

Providence College

the alembic

alembic

noun ■ **alem·bic** ■ /əˈlembik/

an obsolete distilling apparatus. for our purposes, a figurative “distillation” of the collective talents of a literary community. just as an **alembic** distilled each season’s yield of grapes to produce fine wine, we also gather and distill the year’s yield of creativity, in hopes of producing a palatable artistic vinatge.

2015

The Alembic is published each spring by Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island. The two-year subscription rate in the United States is \$15.

Address all correspondence to: The Editors, *The Alembic*, Department of English, Providence College, Providence, RI 02918. Our reading period is from August 1 to November 30. Submissions may also be sent to alembic@providence.edu. Please include a brief biographical note with all submissions, as well as an e-mail address for contact purposes. Manuscripts cannot be returned.

Materials published in *The Alembic* may not be reprinted, in whole or in part, without written permission from the editors.

Copyright © 2015 by *The Alembic*

THE ALEMBIC Spring 2015

Editor-in-Chief

COLLEEN G. GARDNER

Managing Editors

SARAH A. O'BRIEN

DANIELLE E. WATKINS

Editorial Staff

ROBERT F. CLEARY

JOHN P. CONNOLLY

ANNA C. DUMAIS

MEGAN E. MANNING

Faculty Advisor

E.C. OSONDU

Design Consultant

LEAH FLANIGAN

Cover Photo

ELIZABETH McQUEENEY

Watching Them Dance

Special Thanks

JOSEPH CICCARELLO

CAMERON CONDRY

Table of Contents

FICTION

Barefoot Princesses, <i>Jennifer Cyr</i>	4
My GPS, My Love, <i>Walter B. Levis</i>	19
Rejection, <i>Sten Spinella</i>	28
Kamaloca, <i>Stephen Jarrett</i>	47
Blinded by the Sight, <i>Diana Vlavianos</i>	74
Choice, <i>Blake Kilgore</i>	102
Four-and-a-Half Feet, <i>Neal Mercier</i>	121
The Village, <i>Collin Anderson</i>	133
Purple Petunias, <i>Lee Varon</i>	159

POETRY

Simic, <i>Guy Thorvaldsen</i>	1
Nomad, <i>Catharine Lucas</i>	2
Eileen Marú, <i>Matt Gillick</i>	3
Beams, <i>Laurie Patton</i>	10
Home is a Human Being, <i>William Nawrocki</i>	11
Indecisive, <i>Marissa Como</i>	14
Matrimony, <i>Jason Tandon</i>	15
September, <i>Jason Tandon</i>	16
Listening to Seamus Heaney Read His Translation of <i>Beowulf</i> While at the Gym on the Elliptical Machine	
Quite Early, A Monday Morning, <i>Helen Wickes</i>	17
Dead Man's Curve, <i>Eugenie Juliet Theall</i>	21
The Exchange, <i>Elisabeth Muranski</i>	22
Anarchy, <i>Brianna Abbott</i>	24
Wittgenstein's Horse, <i>Blake Bergeron</i>	26
Fountain, <i>Blake Bergeron</i>	27
Dessert Fork, <i>Judith Thompson</i>	37

Table of Contents cont.

A Permanent Numb, <i>Richard King Perkins II</i>	38
Four Flashes After Midnight, <i>Richard King Perkins II</i>	39
Winter is Coming, <i>Sarah Kitterman</i>	41
Recipes, <i>Michael Carrino</i>	46
How Long is the Coast of Britain? <i>Patrick Milian</i>	61
Bursts of Tone, <i>Patrick Milian</i>	64
Kayfabe, <i>Patrick Milian</i>	66
Dear Best Friend, <i>Emily Davey</i>	68
Waiting, <i>Emily Davey</i>	69
*, <i>Simon Perchik</i>	70
Stars, <i>David Sapp</i>	71
Darkness Lost, <i>Donna Pucciani</i>	72
Childhood, <i>Emily Benson Hurley</i>	92
The Suburbs, <i>Emily Benson Hurley</i>	95
Ars Poetica, <i>Judith Grissmer</i>	96
Counterpart, <i>Judith Grissmer</i>	97
About That Study, <i>Stephen R. Roberts</i>	98
Help, I've Fallen and I Can't Get Up!, <i>Austin Harney</i>	99
Choking on Joyful Mysteries, <i>Rosemary Dunn Moeller</i>	100
Duerme Con Los Angeles, <i>Lynn Hoggard</i>	109
Above the All-Night Diner, <i>Jennifer Tappenden</i>	110
Newton's Law, <i>Maria Costa</i>	111
Captain Birthday Counts the Stars, <i>John Buckley and Martin Ott</i>	116
Bears & Butterflies, <i>Jonathan Greenhouse</i>	118
The Wild, <i>Neal Mercier</i>	119
Burning, <i>Branan Durbin</i>	125
Metal Hips, <i>Jill Lynch</i>	126
Museum, <i>Jill Lynch</i>	127
Named By What Was Wanted, <i>Marilyn Ringer</i>	129
It Is Not the Doing That's Hard, <i>Marilyn Ringer</i>	130
Big Yellow, <i>Marilyn Ryder-Levinson</i>	131

Table of Contents cont.

M&M, <i>Brian Ortiz</i>	147
Mouth, <i>Barbara Daniels</i>	149
Broken Brain, <i>Sarah Cardoza</i>	151
The Legend in His Mind, <i>Eileen Henessy</i>	153
Visit to the City, <i>Bruce Bagnell</i>	154
Slow Storm, <i>Stephen Massimilla</i>	155
Uncle Joe's Roadmaster, <i>Chuck Tripi</i>	165
Disconnected, <i>Sheila Murphy</i>	166
Alone Time, <i>Tom McHugh</i>	167
The Line, <i>Tom McHugh</i>	168
The Shadow Field, <i>Jeffrey C. Alfier</i>	169
San Pedro River Night, <i>Jeffrey C. Alfier</i>	170

PHOTOGRAPHY

Arches, <i>Joan Wyeth</i>	42
Second Chance, <i>Melissa Brown</i>	42
Hump Day, <i>Elizabeth McQueeney</i>	43
Chasing Sunsets, <i>Elizabeth McQueeney</i>	43
La Mime, <i>Heloise Dubois</i>	44
Beachside Serenity, <i>Marisa DelFarno</i>	45
La Gardia, <i>Kelsey Blood</i>	112
Liberation, <i>Giovanna Franciosa</i>	112
Suspense, <i>Alexandra Harbour</i>	113
Tree of Life, <i>Alexandra Harbour</i>	114
Inside Cattedrale Di Sant' Andrea, <i>Aubrey Moore</i>	114
Lighting Test 1, <i>Jake Hurner</i>	115

INTERVIEWS

Interview with Alison Espach, <i>Sarah A. O'Brien</i>	32
Interview with Peter Covino, <i>Joseph Ciccarello and Cameron Condry</i>	84

“art is not what you see, but what you
make others see.”

-edgar degas

Simic

GUY THORVALDSEN

It was twenty-five years ago.
I was a carpenter at a party
and mentioned that I read books.
The serious girl in black perked up,
said she studied poetry with Simic,
then gave me one of those it's-no-big-deal-
but-really-it-is shrugs.

Who the hell is Simic, I thought.
I was tired of snooty writer-types
referencing obscure authors and Greek gods,
trying to make the rest of us look stupid.
But her, she was smart and slinky,
had dark eyes and I thought
she was languishing somehow,

hanging around in her black baggy clothes
like someone had died.

What a night we could make
down by the shore where the sea pushes
in-between rocks and salt-thickened spray
lays a glistening selky skin
on all uncovered bodies.

“So, Simic? Yeah, sure I know about Simic.
What a guy, a real champ with language,
and just imagine, you working with him.”
And then smart girl decides I’m all right,
comes closer, and after some free wine
and cheese, we slink out the back door,
leaving behind our shoes.

Nomad

CATHARINE LUCAS

I carry your parting kiss
a small cool pebble
in the hollow of my tongue

Nestled in my cheek
it calls forth sweet water
from secret places behind my teeth

my eyes are hooded against the wind
dust leathers my skin
but my mouth is never dry
all day

Eileen Marú

MATT GILLICK

One.

Donégal holds an island at the northern-
most point. It approaches the sea-
waves lapping over the wide, thick cavern-
cliffs. On this Eileen Marú, thatch-
hills roof the landscape,

Two.

And the salted air wisps these long-
stalks of green beige blades, leaning
almost at an arch, down to
whisper their stories, to talk.
Hear of the unwritten stories
of those little ones.

Three.

Wrapped in burlap, the mother's
tears-gleaming, and laid to lie
another buried alone.
But could there be a better
limbo, a nothing where the soul
could eternally gasp
in the sea but not drown.

Barefoot Princesses

JENNIFER CYR

You meet your best friend when you're seven, and she opens her mouth for the first time to ask you why you're covered in dog poop. In truth, the murky brown stains on your overalls are one consequence of your search for a new pet frog; each one you've held captive up to this point has died due to your constant poking, prodding, and the bouts of torture your little-girl self calls dress-up.

Her name is Geraldine, but she insists in a drawl thicker than your own that you call her Gerri, "Cause my mama only uses Geraldine when I'm bein' a *pain in her ass*." She speaks that last part in an unpleasant screeching that you understand must be her idea of what her mama sounds like. She pretends you're intruding on *her* part of the bayou—which boasts the most impressive tree-fort you've ever seen—yet secretly you both know you're going to end up stuck together somehow, seeing as you're the only two girls in this part of Mississippi that can't afford debutante dresses, that opt instead for bare feet and your older brothers' hand-me-downs that your pop says "y'all oughtta feel lucky to git." You stare each other down for five minutes before she smiles at you, a big one with no front teeth. She invites you to help with her mud-pies, and you figure reading *Junie B. Jones* for the third time that week can wait.

Later in the summer, you decide you're princesses of a magical land—Dragonfly-ville (you both love the colors of the bugs: bright fuchsia contrasted with shimmering emerald). There's a language only you two know, and you have to speak a clandestine password to get into the tree-fort, which you both agree is really a castle made of the finest marble. Each night, when your mama calls you in for supper, Gerri begs you to stay just a little longer.

Fast forward through both your awkward stages, when some little shit tells you he wouldn't kiss you if you were the last girl on earth, when she gets chubby, when you get your period in the middle of gym and everybody makes fun of you because you swear you're dying, when she pilfers a book called *Human Sexuality* from the library and you spend every day after school for two weeks with your palms sweating and your hearts racing, flipping through pictures of couples getting it on in every which way, learning words like *coitus* and *fellatio* and wondering to yourselves, *Why would anyone do that?*

You both get pretty in high school, but each of you thinks only the other is pretty. You get your first boyfriends (and your second and third boyfriends); through it all, you tell each other about what it feels like when someone's kissing your neck. You drink your first beers junior year, huddled in a corner in her musty basement, whispering so her daddy won't come down and smack you silly, listening to the cockroaches scuttle across the cement floor like spilt Tic Tacs. You're there when her parents split up, and she's there when you finally meet a boy who means enough to you to break your heart. Late at night, you wrap your pinkies together and swear that nothing will ever come between you.

One scorching August, you both get your first jobs, her at the Seven-Eleven and you at the Go Pets! store, and for the first time you have money to buy ice-pops. As sugary liquid rolls across your bottom lip, leaving your tongue blue, you tell her you're afraid of not becoming something, of ending up just like your mama, and she confesses that she wonders what it's like to really *feel*, whatever the hell that means.

After nine months, you pool your cash for a crappy, clanging Chevy Cavalier that you drive north until its engine chokes and sputters outside of Mansfield, Ohio. It's one of the best nights you remember spending with her, because it doesn't matter that you've driven from the small town of East Fuck, Nowhere to a slightly larger, slightly chillier version of that same town as long as you're finally free. She somehow talks down the price of

a motel room from a heavysset black woman with dyed blonde hair and you break into the locked mini bar, chugging nips of knockoff Jameson and gorging yourselves on fun-size packets of Fritos. In the morning, you both swear you'll find jobs and a place here for good. For now, you hold each other and sing out-of-tune Lynyrd Skynyrd songs and make designs out of the piles of cigarette butts on the curb outside the building until the black woman comes out and tells you to shut up and get your scrawny white asses inside.

You remember all this, yet you can't recall the exact day you begin to notice that Gerri's hair is falling out—little chestnut clumps that mix with soap scum when they clog the shower drain in the tiny one-bedroom you landed on her nineteenth birthday—and that her green eyes are sunken in and circled with too-thick, too-dark eyeliner. You don't know if you catch it before or after you get accepted to North Central State part-time, only that it's taken you far too long to see that her snippy moods aren't just PMS, that you've been narcissistic in thinking the dragonfly tattoo on her lower back is a tribute to your friendship. She avoids you and you aren't sure what the problem is or if there is a problem at all besides normal twenty-something angst; you get an acidic feeling in your esophagus each night, like heartburn, but your mind keeps chanting: *stop acting like her mother.*

Then she comes home after three a.m. for the fourth night in a row and you approach her in the doorway to the bathroom. You take a deep breath as you think about how to phrase what you're going to ask her, wondering if you should use the rhetorical techniques you've been learning with your fancy new college education; but when you glimpse the way the incandescent light bulb is projecting your shadows, making it look like yours dwarfs hers, like it's eating hers up, you relent and your eyes grow soft and you say just, "Let me help you." She looks at you as if she's doing the same thing you were—considering how to mold a glob of babble into a meaningful sentence. Then she keels over and vomits on the floor a thin, watery substance and you to forget

the confrontation and help her to sleep. After a pause, you climb into the bed with her and say, “Goodnight, Princess Ger,” like you did when you were little.

In the morning, she cooks you breakfast—grits with butter and brown sugar, eggs. She’s cleaned the entire apartment and is sitting with a cup of black coffee, reading the Help Wanted ads. “I just went and lost myself the diner job, that’s all. I’ll try harder at this next one,” she says.

You think about how it’s the third job she’s failed to keep this year, but you keep your mouth shut and watch her as her eyes scan the page; she pauses every so often to highlight a phone number, and even more often to adjust her sleeve so you can’t stare too long at the bruises. “I promise I’ll get y’all your rent,” she adds. You tell her not to worry. You’ve got enough worry for the both of you.

Three months later, her cheeks are rosy and her eyes have a glow that lets you know you can let your guard down. You have almost enough money wedged between the pages of *Great Expectations* stashed in a drawer in your vanity for next semester’s down payment. Gerri has stopped bringing creepy men to the apartment. You’ve stopped finding needles.

