healthy distance. Her work trip would last four days. These occurred almost monthly. He smiled to himself and the quiet house. They rationed their relationship into mealtime, television, after-work complaints, the bedroom. A sweet note on the desk every now and then. Kisses on the cheek. His eyes lingered on the picture of them together on their honeymoon. His arm collapsed her shoulders in toward him but her body wasn't touching his. He often paused to look at it during his paperwork, lightened by their smiles, relieved to see how far they both had come.

He sat, put up his feet, closed his eyes. Spoke out loud to himself, controlled and articulate. "Meeting with Jennings' landscapers, nine a.m." His quiet muttering resonated. Rich, bass tones permeated his words. His height, broad shoulders, and dark Italian features already made for a persuading figure. This particularly helped his work, though in his younger days he used it almost solely to bring girls home with him. And whatever he wanted from there. Even Jane, his wife of six years now, hardly detected the power it had over her. The voice influenced her more than she knew. He prided himself on these secret accomplishments. When he and Jane had first started dating, she had come across some drawings he'd done of Val. At that point, she still

hadn't seen Val before and so didn't recognize immediately who it was. She picked them up, and asked him where they came from, called them intricate and beautiful. He played humble.

"They're mine. I draw a bit, mostly for work you know. Blueprint stuff. I'm glad you like them." She immediately asked who it was, and he told her it was his ex-wife, just some drawings he had done of her awhile ago. He saw her tense up a bit, continued on to ease her worries. Told her he'd been cleaning out some old drawers, found them, didn't quite know what to do with them. Her shoulders relaxed a bit, but she said he should give them to a thrift shop or just throw them away. He agreed, but after they were married she found them, stalked out of the garage and slapped them onto the counter. Looked at him with raised brows.

"Explain."

He had calmed her easily by saying he had put them out there to get rid of and forgot they existed, that he would take them to the thrift store tomorrow after work, that he'd draw her anytime she wanted. He never did any of those things, just ended up with drawings of twenty-nine-year-old Val in his work truck. Of course he hadn't forgotten, and of course Jane couldn't understand. Those drawings were some of his best, caught Val's cheeks with just the right amount of soft and sharp. He wasn't going to give them away. He might even be able to sell them, make it worth his time.

The grey light filtered through the dirty windows of the kitchen. Francis stretched out with a contented sigh, cracked a beer, and grabbed a pen and paper. He wrote out his schedule, keeping everything organized in boxes. "So I can...stop at the deli for lunch, before...the one p.m. Wosler house inspection. Those jack-asses can't tell a water heater from a boiler..."

Having filled out the schedule, he cracked another beer, and prepared his steak. By the time he ate, five empty Redhooks decorated the counter and he sipped Campari and soda. The ice clinked in the glass every time he tipped it back. Its iconic cherry-red glinting against the ice and glass in the lamplight. In low light, the bitters and soda made rubies of the ice. He liked that image of himself: sitting comfortably, nothing to bother him, a thick glass in his hand topped of with bite-size rubies. Jane would point out that could only last as long as he was willing to hold off on drinking it down. Valerie would already have tried to stop him at the four beers. She started by worrying about him, then encouraged him to try habit-breaking techniques, bought him books about alcohol and health, quit drinking herself, asked him to stop, begged him. "I don't want you to fall away from me," she had said, and he remembered the swell of warmth and felt himself larger in the room, taller. She countered his assertion of power, and questioned every discrete persuasion. But this push and pull only further satisfied his sense of control. The space left by her offered no resistance, and Francis was left with the unshakeable feeling that he had lost a fight he designed. But he reminded himself that rigged or not, she cheated the rules.

The light faded from grey to gone and he suddenly grew more aware than ever that his eyes were getting worse. The evening set in early, only six. He turned up the lamp intensity, squinted, and turned it a bit back down. He kept fiddling with it, unable to control the quick turn of his fingers. Another beer, another light adjustment. As happy as Francis was to share his bed with Jane, he always looked forward to the sole occupation of the room. Having the bed to himself a weekend here and there let him sprawl, dizzy with gin, and fantasize about the young women from the movies, then fall into the bathroom, pants down, one hand supporting him against the sink. Jane lacked nothing in these respects, but at forty-five, that spirited corruptibility failed to resurface. Francis didn't create expectations, nor did he avoid the fact of his fifty-six years. The beauties on the screen offered themselves to his imagination. He wouldn't think of disappointing them.

"Las' beer," he stated. He burped and downed the rest of it. "Better walk't off a while. Gotta work'n the morning. Francis, pull't together. Water." He filled a glass, drank it, slipped outside. "I'll get sick att'ere. Muss b'below freez'n." Shuffled back inside for his overcoat. As soon as he walked out the door, he stepped into his muddy half-frozen lawn and slipped. Chuckling to himself, he lay there a moment longer. "Thank God thatwuz b'fore I pissed allovr this damn'd mud." He remembered Valerie telling him once that she loved him most when something surprised him, something he hadn't planned for, because he would respond to it without a sign. She said, "No one's more smooth than my Francis."

"Yeah, Val gal? You go ta hell. I couldn' give a damn you say'm smooth."

The mist thickened and covered everything with damp. Francis kept thinking of Valerie. Staring into the mist, his mind reeling, he saw her take off her clothes for the first time and he remembered how different it felt, how making love to her had nothing to do with her perfect body. He shook his head, reminded himself that she left him. Him! He could still see her on their bed, marks of his hands and mouth on her body, saw her eyes go distant, reminded her that the wife is to the husband what the children are to the adults, says so in the Bible, did she need him to read it to her? He could see her hold herself back time and time again, reminding him it was his pleasure that counted. Saw himself take it to heart, angry.

It didn't matter what he'd done. She made him a fool. Francis didn't want to sort through this, the mist chilled him inside and out, the mud soaked through his coat. More images of memory swirled before him. He tried to focus on the hazy glow of the moon to steady himself. He stood up as carefully as he could and stumbled back inside. The mist reached in but it recoiled with the slam of the door. Dirt and gravel tracked into the house. It wasn't yet seven. The phone was ringing and he saw an unknown number. Thought of Val. He grabbed the phone off the hook, almost dropped it back down but caught it against the counter, his grimy hands getting the phone filthy.

"Heello, this'z Francis with Harbor Construction."

"Hi Francis, how are you this evening?" A voice he didn't recognize. He thought about the number again. "We would like to offer you some wonderful options today I'm not sure you knew you had. We specialize in--"

"No, no - I've asked t'be taken off the calling list," he said with force, annoyed. "You telemarketers, always callin' at dinnertime, I'm eating with m'family. Tell me why I'm still on the phone with you." He tried to pull it together, but his slurring still came through.

"Well, sir, I'm sorry, but I really think you - and your family - will be impressed with our product. It rates four stars with--"

"I don't care whaddit rates at'nywhere, take m'name off the call list."

"Okay, but I feel inclined to tell you that our knives are top quality, and at the lowest prices, I think you really do care and really do want to get some of these. I've seen them work, it's quite ama--"

"I don't want your shitty knives!" Francis yelled and slammed the phone down. The most annoying thing about it was that he did need new knives, and nice knives, and wanted to hear about these. He wished he had just ordered them. But he didn't wish he had, it would have weakened him, he would have been led along, mindless, powerless. It would have made him what Val made him.

"Shit. No, it's different. It's not like Val. I don't want her knives. It's not like Val, at all."

He went to the shower, got in wearing all his clothes. Turned it on hot, took them off, layer by wet layer, the high pressure beating the dirt out. Finally, naked, he looked down at his aging body, the dirt in his nails, scars here and there. Instead of washing himself, he lathered his wet pile of clothes with soap and stepped out. He got into his bed, damp from the shower, naked, and fell asleep thinking of the women in the movies.

by Peter Krok

## UNDER MY SKIN

Billie, there're miles of time between us,  
my white skin and your black voice,  
but in a room or space of an auto  
we're together while you sing.

The way you sway your song,  
the way you stretch your notes,  
the way you breeze your lines,  
they can't take that away from you.

Your sound knocks down  
walls. Hearing you I'm back  
in Harlem at the smoky Savoy,  
elbow at the bar catching jazz.

When they asked the Trumpeter,  
"What is Jazz," he answered,  
"If you don't know, I can't tell ya."  
No explaining, Billie, what you got.

Others score over the airwaves,  
but they're not you, just ain't you.  
What's it take? An echo gets stuck  
that won't leave the eardrum.

A mood lingers in the air.  
How often I had no place to go  
and you took me somewhere.  
Billie, it's you, under my skin.

### **A THREE LETTER WORD**

Ancient word cast into the bin  
of the replaced. They buried you some time ago  
yet here and there you linger in a stray  
and the mouths of the inflamed.  
People avoid you like the beggars of Barcelona  
whose sores bleed through the skin of the world.  
Few repeat your name or talk about you.  
Who is to blame conveniently becomes  
a matter of fingers pointed in another direction.  
I keep seeing you on a page of the catechism.  
The milk bottle with the black dots showing  
the effects of you and the black milk bottle  
Revealing your total darkness. A sign  
of the state of the soul and that word too  
is another outcast. So much becomes  
a matter of spin. So many heads rolling  
out of the mounds of the Euphrates and Kabul and  
the highways of America. What justifies  
or is justification by faith alone?  
There is an altar where knees should bend  
And trespassers should ask for forgiveness.  
See how black the milk bottle gets.

## **GRAY DAY**

A gray day. Mottled sky all around.  
You've been here before you say.  
A muddle within and without.  
Sometimes you'd rather stay  
under the covers. Sometimes  
what's waiting you'd rather not  
wait for. Sometimes you'd rather  
not start the car. You hesitate  
with the keys in your hand. True,  
you have been here before. You move  
into the morning because you must.  
You'll be here again you remind  
yourself, *Drive carefully.*

## **BREAK**

Despite the experts  
and warnings,  
they form their circle.  
No longer welcome  
inside, they light  
up outside.

Thirty feet from the office  
they gather at a gazebo and talk  
about the day ... weather ...  
getting away ... so & so ...  
Much they can do nothing about.  
Often they talk to no one,  
just blow smoke in the air  
and stare into the heavens.  
Parting they stub butts  
in a can, then mosey  
back.

At times,  
I envy their break.

## HER NOTE TO LEONARD

During her engagement with Leonard, she confided in her diary, he was a “penniless Jew” yet she married him and he lived with her and her breakdowns. Always the first reader of her manuscripts, he cared for her. They founded Hogarth Press and published the work of Forster, Eliot, Mansfield, Freud. In her last note, she wrote, “I feel certain that I am going mad again.” One wonders how many times can one go mad? She continued in her note to Leonard, “I feel I can’t go through another of those terrible times. What I want to say I owe the happiness of my life to you. Everything has gone from me but your goodness.” Then walked into the Ouse with stones in her pockets.

How many episodes were there, Virginia?  
How many times did you crash against  
the shores of your mind? How many times  
did you fall and Leonard pick you up  
until your mind had enough and you left  
the *Room of One’s Own* to others?

## WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY, ANNE?

Another question, Anne,  
what moved you to leave  
that October you left the motor on?  
When I listen to your voice  
I understand your whisper,  
“I am not afraid to die.”  
Yet, why, Anne, why?  
You wrestled with Jacob’s angels  
but unlike Jacob, did not want to return.  
You kept on saying soon, soon,  
like night wings attracted to light  
and you kept getting nearer.

I see you on Long Island ferry  
by the railing, watching the nuns there,  
you with your car keys, cigarettes and pocket book,  
so alone, and so drawn to the strange night air.  
I talk to you now Anne. I think of your words;  
I think back to your voice when I saw you in Philadelphia,  
you seemed so alone then too, so removed, so tuned  
to other things. You were looking for what, Anne?  
Should I say it, or did you in one of your last volumes,  
*An Awful Rowing Toward God!*  
Are you now among those four black figures riding in the sky  
saying *Good News*? Anne, what do you have to say?

## SEPTEMBER 5, 1957

Jack, I can see you on that New York corner waiting  
For the *Times*, knowing a review was coming out,  
knowing something good might happen.

In that classic photo, you stand by the corner  
window, a Lucky Strike dangling from your lips,  
an Orpheus in a black leather jacket.

That night you'd never forget. Going out at dusk  
you got an early copy of the *Times*. The next day  
*On the Road* would be on the streets and highways.

You'd be celebrated as *the beat*. Who was to know  
how your life would change? Who could understand  
it all? Who could imagine what would come?

You drove across America,  
always on the move and always moving on,  
searching for wherever that somewhere never was.

by Allison Grayhurst

## Under mosaic whisperings

and cesspool attempts at betterment, spiritual  
or otherwise, neuroses rise raw to the lips  
to sip on again like the new day's dew.  
Hoisting up fences or spring saplings, laying  
out books to see their titles and choose  
between that or combustion.

Enchantments shed to make way  
for awareness that glimpses nirvana -  
particles of burnt-out folly, at times, pervading.

Bytes are streaming  
beaming supernova synchronistic  
melting downs, past  
thresholds that cannot be returned from  
or spoken about. Density surrounds  
like the deep moist grey cold innards of a cloud.  
Fish on a stick, in a stream, going around -  
whirlpool blackholes to vanish in and touch upon an echo.

Giving in to the storm, giving over  
to the voice repeating, compressing  
joy and urgency into a single crescendo.

Three days left to saw down the dead tree  
and sweep the bird droppings from the driveway.  
In three days the winds will pick up, and  
looking out schoolbus windows, children  
will be arriving at the campground,  
close to letting loose, like lavender flowers  
anticipating their first sunrise bloom.

## **The sub angels**

In hand  
Under foot  
they sing for us  
but they do not know our names.

They cry for us  
but will not hold us close  
to let their light in,  
to let the heart-of-the-lizard  
out.

They are with us  
like candles on the tips of a bare tree  
but they are not here  
for us  
only here  
like a butterfly is  
awing us with its glory  
then passing and leaving all  
as it once was.

## Tomorrow

I open myself to the obsidian stone.

It is too much to lose myself in its  
shiny warm darkness, so I press it  
to my heart, I press my private light  
into its own greenish dark sheen.

Love is coming. Like a tree in the winter wind  
of twilight, it speaks to me. It charms my wound,  
sings to me of abundance. Love is  
on my doorstep, like a fully-fed child, giggling  
at the playing squirrels.

Thank you morning for finally arriving.

It has been so cold. And these frostbite talismans  
will be mine forever. But grace is no longer  
a ghost, but something pure and solid, something I can  
swallow. Grace has made its way inside and  
the bells of welcoming relief  
are ringing, ringing.

## Wallpaper Stars

At the top of the stairs  
there sits a box covered  
with wallpaper stars. In this box  
there is a small coin that  
holds the memory of another time.

A child has pushed the box down the stairs  
and the light has caught the coin on the way down,  
glimmering like the leaves on branches after a rainstorm.  
I pick up that coin and I take it away.

I am better than the coin that fell,  
but less than the child sitting and  
staring and waiting for the coin, sure  
of the gift like Job was sure of God's love. I once was  
the same, now I am different, tainted as grownups  
always are.

The box is empty but I will fill it again.

The box is beautiful like the child who  
sits and smiles – coin between fingertips, knowing  
its proper place – inside the box  
covered  
with wallpaper stars.

## **The Burn**

Burnt on dreams

I leave you now

as a pauper by the wayside,

tossed overboard like one

not good enough.

The burn sinks in – assimilates

the remaining glory and soon

all is charcoal and cinder.

The burn is in the flavour of my breath,

it rides my spine and refuses to fully

consume or to let go.

The burn is what I see when I look

into the open sky.

No one's coming in.

No flower is reaching

its petals up up for me.

The burn is in the way I sing,

the way I wait,

the way I move my lips to

smile or listen.

## WALKING ALONG THE ROUGH

Molly Gillcrist

Well, Steven, you found me. For the second time in fifty years, I heard your voice. And I hope there'll be at least a second time to see you. But no hurry. Read this before you fly down here to San Diego. Then decide. I'm not going anywhere this time. Promise.

I won't apologize for not keeping you—it was the '50s. Nobody kept babies then. You asked around; went to someone in another town. If it was too late, you were hustled away and your parents boasted how well you were doing at the new school. At a logical time in the year, you slipped into town sans baby and were put back into the auction. But you were damaged goods; nobody was fooled.

So much for that. What it really comes down to is that starting you off was the one thing I've done that's mattered. You could say we launched each other, you and I. And we both have the Howes to thank.

You see, my friend, that July when I found I was pregnant, your blue-eyed father (are yours still blue?) located a doctor for me in a town not far from the college, before he flew off for his junior year in Cologne. The plan was for me to see that man on my way back to school in late August. Perfect timing. I'd get away with it. One of the fortunate ones.

In the middle of that month, your grandparents made their annual trip to New York, and my friend Paula came to visit. After doing up our pin curls, we'd sit in my shell-pink bedroom, talking late into the night about the party we'd been to or sorority rush in the fall; me, with you always in mind but never, of course, mentioning you, things being the way they were back then.

Mornings, Paula slept in. I'd get up early, run to the tennis court across the fairway to practice my serve. When I came back at noon, we'd go out on the patio overlooking the fifteenth hole, and while Paula lazed in the sun, I jumped rope. "Great for the hips," I'd say, thinking I'd get rid of you without that trip to the doctor. God, you must be strong! Maybe the jumping helped.

After a smoke, we'd hunch down behind the fir branches on our side of the fairway and muddle the game. The annual tournament was on, and when some gray-haired foursome pitched toward the flag, we'd send one of my father's balls rolling toward the green and watch the confusion.

On the Saturday Paula left, we fixed an early breakfast, mainly coffee laced with brandy I took from your grandfather's desk drawer, and carried it outside. We were probably on our second cup, heads buzzing in the morning sun, when we heard a rhythmic grunt like an overloaded camel slogging through wet sand. I froze over my cup, but Paula ran to peer through the branches. She waved for me to come, and I did, but I knew what she must be seeing.

Two women were walking along the rough. The older one was tall, thin in a pale blue dress that flared at each step. She was wearing a white straw hat banded in black and carried a cane. The younger woman had a black-bound hat on too, but below the hat, in her yellow dress, she was pigeon-breasted and slab-hipped. Mouth open, grayish curls swinging around her face, she was staring ahead, and each time her left foot hit the ground, she pumped her arms and let out a grunt.

"*What* is that?" Paula asked.

I backed away from the branches. "Oh, just Nellie Howe and her mother." I managed a smile. "They're harmless."

While we were juggling dishes in from the patio, I asked Paula if she could stay on a few more days, but she had to get back to Lansing for a cousin's wedding. I leaned against the fluted drainpipe at the corner of the garage, watching her pull away. Didn't go in for a while—hosed the driveway, swept geranium petals from the patio, deadheaded some daisies—things like that. Then there wasn't anything else to do but go inside and deal with the shudder that went through me when I saw the Howes go by. I pulled a chair up to the table in the empty kitchen and looked out at the trees between me and the fairway.

The firs had been there when we moved in, and then birches and wild plums had volunteered in the gaps. They were all so much larger than when I used to sit in that same chair with my spelling lists. And, naturally, during most of the school months, the trees were bare, or just about, so I could see the fairway directly then. The Howes, in their fedoras and fur-collared coats, were my morning clock. When they walked by each morning about eight o'clock from their house near the seventh green, I grabbed my lunch box and took off. If I happened to miss them, your grandfather, or sometimes your grandmother, would shout, "Here come the Howes, Marty!" I didn't think much about them unless I saw them, and I hardly ever thought about Nellie, any more than I thought about the two Afghan hounds that accompanied them. But I did sometimes think about Mrs. Howe, because she looked like a picture I'd once seen of old Queen Mary. Her face said "Keep back."

\* \* \*

She wasn't from Kalscott; Mr. Howe had discovered her somewhere East. She had dark hair coiled at the base of her neck, and was said to wear floor-length dresses and pearl ropes for the dinner parties they gave before Nellie was born. I heard that Mrs. Howe played her violin after dinner, before card tables were set up, and that Charlie Fenton, the Lincoln dealer, used to take bets beforehand on whether her bow would catch in the pearls and send them scattering across the parquet floor.

Sometimes while your grandmother's friends were still lingering after their book club session when I'd come in the back door from school, I'd listen from the dining room while I helped myself to petit fours and ribbon sandwiches. Not that I was much interested in what they said. It was the way they batted "Did you hear—?" and "Really!" around the room so snidely after he, she, and they that caught my attention. Such cold

hearts. Sometimes I heard Mrs. Howe's name, but none of the women said she'd been seen with so-and-so or done this or that. Those women described Mrs. Howe by what she didn't do.

She didn't belong to any of the clubs your grandmother did. I doubt she belonged to any clubs at all, not even the garden club. She didn't go to Eastern Star, the housekeeper did the shopping, and your grandmother's circle didn't take walks on the fairway unless they were playing a round. The only place anyone said they saw her was at community concerts. She probably didn't even drive, as Mr. Howe always dropped her off and was waiting in their Mercedes with Nellie when the concert let out. No one else was ever with her, and she didn't stay for refreshments after.

You should know about their house. It wasn't Colonial or Tudor like the others around the course. It looked like a tile-topped Mediterranean prison with grillwork over the windows and along the balconies. It backed on a steep wooded slope that dropped down to the stream that wandered through the course, and there was an iron stairway that spiraled from the foundation to a second-floor terrace. Once when some of us were playing hide-and-seek, I saw Mrs. Howe going up that stairway with her hands full of violets from the slope.

Not long after that, we were all out in the woods near the sixth tee or thereabouts. It was still twilight but rather late—summer evenings are long in the north, you know. I'd slipped between some large rocks near the stream just below the Howe's, and no one had come close to finding me. I was about to leave, when I heard music floating down the hill. Invisible between those rocks, I listened to the sound of a piano and an answering violin glide above the rush of water beside me while my eyes explored inlets of dark, island-shaped clouds merging across the sky into a deep-blue canopy that stretched across a brilliant world barely showing through the openings we call stars and constellations. Cassiopeia lay in her chair right over me.