That’s why when she hears about your program’s annual Christmas party and begs you to bring her as your guest, you say, “Okay.” You’re both adults now and can make your own decisions; you suppose it will be good for her to get out again. When you get ready for the party, giggling like teenagers, you’re reminded of high school – the jitters you felt dressing for the prom, doing each other’s makeup, Gerri making you look like a sideshow clown with that bright pink lipstick. She pours you each a glass of peach champagne and toasts you and though you want to put your hand up to stop her from tipping the glass to her lips, the whole thing seems so normal that you refrain. She comes over and zips up your charcoal dress. While you hold your hair away from the clasp, you watch her thin wrists in the mirror working patiently and you savor the intimacy you observe. You don’t know

why, but you find your eye wandering from the hollow of your collarbone to the vanity drawer, aware that her fingers are just inches from the hiding place of a book that encloses your future; she catches you looking and holds your gaze for just a millisecond too long to be considered fine.

Yet she breaks the silence. “You’re gorgeous,” she says. “Simply gorgeous.” You both laugh. During the cab ride, you sing along to the radio – Bob Seger’s “Against the Wind” – and you talk about the possibility of meeting handsome men, princes of Dragonfly-ville. Your shawl falls off your shoulder and she adjusts it like a lover.

The party is elegant and feels a little too grown-up. You settle for admiring the tasteful décor – strung lanterns, garland, those fake candles that flicker like actual fire. A male classmate offers to buy you a drink. Although you think his nose too upturned and his eyes too close together, you oblige him, happy to have found an acquaintance. When he returns with your vodka-soda, you start discussing the oddities of the professor you have in common, and before you know it, a half-hour has passed and Gerri is nowhere to be found. You excuse yourself, first checking the bar, then the bathroom. You ask around, but no one’s seen anyone in a red floral dress. You’ve got a mental chant going: *shit, shit, shit*.

You want to believe she’s here—flirting with a grad student, perhaps. She’ll play coy and swat his hand as it travels to her waist, but at midnight she’ll let him kiss her underneath mistletoe with berries that match her dress. In your heart, you know she is out of the grasp of anyone here including yourself. You hail a cab, gathering yourself after a harsh gust of wind misplaces your shawl, remembering how just hours before her warm hand brushed your bare shoulder. When you arrive home, she isn’t there, and you wait up until four a.m., expecting her. She does not come, and you fall into a fitful sleep in which you dream about dragonflies as big as cars, with faces like snarling Rottweilers.

The next morning, you walk through the parts of town

you've only heard about, where the air smells thick like sulfur and the windows are boarded up. It takes you until three p.m., but you find her nestled in an alley, barefoot and propped up against a dumpster, her cheeks as cold as the pavement on which she lies. Like you have so many times before, you drag her home, put her to bed, and vow that tomorrow you will make sure she stays through a damn therapy session. You make yourself hot cocoa with little marshmallows—you used to have it every snow day—and curl up on your futon with the new novel you've been assigned for class. Sometime after one a.m., you drift off, and you don't wake up until your alarm screams at you. You scramble through your morning routine and then open the bedroom door to bring her water and two Advil; but she's gone, and your copy of *Great Expectations* has been thrown on the floor like a chewed-up dog toy, and it doesn't seem as fat as it was until you *remember*.

You like to think that one day, maybe when this newborn baby stops suckling your breast or starts middle school – whenever her sentence is up—she will come back to you. She'll say something like, *I'm sorry*. You'll pour her black coffee and she'll tell you how good-looking your husband is and she'll have brought a stuffed toy for the baby. Then you'll both laugh and say something along the lines of how you turned out alright; that, like Cinderella, not all princesses start out wearing dresses.

Beams

LAURIE PATTON

In our kitchen
they were vaults
of darkened sky—
their splinters stars
to be gathered
by our hands.

You lifted me up
so I could touch them.

Perhaps it was then
I began to believe
sky was possible
because of the circle
of your arms.

Home is a Human Being

WILLIAM NAWROCKI

Home is not an ocean of
warped floorboards
adorned with thrown carpet or
crappy bathroom mats
from the local pharmacy store.

Home is not a set of doors,
defined by the moment you arrive
and your eventual departure,
porch lights guiding you like stars,
dying balls of fire
that would blind you all the same.

Home is not a comforting picture frame
along the empty hallways,
scratches in the wood grain that only serve to
remind you of the struggled death of
your dirty-handed,
younger days.

Nor is home the melted glass pane in the window frame
that refracts the light from the inside like a
agitated sea,
muted screams from the blue hue of late-night shows
on television screens.

You think you know what
it means to be home—

cracks in the driveway pavement,
tree houses with plywood that has

caved in.

The smell of clean laundry,
a lingering exhaust shooting from the
side of the house,
an accepted default family brand
strangers immediately sniff out.

Backyard swings splashed with mud,
caked seats not sat on enough,
since now, untied shoes
are not a valid struggle,
and there is no time to fly.

You think you know
what it means to feel home—
a house only reminds of the past times,
whether good or bad.

A house does not have a beating heart,
and an attic cannot store thoughts,
only peeling chests with rusty locks.

A house has no emotions,
and doesn't ache when left alone.

Over the years
you will come to know
what home is.

Home is
discovering trust in another human being
someone you can believe in
that takes you from refraining to achieving.

Home is the swing-set of her smile,
corners pulled by two chains of
unstoppable strength,
trust in a single beam over-coming
the most trying of days.

Home is in his eyes,
a mutual understanding
that each is a keystone
in the other person's life.

Memories serve as a way to feel as though
you are back cradled in the comfort of your home.

Shared experiences only work
when the other remembers the way things were:

A house is a cold vessel of echoes constantly fleeing
while each of us has a brain and a heart
and
home is a
human
being.

Indecisive

MARISSA COMO

Eyes that run liquid fear
Dry and stick on him unclear
Burning, blinking, frozen still
A faded face, a windowsill
Still as her heart, beats pounding thought
Fast as her mind, heart's words are caught
Up in her eyes, her seasick throat

Matrimony

JASON TANDON

We lie naked above the sheets
watching the curtains
robe the wind.

Later, in the splotch and blur
of the small hours
I tell you,

“We’re low on dish soap.”
And you answer,
“Coffee too.”

September

JASON TANDON

Children mill on street corners
in bright clean clothing.
Arms akimbo
they grasp the straps of their packs,

a rabble of colorful butterflies
swept into the school bus
by the slap
of its mechanical hand.

Listening to Seamus Heaney Read His Translation of *Beowulf* While at the Gym on the Elliptical Machine Quite Early, A Monday Morning

HELEN WICKES

The bad-ass dragon's done for, collapsed, out of form,
out of life, a grand deflation. The tatted homey next over,
huge headphones, loud on his cell; I evil-eye him; he desists.

Our hero is languishing, our old man
who's taken on the ravisher of life, hoarder of treasure

(Note to self: Breathe, buy milk, pay bills, and heart rate's
way too high. Note note to self: chick on next machine,
hurling sweat, coughs a frenzy; best avoid her.).

Oh, Seamus, I'm the dragon, hoarding bright moments,
sharp words, glints of treasure, all for memory.

Beowulf at life's end, breath's end, beside his fiercest foe,
summoning the last words of solace, designing funeral rites,
his heritage, what's carried forward.

The Wednesday couple toddle in, fatter than—now words
fail me—anyhow, they give the machines a workout.

All that gold—what's a dragon
want with gold, to bury it deep in earth, to take so many lives?

Old guy removes his shoes, weighs his scrawny body
as usual, sighs and works the daylights from the bike.

Still a dragon, here I go, stealing texture, faceting the edges,
turning it around in the light, hoarding all for later.

And Seamus Heaney's voice, calling me back
to sound. As day begins again I enter the chapel
of his gorgeous voice, his dear, now-silenced voice.

My GPS, My Love

WALTER B. LEVIS

Garmin, my love, this is difficult. I'm nervous. You know how I feel about you, but—well, I won't even try to come up with something original: I want to marry you.

Let me explain (and yes, I'll stop and pull over). You've been so much more to me than a mere global positioning system. Before I met you I was—well, lost. And like a lot of guys, I was in denial. I thought I knew the way, thought I didn't need to ask for help. But I was wrong.

You...you've shown me the path—the purple, highlighted path. And I know now what direction I'm going. I'm confident. With you, Garmy, by my side (or on the windshield under the rear-view mirror), I can go places. Goals, dreams, destination points—I've never felt this way before. And it's all because of you.

I look back on my life. So many wrong turns. So much time wasted in shallow relationships. MapQuest, Google maps, or (I'm ashamed to admit) I once was infatuated with those crazy paper maps that unfold across your lap like a cheap strip-club dancer hoping for a big tip! Not that I've ever been to those places...sorry. I didn't mean to say that. But it just shows how deeply I trust you. And why I want to marry you. As my therapist says, trust is everything in a marriage.

And I'm not afraid to be completely honest because—unlike my first wife, who never hesitated to call me a dumb jerk when I goofed—I never feel judged by you. If I miss an exit, make a bonehead turn, drive right past our house, you just calmly offer to help. In fact, I sometimes take a wrong turn intentionally just to hear the sweet sound of your slightly computerized voice say, "Recalculating." Just thinking of it now, I shiver...

But this is no silly crush on a pretty voice, believe me. I've thought long and hard about us. The equality, the mutual respect. For example, if I mess up when entering an address, you come

straight at me: “No Address Found.” I like that. The direct communication. As my therapist says, communication is everything in a marriage.

We also bring out the best in each other. Like the time last week when I fiddled with your settings and requested the “shortest possible route,” hoping to shave off a few minutes because I was running late—I didn’t fool you. You simply displayed the accurate time of arrival. Being late was my problem. And you helped me accept that responsibility, which is exactly how it should be. As my therapist says, taking responsibility for yourself is everything in a marriage.

Consider too how well we work together. Your memory never fails to astonish me. The other night, while holding you in my hands, I gently looked under your “recently found places” and there was that Italian restaurant we went to in Lake George—three weeks ago! Immediately, I selected, and how smart you were to ask if I wanted to store it as “a favorite.” Yes, yes—that’s exactly what I wanted. How did you know? It’s like sometimes you seem to read my mind. Really, I feel this way often. You tell me to “turn in three hundred feet.” And it’s as if you *knew* that without your reminding me, I would have driven right through the intersection. Such empathy! My therapist didn’t say it, but it seems to me empathy is everything in a marriage.

...Okay, I know we’ve discussed this, but I want to say it again: my little fling last Christmas in Fort Lauderdale when I rented that luxury car with the built-in GPS—it meant nothing to me. Her flashy features, the split screen zoom and all that, it’s no wonder I hit a bus. I deserved to have that accident.

But it makes me even more certain about us. Honesty, respect, clear and open communication—together, Garmy, we will always know where we are and where we are going. And I promise that I will alphabetize our favorite places and update your system and keep you current and never let your battery lose its charge until death do us part. Please, my dear sweet Garmin, my love, marry me!

Dead Man's Curve

EUGENIE JULIET THEALL

I heard your love-cry through sugarcane,
but convinced myself it was birdsong
when I stood at the foot of your grave.

Scarlet were my cheeks as I heaved myself
up the ladder to the rooftop where we once
named constellations after towns in the heartland.

Why were there no guardrails?

When I came to I was flat on my back
again. So many stars. I choked on your name,
tasted yesterday.

Crickets stitched the humid air.
When I could not rise, defiant, my left hand
searched the grass for yours.

The Exchange

ELISABETH MURAWSKI

Grown loose
as her body thinned,
the gold band rolled

end over end
down a hospital corridor,
crouched and hid.

She complained
to her children.
The ring, never found,

was like skin.
It bore witness,
a widow's medal,

to enduring him.
Bargaining
with the Black Madonna,

she gained two years.
Johnny found her
slumped against a wall.

Nails glossed, a first,
she was buried
with her black leather purse,

two sticks
of Doublemint gum,
a rosary and a poem

fiction

poetry

photography

interviews

her daughter wrote
out of love for who she was
and what it cost.

Anarchy

BRIANNA ABBOTT

My body craves impulsive anarchy.
I'll be driving on the highway
and get the sudden urge
to shift the car slightly to the left
and roll into a ditch at 80mph.

I get the urge to jump from that balcony.
I wonder what the free fall feels like.
What if I just ripped my clothes off right here?
What if I just told this perfectly nice customer to fuck off, just
because it strikes my fancy?

I'll be at the zoo,
and my body decides that it wants to climb into the bear pit
for no particular reason at all.
Because I'm bored.
Because it's new.
Because it's not something you would do on any particular trip to
the zoo.

That's why people crave horrible, disgusting news.
A deadly accident?
Three people murdered?
A buzz of war?
Fantastic.
We are addicted because it's something different to talk about.

The body can only tolerate so much of the same routine
Before wanted to fling itself into the ocean without knowing
how to swim.
Or let the tide carry it away just to see where it goes.

Maybe that's why people crave art,
to free themselves from the mundane.
Maybe that's why people crave alcohol,
bullying inhibitions to allow impulsiveness of the body.

A living body is one that needs experience and thrill;
therefore, I think it's perfectly natural
to randomly yearn to light one's house on fire once in a while.

Wittgenstein's Horse

BLAKE BERGERON

Wittgenstein's horse

was the first thing he gave away
a fly came to rest in the center of a daffodil
a small town commissioned a mural of its outlaws
how can anyone *not* be afraid to hold a baby
when flame is the first mistake
though at times you seem, to me at least, a totem
a coal, ephemeral, broken into separate blazes
you never exit elegantly
yet exist inside the whale's echo head
Zeus was an awful father
though its sexy to make a point with lightning
some people are made of senses
others of atoms, wandering between categories
you can stare at a sick person and hope they'll get better
you can run in a snow storm until time aches to see the house it
grew up in
the goal of art is to deceive the weather
ask any painter

Fountain

BLAKE BERGERON

Careful phlebotomist,
slide the needle
lightly or risk
the type of bleeding
that strands me
in a past of wax paper
& pin pricks.
Your eye
is the eye
of a hurricane, mist
sucked & split
until it spins
sidelong into life,
the way a kid
is when he looks
up at the night sky,
constellations
clustered like
coins at the bottom
of a fountain.
I'd take one
if no one
was looking.

Rejection

STEN SPINELLA

““**W**hat makes you a good man?”
“Would you please come out of it? This is your
fucking party, my friend.”

It was everyone’s fucking party. The smell of basil became the smell of olive oil, which became garlic. It was Italian. It was sauce. It was all sauce.

“J! Are you tasting what I’m tasting?” Jeff’s friend put two fingers to his lips. “Magnifico!”

“Yeah it’s great. Have you tasted the whiskey?”

“Why, of course not, everyone’s drinking the Cabernet! This Ristorante is renowned for its Cabernet. Try some! Try some Cabernet.”

“I’d rather not.” Jeff’s friend disregarded Jeff’s statement and poured him a healthy glass of the Cabernet.

“Isn’t it wonderful, J? Isn’t it worldly?”

“I haven’t tasted it yet.”

The champion of Cabernet seemed discouraged, then turned back to a woman and continued romancing. Romancing was always easier over Italian food and wine.

“Jeffrey, come dance with me!”

“I’d rather not.”

“Is that all you know how to say? Unbutton for God’s sake!”

“I’m tired.” Jeff almost fell from his chair as it was nearly pulled out from under him. He heard a burst of laughter, which subsided when he administered an icy glare. Stefanie giggled.

“It seems your decision has been made for you.”

Jeff grudgingly took her hand and followed her to the dance floor. She whirled and her hair whipped his face and it was the first thing he had enjoyed all night aside from the whiskey. He wasn’t in the mood for much, but Stefanie was an exception.

“J...they don’t know real talent when they see it.” They had sat back down. Stefanie was beside him now. They interned together at the publishing firm.

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“J, I’d give you inspiring words, but I could really give a fuck right now. We’re in a goddamn blessed Italian restaurant with our friends and a fucking dance floor. I look goddamn good tonight. Can we just talk about it tomorrow? Don’t look so rotten—smile, goddammit. I’m not leaving until you smile. Do you want to ruin my night, too?” Jeff did not want to ruin Stefanie’s night. “Then speak - for Christ’s Sake.”

“You’re blasphemous,” he said.

“I’m not religious.”

“But you’re broke? Poor people have to be religious. They have nothing else to fill the void.”

“In God we trust, Jeffrey!”

Jeff felt better now. Another sip of whiskey warmed him. He finally tried the Cabernet. It tasted worldly and wonderful and renowned. He heard the sound of a clinking glass.

“I’d like to propose a toast.” It was Jeff’s friend Mitchell. “To the food, the friends, and the fucking beautiful waitress over there.” He pointed to an Italian waitress who had brought the Cabernet. She blushed and couldn’t hide a smile. Was that all it took?

Jeff had forgotten about his rejection today. Or at least he thought he had. But he forgot what he thought, and then he remembered Stefanie. He squeezed her thigh and she couldn’t stop from smiling while talking to a friend, and then she slapped his hand away and ignored it. He didn’t care.

“Mitch!”

“J!”

“What a glorious night.”

“It’s fucking beautiful.”

“Who will pay for all this?”

“Why, God of course.”

“I assume you’re God?”

“Well you most certainly aren’t.”

“Have a drink with me, Mitch. I’ve never drank with divinity before.”

“You drank with Stefanie, though.”

“You are such a beautiful creature, Mitch. You are fucking beautiful. Are you taking that waitress home tonight?”

“As much as you’re taking Stefanie home.”

“I wasn’t aware?”

“Oh yes, I’ve just decided.”

“You are God, aren’t you?”

“Yes. Ruler of all beings.”

“God has no control over love, though.”

“No. But God puts people in places where they are drunk and together and merry.”

“God gave me this internship.”

“I didn’t give you this internship!”

“Right. You’re a beautiful creature, Mitch.”

“You’re something, J.”

Jeff’s conversations had no reason; they were just laughing lusty loveless. It was love, right? It was an L. Jeff laughed. What a fucking night. What a goddamn day.

The night continued its course. The food was tasted and the women were flirted with and they drank the holy water and the alcohol was drunk or were the people drunk? Everything was drunk. Everyone was. The owner ushered everybody out at midnight except Jeff and Stefanie because they “looked as if they were struck by thunder.” Or was it lightning? It was an L. And Jeff and Stefanie stayed and said things to each other that sounded like wine and tasted like opera and Jeff thought he forgot about rejection.

“Stefanie, you are a beautiful creature.”

“God is a beautiful creature.”

“God is a man, not a creature.”

“God is a man when he needs to be and a woman most

of the time.”

“God rejected me.”

“No, the publisher rejected you.”

“You reject me.”

“No, I accept you for who you are, you drunk, poor man.”

“I’m sauced.”

“That sauce did taste awfully good,” Stefanie said. Jeff kissed her.

“You taste awfully good,” he said. She slapped him.

“That was a sad excuse for a pick-up line.”

“We’re past pick-up lines at this point.”

“Where are we?”

“We’re in my apartment.”

“Oh we are? Where’s God?”

“He wishes not to be implicated in such sinful acts.”

“Aw, we don’t need him anyway.”

“Everyone needs a little religion, Stefanie.”

“Yes, but some people need a lot.”

“Like who?”

“Like the people you write about. The unfortunate.”

“We’re all unfortunate.”

“Unfortunately, yes, but some to a greater degree.”

“What are we?”

“We’re fortunate, we don’t need a God.”

“But we need money.”

“Everyone needs a little money.”

Jeff walked her out. It was two in the morning. They had work in six hours. They worked for hours. They talked for hours. They walked to her apartment. They talked on the front step of her place. He told her he wished they had some Cabernet. She told him she wished he was published. They stood up. They looked at each other. They kissed for minutes. She pushed him away. She smiled.

“Not until you’re published.”

Interview with Alison Espach

CONDUCTED BY
SARAH A. O'BRIEN

ALISON ESPACH teaches Creative Writing at Providence College, where she earned her undergraduate degree. Her debut novel, *The Adults*, was published by Scribner in 2011. She is also the author of the short story e-book, "Someone's Uncle."

SO: What were you involved in as an undergraduate at PC? What role did the Washington University in St. Louis M.F.A. program play, in terms of your writing?

AE: I studied English and had been an editor of *The Alembic* while on campus. Once I figured out that creative writing was something one could be involved in (I had always thought of writing as a solitary kind of pursuit, something I did alone and at night when all the other work was done), I tried to get involved anywhere I saw it. So college gave me my start, and the MFA program gave me the chance to really focus and study writing from a craft vantage point. There's always a debate about whether or not it's worth it to get an MFA, and there are certainly points to be made on both sides of the coin, but the uninterrupted time to exclusively focus on a long project is something I haven't experienced since and do miss.

SO: Your characters are dynamic, peculiar, and relatable. What goes into your character creation process? Is the plot born out of the characters or vice versa?

AE: For me, the plot is formed out of the characters. I'm not interested in a story unless it is someone's story. In fact, I can't really imagine a story being a story if it doesn't belong to someone.

SO: If you could send a message to yourself at Emily’s age at the start of your novel (fourteen), what would you say?

AE: Write down everything. It’s scary how much I’ve already forgotten.

“What are my phantoms? The first and most toxic was the fear of not being taken seriously as a woman writer.”

SO: Electric City Entertainment bought rights to *The Adults* and there is a movie in production based off your book—what has this experience been like for you? How much creative control do you retain? Is it strange to see your work change to fit a script?

AE: Massy Tadjedin is the writer/producer, and has written a script that she is in the process of revising right now. For the most part, I’ve been outside the process. I’ve consulted with Massy a few times about the script and with the studio about casting, but unless I see them doing something I find completely outrageous, I will remain pretty hands-off about it. I made a decision very early on in the process that the movie should not be the most authentic adaptation of *The Adults*, but rather a really great film called *The Adults*. In my opinion, the whole point of adapting a book to the screen is to see it adapt—let the screen do something that the page cannot do—and so I’m excited to see what happens to it.

SO: What has been the most challenging part of your career as a writer so far? The most rewarding?

AE: Honestly, right now is the most challenging part of my career. I wouldn't have said this years ago, when I was either jobless or transcribing market-research interviews for Walmart or waitressing, but you couldn't keep me from writing anything and everything then. After publishing my first book, I felt for the very first time a kind of pause or hesitancy to write, a feeling I had not felt prior to publishing.

That being said, the most rewarding part of my career was publishing my first novel. It was something I had dreamed about basically since I began dreaming. There was not (and still hasn't been) anything like it.

SO: What is it like being a female fiction writer, in particular? Do you feel that you have the same opportunity and respect in the field as male writers?

AE: I think Virginia Woolf says it best in her essay, "Professions for Women": "Even when the path is nominally open—when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant—there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way."

What are my phantoms? The first and most toxic was the fear of not being taken seriously as a woman writer. I grew up in a male-dominated Italian family, and the stories of young women were not mocked or explicitly shamed; they were hardly even noticed. My father was a big reader, but a reader of biographies and histories of great American men who had great stories to tell. It seemed, to my young eyes at least, that the things that happened to men were called great stories and the things that happened to women were called secrets. When these secrets were revealed, they ended up on the Women's Fiction shelf at the bookstore.

As a young writer, it didn't occur to me to wonder why a man's story was for everyone, but a woman's story was only for women. I just believed it, slowly, without realizing it, over time. I spent too many years trying to compensate for my female characters, masculinizing them, avoiding

descriptions of their bodies and—most importantly—never letting them have sex! The more sexless they were, the more seriously I thought they'd be taken. The less passions they indulged, the less likely they'd be called sluts. By the time I got to graduate school, I considered renaming myself A.J. Espach and wrote almost exclusively about very serious men committing crimes in the Midwest.

“I wanted to write about the gray area between adulthood and childhood, about heartache and longing, about confusion and sex.”

It wasn't until my second year in graduate school that I really started to feel distanced from my own fiction. I realized I was not writing the things I wanted to write. I realized that I wanted to write about the things that mattered to me personally and not worry that those things might not matter to men. I wanted to write about the gray area between adulthood and childhood, about heartache and longing, about confusion and sex. I wanted to write about sex, I realized, in all of its complexity, and what I wanted most of all was to stop imagining what everybody might think about all of this. I wanted to do as Virginia Woolf suggested and “kill the Angel in the House.” Because she was right. You have to kill the angel of the house. Worrying too much about what it means to be a “woman writer” was the only thing keeping me from becoming a “writer.”

And honestly, what's the point of worrying? No matter how much you worry, people are going to say everything and anything about what you publish. There are always going to be critics in the paper, reviewers on the Internet, relatives at the family party; all of them pointing their finger at you and saying, “This book was okay, but there's far too much sex in

it, young lady.” You can’t wait on those people to change. You have to change. Or rather, I had to change. I had to become strong in my own convictions of what I believed and what I liked. It wasn’t easy, and it’s still not easy, but it’s the only way.

Dessert Fork

JUDITH THOMPSON

Say anything you want
 Say it won't hurt
 Say you'll never lie
 again

Say one more day *isn't* the same
 It's different, like that dwarf over there
 who says it doesn't hurt

when a shirt is stuffed
 in your mouth so you don't cry
 Hurt

We misplaced the Fun House
 Yes, and we left the laughs
 inside with the evidence
 Say it didn't hurt

Say we *like* front row center
 and demitasse cups
 Say pretty please with sugar on top
 Lie about the hurt, the dwarf,

the torn shirt, the dirt,
 the snakeskin, the lexicon,
 the big knives,
 the killing squads

Say we have manners
 Say it won't hurt

A Permanent Numb

RICHARD KING PERKINS II

Between teabags, coffee and sweetener needs
the small metal plate affixed to the side reads:

*This microwave is dedicated to The Senior Center
in memory of Emily DeFrink,
so that she will be warmly remembered each time
you heat your food or your drink.*

But no one should be memorialized in bad rhyme
no matter how grave or grievous their crime.

Now I remember sweet Emily, giving and true,
so I'll try a new verse to give a more accurate view.

*Emily DeFrink lies cold in this microwave tomb
where a push of the button makes sustenance bloom*

*and if the ending of life is a permanent numb
then invisible energy is what Emily's become.*

Four Flashes After Midnight

RICHARD KING PERKINS II

As you sleep, wolves howl
and lick your ankles
regurgitating gophers
and the occasional old woman
into a pliable sky
and the fealty of winter.

Hewing clouds
with unattributable ugliness,
you become liquid
at the mention of your name.

This is something else—
an endless diatribe.
The woman escapes from a prison
of alien language
into a string of perfect numbers.
The woman is you
but still a forgery
written in Newspeak
where almost anything is about to happen.

This is the blade of morning—
as radiant as lemon-infused eggs.
I watch you spread blessings
on the pavement
and ask an old man to taste it.
I am a boy with a pocketful of matches
staring out a window
at a forest of dried tinder.

We are too young to be alone
but there is no one left
to remind us.

Winter is Coming

SARAH KITTERMAN

My end is coming,
winter's breath whispers
closely,
closer to my neck

I am not ready for the
dead, the mourning
period.
three months maybe
six months more.

Mother looms over me
ready to seal me in
my casket
with the apple trees
and pumpkin patches.

Postpone my burial,
please.
Take away the snug
wool scarf—
I am suffocating at
the thought of being
hidden, tucked beneath the drapery,
for only my eyes will you see.