By the time I realized my friends' voices had disappeared, the full moon was high, and so bright I could see rocks below the water's surface. I meant to follow a narrow trail back to a crossing near our house, but when I got to the other side of the stream, I looked up and saw the Howe's stairway, with light from a room off the terrace falling part way down it. I put one foot on the steps, then the other. At the top, I saw a wide screen door with two glass doors open behind it. I edged over and looked in.

Let me tell you, that room was dazzling—double-armed wall sconces lighting bookcases that lined the white walls, lion-footed lamps burning on tables by each chair. At the far end of the room, a lamp with a rose tulip shade stood next to a piano on a rug so full of flowers they seemed to spill over onto the floor.

That's where the Howes were, he at the piano and she standing in the curve of the piano playing her violin. Nellie, well into her thirties by then and wearing a pink flannel nightgown, was sitting on the floor at the junction of two white couches opposite them, and the Afghans were lying on each side of her. Her fingers were weaving lacy patterns in front of her eyes while she hummed and rocked in time to the music.

Whenever her hands stopped twisting, both dogs looked up until she stroked their heads. Once they'd closed their eyes, she began to rock and twirl her fingers again.

I leaned over to see her better, and one of the Afghans looked up. Nellie stopped rocking. She put her hand on the dog's neck and pushed it down. Then she frowned, swung her face toward me, and she and both dogs stared at the screen door.

The music stopped. "Nellie?" I heard. Mrs. Howe had turned away from her husband, and they were both watching her. Mrs. Howe set down the violin and started walking toward her, looking as if she were trying to lip-read through a dark window.

Nellie was still staring right toward me. Right at me. I'm sure. She'd lifted her arm and was pointing toward the door. Her frown changed into a smile as she opened her hand. And with it she beckoned twice before swinging her head away from me, lowering it, and putting both hands in front of her face. Then she opened her fingers and began to twist them again, smiling this time toward her mother.

Mrs. Howe was in front of her by then, the question gone from her face. She knelt and patted Nellie before returning to the piano. Behind her back, as she walked across that parquet maze, Nellie stroked the dogs. I felt my way down the steps and followed the trail home, wondering what I'd seen.

That's what I considered at the kitchen table after Paula left, and there was no escaping it. What I'd come upon that night was a fortress, not a prison. And the architect was Nellie. She'd sighted out through her lacing fingers and ordered with her smile, and somehow transformed her prison and theirs into a stronghold. No other way to think about it. If she, spinning out from her strange world, had the power to make something like that—and secretly call me in—what even grander mystery might be lost if I did away with the new person in me.

I tossed out my lighter, hung up my jump rope, and went to the cupboard to take out a glass for milk. That's it. That's what I want you to know.

If you want to hear more—there isn't that much—I'll be here. If you want to.

Marty

## **Little Cuts      Allie Lahn**

this proud little home  
bare ankles moving in  
making it our own, jet-lagged  
covered in sawdust  
air mattress  
giddy empty  
possibilities.  
the kitchen was perfect  
cool barefoot and wine-drunk at night  
pancake batter in the morning  
shattered jam jars  
lovemaking, jarring  
little cuts and cereal boxes  
clogging the pantry  
even the glass bowl heaped high  
with overripe mangoes  
and underripe avocados  
and outside a garden hose  
black-eyed beetles  
under a stone  
who cares?  
about an old painting  
under the stairs  
behind your ears  
the sour smell  
coming from  
inside the furnace  
in the corner  
where the dog  
we name and love  
will  
die in its sleep  
impossibilities.

## Chill on the Street Lisa Ryan

Inside his abdomen  
metastasized cells congregate like

gangsters behind thick walls  
initiating a new made-man with

blood, fire, fear. It's organized  
crime of the body, La Cosa Nostra

—*this thing of ours*—  
of being born again into a new life of

truth as a moving target, a territory  
claimed but never secure, all of it

as terribly familiar as cigarettes  
blown into creases of the street.

by Steve Ablon

## Mother Tongue

Before sleep in bed my mother read Babar,  
one book each night pictures bright  
as pastries. "In the great forest a little

elephant is born. His name is Babar.  
His mother loves him very much.  
She rocks him to sleep with her trunk

singing softly to him." I cried when  
Babar's mother was shot. On my pillow  
that night I wondered if my mother

were shot would I find the old lady,  
Babar's new mother buying him clothes,  
showing him the elephant in the sun

marbled mirror, in a bow tie, a new  
green suit, showing him how to sleep  
on his back, his trunk on a red pillow.

When there were no more books, she read  
in French, that soft sibilance and so  
I could begin to learn my mother tongue.

She wanted to be French, travelled  
to Paris, wore Channel 5, an exotic intimacy.  
I did not know I would study French,

be an exchange student in Beaune,  
write about Malraux and Camus  
and years later on the Henry Hudson

sit lost beside her in her red Mercury  
her hair tied up in a silk scarf  
she said she bought in France.

## Blankie

*Next time I'll fix your heart. I'll bring my hammer  
and my saw.* Cam stares at the bed that holds  
me down, the monitor and wants to learn  
what are those blue lines that draw hills and valleys,

the voyage of my heart, blinking numbers  
of my blood pressure. He wants to try  
the finger clip to check oxygen.  
I say OK. He says it feels warm, wet unzips

his knapsack hands me his Blankie, a diaper  
darkened, torn with years. Cam tells me I should  
keep it, puts it in the middle of my chest  
where he thinks my heart is, looks in my eyes

the way he did at the museum  
when I smoothed the hair, head to tail on the  
tarantula's back. He trusts me to show him  
how scary should be touched, how to be brave.

## Family Dinner In The Garden

In the hammock a son imagining  
tempestuous love, my daughter  
in the swing inculcating the ghosts  
of great grandparents who fought  
their civil wars, all the grandchildren  
barefoot, fragrant after baths, sturdy  
as mint in the stone strewn garden  
eating on the porch, salmon, hotdogs,  
or hamburgers enough table space  
for all of us, my wife grass-hopping  
from table to table, plates plied  
with every generosity.

I think of the ancient times, of olive oil  
in the stagnant marble washing basins,  
algae embracing salubrious surfaces  
of fig loaves, and statuaries, tiny  
bottles the shape of rooster hearts,  
elixirs of bravery, cures for impotence.  
Did they feel as immutable as I?

I have felled oak, hickory and pine.  
The first blow severed the bark,  
the second spewed off a wedge,  
and on the third cut that intimate  
descriptor, death. Ants in three lines  
cross the dirt reaching the tiles.  
They navigate lye, boric acid,  
the murderous sun, the vagaries  
embedded in the foreground.  
We open umbrellas to be safe  
in shadows, aspen clinging to life,  
leaves trembling.

## The Catch

I kneel in a field of wheat grass  
catching grasshoppers I scoop

underhand into my jar, another  
at the height of its jump, a third.

I put my jar by the stream, pull one  
out and I grab it, force my barbed steel

hook through the belly still trembling  
in my hand. I cast long loops of line

into the drift below rocks where current  
froths and whirls. I stand mechanically

slightly ashamed, uncomfortable on that  
shaded bank where trout strike hard.

I let them swim, then hold fast, reeling one,  
exhausting him, wrenching him into air.

his tail drumming against the sky,  
hanging from the line his fat belly flinches.

All his life of riding rapids, hiding in flats  
embraced by waters' fast flow, by red

rainbows in his scales. I didn't expect  
that open mouth, that whiteness,

the gills stop twitching, the eyes  
caught in that open stare.

## **Macie, The Dog**

Hers is the dark black coat of crusaders,  
who was abandoned on the streets of Nashville,

found a home with us, the bray of a hound  
leaping in the air when she sees me

because of the biscuit I always bring,  
because she knows that I too am dog,

huskie among parsimonious  
particles, poodle studying law

and languages, hound smelling a hundred  
years of lilacs buried here, their dust

incarnate. When our grandson can't sleep  
she leaps in his bed, rests her buttocks

against his back, stays until comfort comes.

## **Picking Locks**

**Jacqueline Berkman**

Charles didn't realize how hungry he was until he watched Officer Portly take a bite of his donut. The fried, doughy treat was covered in pink frosting and rainbow sprinkles and Officer Portly ate it with a leisurely smugness, and by doing so, asserted his power in a way that was far more effective than flashing any of his badges.

"Alright," Officer Portly said, brushing donut crumbs off of his chin in a let's-get-down-to-business manner. "Let's get down to business," he said. "Tell me in your own words what happened today."

What other words could he possibly tell it in Charles thought to himself, his contempt for law enforcement rising to a previously unsurpassed level. He had only dealt with the pigs one other time in his life, that being back in junior high school, when his group of friends got caught tagging outside the gymnasium. Charles had hardly been the ringleader in that endeavor. If anything, he was the shy, lanky one who had obligingly trailed behind the rest of the group, the one who would have been cast in a movie as the guy who says "I don't know about this guys, I don't know about this."

Twenty-five years had passed, however, since that mischievous day in the fall of his twelfth year, and that timid boy had turned into someone else, someone that Charles was not entirely sure he recognized.

"Go on," Officer Portly urged. "Take it from the top."

Top? Charles thought. What top? Though of course he knew that by the top the Officer meant today, when Charles got onto the subway, before the whole incident even got started.

But for a moment, one of Charles' more abstract, meditative moments, he wondered if by "from the top" Portly meant from the beginning, thirty seven years ago, when Charles was brought, kicking and screaming, into the world. He wondered if Officer Portly wanted to hear the whole sorry story, about how he grew up poor in the Bronx with a depressed alcoholic mother and an absent locksmith father who managed to enter everybody else's house but his own. If he wanted to hear about Charles' brother Sammy, who was born four years after Charles and had always been the "good one," the one who was better at sports, and at school, and who joined the army at eighteen just so he could get the hell out of their house.

Charles wiped the sweat off his brow, suddenly feeling suffocated by the dampness of the interrogation room. Would Officer Portly want to hear about how he dropped out of high school and spent a year drinking and feeling sorry for himself before turning to construction, spending days pounding away at asphalt and nights studying geometry so he could earn his GED? How he fell into a brief spell of unemployment after the construction company disbanded before finding work as a doorman at Park East Highrises? How this job was supposed to be the landing stop before going to college,

but then the plans for college never actually materialized?

Or perhaps Officer Portly would want Charles to jump further ahead in time, to describe the moment when he first saw Suzanne at a pizza shop in Brooklyn eight years ago, and how, when he tried to talk to her, his throat went dry and his knees trembled and he turned into a defenseless little boy. He wouldn't tell Portly about how getting Suzanne to love him was a long, tiresome process, and how he was still worried that one day her love would just cork to the surface and bob away, enticed by another current. How he felt guilty about the fact that she was still working as a receptionist for an orthodontist who didn't give her health insurance, and that he didn't have the flexible income to let her stay home with the kids.

Would Officer Portly want to know about Charles' kids, Tommy and Richie, five and seven, who he played ball with in the apartment building's communal yard on a good day? He wouldn't tell Portly how, on a bad day, their mother would tell them to go to their rooms while she yelled at Charles in the kitchen for never making enough money. Or how those fights always seemed to knock the life out of him, and when he went into the boys' room afterwards to read them stories before tucking them in to bed all he could do was smile an empty, defeated smile and promise them that tomorrow, yes, tomorrow, they would play ball again.

"Take it from when you got on the subway," Officer Portly said.