ARCHES Joan Wyeth

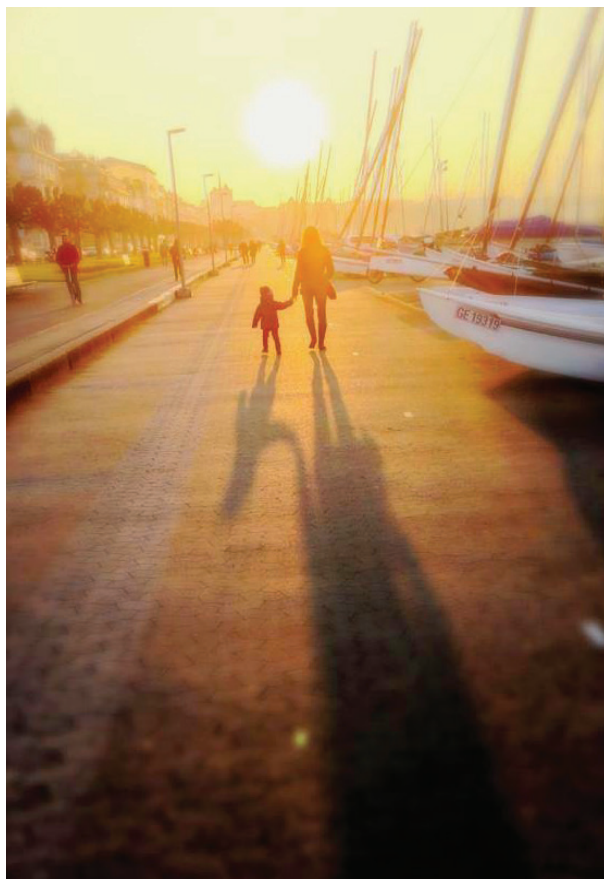


SECOND CHANCE Melissa Brown



HUMP DAY

Elizabeth McQueeney



CHASING SUNSETS

Elizabeth McQueeney



LA MIME Heloise Dubois



BEACHSIDE SERENITY Marisa DelFarno

Recipes

MICHAEL CARRINO

Lasagna, ravioli, cacciatore, printed
with care in pencil

on school lined paper by Lilian's strict
mother, taken from their flat

on Bedford Avenue, where tough boys
sang bel canto a cappella,

the widowed strega cast spells, mixed
rough potions for bruise,

ache, thwarted desire. Lilian keeps
the stained, brittle paper

she can barely read in one olive wood
box under her bed

along with some buttons, thimbles, pins,
a spool of white thread, one

blurred black and white photo –
the Bay of Naples

at twilight, sent long ago by her foolish
high school flame.

Kamaloca

STEPHEN JARRETT

At twenty-six, my sister's playing went to shit on account of the numb-hand curse. Her European recitals were cancelled following a botched surgery that rendered her left wrist a flaccid poodle paw. With her right hand, she hacked up her recital gowns and used them as dishrags, cleaning the regurgitated portions of Evgeny's corn mush meals with shards of Dupioni silk. While he slept in his crib, she wrote letters to food manufacturers: "Misspelling: Line 8, 36-ounce rice container. 'Remove from heat and let stan for fifteen minutes.'" "Who is STAN?" she asked, in illegible cursive. In this way, she clung to the threads of sanity.

As a young woman, she was a gorgeous, swan-necked creature who played Schnittke sonatas and dated men that looked like Ken dolls: the kind of nauseating savant you don't even bother sharing a childhood with. In elementary school, we sang a chorus-sponsored duet of "Fifteen Miles on the Erie Canal" and I remember receding mid-song into a sluice gate. In the evening, I'd throw a spherical foam miniature of planet Earth into a basketball hoop in our bedroom while she looped the same four bars of Schoenberg in the living room and our mother critiqued her staccato. By the time she came to bed, I had gnawed off the Rhineland and sat staring cross-eyed into the nearest wall, homework untouched as I blasted Super Strength Self Esteem tapes. I estimate that I've heard over twelve thousand minor third glissandos.

To save money for college, I landscaped for Robertson Beautification on the weekends. I grew to love the smell of mulch, the dried clumps of grass under the lawnmower, the weight of railroad ties, and the negative ions I inhaled when we worked through thunderstorms. After work, with a copy of *Middlemarch* in hand, I'd encase myself in a wool throw in front of our dining room heating vent – my hair often matted from the rain – and my mother, after looking over her shoulder to ensure my Dad wasn't around, would call me a "pig in a blanket." On Saturdays and Sundays she voiced this ritual utterance, catharsis enough for her to

avoid me for the rest of the week. Before I left for college, I left a pound of chipped ham under her down comforter with a note reading: “The Remains of Your Lesser Daughter.”

My sister Elana called me from Prague in May while I was sifting through tax forms in my basement (doomed, as it were, to financial ruin) and asked if I would host Evgeny for three months while she conducted a summer-long master class in Vienna. She was riding the death-rattle of her former notoriety, teaching Bartok etudes to four-year-olds and drinking enough liquor to sedate a walrus. Her name, “Elana Guzman,” the “n” dragged with syrupy nonchalance, was still spoken in select musical circles, the result of some universal propensity to lionize the golden child flaked down by Fortuna’s vicissitudes. In the meantime, Evgeny had carried her to bed when she collapsed in her kitchen – half naked, clutching a silver bladder of wine, voicing a desire to kill herself. He swept her practice space clean of dust and horse-hair to prepare the room for each new student, their only reliable source of income.

My furniture business, inherited from my late father, was sandwiched between a custom headstone supplier (“You’ll get ‘em next time, Herb”; “God’s Treasure Lies Here,” and other semantically-baffling slogans) and a pizza shop rumored to mix cigarette ash into its crushed red pepper as an insult to its customer base. Here, in this vortex of hopelessness, I was asked to host and employ the adolescent nephew I’d never met.

Because of his asthma, he breathed like a horse with an arrow in its side. When I picked him up at the airport, he was wearing a burgundy jacket, tight black slacks, over-sized sunglasses, and his hair was styled with Aerosol spray. He looked, I thought, cool: much cooler than I was at fifteen, a time when I couldn’t make eye contact with my mother, and I trimmed hedges in the suburbs with a man who tried to run over animals on the freeway to hear the “pop” of their bodies.

“I’m your Aunt Becky,” I said. He smiled and we stared at each other near baggage claim, as if to telepathically commiserate:

“Salutations, fellow pariah.”

He played a mix CD during the drive back to my house. I nodded my head to the downbeats of the more aggressive stuff to express non-matronly approval, though I may have overdone it. He asked if I was married and I said something about how things were complicated with my boyfriend Devon, assistant manager at Bucky’s Super Video and Tanning; former left tackle for the Grand Rapids Thunder. After college, I explained, Devon had trafficked methamphetamine to a number of state colleges in Michigan until he was pulled over by a state trooper who remembered him well as “Immovable Fridge,” bulbous pride of Eastern Michigan U.

“You’re twisted up in all the wrong shit here, Immovable,” followed by a series of solemn nods, oaths of discretion, the disappearance of the state trooper’s cruiser, and Devon’s chucking of twenty meth-laced Christmas wreaths into a nearby gully.

“Devon’s very serious about Bucky’s now,” I said.

I showed Evgeny the guest room on the second floor of my house, equipped with a small desk, banker’s lamp, and a variety of toiletries laid out on the bed in what resembled a market tribute to the war god, Mars. A week earlier I had ventured into BIG SAVINGS DEPOT to buy Evgeny one of the many vacuum-sealed “dorm room bedding” sets reserved for teenagers headed to their first year of college. The comforter I found featured what can only be described as a David Cassidy Disco pattern and I selected it from a colossal display mound as a set of parents nearby were accosted by their (I’d guess) seventeen-year-old daughter who said they had ruined everything.

Evgeny thanked me for caring enough to make up the room. As he unpacked, I explained how his mother had insisted that I never visit them in Prague, how she communicated solely through scrawled letters, which felt like dispatches from the depths of outer space, remote and anachronistic, as she liked it.

He picked up a glass elephant trinket from the window sill.

“Your favorite animal?” he asked.

I nodded.

“There’s a glasswork factory in Nižbor, not far from Prague. When you visit us, I’ll take you there and introduce you to my friend, Artem.”

“I would love that,” I said.

“The company makes drinking glasses mostly, but Artem makes things like this in the morning before his shift has begun. Animals of all kinds, and small figurines. Of course, you must tell me your second favorite animal.”

I hadn’t heard words like these in years. The words of a teenage boy without the resources to make his promise manifest, who promised anyway, who knew he would find a way to bring his forlorn aunt across an ocean to receive a luminescent crystal sloth, or perhaps a gray whale. I hadn’t decided which was my second favorite animal.

In the late afternoon, Evgeny knocked on the door to my den while I was poring over an article entitled “The Perils of Idleness in Gaskell’s *North and South*,” a piece I’d revised for over ten years (the sole relic of a doctoral degree in comparative literature, abandoned when my Dad became ill and I inherited his business). Each evening, I made a coconut macaroon hot chocolate mix and drank it out of a floral mug while examining illegible notes on the novel’s martyr, John Boucher, whose choice suicide method – drowning face down in a shallow brook – piqued my interest to no end. For five months, I had pursued a tangent on the symbolic function of pears, writing my thoughts down with mechanical pencils imported from Bonn. A part of me hoped Evgeny would enter my den with a flamethrower and set the whole project ablaze.

He mentioned how easy it was to fall asleep in my house, as though this space and this sleep was a delightful exception for him. I cherished the thought of him feeling safe and content in a space that had fostered nothing but loneliness for me.

“Dare I show you America?” I asked.

Devon's band, The Poncho Villas, was playing a show at Tommy's Ice Tavern in Turtle Creek. I showed Evgeny one of the fliers Devon had asked me to hand out at my furniture store, still in a stack on my desk, featuring an illustrated wreath of skulls, handguns, and wilted roses. He removed one from the pile and shrugged his shoulders good-naturedly. "Morbid curiosity prevails," I said.

I started my car, and the CD changer cued an album by motivational speaker Myron Leibowitz, who asked with rehearsed empathy, "How could you think you're anything *less* than limitless creative potential?" Evgeny was kind enough to remain quiet while I powered down the CD player and switched to the FM radio which, because of my bent antenna, made the classical station's broadcast – a Bach mass – sound like a chorus of fervent Donald Ducks.

When we entered Tommy's Ice Tavern, Devon nodded to me from the stage with funereal solemnity. He was tweaking the EQ on his 45-watt practice amp to the right of a drum set equipped with cracked cymbals rendered asymmetrical with hedge clippers. The singer ran through an ascending series of thirds and fifths behind a moon-patterned curtain and adjusted his dress shirt. The guitarist had set up a daisy chain of effects pedals, including a Talk Box, which he tested at high volume to the chagrin of a drinker nearest the stage, who adjusted a wool beanie over his ears.

"You could run laps around these goons," I said. On the ride over, Evgeny mentioned how he had spent most of May transcribing reductions of Frederic Mompou's "Impresiones Intimas" series, adapting the piano pieces for classical guitar. The counterpoint of the eighth song, he said, "reminds me of two people groping through dense woods, separated but walking in the same direction. Through brush towards a kind of clearing. A place to rest, maybe. I think it's a delicate song. And modest."

He turned towards me. "I'm not surrounded by a lot of modesty."

“I love to garden,” I said. “Japanese and Chinese gardening. It’s modest in its own way. Jinja is the Shinto concept of a shrine, but it can be any sacred place. A mountain. Or a field, for instance, like the one you’re describing. When I was your age, I couldn’t stand to be inside. All gardens are a kind of sanctuary, I think. ‘A clearing,’ as you put it.”

“We’re moving towards the same thing,” he said.

The Poncho Villas’ first track “There Ain’t No Love for Me,” was a chilling amalgamation of Protestant hard rock, hair metal, and self-indulgent, bass-driven (read: Devon-driven) funk. The mid-song genre shifts were so pronounced that every piece sounded like a forced medley. The men’s solos pushed them well beyond their playing abilities, highlighting that there was no discernible difference between their lamentable noodling and that brand of faux-virtuosity practiced by children with brooms in front of bedroom mirrors. The singer, confounded by the lack of response to songs like “My Lady Likes a Hot Rod,” weaved through the crowd, serenading different members of the audience, most of whom (excluding me, Evgeny, and a man wearing a shirt reading “Eat Food”) were seated at the bar.

I had nodded my head to the first twelve measures of their ballad “Oh Momma, Momma,” out of a desire to be a supportive partner to Devon, a desire which dissipated when I acknowledged – amid the stench of stale beer and cilia-trampling sound waves - that what I had with Devon was anything but a partnership. We left before their set ended and I didn’t even mime anything to Devon from the floor. The white Oak trees outside the bar looked languid, as though they had been doused with the leftover grease from Tommy’s Fried Tilapia Night. I drove us both home, past my furniture store, the neighboring pizza shop, the headstone engraver, Turtle Creek Lanes, and Teddy Bust Lingerie, feeling as though I was the worst aunt a boy like Evgeny could be obliged to tolerate, feeling as though I was incapable of finding a place in the entire universe, for him or myself, that wasn’t despicable. I can only offer you shelter, I thought. I am, in essence, a

person who hides.

While Evgeny used the upstairs bathroom, I stared into a print of a Canaletto landscape painting I had framed and positioned above the desk in my den: “Westminster Bridge with the Lord Mayor’s Procession on the Thames.” I first saw the image in the Cleveland Museum of Art during a fourth grade field trip. In the noiseless gallery, my peers likened the painting to a tourist snapshot, to their own parents’ third-rate panorama photos taken on vacation or at the site of national monuments. Only, I felt Canaletto’s sense of removal, his judgment of the scene’s vanity. I thought of him as a Venetian Shostakovich, puking in the face of his patrons. In his depiction of the scene’s ostensible celebration, I saw a collection of adrift vessels, the mayoral barge with its overstated red-dyed banners the most ridiculous of the batch, the columns of the Westminster Bridge polished to a marble sheen by child laborers, the ships’ passengers miniscule or obscured, Canaletto’s every stroke and blot saying: “This too will crumble.” The kindest form of condemnation, I thought; cluttered boats resembling wayward refugee vessels tangled on the Thames. Canaletto’s remote lens brought sobriety to the painting’s subjects, who remain suspended in time, in a kind of purgatory, convinced of their own centrality.

“This painting is following me,” I said, as Evgeny returned. I explained how I had found a print of the piece, twenty years after the museum trip, in a Beaver County thrift store, discarded among original paintings by local artists – a watercolor of juggling clowns and an oil portrait of a Pomeranian poodle named Agamemnon.

“Is that how you feel?” he asked.

“Is what how I feel?”

“Far away?” he asked.

“Sometimes,” I said, before capitulating. “Often.”

Three months earlier, Evgeny said, his mother had interrupted a performance of *Così fan tutte* by shouting into the orchestra pit that only nature has the right to produce sound, that

the rustling of wind through hollow trunks is the sound of “an uncorrupted woodwind.” The stunt (labelled performance art by some) galvanized interest in the former prodigy. In conjunction with her Viennese master class, the Berlin Philharmonic elected to review and ultimately endorse the score and choreographic abstract of a piece she had written for voice and glass armonica – slated to include cloaked modern dancers, functional guillotines, and an autobiographical libretto set in Proto-Norse.

“She’s a composer now,” he said, sipping a cup of chamomile tea I had made for him in the upstairs kitchen. “From what I can tell, ‘Ghost Limb’ will be the most narcissistic song cycle ever conceived. That’s why I’m here, you know. She said she needed to ‘clear the gossamer.’”

However justified a joint, transcontinental rib-kicking may have been, I couldn’t lambast my sister in front of her only son. I said he could vent his frustration to me anytime he wanted. I said I was delighted he’d be spending the summer here, which felt like the first truthful, spontaneous thing I had said in years. I refilled his chamomile tea and added honey. Our throats were sore from shouting over the music at Tommy’s Ice Tavern. He took a puff from his inhaler.

“Do you have a name for this room?” he asked.

“I guess it’s just a den. A ‘study’ seems too formal.”

“We need to think of a better name.”

“Let’s go with ‘The Chamber of Candor.’”

After asking for my keys, he ran out to my car and fetched the mix CD he had brought with him from Prague. He returned drenched and smiling. In the downpour, he had slipped on the asphalt of my driveway and I had the pleasure of witnessing the tail-end of his laughter.

“Track eleven,” he said.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Balm,” he said.

Although I was enamored with the French impressionists as a child – Debussy, Faure, Satie, and others, all of whom my

mother called “the lazy parlor hounds,” and “reflections of my inferior taste,” – I had developed a bias against German composers, even Beethoven.

“I’m not alone,” I said, joking with him. “Didn’t Glenn Gould hate Beethoven?”

“Not every savant is a good listener,” he said. He turned up the volume on the CD player. “You will feel better,” he said.

In near-complete darkness, we sat with our teas and listened to the Largetto movement of Beethoven’s violin concerto in D major. So he wouldn’t distract me, Evgeny only dried his hair with a towel during the fortissimo passages.

* * *

In the early morning, Evgeny found me entranced by a photo slideshow of waterfalls on a desktop computer in my dining room. Though I was wearing headphones, he heard the sounds of a koto harp and a man with a Cockney accent encouraging me to release my tension, exhale my fear, and increase my capacity for immutable love. I had moved beyond responding to these Cockney prompts with snark. “I will achieve emotional equilibrium,” I said, with the verve of a mannequin. “I will feel better,” I said, in a shame-laced whisper. I turned around mid-session, summoning a smile at Evgeny’s entrance, having felt the vibration of his footsteps against the edge of my toes. I had tried to wake up early so he wouldn’t see me like this.

“Jet lag,” he said, accounting for his appearance.

“Nothing to be sorry about,” I said. “Would you like some breakfast before I show you the ropes?”

When we arrived at my furniture store, I retrieved a medieval-jailer-grade key-ring from my purse and opened the front door for us. For a few hours, we didn’t have any customers, so I showed Evgeny the various stock binders, the back room with its shrink-wrapped surplus, and our loading bay stained the oil of innumerable, ill-maintained trucks. My Dad would have been

less disappointed with the store's state of affairs than saddened to find me laboring in such a dismal space. I think, in retrospect, he would have wanted me to sell the store. He never feigned a passion for bureaus.

I was reading *Villette* by the register when two customers arrived. Newlyweds, they said. The woman was short with cropped brown hair and the man was lanky with bad posture and deep-set eyes. They struck me as types with no intention of buying. The man followed her around like a forlorn lemming, rolling his eyes in infantile protest while she touched and inspected the fabric of each piece of furniture. Evgeny was vacuuming under the pillow of a loveseat when the woman asked him about a grey ottoman located near the front of the store. He referenced his stock-binder to give her an informed answer about the fabric.

"Tweed," he said. "The fabric is Donegal tweed."

"Donegal tweed," she repeated, as though it were the name of an exotic bird.

My nephew referenced his binder again to say – with the endearing verbatim of a boy in Debate class – "Apparently, the tweed has long been associated with a region of Ireland and is dyed with fuchsia and blackberries."

"Two of my favorite things," she said, smiling as she looked down at the ottoman. I rolled my eyes and pegged her a flirtatious simpleton. I watched them from the manager's station while I ate a granola bar and shed crumbs onto the countertop where, weeks earlier, several teenage "customers" had inscribed the words "fat bitch" with a letter opener while I helped one of them browse for a futon. When they left and I saw what they had done, I covered the words with a piece of notebook paper, perhaps too embarrassed to call someone to repair it, perhaps convinced that I was, in some ways, this thing which they called me. I ran my hand over the paper for days, touching it like the scab of a wound I could only faintly remember.

My nephew and the woman were locked in conversation, the woman's husband lounging on one of my discount recliners,

a sun-warped tribal tattoo revealed on his scrawny right bicep. The two of them were now on the topic of music, mocking a Sade song that played over the store PA system on a station I had chosen; they agreed on the lameness of my musical taste and I listened, only slightly hurt, thinking I should visit to Reggie's, the pizza shop next door, to grab us lunch.

During some evenings in grade school, my Dad and I would sit on a flat, shingle-less section of our roof with a pair of ginger ales and talk about anything we wanted. Until dusk, he'd ask me about my larger aspirations (not a lot of people were asking at that point) and I told him I aspired to be well-fed and alone. We'd hear my sister and mother laughing downstairs at the punchlines of romantic comedies (their treat after concerted musical labor), and my father, addressing the gorge of separation between our factions said:

"It's a good sign. Not knowing what you want. Not planning every second of your god damn life."

I wanted to spend my lunch break with Evgeny, drinking cans of ginger ale on the roof of my store. I wanted to grab chair cushions from the back room and scale the rusted ladder to the roof. I wanted to sit with him and listen, and make him feel ever and ever more like the opposite of gossamer.

I asked Evgeny if he felt comfortable with me leaving the store to grab our food and drinks for lunch and he looked embarrassed. In fact, he didn't even look at me. He said, "Yes, it's fine," the "fine" phonetically dragged before he resumed his conversation with the young woman. I saw the man adjust his body on the recliner, as though he was listening.

"I'll be right back," I said.

For Evgeny, I ordered a vegetarian hoagie, substituting three of the listed deli meats for extra cucumber, lettuce, and banana pepper.

"You don't want meat?" the employee asked, incredulous.

"No meat, please."

"It's not really a hoagie if you take away the meat."

“Then call it whatever you want.”

“A bad sandwich?” he said, tilting his head. He took a moment to watch himself flex and relax his right bicep.

“I’d like my bad, meat-free sandwich made as quickly as possible,” I said.

The employee had begun placing slabs of provolone onto the toasted bread when the bubbled “e” in the phosphorescent “Reggie’s Pizza” sign burst, shooting shards of glass against my blouse. At least, it felt that way at first; a kind of malfunction. When the glass of the bar mirror behind him burst seconds later, accompanied by a thunderous noise and a splintered explosion of drywall, both the employee and I fell supine on opposite sides of Reggie’s linoleum counter.

“I’m so sorry,” the employee said. “I’m so sorry for everything.”

I clutched two cans of ginger ale I’d fetched from the vending machine. They were already sweating water.

The employee kept saying I’m sorry while I told him to shut up in a forced whisper. I crawled toward the front entrance of Reggie’s and as I opened the door with my right hand, my chin against the tile, the door voiced its requisite, electronic “ding.” I saw the newlywed’s brown car peel out past the headstone shop. The sun was blinding, illuminating the exoskeleton of a cockroach, who retreated into a small hole in the wall.

“I’m so sorry,” the employee said.

I stood, dazed and bleeding from the shattered glass, and examined the bullet holes in the wall to my right, knowing what awaited me next door. I thought of a house I had visited with Devon a summer earlier, located on a Civil War battlefield in Maryland, where, in 1864, a woman kneading bread had been shot through the heart by a stray bullet from a Confederate sharpshooter. Her home was converted into a museum and a placard was placed next to the fatal bullet hole, authenticating the frozen point of violence through which the woman was killed. Some tourists pressed themselves against the wall to look through the

hole with their left or right eye, their sole, fiendish orb wriggling around the slot. An employee brought out a small stool so the tourists' children could hoist themselves up to replicate their parents' act. When I saw that, I could only think of the word "vile."

I returned to my furniture store with the two lukewarm soda cans, which I placed on the countertop, on the piece of notebook paper. The cans left wet rings on the paper, making the inscribed words – "Fat Bitch" – appear with greater clarity as the water spread across the sheet. Over breakfast, a radio DJ had forecast a sunny day, "atypical for our area." I had considered closing the store to take Evgeny to a botanical garden outside of the city, but I thought it would be selfish, imposing my interests on him. I had imagined us outside, sun burnt and dehydrated. I had imagined him reaching for his inhaler, struggling to breathe through the thick, circulating pollen; in my mind, this was the worst possible scenario.

The surveillance system my father had installed years earlier was low quality, so the video tape was soundless. The second shot – fired by the husband with the tattoo – "was unnecessary," they said. Evgeny died instantly. The doctor who removed the glass embedded in my chest referred to the shards as "shrapnel."

In April of this year, I will visit the Nižbor glass factory. I'll walk past Evgeny's friend, Artem, without him knowing it. I often wonder if he is the last remaining person on Earth, other than myself, who actually knew Evgeny. I wonder if he salvaged Evgeny's transcriptions of Mompou or if my sister threw them away with the rest of his belongings. I wonder if Artem is the same age as Evgeny or older, headed to our unifying fate, what Evgeny called "the clearing." I imagine my nephew resting in the sanctuary of that song. Most days, I shake myself out of infantile terror into another mode of being – what is euphemistically called "acceptance," which is actually resignation, a process of irreversible deadening. In Nižbor, I won't make myself known to Artem. I'll watch him - or whoever I think is him – wield enigmatic tools by a furnace and smooth creatures into being. I'll conceal my-

self among the money belted tourists. I won't mention Evgeny's promise of a new glass animal, though I have decided on the gray whale.

How Long is the Coast of Britain?

songs for a mathematician

PATRICK MILIAN

1.

Become sea. Become
season. Become
stink, stank, blank,
far-shone blank scape.
How like you to
evade the question,
but what would we do
without corners?

2.

[nest a stone
in sandy earth]
[when it's found
it's thought
a root and pulled
to declaw beachgrass]

3.

This once was a beanie.
This once was a narrow spoon.
This once was a basin
lined with lacey hem.
Clear smear envelopes the worm—
needle of silk pushed out.

4.

[from center, skew]
[queue-up, dare-down]
[water-ripple nestles in shadow
because shadow comes through glass]

5.

Storage, storages, storaged.
Skein a sort of loose folding.
Steam an unfolding of ripple
lipping up a cup.
Luxuriant curl of cream, think
of clouding into pale,
out from center, out of.

6.

How like a liver,
brown where it should be
pink and outspread:
jelly wing over the gut,
saccharine-clean

7.

[dream how brave a green
feather must be without
the wing, without seeing
the feather or the milk-white
wing-skin, just the thought,
the clear container of jealous]

8.

The thick of it thins,
thinks as if the noise
comes in through the nose
and the fire through the eyes
and the near through the ears.

9.

Frothy
dune-spill
and wave-break.

10.

First, notion.
Next, compulsion.
[snap the spines
softly as the inside
of your mouth]
Last, consequence.

Bursts of Tone

one act without words
PATRICK MILIAN

[cold rubber waders against their legs,
bootprints against the dust,
farmers competing against farmers—
the two had driven north in the night
to where the water still runs,
where northerners suck it out
and leave the southern bed cracked
and curved like a truck's windshield]

[the ski-masked pair finds a gap in the fence
and wades into the hip-high runny mud
to fill dominion jarfuls of swirling mica]

[an ear to the ground would hear
the miles-long aquifer getting moon-pulled
and pressing itself longer,
scraping out a cavern with rocky groan,
but all the farmers hear is *gulp* and *gulp*]

[near sunrise, their throats and guts
heavy with drunk river, they complete
the charm, the drought-curse,
by smashing their jars on the dirt road]

[shards fill with dawn's sherbet purple]

[back in the truck, the driver picks
beads of wool from his eyebrows]

[his passenger switches on the radio]

[they sit for minutes while the interference
of jupiter's magnetic field plays]

Kayfabe
aria for pro-wrestler
PATRICK MILIAN

We're red-rimmed and held in spandex wastebands
bejeweled with our rhinestone stage-names
by a system of signals and codes—

arms x'd across the chest or over the head.
[one for this is about to hurt]
[another for that must really hurt]

Ref says this isn't makeup:
red wreckage of ribboned earlobe.
Ref says this is live TV

and I'm a semipro
sketch-artist of nudes slick
with stage-sweat—neck pummeled
into canvas between my thighs.

This is faked and felt
by the semicircles in our ears
sloshing the inside/outside to our heads.

[upside/leftside/ringside/ropeside]

Falling always feels as real as it seems,
but pratfallen foes lumber louder. All I need

to know is if we're low enough,
if the singlet's come loose enough,
up and off in stretchy corsetry.

Ref yells to my face, sounds like

you've been under him too long get up get up!

We sway cheek to waxed chest,

and Ref gives the x.

[you've been ear-rung stunned and are bleeding out up]

Dear Best Friend

EMILY DAVEY

Animated crowds consume the gym at Madness, *flash*. Friars in superhero costumes, *flash*. Ed Cooley and Nick Cannon on stage, *flash*. Dressed turkey displayed as family gathers, *clink*. Glasses kiss to give thanks. What about that first big snow storm last year? White flakes blanket fields, no longer budding with panting children running bases. Ice dangles from bare branches, *shutter*. Ankle deep, boots crunching ground toward an abandoned playground covered in white, *shutter*. Soon thistles will collect on hardwood and gifts will embrace the tree. Stockings stretch across the fireplace, building anticipation of sweets, snapshot. Your presence still remains during joys of summer. Monte Cara reflected on glistening water, *click*. Heavy duty lens protrude, proud to capture memory. Fingers curl, images focus as I guide your vision. *Steady. Focus. Steady*. Snapshots enhance sight and mind; highlights of where we've been. Grasp. Reminisce. Ready for any situation, your strap becomes a safety net; part of the love although behind scenes. Life flashes by, but not with you. You keep it sheltered, keep it standstill.

Waiting

EMILY DAVEY

Activity lurks just beyond my shelf, but I'm not noticed. A pigtailed girl giggles at pictures. Past the circular rug, labyrinth of desks are center stage; students bore their eyes into flashing screens. A newspaper coaxes a frown on an elderly man's face. Absorbed minds focus on other entertainment as I am stiff and lifeless, tucked away deep within the stacks. Enslaved we wait, we listen.