Charles shifted in his seat. He thought vaguely about asking for a lawyer, about refusing to speak until he saw one, but he found himself dismissing that idea, doubting that a lawyer, at this point, would be any better or worse than Officer Portly. Charles felt contented in the fact that he simply had an audience, and that even though his audience was only one person, and a person with a squashed nose and donut crumbs all over his face at that, he was still a person who had an interest in what Charles has to say. The fact that he was getting paid to listen, much like Charles' last shrink, was entirely beside the point. Charles became preoccupied with wanting to dazzle Officer Portly, to entertain him, to enlighten him. He wanted his story to make Officer Portly sympathetic to the plights of a working man. And so, with the characteristically high expectations that he set upon himself, Charles cleared his throat, desperately trying to frame this in the best way possible, to not fuck everything up even more than it already was.

"Well," Charles said, "I finished my shift at eight, and so I headed over to the subway immediately after, the one on 72nd and Lexington, right by where I work."

Officer Portly looked through his notes. "And you work as a doorman at Park East Highrises, correct?"

"That's the one," Charles said. "It was a bad day. Pretty miserable if you want to know the truth. There was a cocktail party going on and people kept coming in in droves. I was supposed to leave at seven but I had to stay an extra hour because of all the commotion. I must have opened the door for over 100 people." Charles didn't tell him that one of these people was Jerold Wilson, the self important stockbroker who he

opened the door for every day precisely at six and who always called him 'Chris' even though his name tag clearly read, in bold letters, 'Charles.' Or the fact that out of the hundred people he opened the door for that evening, only one person had actually made eye contact with him. Instead, he cleared his throat and said: "So I was doing okay, a little annoyed by staying late. The only thing that really irritated me was when some lady who was outside waiting for her husband came up to me and asked me if I could fan her. Fan her. Do you believe it? They call me a doorman but sometimes I wonder if the job title should read 'certified ass kisser.'"

Officer Portly's eyes narrowed into a squint. It was hard to know if he was intensely thinking about the incident or about the leftover pink frosting on his paper plate. Finally, in an attempt to curb the silence, he grunted under his breath and said, "So you must have been pretty annoyed, huh?" The comment unsettled Charles. It seemed that Officer Portly was taking a new approach, trying to lure Charles into admission of guilt with the false appearance of camaraderie. Charles was not going to take the bait.

"It was irritating, I admit. But par for the course," Charles said. "You're opening the door for the Upper East Side's finest day after day, and these things happen. You've got to have a thick skin about it." It's like a duck that lets the water roll off their back, thought Charles, not questioning for a moment that rather than a duck he might be more like a sponge, and that it might be his curse, instead, to permanently absorb all of the world's shit. "Anyway," said Charles. "I finished my shift, late, and got onto the subway. I was sitting and minding my own business, as always. And then, on 96<sup>th</sup> Street, they walk in."

Officer Portly looked through his notes again. "The Stratfords?"

"Yes, the Stratfords." Charles tried to loosen the muscles in his face so that Officer Portly wouldn't interpret his expression as a scowl.

"So what happens then?" Portly asked.

What happens then? Oh for Christ's sake, Charles thought, nothing at first. Isn't that how these insidious interactions always begin? Nothing happens at first. Charles mentally replayed the image of the Stratfords walking onto the train. They were a stuffy older white couple, the husband wearing a pinstriped suit with his hair gelled back and the woman wearing a frilly white dress and an absurd Scarlett O'Hara-esque hat, covering what looked like the aftershock of a shoddy perm. They looked like a garish, costumed imitation of what they must have imagined rich people looked like. In a sense, the couple reminded Charles of his own parents, at their worst, when they decided to act like a couple and go out to The Sizzler and pretend that they were happy. Maybe that is what caused the unpleasant stir within Charles when he saw them, this reminder of his past. That, and something else he had failed to identify but was undeniably true, that their outsider ness made them somehow aligned with him.

"So the Stratfords caught my attention, and not in the most flattering way," Charles said. "But I wasn't going to say anything, Officer, really, I'm not the kind to just drop a snide remark in the middle of nowhere. I'm a *doorman*, for Christ's sake. It's my *job* to

be nice.” He took another deep breath. “But that was all before Sampson came into the picture.”

Officer Portly narrowed his eyes again. “Sampson.”

“Yes, Sampson, that stupid little dog, Yorkshire terrier or whatever you call them.”

“So you see the dog...”

“Yes, I see the dog. It was peeking out of Mrs. Stratford’s hideous red bag. At first his eyes just bob around and Mrs. Stratford gives him a good old pat and I look and think nothing of it. I mean, you’ve got to understand, I’m a dog person. I *like* dogs. But this, this was just different.”

“Different how?”

Different how? Charles drummed his fingers against the table. Could he say it was different because he was already in a lousy mood, and that Mrs. Stratford had made it exponentially worse just by simply being herself? “I don’t know,” Charles said, grasping for the right words. “This woman was just so...loud. Like there was nobody else on the goddamn subway but herself. You know the type? The type that scream into their cell phone at the doctor’s office? She was just like that, Officer. Aren’t those people the worst? She was talking to her dog. Talking to the dog, I swear to God! Not a comment but a full on conversation. Imagine the sight: her beefcake of a husband piddly diddling on his iPhone, and this woman with a Scarlet O’Hara hat talking to her little rat dog. Tell me, Officer, that you wouldn’t be pissed off too.”

Officer Portly jotted something down in his notepad. “What did she say to the dog?”

“Everything! She was giving him a recap of the day. She’s all like ‘what a day, Sampson, what a day! You must be so tired. Aw, Sampson, I know you’re scared of the vet, but it wasn’t so bad, was it, Sampson? You’ve just got a little ear infection is all! You’re just going to take your little doggie pills and everything is going to be so much better!’”

Charles found himself out of breath. Panting, he looked up at Officer Portly for some gesture of sympathy. Officer Portly chewed on his pen instead.

“I take it this upset you,” was all he offered.

“No,” Charles insisted. “I mean, a little bit, obviously. It was irritating as hell, for sure. But like I said, thick skin, right? After her little monologue the rat dog went back to sleep in the red bag and her grease ball husband fell asleep probably playing Tetris on his iPhone, and all was well. Until Mrs. Stratford started singing.”

This caught Portly’s attention. “Singing?”

“Yes. Singing. She closed her eyes and started shaking her head from side to side, like she was in a trance. Then she started singing ‘Sampson, Sampson, my angel Sampson. To the tune of ‘Angel Baby.’ Do you remember that crappy oldies song?”

Officer Portly nodded vacantly. Charles had a flashback of his mother driving her beat up Cadillac, singing ‘Angel Baby,’ her voice hoarse from crying after one fight or other with his father. Charles would always be in the passenger seat on these trips, even though he was technically too small to be sitting up there, but his mom didn’t

care and he liked the thrill of being next to the driver, looking out at the open road. He always insisted on wearing his Boy Scout uniform in those days, just because it made him feel resourceful. When his mother started humming and getting teary eyed and sentimental, he would look out at the side of the highway and pretend it was somewhere rural and beautiful, where he could pitch tents and count stars and roast s'mores with an infinitely happier family that he was completely unable to picture.

"So she stopped singing briefly," Officer Portly said.

For a confused moment Charles mistook the 'she' for his mother, but then came back to his surroundings, to Officer Portly's impatient stare, and his reverie gave way to the interrogation room once more. "Right," Charles said. "She stopped singing for a couple minutes, started petting her dog, and I thought it was over. But then--then she started singing *again*."

"Again?"

"Yes! This time even louder! She was petting him and singing, '*Because I love you, I love you, I do, Angel Sampson, my Angel Sampson*.'" Charles closed his eyes, and thought that by doing so he could somehow open up his diaphragm and hit those agonizing high notes with the same awful intensity that Mrs. Stratford had just a couple hours earlier. When he opened his eyes and looked up, however, he saw that Officer Portly's face was blank. Charles began to panic as he wondered if he had maxed out on any potential sympathy. "So that's when I got fed up."

"That's when you got fed up," Officer Portly said.

"Yes, that's when I got so fed up I knew I needed to say something. For my own sanity if nothing else."

Charles' palms began to sweat. He wondered what Portly's natural expression meant. Surely he can relate, Charles thought. In his day-to-day endeavors in law enforcement, he must come across equally aggravating situations. Maybe he would be so mesmerized by Charles' oratory skills, so impressed by his refusal to take any more shit from such an indifferent world, that he would let him go back out into the hot New York night without so much as a warning.

"Well?" Officer Portly said. "What did you say?"

Charles shifted in the seat, trying to ignore the cold sweat accumulating down his back. What did he say? It was a simple enough question, and yet this question had been the underlying source of Charles' dread. All roads would lead to this. He knew that this part of his story would polarize Officer Portly: he'd be forever on Charles' side or despise him to the core. And the fact that the whole story had been leading up to this one moment troubled Charles to such a degree that he found himself trembling, and he wondered if he was in the throes of a panic attack.

"Alright," Charles said, finding himself out of breath. "The whole thing got blown up completely out of proportion." And he thought back to that fatal moment on the subway when the incredulous woman with the Scarlet O'Hara hat had looked at Charles as if he had just put a bullet through the dog's stomach. "I admit, my impulse control isn't

the best sometimes,” Charles told the Officer. “But finally I just got so fed up by her singing that I just said ‘for Christ’s sake, the damn dog can’t understand what you’re saying! Give it a rest!’ ”

“And how did Mrs. Stratford react?” asked Officer Portly.

“How do you think she reacted?” Charles said. “This is a completely irrational woman that we’re dealing with. She got mad as hell.” Charles thought back to the moment again, of his frustration giving way, how after he made the comment the woman seemed to fuss and growl in a way that was quite similar to Sampson himself. “What nerve,” she said. “How dare you.” Even in retelling the story, Charles felt his heart begin to race. It was because he could only know in retrospect about the series of misfortunes that lay ahead. The domino effect of disaster had begun and was now threatening to capsize the natural order of his world, and none of this was as clear to him as it was right then, at a police station, on a Tuesday evening.

“So, is that about the point that her husband got involved?” Officer Portly asked.

Yes, that’s when the greasy motherfucker got involved, Charles thought. The dominos were toppling uncontrollably now. To Officer Portly he said “Yes, that’s when Mr. Stratford got involved.” He didn’t describe to Officer Portly the troublesome quality of Mr. Stratford’s glare. Troublesome precisely because it was so empty: behind the glare was a tired indifference, a glare that came not out of personal interest in the context of the argument, but rather in the desire to cut Charles down, just because he could. He didn’t tell Officer Portly about how the look reminded him of the look his father gave him when he came home after getting caught tagging the gym back when he was twelve, his cold gaze as he lowered his paper, as if this incident had only cemented his decision that his son was a verifiable disappointment.

“And what did he do after he looked over at you?” Officer Portly said.

Christ this room is small, Charles thought. He wanted to suspend the moment, put it on pause, and step outside into the hot, smoggy night and catch his breath. Portly’s steady gaze, however, told him that this would not be an option. “Well,” Charles said, “his wife told him about what I said, about the dog not being able to understand her, and then he looked at me and said ‘you told my wife that the dog couldn’t understand her? What kind of faggot says that?’”

“So that’s when you punched him.”

“No, that’s not when I punched him.” Charles felt his blood pressure begin to rise. He looked at Officer Portly’s bald head, glistening under the bright overhead light, the donut crumbs dangling from his lips, and his dull, unsympathetic squint, and Charles felt sorry for himself, sorry that it had come down to this, to dealing with another person who just wouldn’t listen. “I didn’t do anything,” Charles insisted. “I mean, after he called me the- the ‘f’ word I just looked at him for a moment and said ‘what did you say?’ and then he looked at me and said ‘I said you are a fucking faggot. My wife can talk to her dog whenever she feels like it.’ And then he went back to Tetris.”

“So that’s when you punched him.”

Yes, but it was so much more than that. It wasn't just punching a man, but all he represented. His gelled back hair, his cruel indifference. His ability to cut a person down with one comment, carelessly taking a Jenga block away from the tower of pride that Charles stood on and then turning his back as the entire thing came crumbling down. Going back to playing Tetris, or picking a lock, or doing whatever these cruel people did after they had ruined someone's day with a scathing comment and disappeared, once again, into their mundane, indifferent routines. Charles felt that his punch was a necessary act of defiance, that he was breaking through the comfort zone of these assholes who were as omnipresent in New York as rodents, who *were* rodents, the same rodents who he opened the door for day in and day out, the people who never acknowledged him except if they wanted to be fanned. And in his mind, this all unraveled into a yarn that made some kind of cognitive sense, that made the punch not only excusable but also admirable.

He didn't say this to Officer Portly though.

"Charles," Officer Portly said. "Charles, is that when you punched him?"

Charles put his head down. "Yes," he said.

At that moment there was a knock on Officer Portly's window. He got up, opened the door, and started talking to another officer outside. Their conversation was mumbled, and Charles wasn't paying attention anyway, instead focusing on curling up inside of himself, feeling the blood rush to his head.

"Sit tight, Charles," Officer Portly said. "I'll be right back."

He shut the door, and as it locked behind him, Charles looked down at the floor, and then at the cream color walls. He looked at his phone, seizing this as the perfect opportunity to call Suzanne, but the phone had run out of battery. His heart began to race as he pictured how angry his wife would be at him. His mind went down a corridor that faced two possibilities. The first was that he would borrow Officer Portly's phone and tell Suzanne to come bail him out, but the thought of her trudging into the police station, her hair frizzy from the sticky heat and her eyes frazzled at the sight of Charles hunched over in a plastic chair, was enough to make his stomach drop. The other option was that he would be able to leave on probation, with the understanding that he would be required to complete anger management classes and community service. He imagined walking through the hot New York night, inhaling his freedom until it threatened to suffocate him, before descending into the underground of the subway. He would then resurface and walk the few extra blocks home, trudging up the stairs to his apartment building until he approached his front door. He found himself unable to imagine Suzanne or the boys' reaction in this scenario, or the words he would even be able to string together to tell them. He could only go so far as up to the door.

by Jacqueline Marcus

## Abandonment

Bent on the weather of distraction,  
I watched the blackbirds from the large framed window  
make their way to the northern sea for the last time.  
I don't know why I was feeling the need to go with them,  
or why the rain spelled the music of elsewhere,  
or if the moon signaled its lost joy, like a child's drawing  
that had been left in a box of memories. All I know  
is that the time had come for the end of summer.  
A cold sun pressed its palm against the pane of glass  
as if my heart would shatter—  
so many pieces of impossible nights, a splash of leaves, perhaps,  
in a field of elegant trees...

There was no point.

There was only the sound of a lifetime,  
diminished. It drifts across the sea and a million stars.

It has no destination.

You come to me, dear soul, in the middle of this winter,  
stubborn as a fierce storm.

What exactly do you expect from me night after night?  
You follow me like an abandoned dog.

## Crimes against Humanity

In the awkward moment of farewells,  
small talk, coffee, the clatter of silverware at the café,  
we left our signatures beneath the prose of endearments.  
The train muttered the sound of towns with its gray whistle and scarves,  
a cold wind embraced the warmth of the fire.  
No one could have guessed by now how the country had changed.  
We were strangers passing through centuries of farms,  
cobblestone streets and mothers hurrying with their children,  
bargaining prices for fish, cabbage and flour for bread...  
The train sang through fields of wheat. Each time  
it entered the tunnel of years,  
it was a new dawn.

I got off, and stepped down to the platform.

I could tell you what I saw through the steamy windows:  
the faces of the young, the faces of the old—

and the long, dolorous smoke of what we've done to one another.

## Mythos

Margaret Stawowy

One hundred months later  
thieves became volunteer lawyers  
for hedonists who went too far,  
got too rich, too heavy.

*In her paper  
dress she washed away  
anguish at the tide-swollen shore,  
a black and red sky swallowing each bit  
of briny pulp and sand.*

Rapture can be that  
way too: a joy but also a torture, perhaps a  
by-product, like alcohol  
from sugar that some pour  
down the drain.

*The burnished  
and dirty acclimate to a gentler terrain.  
They set a match to salt-  
laden driftwood that sputters,  
combusts into turquoise slivers.*

How many ways can stars explode? See  
that big cupboard over there? Just open it.  
Here's how.

by Susan Terris

## THE TIDE RECEDES

Taunt: Instagram photos, texts, coast to coast.

The lie of seals playing in Penobscot and of ease.

Is this another way of saying: *Choices. And you've made the wrong one?* This morning the bay is

bark-textured and water siphons south as the tide recedes. Hard as the years he waited. As I waited.

*Reality is better*, my text said, *but fantasy eases pain*. His said: *Get to work*. Mine: *Then crack*

*your whip*. His: *I'll crack it across your ass*.

Fantasy and metaphor: waiting yet not waiting

long enough. I work. He texts: *Lovelovelove*.

He is not alone, yet I am. Choices: yes, he would

have to make one but won't. Though sunrise here is glorious, for him the sun hasn't risen.

Inertia. Love only goes so far. Waiting, too.

## SAMPLE ME

Sitting in a waiting room, listening to the moussed drug rep  
use the word *sample* as a verb ("Even if Doc's gone, c'n I still  
sample you?"), I can't decide whether to cry or steal  
the *Cosmo* that rates orgasms.

Out the window, a flick of fall. Last patchwork-leaves of  
ornamental pear, a barren tree, and rays of afternoon light.  
Caught in the moment, not yet old, other samples  
intrude, the way we used to test

chocolates: punching thumbs through the bottom.  
Caramel or cherry? Coconut was a disaster of youth.  
Now past that disaster but facing another,  
I feel a slow diminishment,

no one to thumb me now, no one to decide  
if I'm good enough to eat.

## THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONES

### 1) Orbits

Gliese 581g: a planet circling a red star in the constellation of Libra. Sensitive spectography in Chile and the distinct probability of water. But eccentric elliptical orbits, four percent chance of being a false alarm. Possibility of satellites colliding in 200,000 years. Still, no published data. Is this the bin of failed dreams? The silence is telling.

### 2) Dreams

Last week, a poet I know asked about my work, tried to console, reminding me we all have failed dreams. But the Goldilocks zone of poetry: what would that be like? A place just right, in the woods of—say—northern Minnesota, not far from the origin of the Mississippi River. Here no bears would come home and words might circle or align. No beds, no porridge, only a just-right chair and dense elliptical orbits with enjambments that come dangerously close. Life might be possible here: water, sunlight, jack pine. Here a four percent chance of failure would be success.

### 3) Ellipses

For marriage, too, the golden zone is elusive. Maybe it's the shadow planet no one can quite define. How many bodies are orbiting now? Eyebrows are raised. The bears are restless and want to return home, and my locks have never been golden. Was it the hair in the shower drain? The lumps in the porridge? The novelist at Squaw Valley who pressed his room key into my hand? Look, the tiny loaves of bread I baked were golden. So were the monarchs at Big Sur and summer sun on kayak blades. Yet there are lost moments, stellar noise, planetary uncertainty, and a high probability of failure. Still, if my love can fend off the bears, say again I am golden and mean it, this could, at least, offer moments of being just right for life. . . .

## PIETRE DURE

Hard rock. Not about music or a franchised café,  
but art—flakes of the Renaissance puzzled in stone.

A bright, thin translucence, bonded, reminder  
of the long-ago Saturday when a stranger  
doffed his hat on a street corner, and told a girl-child  
of thirteen she was a fresh, shiny work of art.

Now, the once-girl stares at a pietre dure armoire—  
where peach and berries, centuries old, radiate  
perfection while flesh continues to loosen and pale.

Still, who would be only a hard-edged spectrum?

Better to change over time; yet she sees you, her lover,  
eyeing her, your eyes cut, lips pinched.

If you look past the rock-hard gloss of the girl-  
woman's artful clothes and fresh make-up,  
beyond the creped body, you'll find  
space, akin to the hollow of this ancient wardrobe.

There, clouded secrets are cached, mysteries kept.  
Even the shadows

suggest a feint past perfection,

where, deep inside, the present might present.

After centuries or decades, a dark trompe l'oeil  
pulses. Believe and you may be, artfully, drawn in.

## SLEEPOVER

Though you think they will never know, they  
will. . . .

First, the kerosene lantern at the cabin hisses away  
a lock of your hair when you bend over to light

your first-ever cigarette. Then, the sleeping bag.  
You know you must be careful, don't drink Coke

or rum or have cocoa at midnight. Later, in the bag,  
curled so only the top of your head shows,

you curve your back to comfort yourself, slowly,  
sweetly, guiltily. But the girls, they stalk you—

their footsteps, shrieks—and you are unzipped,  
uncovered. Those 12 year olds, that jury of your peers,

try, then convict you on the spot. *Thumbsucker!*  
*Baby!* they yell, jerking your hand

from your face. *It stinks! You stink.* Then, helpless,  
you feel it coming—

## **Instructions for the Ascent: A Guide**

**Meg Sefton**

Shuffle through the silent wood to worship, past loblollies and scrub oak hung with flowering vines, your sick feet, affected by the chemo, the nerve endings numb, barely registering your footfalls. The glittering lake beckons beyond the Bishop's Walk and the Church of the Incarnation where someone sits at a piano, someone mixes water with wine, someone is blinded by the sun streaming through a window as they think about what they would like for dinner.

Step high over roots, concern yourself not with the sand slipping between your toes, breaking down your best sandals. Enjoy the sand and how it falls out of your shoe in a playful way because you cannot walk because of your numb feet and it is as if you are doing this on purpose, like when you were young and flopped your legs in front of you, flinging sand on your brother, on your sister, and you had more time then, all the time in the world.

It doesn't matter you are late. You have nothing to contribute. There will always be voices in worship somewhere. There will always be worship. Not even the forest needs you though it will take you. There will always be bodies who, once animate, return to earth and you, no longer a child, see how it begins as you fall off out of time beginning with the feet that can no longer run, the flesh that is no longer thought of or desired by those in time, and you, having once participated in a chorus, live on an edge without recognizable features or breath, where eternity has caught up with you and you had thought yourself not ready and yet here you are, venturing on your own. Those you thought should join you cannot follow through the divide, they cannot pass. You have tried to carry them but the overwhelming nature of their fears have led you to focus instead on the little white dog who waits for you on the edge of town, the new ferns that must be watered, the meals you will make with the ingredients you just bought at the market, the son who will be home from his father's next week.