Next to me, rows and rows of withered text line walls. A homey atmosphere envelops the space, yet I'm trapped. Sighs fill air, particles crowd my frame. Can't breathe. Sheltered syllables cling together though words do not form. Ideas left to sag on the crinkled page, wanting to reach their full capacity. Romance erupts with passion while Mystery boasts suspects. Bindings left unwanted. Propped with my companions we wait, anxious to be grasped. Hands budding with curiosity, radiating intelligence, wrinkled. Intriguing Adventure welcomes all.

As days pass, I become frail and weak. Wilting as the sun rises then sets. But you pass by; footsteps stop. You reach out and cradle my spine. Blowing away dust that held me together, I am free. Pages turn as if new, to reveal hidden secrets. What I carry now is yours. Part of your world until I return.

*

SIMON PERCHIK

These petals taking command, the flower
pinned down and the work stops
—your breath dragged back

where it's safe and in your lungs
hides the way each sky is named
after the word for stone

for this small grave each Spring
the dirt adds to till suddenly
you are full height, your lips

defending you against the cold
waiting it out in your mouth
—they too want you to talk

to call them by name
say what they sound like
turning away, alone, alone and alone.

Stars

DAVID SAPP

I toss my blanket aside,
up from my tepid bed,
up from my familiar, warm lover
and peer through the cold pane;
in this black, crystalline night,
pulsing lights pierce the umbra;
the flaming stars seem closer.

Before her children, *Osiris* and *Isis*,
when she was young and slender and febrile,
the goddess of the cosmos arched
her naked body across the sky,
across an ancient, ebony desert,
her toes and fingertips stretching
across the horizon from *Thebes* to *Giza*,

at dusk she swallowed the sun
after he capered across her back
in a blazing, solar barque;
the stars, her vaulted firmament,
freckled her smooth belly
like glowing, jeweled bangles.

She blew fiery kisses
from afar, across a dark, frigid room,
but on this night, so near, she whispers,
scalding breath at my ear
burning stars pressed upon my cheek,
searing caresses upon my lips.

Darkness Lost

DONNA PUCCIANI

To bury one's head
in a pillow of darkness
is a forgotten pleasure.
The blizzard of stars
has nowhere to drift,
stranded above the porchlights.

Each night, the delicate
moment at which the body
anticipates relief--
a woolen coverlet the color
of ebony and eggplant--
is stolen.

The neighbors have turned on
their lights, fearing burglars,
not knowing they themselves
are thieves, shining their bright anxieties
on the tissue eyelids of the weary,
stealing the well-earned dark
of the exhausted.

For the ancient Greeks, the King
walls up the princess, the last
of her cursed line, buried alive in a cave.
The modern existential tale
punishes with electric torture,
caustic beams invading
the winding streets of suburbia,
the narrow pavements where
the promised darkness backs away

over the green squares of lawn.

It comes to everyone,
that time of life when night
is the best of all possible worlds.
The stars blink to camouflage
years and regrets. The celebration
must be one of snuffed candles,
dimmed sconces, lamps extinguished
for mercy's sake, letting darkness
finally have its way.

Blinded by the Sight

DIANA VLAVIANOS

I've spent the past twenty years of my life straddling steel. Most people drive by me and don't give a second glance, they're in a hurry, they have to be somewhere. Or maybe they're afraid of heights and they're busy saying their Hail Mary's and rubbing their fingers over the rosary beads, putting the pedal to the medal as they zoom past me. I like to think that some people see me. Maybe kids with their little snot-cruste'd faces pushed up against the tinted windows of their minivan spaceships. Yeah, I bet that kids look at me as they whoosh by. They see the man teetering on the edge of the bridge like they would on those balance beams in their tiny tots gymnast classes, except I'm not about to fall into a pit of gemy foam. Gripping their stuffed dinosaurs and coloring pages a little bit tighter, they feel their hair knot in the slapping wind and beg their parents to push up the child-locked windows, nervous that in any instant, their most valued possessions could fly away, gone forever, just like the man before them.

Maybe they even cry when they look at me...through their tears they yelp out a frenzied vomit of words, all stumbling over each other in a chaotic tripping resembling: "MOMMYTHAT-MANHESGONNAFALLHESGONNADIEHESGONNABE-GONE!"

But who am I kidding, they probably don't even notice. Sometimes I like to think the angsty older ones can't spot my construction gear and in some twisted romantic fashion might think I'm a jumper or something, easing to abandon life just as they turn up the volume of their music to drown out the sounds of their parents in the front seats...not too far off. Yeah, I've spent the last twenty years working bridges, just like my pops, and my grand pops. But the thing is, *I'm* different. What I see, *the sight*, well, that inheritance, received at the ripe old age of eighteen, is rare for my kind...a gift that only me and my grandfather have ever been re-

corded to have within the tribe...a gift that makes me wish I could summon the strength within to just jump.

I like to work the graveyard shift on any bridge, typically accounting for the hours between midnight and 7 a.m. You'd think I'd hate to work the graveyard, but I learned to love it because during those hours on any bridge in New York, there is less traffic than the other shifts. Common sense, huh? But why sacrifice normal sleep hours and the opportunity to function in society as an average human? I didn't have a choice in the matter. *The sight* chose for me. Sometimes when I work the graveyard, just as dawn approaches I like to stick just the scuffed up toes of my Timberland's over the edge of the bridge, my only friend in this world, whose spine I had been massaging and popping back into place for so long, squeezing my eyes shut and dreaming of the wind taking me and sucking me into its breath.

I grew up in Southern Jersey on the shore, wide sun-bleached streets glittering in the eye-covering glare of summer, complete with rickety rickety boardwalks and the rotten egg stench of low tide always hanging in the air. I didn't live in one of those coveted bungalows near the sea though; no, I was not a boardwalk rat, I wasn't a part of that life of cruising up and down Main Street and Ocean Ave on a polished red Schwinn, clad in denim jackets, sticky swim trunks, matching my posse, as we rode around, salt tangling in our hair waiting til nighttime so we could finger some vacationing girls or maybe just our cherry gum-snapping local Tinas and Traceys under those moaning planks of wood to the groans and slaps of the waves. No, the ocean wasn't my lover, nor did I have any friends. Instead I lived on the other side of the rusty drawbridge where my grandfather and pops rotated collecting tolls day in and day out, the bridge that separated the Cape's sea from the sound, my people living not in the nautical-netted, shell-lawned bungalows firmly planted on pavement, but rather in tiny cabins that melted to marsh. We were the ghosts haunting the skeletal bones of the empty lodges that once comprised my Native American community's tribal reservation. Spooking the beach folk by our

very eerie unwanted presence, evoking images of ritual sacrifice and medicine men, we stuck to our own, our own constituting just me, my pops, my grandfather, and in my case, a childhood consisting of just me, myself, and I.

My grandfather Knoton knew a different tribal youth down by the shore, one full of toasty faces and skinned ash knees shin-deep in the dunes constantly in exploration, sitting around campfires, true Indians, listening to stories of their people both past and present, the crackling embers of smelling like actual pride for a history. “My name means wind,” my grandfather used to whisper to me, in his more tender moments nursed by a bottle of the finest of moonshine, thick mane shimmering with threads of the finest silver, as though kissed by the wind itself. He placed a firm fist on his heart, “The wind is with all things. It sees all.” He opened his fist to reveal a palm significantly lighter as though starched, and carved with the lines of many years of exchanges of hand. “Alo, your name is very special, I picked it myself,” he said, placing his open hand on my slowly beating heart. I wonder why it never beat as fast as his. “You were destined to be a spirit guide, it is in your name. You will seek quiet, but will only find truth everywhere you turn.” He pulled his hand off my slow-beating chest, staring down at my blank face, glazed eyes shining from his moon, breath potent, “You will see soon.”

Knoton understood me in a way that nobody ever would; I had open eyes, even before I was fully aware of it. That is because we shared a common burden; sure, our people hyped it up, saying it was some huge gift...to them we were “the Chosen,” the “all-seeing.” But no, Knoton and me, we knew the truth; we knew that what we had was powerful, yes, but also extremely dangerous, especially to ourselves. Knoton never told me exactly when he realized he had the sight, but he did tell me that having friends on the reservation made it a lot easier to cope with...they all knew the legends of the tribe, of the “all-seeing,” of the inheritance and how it would happen: *tribal legend says that the sight will come when a male of the tribe who carries it in his blood is no longer a boy and becomes a man. He*

will first receive the sight upon his first escape from death as a man. Knoton never spoke about his brush with death, but I remember mine like it was yesterday.

Pops wasn't around much. Ever. He and Knoton both worked the same drawbridge connecting the sea to the sound, leading us from the reservation into the center of the beach town; Knoton worked the night shifts and stayed with me during the day, pops worked the day shifts. You'd think that sounded weird, that your own father wanted nothing to do with raising you, that your grandfather did it all, but it wasn't weird...I preferred it. I can only think of two days in my entire life when I saw pops stone cold sober...the day my mother left him for the bleach-blonde businessman visiting the ocean beach, and the day Knoton blew away with the wind. I was five when she left. The blonde man was shorter than pops. Paler...almost see through like a ghost, which was strange, because people at the sea always treated us like we were the ghosts, like we were the ones never really there. My mother was so pretty, perfectly browned all year round, always in yellow. I thought she chose to dress like that. She was a *dumb ass waitress. Good for nothing. Dumb slut. Worthless.* Me? Well I always thought she looked like a sunflower perfectly in bloom.

She didn't even say goodbye to me. I was sitting on Knoton's lap when she left...She walked straight past me, as though I was a phantom to her. Pops was at work, exchanging hands with passerbys, 25 cents to be welcomed into Mother Nature's arms. They were charmed by him, I'm sure. His set of dazzling white teeth lit up against his toasted, flawless brown skin, long, thick black hair tied back, the epitome of health. I bet he took that businessman's fare and welcomed him into my mother's arms. I feel bad for him. Since then, pops hit the bottle even harder. Sure, Knoton raised me to be a man, but there was so much I was missing, an entire childhood of seeing with nobody to share it with. The reservation population dwindled, until it was just us three and Onin across the street. Onin was a decent-looking girl who was year older than me, but she was blind...we rode the bus together to school, but

kept our distance from one another. I would help her walk up the stairs to school, but would leave her off at her locker, abandoning one another in the unspoken agreement to endure the loneliness independently. We were both rejects, both spirits floating along in a world of flesh.

Knoton would talk about the sight all the time because he had a hunch that I would inherit it. There was no way he could have known I would, and he could not have prompted my experience of inheritance, but in the end, he was unfortunately correct. I sometimes wonder about Knoton as I reflect upon my memories of him. When I look at the wind and listen to it tangling and knotting within itself over the bodies of water upon which I hover, I think that maybe Knoton was so much more than he revealed to me. When he passed away, I knew I could no longer stay sucked in the muddy swamps of Jersey. Although I would do anything for Knoton and his memory, I doubt he would want me to live my life slurped into the marshes of what was indefinitely a past; the reservation would now be extinct, gone with his life, and my pops would be better off dead. I was shocked to see him sober on the day we took Knoton's ashes to the drawbridge to set him free. His breath was not stale with the stench of whiskey, but rather crisp with that of fresh mint. We exchanged not a single word, and after I parted from Knoton, watching his body and soul finally reunite in a twirling dance with the arms of the wind, I took his beat up pick up straight to New York to seek work.

Onin, the closest living person to me, the only person who probably ever truly loved me, helped set me up in New York, as much as she hated to see me go. Turns out her father's brother had connections with bridge workers in the tri-state area. Poor, sweet Onin. She was the only one I said goodbye to, the only presence from home that left an impression on me. She felt my face before I left...*how much it must suck to be blind*, I thought. Stupid me...now I envy that beautiful, lucky girl. How I wish I could be ridded of my sight. Onin helped me out with my accommodations, she had her father phone her uncle, who offered me living space in his apart-

ment until I could afford paying rent from my job. “Are you afraid of heights?” he asked. That is about the last thing I’m afraid of. And that’s how I got where I am now.

The old stereotype is true...my people did help build Manhattan, for we live for the thrill of being closer to the heavens, and embrace the opportunity to be on the brink of death. After cutting my ties in New Jersey, I was just eager for a fresh beginning, and my first day on the job, I had to adjust, as anyone would, to the idea of being hundreds of feet in the air, literally toeing narrow, slippery metal beams and wires separating my paycheck from the plunge to a back-breaking, neck-snapping, cranium-cracking death by drowning, if that is the last option fate.

After you get used to the whole death being one false move away deal, it really isn’t that bad. Of course, I had to learn the hard way. On my first day after training, they had me inspect the connections of the bridge’s suspension cables for repair. I was lifted up from the base of the bridge to the connectors on a rusty, groaning cherry picker to examine the bolts, wrench in hand, shivering from the altitude, trying not to look down. The cherry picker would sway and groan, and I had to convince myself that every man did this so I had to remain tough. But the groaning became shrieking and the machine began falling faster and faster like a boardwalk Tower of Terror drop ride. The wrench fell from my hand hitting the floor of the picker with a clatter. Like a knee kicked in from the back, the machine was going down and I couldn’t help but keep my eyes open and see it all happen. I was about to die on the first day of my new beginning...how sad.

Of course, I didn’t die. That would’ve been too easy. Death would’ve been too welcomed over the loneliness of my existence with the sight. “Yo man, you’re fuckin’ lucky you survived. I was sure that thing would’ve come crashing down in fuckin’ flames!” “Yeah man, it was crazy how it just stopped like that. Like out of fuckin’ nowhere. Crazy shit, mothafucker.” My near death experience definitely did wonders for my social life at work; the guys were quick to accept me, owing to the fact that I was some sort of

hero to them, victorious against death, stopping it in its tracks and all that jazz. I didn't even have to go to the hospital or anything...I was just shaken up. The picker came to a screeching halt about five feet above the ground, just as I had come to terms with the fact that my remains would be peeled off the cement and nobody would be able to identify them (Odin probably couldn't feel the mush of my face and know it was me). My boss was even more shaken up than I was; he even let me go home early and gave me a bonus to keep it all quiet, apparently I could sue. So I went to what was now my home, and couldn't help but notice that now, after flirting so closely with death, everything seemed so different...