In the twilight worship hour, you must go alone through the loblollies and scrub oak hung with vine, the sparkling lake in the distance, until you reach the lip of it all, where the worshippers' voices coalesce and become strongest, like a ring of sound around the world. And yet, you only see the glittering eye of the abyss in the distance and it is not in the depths of the earth but suspended and it is not dark but filled with light and fills the skies from the waters it takes from earth and one day you will be taken up from the earth and one day you will return again as rain.

# ALL I KNOW

by Star Spider

## CHARACTERS

NIKKI, 10

ZITA 10

RATOOSH 10

## TIME

Past, present or future, sometime before dusk.

## PLACE

Somewhere familiar, a field perhaps, or an empty lot. Maybe there is trash here, or tall grass on the outskirts. It smells of childhood, of rubber and bubblegum, of dish soap and dirt. The scene is all at once comforting and familiar yet alienating in its distance. Is that a mist in the air? The fog of memory? Unreliable and grey. Or perhaps it's just the way the sun is shining in gleaming slants and hitting the moisture in the air. There is a cricket chirping, the distant sound of a lawn mower and children playing. Everything is fresh and alive like never-ending spring. You want to squint from the brightness even though it isn't too bright. This place is a blank spot in your mind, an empty space waiting to be filled. Eternal and optimistic but awash with the sadness of longing, time and dreams just beyond reach.

(NIKKI, ZITA and RATOOSH occupy the empty space. They show all the signs of children at play; legs folded into origami flower petals beneath them, backs slim arches leaning inwards, curious, restless, wondering faces. RATOOSH has a stick and he is marking the dirt around them; strange, tribal drawings that look like they could be the first. NIKKI watches him and ZITA looks up at the sky; perhaps cloudless, perhaps marked with bulbous cumulus or stringy cirrus, only ZITA knows.)

Zita

All I know is that I live in a house.

(RATOOSH continues to draw in the dirt, NIKKI continues to watch him. You're unsure if the others have heard ZITA. Or maybe they don't care, despite their body language suggesting otherwise. They hold the form of children who care deeply, aching, endlessly, in the way only children can care.)

RATOOSH

What kind of house?

ZITA

Mommy calls it 'le maison'. It is grand. We have a staircase that curls like a birthday ribbon. Everything is big. The wind sounds like whispers when it blows through. Our living room echoes.

(RATOOSH draws a house and NIKKI's eyes are trained on the end of the stick. She is far but near, occupying the house and the space in front of you simultaneously.)

NIKKI

How do you know?

ZITA

What?

(RATOOSH pauses his drawing at the door, unsure whether to draw a handle.)

NIKKI

The rules of the game state you must say what you know and I want to know how you know that you live in a house.

(Both NIKKI and RATOOSH look at ZITA. She shifts her position, but not with physical discomfort. You have seen a shift like that before. A slight displacement, a doubt, an undoing of something deep.)

ZITA

I was there this morning. I remember. My bedroom wall is blue like the sky. I know.

(RATOOSH draws a handle on the door in the dirt.)

NIKKI

(Watches RATOOSH, not ZITA)

You trust your memory?

ZITA

Of course...

NIKKI

And you expect us to do the same?

RATOOSH

An act of faith. A leap into the unknown.

ZITA

It's not the unknown, you have been to my house. We played hide and seek last week and both of you hid in the attic but I wouldn't come up because the attic is dark and dusty. You waited for hours, but I didn't come up.

RATOOSH

I remember.

NIKKI

So do I. But that doesn't mean it's true.

ZITA

Come! We can go there right now.

(ZITA leaps up, her posture defensive and troubled, as though she too doubts her own memory, as though maybe there is nothing beyond that space that they currently occupy and all she remembers is not what she knows.)

I can show you, I can prove it.

NIKKI

(Looks up at ZITA and shades her eyes with her hand)

Sit, stay. I get it.

(ZITA pauses and looks to RATOOSH who nods at her. She reluctantly rejoins them on the ground but she looks smaller, diminished by her fear. She glances over her shoulder, presumably in the direction of her house. Is it there? You can't see it, but perhaps seeing isn't always believing.)

RATOOSH

All I know is that I'm a boy and you're girls.

(RATOOSH draws two stick figures in the dirt beside the house. Skirts and pants delineate boy from girl in the drawing despite the fact that all three children are wearing pants.)

ZITA

I know that too.

NIKKI

How do you know?

RATOOSH

(Grins)

Doctor.

(NIKKI blushes and marks the ground with her finger, she has no stick and dirt gets under her fingernail. She draws a swirl and a figure eight. Her motions are smooth, practiced as though she has been drawing her whole life.)

NIKKI

All I know is I am me.

ZITA

(Curious, almost combative)

How do you know that?

NIKKI

I feel it.

ZITA

I'm not in your head, I can't feel the thing you're feeling. So how do I know you're telling the truth?

NIKKI

This isn't about truth. Lying is a form of truth because it tells you something about me. So even if I was lying I could still be me. This is about knowing. I feel it in my fingers, my toes, my eyes, my nose.

(RATOOSH laughs, presumably from the rhyme. He has stopped drawing, put his stick down and is watching NIKKI draw. The attention he pays her is devastating because it is so careful, sure, proud and reluctant. It is every relationship you have ever had. It reminds you of moments of hesitation where your feelings are unclear but that voice inside your head pushes you on.)

You can feel it too, can't you? Think about your left ear. Just think about it. You can feel it. It's there, it's a part of you. You can't deny it.

(Both ZITA and RATOOSH reach up and touch their left ear. No one speaks for a long time. NIKKI draws the spiral of an ear, sound is a wave of dirt entering the canal, wave upon wave. The cricket has stopped chirping, the lawn mower is silent. There is the single sound of a mother calling her child home. Perhaps the call goes unheeded, supper growing cold. Baked potatoes steaming in waves that dissipate into the cooling afternoon air.)

ZITA

All I know is that I'm alive.

RATOOSH

(Closes his eyes and smiles)

Tell me how.

ZITA

I breathe. I talk. I move my hands and feet. I share the air and the ground with all the other living things. Here feel my pulse.

(ZITA crawls across the dirt to RATOOSH's side. She takes his hand and puts his fingers to her neck. His eyes are still closed. NIKKI watches them.)

RATOOSH

I feel it.

NIKKI

An act of faith. A leap into the unknown.

ZITA

Not a leap. Not an unknown.

(ZITA sits back on her heels and RATOOSH's hand falls from her neck. Does he miss the warmth? She was so alive.)

NIKKI

We are all unknown to each other. You said it yourself. I'm not in your head. How do I know?

(ZITA crawls over to NIKKI, in the process she ruins the picture of the house scrawled into the dirt. She grabs NIKKI's hand. Perhaps in an act of violent desperation. She places NIKKI's fingers on her neck then moves them to NIKKI's neck. Two pulses. NIKKI and ZITA.)

ZITA

It's the same. You feel it in yourself. It's real. Thump thump. Thump thump. We're alive. No faith required. No truth or lies. Just knowledge.

(ZITA is breathless, her face contorted into a frown. NIKKI smiles, reaches out and runs a hand along ZITA's cheek. Like a mother and daughter caught in an act of tenderness. ZITA doesn't pull away, she accepts the comfort, but you know she doesn't really want to. She needs to. This you know.)

RATOOSH

All I know is there is a beginning.

(ZITA returns to her spot. NIKKI starts her drawing again. Over and over in the figure eight.)

ZITA

How?

RATOOSH

Everything has to start somewhere, or nothing makes sense.

NIKKI

A beginning doesn't make sense, you can't get something from nothing.

(In the silence that follows there is an absence of sound. No crickets, mothers, lawn mowers, not even the sound of NIKKI's hands in the dirt. No waves entering spiral ears. There is an empty space occupied by three children and the question. The question alone allows for the possibility of something and therefore extinguishes the possibility of nothing. But without the children, without the question, what then? Still the grass and the dirt. But without that, what then? Still your eyes taking in the emptiness, but without your eyes, what then? Forever reduced into infinity.)

ZITA

Nothing is the absence of everything. The beginning is the absence of everything.

NIKKI

It can't be. Not now, not ever.

RATOOSH

(Concedes thoughtfully) Even if it was possible, it's not knowable.

(ZITA starts to cry, softly, her body moving up and down like sound waves.)

ZITA

All I know is the face of God.

RATOOSH

What kind of face?

ZITA

Bright as the sun, broad as the sky.

(NIKKI is silent, still drawing. You can't see what she's drawing because it's in the shadow of her body, obscured by her bright, bright skin.)

NIKKI

All I know is that God is unknowable, as a person, as a thing, as a concept. It is unknowable, you're breaking the rules.

(ZITA stands, hands on hips a posture of defiance.)

ZITA

Nothing is knowable, not my house, not my breath, not my God! What do you know Nikki? What do any of us know? No beginning, no end, no sound, no questions. This game has no rules because we can't know them! This game is not a game at all.

(ZITA kicks the dirt and all the drawings lose cohesion and fade. There is nothing in the dirt. Nothing in the air. Nothing but the bright space between the children. Between you and the children, between me and the children. Your eyes say it's there, that you know it, but you know nothing of ZITA's house, her breath, her God.)

NIKKI

We all felt our left ears, our pulse. All of us. I don't feel God. All of us must feel to know.

(NIKKI sets to work redrawing the spiral, the house, the figure eight. But not the thing you couldn't see.)

ZITA

Since when? Since when do we all have to agree? I know Argentina, South Africa, Sweden. I have been all those places, seen them with my own eyes. Your eyes haven't seen them though, so does that mean you don't know? We can't need agreement, that's not in the rules and the rules are stupid anyway, the rules don't know, we don't know the rules. Any of us.

(ZITA is crying harder now, her tears a flood. Everything is soaked, the dirt turns to mud. The sky is getting darker, the brightness fading into something black and endless. The mud is on NIKKI's hands, Ratoosh's knees, ZITA's feet; brown and thick, warm and wet. RATOOSH looks up to the sky.)

RATOOSH

All I know is there are stars. Far and bright. I know I can't touch them or know them. Maybe none of us can know anything, we can only guess, take a leap of faith, trust our eyes and our left ears. Game over.

(ZITA stops crying and looks up. NIKKI stops drawing and looks up. You look up. There is one star where no sky was before. It is white, empty of colour. Empty. White.)

NIKKI

All I know is I know nothing.

ZITA

All I know is that I live in a house. My mother is calling.

(No mothers are calling. No one is calling, not the crickets, not the children, not the dirt. There is nothing but you and the single star; the first point of light, or maybe the last. When you look back down the children are gone. Perhaps they were never there to begin with. All that remains is that space and the image of a house scratched into the mud and the memory of childhood redolent of bubblegum and games that had rules you ignored.)