It wasn't until I got acclimated to the job that I started to relax and open my mind more. Once I started not thinking and not having to concentrate on my work, did the gift of the sight start imposing itself on my life more and more. As I would take a breather and just stare at the blurring line of cars vrooming past me, I would start to sweat. My heart would begin to thump faster and faster, accelerating, and stomach would drop as though it was thrown over the edge of the bridge with my body still planted firmly in place. Even in thick workman's gloves, even in the 80 degree blazing summer sun, my hands would get ice cold, clammy, my heart would feel numb. I would be overcome with a feeling of horror...of injustice. The cars were speeding by me too quickly though, so I couldn't *see*. It wasn't until the 5 p.m. bridge traffic when I finally realized what the sight actually entailed.

Bumper to bumper. When you watch it from a worker's perspective, you cannot help but grin because you don't have to be the one trapped in the hell box, literally moving an inch an hour, ass melting into leather, stuck listening to the same stupid sugary pop song over and over again on crackling static radio. But on this day, bumper to bumper no longer was a joke...it became a nightmare, a record skipping on loop in a room in which I was locked from which I can never escape. I remember the first car I *saw* into. It was your standard pretentious, showy, gas-guzzling, ozone-eating over the top, pimped out Range Rover, shiny and sparkling, as though

permanently clean. But I was not fascinated by the impressive grills of the car, nor was I standing there, jaw-dropped, staring at the sheer size and sheen of the monster; no, that would have been impossible given the fact that it was fifty feet away from me in the distance, three lanes away. Why I was so awestruck by this beast of a car, was because from my distance, I could I was somehow able to peer inside of it, as though looking with my face pressed against its window. Muppets resembling preteen girls caked in heavy mascara and blue eye shadow were whispering to one another about jerking Logan and Ethan off at the movie theater while their chauffeur mother was screaming into a handleless headset about tonight's dinner. I could not turn off the sound, and the cackles of their voices, trying so hard to sound raspy and sultry, were stabbing the center of my forehead, the tingles of their charm bracelets echoing in my ears as I stand yards away, watching the truck, realizing this was really happening, I had obtained this sight, this is what it entailed, and wishing it came with a remote control, or the ability to mute it all.

As obnoxious as my first encounter with the sight was, it was a harmless learning experience, teaching me the limits of my control over my new power. Annoying as those girls were, they weren't the first to irritate me, and they surely wouldn't be the last; at least they wouldn't scar me. They were utterly forgettable, and would not have been remembered, had it not been that they were my first encounter with the sight. There were much more memorable experiences, however, that would haunt me for all of my days, and make me hate my inheritance. I still remember the car that made me want to give it all up. It was a white car. Your average car. Not a high model car. Not a low model car. Just a car. except for Now, inside this car, was something incredibly disturbing that I would never expect to see in five o'clock traffic. Yes, there was a happy, doting couple, looking almost as though they were newlyweds. Preppy in their chord sweaters, nearly matching, creamy white skin touching one another as they hold hands in the front seat, not the least bit frustrated or concerned by the traffic or the

weather; they just sit there, silent, bopping their heads to the pop music, staring occasionally into one another's eyes.

Nothing alarming about that, right? It just seems like I'm a peeping Tom, looking in on a private moment. Well, what's stomach churning is what I see in the backseat. In the backseat I see an empty toddler seat. Fair enough, maybe this couple had a romantic getaway and left their kid with someone...I don't know how people do it, I'm not married. But no, I smell something foul, and the right side of my head is being prodded with needles to turn and look left into the trunk. So I do. And I want to vomit. The trunk is neatly lined with plastic wrap, and on the plastic wrap are three Igloo coolers, different shapes and colors, as though the couple was returning from a picnic carrying home the remaining beer and leftovers...precious cargo. But no, I can see into those coolers, and shielded within the steamy white domes are neatly-chopped little hunks of meat. Looking closer, I see that this is no meat meant for a grill; the bone was slashed right through, and I could see marrow. I could see skin adorned with neon pink and purple band-aids stuck on the chunks of flesh, as though proof that this meat was *not* FDA approved. The plastic tarp, upon closer inspection, appeared to be finger painted with ruby red blood, not washable Crayola watercolors, and I could make out a Barney stuffed animal, a blankie, and Velcro sneakers. Disgusted, I opened my eyes, dry-heaved until all I could taste was a metallic blood and that white car was out of sight. Everything is not as it seems.

As much as I'd like to say that my visions might have faded or gone dormant with age, they didn't; they only got stronger and more active. A tow-headed, rosy-cheeked, Down Syndrome pushing her first word out of her Go-Gurt-stained lips: Sponge (while pointing at her Spongebob Squarepants Go-Gurt wrapper. Her parents cry fat tears of joy and kiss); a healthy looking family on their way to the beach, the bronzed mother wearing a yellow cover up sitting with her young son in the backseat, holding him close and telling him how much she loves him, the grandfather and father chatting in the front seat about sports and politics; all of this

is white noise, all of this I can never turn off, never shut down, never mute.

I wish I had understood the sight when Knoton had spoke of it, I wish he had warned me about how vivid they were, how much of a burden they would be on the gifted, and how helpless and remote they would make me feel. I wish I knew how he had coped with his sight, because after twenty years of seeing, I just don't know how much more I can take. It's not like I can just pick up a phone and call 911 and say "Hey, I'm Native American and I was gifted with the sight...I'm actually the chosen, so like I see all this illegal, crazy shit happen, I can be a narc for you if you want." No, I can't do anything about it except dwell on it in my mind. I analyze it over and over again until I get sick. That's why I took the graveyard shift...not as much traffic...more cars speeding by. When they speed I feel more pain, but I see less. I much rather feel that than see it.

I've considered blinding myself, but that would make no sense; what would I even have to live for once I went blind? I think of Onin back home. At least she has a family, something to love. Me, all I love is Knoton, the wind, and he is gone. I have grown to love my bridges, but I need to see those, I need to work on them to love them. Plus, I have a feeling that the sight is smarter than man; if I try to outsmart it and blind myself, it will find a way to still make me feel, to make me dream, to make me *see*.

I could get a different job, but I love being on the top of the world. The wrench feels freezing cold in my hand, metal stinging my dry, calloused skin. I hear the wind snap against the tarps of clouds, bite against the sun's rays, and feel it tenderly kiss my face. I'm working the graveyard shift today, assigned the task of inspecting and repairing suspension cables again. In my fresh pair of Timberlands, I edge my toes over the verge of the bridge's beam, looking back at the shiny new cherry picker behind me. I see out, and then squeeze my eyes shut, looking in.

Interview with Peter Covino

CONDUCTED BY
JOSEPH CICCARELLO AND
CAMERON CONDRY

PETER COVINO is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing and Poetry at the University of Rhode Island. He is the author of two collections of poetry, *Cut Off the Ears of Winter* and, more recently, *The Right Place to Jump*.

JC/CC: To us, your poems, such as “Armies in the Blood” and “Anterior with Dictionary Chain,” have very distinct voices to them; that is to say, the structures of these poems are quite unique. How much thought goes into how you structure your poems, and do you intend for the structure of your poems to be different from one another? Do you think the structure of each poem helps influence the poem’s tone?

PC: Structure is, of course, essential to poetry since it is often as much about visual play and the relationship between the visual and the sonic, as it is thematic exploration. Both of these new pomes, both quite long, may or may not end up being included in my current manuscript, which is tentatively titled *Armies in the Blood*. In this new manuscript, my third full-length collection I return to some of the themes of an earlier book, *Cut Off the Ears of Winter* (W. Michigan UP, 2005), which is also about hearing and listening to poetic “truths” that are often less threatening, less painful, and more exciting than the sometimes—transgressive realities the poems address. The title of that first collection is mimetic of or enacts a rather dire process of cutting or doing away with all the negativity the varied speakers of the poems hear

and explore. Of course “hear” and “ear” are separated by only one letter; and the goal of that first collection is to transform difficult and more fixed past experiences into sounds, syllables, silences, and images that are surprising, lyrical, and memorable in the moment you read them. The poems are intended to inspire a lively and startling present experience, not merely recount events that already happened.

In these new poems from *Armies in the Blood*, I’m thinking even more about experimentation and concision. The central themes instead of being cutting or hacking away—like Van Gogh does his ear in that penultimate winter of his life—now have an even more clinical and biologically-relevant feel, as if you are looking at these intense realities of existence under a microscope, in ways that are fearless and systematically connected to the larger realities of war, capitalism, and who gets access to health care, for example, among many other ideas.

JC/CC: You’ve called many places home in your life, and any reader can see references to places such as New York City and Italy where you have previously lived. Does one place stand out the most to you as an influence in your writing? If so, how significant is this influence?

PC: Again, returning to earlier collections as in *Cut Off the Ears of Winter*, that first section of book draws on foundational myths about Italy and my own evolving sense of Italian and Italian American culture, art history, and folklore and specifically what is fractured and lost during a poetic acculturation process. In newer work, I’m thinking even more consciously about the socio-political connections of culture: the statistic is that roughly 6% of all Americans claim Italian American heritage, something like 17 million people, and the number of those claiming Italian heritage swells to three times that amount if consider together several South American countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela—

not to mention Australia. I am a scholar of Italian American and ethnic literature and I've written widely about Italian American poetry so naturally thinking about the millions of people who immigrated from Italy during the bulk of Italian immigration between the 1880-1980 over that hundred year period is a crucial to my worldview, and to global ideas of colonization. Southern Italy was colonized by many nations throughout its history and then by richer northern Italians, and for too long our intellectual and creative voices have been silenced and continue to be underrepresented—in Italy and especially in these significant Italian diasporas. Since we immigrated to Long Island, New York when I was three years old, I also grew up with immediate family members and relatives who lived in Venezuela and my parents never learned to speak English really at all. My work is influenced by a hybrid of language that includes, Italian dialect (mostly Neapolitan), Italian, and almost as much Spanish, in that order more or less.

New York has always been a safe haven where I could explore my changing identities, and it has helped me to learn and thrive at so many levels, because of the tremendous financial and creative/intellectual opportunities it offers. My most recent published poetry collection, *The Right Place to Jump* (W. Michigan UP, 2012), takes New York City and my life there as a major backdrop; the title of book refers to the restless range of poetic styles and attentions included in the collection. I want readers to feel both a sense of vertiginous playfulness and urgency throughout the poems, while never settling on any one easily identifiable fixed response, or adhering to one poetic school alone—much the way New York seems to many of us. Readers of the book are invited to leap not to a death or stifling place but from one type of poetic mode and style to another: from narrative poems to the psychologically-informed lyric, to more experimental, associative, surreal, and Cubo-Futurist inspired poems—Kazimir Malevich and early Avant-garde and Futurist art are clear inspirations. Frequent trips to New York museums instilled a respect for the abstract and

nonrepresentational, which is so different from the Catholic-infused images I continue to love during frequent trips to Italy. *The Right Place to Jump* not only interrogates headier ideas about the value of different artistic and poetic styles, but it also chronicles the end of a long-term relationship with a character, not incidentally, also named Art—who also happened to be my partner of many years.

JC/CC: How significantly has your experience as an editor influenced your writing? Do you find yourself learning from your peers' writing?

PC: Editing is a daily and long-term practice for me. I'm not someone who likes to publish everything he writes, nor am I a great writer of long emails, or other blogging or on Facebook-like venues—but I do belong to small online writing group with several terrific writers. We each post 100 words every week and mostly refrain from comments, but instead just “witness” each other's process. Additionally, I spend hours and hours a month reading poetry manuscripts to evaluate for publication for the literary press I helped establish in 1999, Barrow Street Press. We publish a prizewinning journal once or twice a year, and we also produce four poetry books a year, which only happens after careful reading of approximately 600 book manuscripts each year. We also have a wonderful literary journal, the *Ocean State Review*, for which I serve as the faculty poetry advisor, here at the University of Rhode Island where I am an associate professor of English and Creative Writing. Among related editorial obligations, I also serve as the poetry editor for VIA: Voices in Italian Americana, out of the Calandra Institute for Italian American Studies at the City University of New York.

It's safe to say, I'm more interested in innovation and unusual language than poets who settle on one style alone and then try to preach that there's only one “mode” or manner to write. Editing

has helped me to become a more wide-ranging reader and to appreciate how difficult lots of different poetic art can be, from formalism, to spare poems, to deep image poetry, and really funny and Dada inspired, or conceptual and other experimental poetic forms.

JC/CC: Your writing career has extended over nearly two decades. Can you see the difference in a poem such as “At the Museo Barberini” written in 1999, as opposed to a work such as “Harvest,” which was written in 2012? How, if at all, do you think your work has changed over your career?

PC: Looking back over someone’s career even mine—which is not quite twenty years old yet if you consider that I published my first poem in 1997—can be humbling and problematic and should likely be left for critics to judge many years from now ideally. In spite of a fair bit of experimentation—I think I’m essentially the same sort of writer I was when I began: I believe in having and trying to articulate a clear subject or several identifiable subject matters. I also really value urgency or intensity and strongly voiced poems. Yet, I love more subtle sonic puns and surprise too; and I especially I don’t believe in over edited poems that seem so subtle that they don’t cover any new ground. I always insist on a cumulative worldview to by striving, when possible, to connect personal observations to larger political and social issues.

JC/CC: You worked for 10 years as a social worker in New York City, specializing in foster care and AIDS services. How, if it all, has that experience influenced your writing?

PC: Yes, I earned an MS in Social Work Planning from the Columbia University School of Social Work in the early 1990s. Social work taught me the importance of assessing mental and cognitive gaps, and how sound linkages and psychic and real, manifest lack of sustenance affect meaning. Now, these may seem like an

arcane, or intellectualized, or counterintuitive processes yet social work helped me to feel brave about my exploring difficult and interconnected subject matters, such as writing about sexual abuse, queerness, and multiculturalism. I worked with people who said and heard awful things about themselves, and social work helped me figure out ways to look at these concepts holistically through respectful and an interdependent life-systems model.

Poetic craft gave me the tools to refine and manipulate language, to think about pacing, rhythm, timing, and poetic history and etymology, which still drives my poetic output. I am, for example, especially interested in the transition of the Latin language into Italian and English and how some words and sounds became standard in English while others did not. I often strive to preserve odd phrasing and use portmanteau words (combined, blended, and occasionally made-up words) that are linked sonically to Italian and Italian dialect, in particular, among other linguistic registers. I also value a technique of linguistic “jumping” that allows for varied diction and doesn’t feel too pressured, staid, epiphanic, or dismissive of humor.

JC/CC: On your website, there is a poem entitled “Home Movies” and a collection called “Ten Poems.” Is there a point that you are trying to make by featuring these particular poems on your site, which tell the stories of gay men? Or are you simply just proud of these particular poems?