## Lisa Zaran Interview by Carol Smallwood

Lisa Zaran, American poet, essayist and the author of six collections; her poems have appeared in hundreds of literary journals, magazines, broadsides, anthologies and e-zines. Lisa is the founder and editor of Contemporary American Voices, ContemporaryAmericanVoices.com

**Smallwood:** Please describe your website and your duties as editor/writer.

**Zaran:** Contemporary American Voices was created in the late evening hours of December 2006. As a writer who has submitted primarily online, I wanted to establish a place for poets I felt truly loved not only the craft of poetry but the music of language. My hope was and still is to create a space that is consistent, trusted and tasteful. A place where writers can proudly have their work displayed, where other writers and readers can discover voices with poignancy. My own life has been positively altered when I discovered a writer that was able to say something in such a way that caused me to shut up and pay attention. In the beginning I invited poets I admired, poets I wanted to hear more from, writers that articulated their thoughts into vision. CAV went live on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007 and published monthly through January 2013. The journal, unfortunately, went on hiatus, unexpectedly in February 2013. Without going into minute detail, life events took precedence and CAV simmered on a back burner. I re-established CAV in April of this year and the response has been significantly positive. My hope lives on and I plan to publish monthly, on time on schedule with some of the best writing to be found.

Duties as an editor, well, that's easy. I read the submissions that come in unsolicited. I give my time and attention to each individual submission, each individual writer. I read the biographies and I especially pay attention to the opening hello, those short introductions that give me a glimpse into the person behind the poem.

Duties as a writer is a little tougher to detail. I write when I can. I think more than I write and I can't write as quickly as I think, but I try.

**Smallwood:** Tell us about your own work as a writer.

**Zaran:** I have been attracted to poetry since childhood. I don't know why as a child poetry moved me, but it did, I felt a connection to the language, the music in poems. I used to write anonymously for years. It wasn't until my mid-twenties when I took the plunge and started submitting pieces I'd written. Those first few acceptances are what turned the page for me. I grew wings then and began submitting anything and

everything I felt meant something. Most was rejected for various reasons, a few were accepted and that's what kept me going. This is a vicious circle. It still holds true today. Often times I'm surprised what has been accepted, for instance, a piece that took me two minutes to scribble out. A piece that took me weeks is rejected over and over again. It doesn't stop me. I write what I want to write regardless of an audience, although audiences are nice. It used to be very important to me to have a "book". I wanted that credit. Now, it is not as important to me. I feel that now at this point in my life I'm back to how it was when I first wrote. I'm that pre-teen sitting in her bedroom writing away without a soul as witness but it feels right.

**Smallwood:** What writers have influenced you the most?

**Zaran:** This is a loaded question. It often depends on where I'm at with my reading. I can say with absolute certainty that I was heavily influence by James Whitcomb Riley as a child, a favorite poem "He's Just Away". I will always adore Fernando Pessoa, Goethe, Bob Dylan. I discover daily writing that makes me stop in my tracks, from a song on the radio to an undiscovered author at the library. I find writers in people I encounter on a daily basis. They may not be writers but their language makes them a natural to me. I go through many phases. I can give you a list that would be unending here and my mind spins just thinking about it. I have also been heavily influenced by music, something I am so inept at, but that interests me to the degree I call musicians writers.

**Smallwood:** How has the Internet benefited you?

**Zaran:** Enormously. My own writing as reached places and people that it may never had if it weren't for the internet. When the digital age started really coming into fruition I was wholly onboard. My own work has been translated into multiple languages, been displayed in museums in other countries, performed in theatre groups, incorporated into translation courses in schools, turned into songs and performed by musicians in places I've never been, brought me invitations to speak in colleges across the country and into other countries. To be honest, it is invigorating but it can also be frightening. The internet attracts both the true and the truly questionable. I've had work plagiarized because of having it available online. For the most part, I've had great experiences and have made connections that I hope to maintain.

**Smallwood:** What classes have helped you the most?

**Zaran:** I have never taken courses on writing, if that is what is meant by this question, although I adored my high school literature teacher, Mr. Jacobsen. Life has assisted me the most, life experiences to be precise. Reading has been my greatest asset. I will always be a thinker first. Reading is extremely important to me. Writing

is something I do and it always surprises me when I get a generous response. It's almost as if I am putting something "out there", like the world is my personal diary and when I receive a response it surprises me, but in a very good way. I smile and try.

**Smallwood:** What advice would you give others?

**Zaran:** If writing poetry is your passion? Just write. Read a lot, listen to those you trust but most importantly trust yourself, trust your own voice. Do not be indifferent to others' advice. You'll be amazed by how much other people know. Don't judge, don't criticize. Trust your voice, hone how you portray your words. If you're in the middle of a strong emotion write write write it out. Let it rest. Then revise. Trust your intuition. If you know something is right, it's right. READ. Research. Discover. Everyone has a story, every life is a poem.

Poets are people who become utterly dedicated to the threshold where silence and language meet. One of the crucial tasks of the poet's vocation is to find his or her own voice. When you begin to write, you feel you are writing fine poetry; then you read other poets only to find that they have already written similar poems. You realize that you were unconsciously imitating them. It takes a long time to sift through the more superficial voices of your own gift in order to enter into the deep signature and tonality of your Otherness. When you speak from that deep, inner voice, you are really speaking from the unique tabernacle of your own presence. There is a voice within you that no one, not even you, has ever heard. Give yourself the opportunity of silence and begin to develop your listening in order to hear, deep within yourself, the music of your own spirit.

— from *Anam Cara* by John O'Donohue

## CONTRIBUTORS

**S Weasel** is a writer and overall degenerate poet. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Literature at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, and started up a publisher called Weasel Press. The vagabond poet released a full length poetry collection titled Ashes to Burn which was picked up by Transcendent Zero Press. He has also self-published a small chapbook titled Y'all Muthafucka's Need Jesus. His writing has been accepted in several publications, some of which include: *Houston's Harbinger Asylum*, *San Jacinto College's Threshold*, *Permian Basin Beyond 2014*, *Hunger For Peace*, *Everything on Earth is Huge and We're All On It*, *Di-Verse-City from the 2012, 2013, & 2014 Austin International Poetry Festival*. Weasel also appeared in a small documentary about art titled Something Out of Nothing (S.O.O.N) directed by Mitchell Dudley. You can find more of Weasel's work at the website listed.

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**Elaine Rosenberg Miller's** essays, memoirs, poems and short stories have appeared in numerous publications, including:

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Her short story, "THE NIR TAMID" was chosen as one of the best short stories of 2013 by *The Huffington Post*.

**Andrea Moorhead** was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1947. Editor of *Osiris* and translator of contemporary Francophone poetry, Moorhead publishes in French and in English. Poems and translations have appeared in journals such as *Abraxas, Great River Review, The Bitter Oleander, Autre Sud, Estuaire, La revue des Archers*, and *Metamorphoses*. Poetry collections include From a Grove of Aspen (University of Salzburg Press), Présence de la terre (Écrits des Forges), De loin, and Géocide (Le Noroît). Translations include The Edges of Light (Hélène Dorion, Guernica Editions), Night Watch (Abderrahmane Djelfaoui, Red Dragonfly Press), and Dark Menagerie

(Élise Turcotte, Guernica Editions, 2014).

**Anna Fonté's** work (often about invisibility, outsider status, everyday monsters, and her attempts to befriend the neighborhood crows) has appeared online and in print, most recently in *Stir Journal*, *Unshod Quills*, *ElevenEleven*, and the *Huffington Post*. lives in Berkeley, California and can always be found at [girl in the hat](#).

**Rob Cook** lives in New York City's East Village. He is the author of six collections, including *Undermining of the Democratic Club* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2014), *Blueprints for a Genocide* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2012) and *Empire in the Shade of a Grass Blade* (Bitter Oleander Press, 2013). Work has appeared in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Caliban*, *Fence*, *A cappella Zoo*, *Zoland Poetry*, *Tampa Review*, *Minnesota Review*, *Aufgabe*, *Caketrain*, *Many Mountains Moving*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Bomb (online)*, *Sugar House Review*, *Mudfish*, *Pleiades*, *Versal*, *Weave*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Ur Vox*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Phantom Drift*, *Osiris*, etc.

**Brian J Helt** I am a recent graduate from San Francisco State University, majoring in creative writing. My most recent publication is forthcoming in *Forge Journal* and my previous publications include work featured in literary journals such as *Ray's Road Review*, *the Blue Moon Literary and Arts Review*, *Crack the Spine*, *the California Quarterly*, *Lilliput Review*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal* and more.

**Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois** has had over seven hundred of his poems and fictions appear in literary magazines in the U.S. and abroad. He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize for work published in 2012, 2013, and 2014. His novel, "Two-Headed Dog," based on his work as a clinical psychologist in a state hospital, is available for Kindle and Nook, or as a print edition. He lives in Denver.

**Kelley J White** worked as a pediatrician in inner city Philadelphia and now works in rural New Hampshire. Her poems have appeared in journals including *Exquisite Corpse*, *Rattle* and *JAMA*. Her most recent books are *TOXIC ENVIRONMENT* (Boston Poet Press) and *TWO BIRDS IN FLAME* (Beech River Books.) She received a 2008 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant.

**Courtney Leigh Jameson** graduated with and MFA in Poetry from Saint Mary's College of California. Her poems have appeared in various journals and are forthcoming in *MadHat Lit* and *Slipstream Press*. She currently resides in Arizona and is The Bowhunter of White Stag Publishing.

**Vance Mikin-Laurie** is a writer from Melbourne, Australia. He completed a B.A. majoring in literature and media studies at Swinburne University. His work has most recently been published in *Crack the Spine Literary Magazine*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, and *The Molotov Cocktail*.

**Perna Bidalia** is an English Literature student from University of Delhi, India. She likes spending her time by reading novels of different genres and writing short prose pieces and poetry, both in English and Hindi. Her work most often reflects the most basic of human emotions. Her style is simplistic, so that more and more people are able to access her writing and make sense of it.

**Phil Rice** lives and writes in Woodstock, Illinois. His writing has appeared in a wide variety of publications, including the *Connotation Press*, *Eastside Boxing*, *Poetry Motel*, and *The Duquesne Lawyer*. He is the founder and co-editor of *Canopic Jar*, an arts journal now in its 28th year.

**Sara Clancy** A Philadelphia transplant to the Desert Southwest. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Linnet's Wings*, *Crab Creek Review*, *The Madison Review*, *Shark Reef*, *Turtle Island Quarterly*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Antiphon*, *Vayavya* and *Housebout*, where she was a featured poet. She lives in Arizona with her husband, their dog, and a 23 year old goldfish named Darryl.

**CB Follett** is author of 9 books of poems, the most recent, *OF GRAVITY AND TIDES* (2013). *AT THE TURNING OF THE LIGHT* won the 2001 National Poetry Book Award; Follett is general dogsbody of Arctos Press. She has several nominations for Pushcart Prizes, a Marin Arts Council Grant for Poetry, awards and honors and has been widely published. She was the Poet Laureate of Marin County, CA 2010-2013

**Gretchen Van Lente** I think it's funny that I publish about one or two stories a year, but I submit about twenty or thirty. That's the game. I published in *The Barcelona Review* recently, also *Danse Macabre* and *Drunken Boat* and *The Second Hand Review*. I have published in all genres. Once I wrote dialogue for a talking crow for children's educational television. I used to write little paragraphs and book jacket blurbs and letters for my celebrity neighbors in Malibu who were not so literate. I spend most of my time writing novels and rewriting short stories. If a story comes back from an editor I almost always rewrite it. I really enjoy the short short form; I should have been a poet but this is as close as it gets for me.

**Aileen Santos** is a Certificate Student of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Toronto and a member of the Writing Collective, the Club of the Incomparables. She has published short stories for small literary zines such as

[commuterlit.com](http://commuterlit.com) and has a novel forthcoming in 2015. Her latest poem was short-listed in Passion Poetry Magazine's Contributor's Contest. She teaches high school near Toronto, ON where she lives with her two adorable children and a wonderfully supportive spouse.

**JC Freeman** I live in the pacific Northwest and have had shorts published over the years, but mostly I've been a songwriter.

**Madeleine Kruhly** graduate of the MA in Poetry at the University of East Anglia. Her poems have been published in *Lighthouse*.

**Di Jayawickrema** is a writer who lives in New York City. Her fiction has appeared in *The Albion Review* and *Fiction Fix*.

**E.M. Schorb's** work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Yale Review*, *The Chicago Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The American Scholar*, *Stand* (UK), *Agenda* (UK), *Oxford Poetry* (UK), *Poetry Salzburg Review* (Austria), *The Sewanee Review*, *The Notre Dame Review*, *Shenandoah*, *The Hudson Review*, and many others, here and abroad. His collection, *Murderer's Day*, was awarded the Verna Emery Poetry Award and published by Purdue University Press. His most recent books are *Stories, Etc.* and *Resurgius, A Sixties Sex Comedy*.

**John Casquarelli** is the author of two full-length collections, *On Equilibrium of Song* (Overpass Books 2011) and *Lavender* (Authorspress 2014). He is an English Instructor at CUNY Kingsborough, as well as serving in an advisory role for the Kingsborough Poetry and Creative Writing Club. In addition to teaching, John is the poetry editor for *Otter Magazine*. He was awarded the 2010 Esther Hyneman Award for Poetry. His work has appeared in several journals and anthologies including *Storm Cycle: Best of Kind of a Hurricane Press*, *Pyrokinecton*, *Kinship of Rivers*, *Miracle*, *Downtown Brooklyn*, and *Mind[less] Muse*.

**Tamim Sadikali** designs software for hedge funds by day, runs after his kids in the evening, shares the quiet of night with his wife, and writes fiction during the dead hours. His first novel, *Dear Infidel*, is a story about '...love, hate, longing and sexual dysfunction, all sifted through the war on terror...'. He blogs about satellite subjects, reviews for Bookmunch, and rants on Twitter.

Dear Infidel - [dearinfidel.com](http://dearinfidel.com)

blogs - [dearinfidel.blogspot.com](http://dearinfidel.blogspot.com)

reviews for Bookmunch - <https://bookmunch.wordpress.com/?s=tamim+sadikali>

Twitter - <https://twitter.com/TamimSadikali>

**Patricia Connolly** was born in London, she's lived most of her life in New York City. Her poems have appeared in a number of publications including *Ginosko*, *Denver Quarterly*, *International Poetry Review*, *Poetry Now*, *Salt Hill*, and [Archipelago.org](http://Archipelago.org). She's a freelance book editor. [jocpatcon@hotmail.com](mailto:jocpatcon@hotmail.com)

**Sheila Murphy's** most recent book-length publications feature collaborative visual poetry: Yes It Is (with John M. Bennett), Luna Bisonte Prods. 2014, and 2 Juries + 2 Storeys = 4 Stories Toujours (with K.S. Ernst), Xerolage 55 from Xexoxial Editions. 2013. To learn more about Sheila Murphy, please visit her Wikipedia page: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheila\\_Murphy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheila_Murphy)

**John Grey** is an Australian born poet. Recently published in *Paterson Literary Review*, *Southern California Review* and *Natural Bridge* with work upcoming in the *Kerf*, *Leading Edge* and *Louisiana Literature*

**Olivia White** has a pseudo-degree in writing and philosophy from Whitworth University in 2014. This piece was written in her final semester for fiction writing, the genre with which she has the least experience. Her work consists mostly of poetry and lyrical nonfiction. She lives in Seattle, WA and frequents the salty beaches of the Puget Sound and the scattered woods.

**Peter Krok** has been the editor of the *Schuylkill Valley Journal* since 2001. The journal was founded in 1990. He also serves as the humanities/poetry director of the Manayunk Roxborough Art Center where he has coordinated a literary series since 1990. Because of his identification with row house and red brick Philadelphia, he is often referred to as "the red brick poet." His poems have appeared in the *Yearbook of American Poetry*, *America*, *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *Potomac Review*, *Blue Unicorn* and numerous other print and on-line journals. In 2005 his poem "10 PM At a Philadelphia Recreation Center" was included in *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania* (published by Penn State University). His book, Looking For An Eye, was published by Foothills Press in 2008

**Allison Grayhurst** is a full member of the League of Canadian Poets. She has over 450 poems published in more than 225 international journals and anthologies. Her book *Somewhere Falling* was published by Beach Holme Publishers in 1995. Since then she has published eleven other books of poetry and five collections with Edge Unlimited Publishing. Prior to the publication of Somewhere Falling she had a poetry book published, Common Dream, and four chapbooks published by The Plowman. Her poetry chapbook The River is Blind was published by Ottawa publisher above/ground press in December 2012. More recently, her e-chapbook Surrogate Dharma was published by Kind of a Hurricane Press, Barometric Pressures Author Series in

October 2014. She lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts, working with clay; [www.allisongrayhurst.com](http://www.allisongrayhurst.com)

**Molly Gillcrist** Childhood in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. BA Duke, MA U. Virginia Speech/Language specialist at Kennedy Memorial Hospital, Boston. Fulbright teacher at Language Learning Institute, Seoul, Korea. Developed and taught in programs for linguistically/culturally diverse students in Oregon school district. Gave statewide teacher workshops to integrate these students into regular classrooms. Editorial board Oregon English Journal 2005....

**Allie Lahn** writes fiction and poetry in British Columbia's Fraser Valley. She is a recent graduate of the Southbank Writer's Program at Simon Fraser University, and holds a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Toronto's Trinity College. Allie is currently working on a short story collection, which is on track to be released posthumously.

**Lisa Ryan** is a writer and editor living in Charlottesville, Virginia, with her husband and two young sons.

**Steve Ablon** has published four books of poems: *Tornado Weather*, (Mellen Press), 1993, *Flying Over Tasmania*, (Fithian Press), 1997, *Blue Damsels*, (Peter Randall Press), 2005, and *Night Call* (Plain View Press) 2011. His work has appeared in many magazines, including *Third Wednesday*, *Off The Coast*, *Doss Passos Review* and *Ploughshares*. Steve is an adult and child psychoanalyst and an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard University Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital.

**Jacqueline Berkman** is a writer living in Los Angeles. Her short fiction has been published or is forthcoming in *The Writing Disorder*, *The East Bay Review* and *Waccamaw*. Follow her on [Twitter @JackieBerkman](#).

**Jacqueline Marcus'** first book of poems, *Close to the Shore*, was published by Michigan State University Press. Her poems have appeared in the *Kenyon Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Ohio Review*, *Literary Review*, *Wallace Stevens Journal*, *The Journal*, *Poetry International*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *College English*, *Sycamore Review*, *Seattle Review*, *5AM*, *Iris*, *Appalachia*, *Mid-American Review*, *Passages North*, *Ascent*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Faultline*, *Yalobusha Review*, *Bellowing Ark*, *Plainsongs*, *The New Delta Review*, *American Poetry Journal*, *Hotel Amerika*, *North American Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Fine Line*, *New Madrid*, *Tampa Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology*. Her latest book, *Summer Rains*, has been accepted for publication at Iris Press.

Education, degrees, profession:

During her childhood years, Jacqueline Marcus attended Sidwell Friends and studied painting at Corcoran Gallery Art Institute, Washington, D.C. She received her undergraduate degree in philosophy at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and her master's in humanities journalism at Southern Oregon University.

She taught philosophy at Cuesta College, San Luis Obispo, California, and is the editor of ForPoetry.com and EnvironmentalPress.com. She is a contributing writer at [Truthout.org](http://Truthout.org); primarily writes about the threat of global warming.

\* Sort of a strange experience on the writing of these two poems. I was an avid reader of Anna Akhmatova's poetry, but it's been years since I've read her work. The other night, I had a dream about her: I was in a dark café—probably the Stray Dog, a name that always stuck with me in the biography, where Russian poets would meet and read their poems. Akhmatova stood up on the stage. I was trying desperately to make out the words of the poem, but I couldn't hear her. The only thing I could hear was the sound, the tone of her voice that was like a very sad cello. And her eyes, I remember her eyes—those huge, mournful eyes. I could vaguely remember the dream when I woke up at 4 a.m. And then I sat down and wrote these two poems. Both were written in less than 10 minutes. I didn't touch a word.

**Margaret Stawowy's** poems have recently appeared in *Up the Staircase*, *Atlanta Review*, *West Marin Review*, and *Memoir*. She was a 2014 winner in *Atlanta Review's* International Poetry Competition. She has volunteered for over ten years with Marin Poetry Center, including two years as Chair. She works as a children's librarian and loves connecting kids with that "just right" book.

**Susan Terris'** most recent book is *GHOST OF YESTERDAY: NEW & SELECTED POEMS* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2013). She is the author of 6 books of poetry, 15 chapbooks, and 3 artist's books. Journal publications include *The Southern Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Journal*, *Ginosko*, *North American Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and *Ploughshares*. A poem of hers from *FIELD* appeared in *Pushcart Prize XXXI*. She's editor of *Spillway Magazine*. Her book *MEMOS* will be published by Omnidawn in 2015. <http://www.susanterris.com>

**Meg Sefton** I have a BA in English Literature from Wake Forest University, an MA in Christian Education and Administration from Denver Seminary, and an MFA in Fiction from Seattle Pacific University where I had the privilege of working with Robert Clark, Sandra Scofield, and Gina Ochsner. My work has appeared in *Best New Writing*, *The Dos Passos Review*, *Serving House Journal*, *Atticus Review*, *Apocrypha and Abstractions*, *Danse Macabre*, *Connotation Press*, *Dark Sky Magazine*, *Relief*, and other fine journals. Current works in progress or recently published works may be found on my blog [Within a Forest Dark](#). Also, I occasionally blog original pieces under the pseudonym Gry Corvin at my blog [black shatter](#). I live in central Florida with my

son and our little white dog "Annie," a Coton de Toulear.

**Star Spider** is a writer from Canada where she lives with her awesome husband Ben Badger. Star is in the process of seeking publication for her novels while pursuing an education in astrophysics. Her work can be found in many places including *A cappella Zoo*, *Maudlin House*, *Flyleaf Journal*, *Gone Lawn*, *Bitterzoet*, *Apeiron Review* and *Klipspringer Magazine*. [starspider.ca](http://starspider.ca)

**Carol Smallwood's** most recent books include *Water, Earth, Air, Fire, and Picket Fences* (Lamar University Press, 2014); *Divining the Prime Meridian* (WordTech Communications, 2015); and *Writing After Retirement* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014). Carol has founded, supports humane societies.