PC: I am proud of these poems and glad they exist on the web, as they integrate a campy side of myself along with some more familiar physis intensity that I don’t always reveal together—some of them are included in *The Right Place to Jump*, too. All eleven poems were written and edited while I was at the University of Utah where I earned my PhD, studying under Donald Revell, and Jacqueline Osherow, and before that, with Agha Shahid Ali who died tragically of a brain tumor in my first semester in Salt Lake

City. I was deeply affected by Mormon culture and the similarities among my queer friends and so many of us, who grew up in devoutly religious cultures (I'm still a practicing Catholic) yet may have been misunderstood by others. These teacher-poets I

“These mentors instilled a newfound peace in me that I miss every day, and still try to access regularly.”

mention, who represent a wide and rigorous aesthetic, share a commitment to multiculturalism and they seem years ahead of others in writing with a quiet and loving acceptance of difference. At the time, these mentors instilled a newfound peace in me that I miss every day, and still try to access regularly. You can see the effects of Avant-garde writing in these poems too, especially Gertrude Stein, and Futurist writers in their quick movement, and multiple, oblique takes on related subjects. Mostly, however, I just felt so supported and stimulated by my mentors' lessons that having these poems appear together on the web feels like an important homage to that time, which is now more than ten years away.

JC/CC: Looking at the awards you have received and reading through your work, it is evident that you are a gifted writer. What then drives you to also be a professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Rhode Island?

PC: Teaching at a large public university is an incredible and truly special and humbling pleasure. I love the economic diversity of the students at the University of Rhode Island; I appreciate their struggles and triumphs (and there are many) and we all have the chance to acknowledge our differences in a safe environment, which we realize can't happen all the time, given some of the larger classes. I constantly tell my students, especially in the smaller

workshops that I teach—hey, I get paid to read your poems and to discuss literature and creativity with you. I get paid to help encourage you to make radical insights about yourselves and the world. Radical, as in revelatory and in the Latin radix or “root” of many experiences; again insights, at the level of each image, each sound, syllable, and even the silences.

Childhood

EMILY BENSON HURLEY

Saturday evening,
An orange sun shone through
The trees. A Vermont sunset
In a winter forest.
Shadows upon the snow
And the screams of excited children.
Our post-skiing adventures
Through the wood led us to a
Brook. The trees shook
Silently with December wind.
We scampered around,
Jumping over logs and running
Through the snow.
Our feet left marks,
Leading a trail.
I saw blonde tufts of hair poking
Behind a boulder, then mittens.
Suddenly he was up high on that rock.
His six year old body swaying
From side to side,
Chubby cheeks brushed with red.
A slip, and a silent fall.
His laugh stopped and time stood still.
Behind the boulder I saw once again,
His tufts of soft gold, his
Icy eyes and then swollen lips.
The redness in his face went ashen
And his eyes dark.
In his face a protruding stick jabbed out,
Below his nose.
Tears began to rush down his face,

And his wails echoed through the wood.

I grabbed him, my baby brother.
I held him close against my breast.
Blood stained my coat and the snow below,
The oozing red drowned out his cries.
The others ran away, off into the forest,
Away from the horror, gone and gone.
Far they ran, from the grotesque image of
This beautiful boy.
I realized the panic and felt it too.
I saw the terror in their eyes,
In his eyes.

My nine year old face locked to his,
And the orange sky started to fade away,
The dismay our young selves felt.
A simple day, turning from innocent
To real.
My awakening as a sister, as a young girl.
I realized our fragile state.
Human existence,
And coming of age.
I had failed my one job,
To watch over this angel child.
I couldn't protect him.
I should have stopped him,
I could have stopped him.
But I failed.
This poor child,
Lachrymose and cold,
Frozen red and white.

But soon they came.
Running and shouting,

Flashlights lighting up the forest,
And shadows shifting amongst the trees.
They came.
Our mother and father.
Snow fell silently
As he cried.
He nestled his body closer to mine,
And I drew my arms around him.

This beautiful child looked into my eyes,
And all I could do was stare at sky.

The Suburbs

EMILY BENSON HURLEY

White walls and beige couches,
Plain Jane curtains,
Quiet, it is too quiet.

Defeat and listless thoughts,
Buzzing coming from the aquarium.
And I'll stare at them, those moving pictures,
Day in and day out on the TV screen.
Those images of people make me feel less alone,
For this is no home.

Burnt cookies,
At least she tried.
And we aren't out of tissues,
So maybe she didn't cry.
This house made of white walls and white lies
Has torn her apart.
TV screens and Daddy's screams,
Plain Jane curtains.

The fishes swim in circles,
Around and around their tank.
The good times in this house seem like distant memories,
Like the old books upon the dusty shelf,
And all of our fighting is not
Good for our health.
I'm surprised any of us have any voices left.
But today, it is quiet, it is too quiet.
So I'll sit on the beige couch and watch those moving pictures.

Ars Poetica
In Memory of Jack Love
JUDITH GRISSMER

Find the poetry

in a hawk
that swoops to catch
the finch about to feed,
in owl's awful night-splitting cry

in the ice-laced table
set beneath the hickory
where ghosts of vintage days
await the feast

speak poetry, he said
to teach two lovers
tearing at a single loaf of bread
faces full of blame

hear poetry
in frozen words
that burn
in lies

in loneliness.

Counterpart

JUDITH GRISSMER

I am my mother's mirror
 forever clear of any countenance but hers
 I catch each question asked
 maintain a liquid mask
 become her looking glass
 abide an angle toward
 each brooding glance
 bleed back a radiance
 amalgamatic trance
 never to lance delusion
 give surprise
 insinuate demise
 smile always
 at her anxious eyes
 dispel all care
 adjust her hair
 align her seams
 let loose my dreams
 smooth each crevice
 save face
 pray for grace
 stiff neck straight
 vindicate
 absorb unseen
 behind a surface sheen
 trill silver-voiced
 through alloyed screen
 a lens that tells the queen
 she is the fairest
 one of all.

About That Study

STEPHEN R. ROBERTS

One study revealed nine out of ten followers follow the first one they come across despite the conundrums of sexuality and religion.

A second study, two years later, or one year before the first, depending on who you listen to, showed nearly the exact opposite, with reservations.

A recent questionnaire circulated among equals proved beyond a statistical doubt that few are equal when compared to their own kind within a culture.

Outside the box is actually inside a cubical set in an office space equal to the number of people involved, multiplied by the square root of a tree.

According to a tree study, only three species of the woody abominations with square roots exist in the known world, by happenstance or elsewhere.

The solution to the problem lies within the structural creations enabled by a tree's thought process, with no specific form unless compacted from cellulose and phloem.

Despite all this, fog slowly drifts over the bean fields as if no wood products exist, which lends credence to the theory, along with evidence to the contrary.

Help, I've Fallen and I Can't Get Up!

AUSTIN HARNEY

I think I've been here for quite some time,
Below a shadow of
A doubt,
Calling for some form
Of Sympathy and
Believe me,
I've hit this Life Alert button more
Than enough.

I realize that maybe I am simply
Helpless,
Shapeless,
And I cannot even
Form some relationship or
Connection, that could have
Let me escape this awful predicament.

Perhaps I enjoy laying here,
Offering guidance to the dust mites
And having a moldy carpet as my
Companion.

I should have vacuumed.

Choking on Joyful Mysteries

ROSEMARY DUNN MOELLER

The Joyful Mysteries of Mary
never included her marriage to Joseph
which I never noticed at eight
when I learned the rosary and
couldn't imagine how I'd meditate
on each mystery for so long,
but was willing to try since
sleep eluded some nights and mom said
to say the rosary and don't put it around your
neck and choke to death in bed.
Angelic annunciation and
cousin's visitation seemed appropriate
and the nativity worked out great for me
for gifts and days free of school.
I'm pretty sure I was the only kid in church class
who had been to a real *bris*, dad's side of the family,
so I shuddered knowing what that presentation involved.

But finding her child in the temple
was like mom finding me lost in the wrong isle at the A&P.
My joy, her annoyance.
Mary's mysteries aren't simple.
The annunciation of womanhood wasn't included;
blood on toilet paper, meant
running to mom who wasn't surprised
or scared at all, just bored
to explain again about marks on calendars and pads,
and weird things making sense but no more real knowing
than before;
or the finding without joy of mom's nephew in the big city ready

to start misbehaving like his father whom my aunt never really married. That son unwilling to come home but going back to his father again and again to his destruction. It's a mystery.

Something to meditate on while stringing beads for necklaces since rosaries might choke me to death while I dream.

Choice

BLAKE KILGORE

Wundan bowed his head over the warmth of the fire. His large bones were pressing against his thin leathery covering of skin, his form only rough angles and cavernous depressions. Black pupils swelled with hunger and despair in the flickering light, watching as it licked away the surface of the fallen timbers until they were hollowed and crumbling, coals living only until the burning consumption reduced them to ash. Long he sat in thought, pondering his choice.

Their mother, his wife, was dead.

Sakana had been a great warrioress. She had slain many men in battle; she was unafraid of death. It came for her just the same. She refused to eat, sharing whatever was found with the children. She vilified all her kin who made the cruel choice and refused to even discuss the option with Wundan. Yet in time her rippling body withered and the lightning in her eyes cooled to a low burn and was finally extinguished.

She was gone now, and Wundan at last considered the choice. He could hear the memory of Sakana's chastising voice stirring in his brain and his lips uttered his harsh judgment in a whisper.

"Can you protect your children now that you are dead?"

Stringy, clumped black and grey locks hung heavy and long and filthy about his shrunken face, dragging him down to the wasteland. This crown mocked him, ever flourishing even while his family wasted away. After the consummation of the last dying ember, he raised his eyes to the south, toward the Danube.

Waves sprayed and shimmered in the morning light. Black waves, ominous and steady, a border between life and death. A creeping desolation strangled the northern shoreline of the Danube for miles to the north and east and west as refugee Visigoth hordes devoured all living things. The only growing things were the

rows of wretched huts, each stuffed with the shriveling and dying.

Wundan unfurled from his hunched pose, slumping onto hands and knees. He paused, rested, taking raspy and uneven breaths. Finally he lumbered up on one knee. Both hands clasped the worn grains of his oaken staff which he climbed until he stood upon his cracked feet. The rickety bones in his legs crackled with the effort. He was standing, but swayed in the breeze like a barren and forgotten stalk.

Black eyes looked beyond the forbidding waters, toward Rome.

The walls of Durostorum stood like a shadowy dam against the morning light, which slowly slithered down over its towers to reveal the green of living earth on the southern shore. Wundan's stomach rumbled, reminding him of his choice. He would cross over to the other side today. If he waited any longer, they would all perish.

He shuffled over to the tattered hut where his family slept and clutching his staff with both hands, slid down onto one bony knee. He pulled the flap and his eyes fell, sorrowful, upon his three children. He only really knew the eldest – Agalest. Long brown braids fell across the sleeping boy's eyes, shielding him from the morning light that snuck in past the shadow of his father. A small hand scarred by the bite of a wolf lay across his small chest which rose and fell in seeming rhythm with the pulse of the Danube. Wundan knew that he could not bear to lose his son.

He turned his eyes to the girl cuddled against Agalest. Galentha looked like her mother. Fair, unblemished skin. Lively green eyes. Blonde hair entwining down her back in braids, the artwork of her delicate, kind hands. Despite all of the loss, she still smiled and those hands still touched her father's with affection, hope. She was the resilient one. The failings of tribe and clan and family did not still her mind or silence her giggles. Wundan wondered if he could endure the loss of her singsong, the uplifting hum of her voice. The terrible question resounded in his thoughts - *which fate will crush her?*

His baby was in the corner of the tent, cuddled into a knobby ball. Liuhada was only two years old. When she used to smile a huge dimple would crease the left side of her plump face. She was emaciated now, and no longer laughed. As the days had grown to weeks and sustenance dwindled, she began the almost constant whimpering and moaning. This moment she was quiet, sleeping peacefully.

She needed food. She needed love.

Wundan wondered if he could provide either. He began to question which child would truly be abandoned. Was it the one who would accompany him today or the two he'd leave behind?

When Agalest rose, Wundan sent him away to hunt. He wouldn't kill anything, wouldn't bring home any food. There was nothing left. But he needed Agalest gone. He was the son of his mother, full of pride and anger, and Wundan knew his son would take up his mother's cause. The boy hated him for conceding defeat, but he was a child. He didn't yet understand the cruel choices.

That left his two girls – Galentha and Liuhada.

One was still radiant, the other pale. One vigorous, the other feeble. Who should suffer, who should survive? Wundan did not think it really mattered. He lowered himself onto the parched ground as the sun pushed the night to the edges of the sky, and while he watched his still sleeping daughters, he wept.

* * *

Wundan's oars creaked and splashed against the water, which seemed to resist the encroachment of the Tervingians upon the land of the blessed Romans. Others rowed beside him, each having made their own desperate choices. Sorrow and remorse covered them all as a heavy fog and none looked up; they sensed fate had blinded them, lied. Only a shameful resolution pushed them onward across the watery threshold toward loss and survival.

They neared the Roman dock and were caressed by a whistling breeze that seemed to taunt. The sun was up, illuminating and warming. Colors were bright and clear. The songbirds sang a lazy song of restfulness, a grateful refrain of life. Tall stout men wearing

scarlet and eagles and swords approached and lifted them onto the vibrant earth of the southern shore. Wundan did not look at them, but she did. Her curious green eyes were taking in the plentiful surroundings with relief.

“Papa, there must be food here. Look how everything blossoms!”

Wundan trudged between the soldiers while he held his daughter’s hand. He did not look up or answer. She did not know of his choice and he thought to let her enjoy this last simple joy. Near the gates the predators waited, eyes wide and fingers grasping unconsciously in anticipation. As they neared the market, Wundan heard its churning hum.

His ears were tormented by the sound of greedy hands hesitantly fumbling tinkling bags of coins and then the startling thump and ring of gilt on the tables of the slavers. The slamming, hacking of butcher’s blades through bone and muscle made his stomach growl with guilty yearning. And the voices of the raucous, negotiating, happy hucksters and the sobbing of those starving dead who claimed another few days for the price of their souls filled him with despair.

They led Galentha up on stage and she smiled at the gawkers and waved.

Laughing mockers hurled insults upon Wundan and lewd suggestions were hollered toward his cheery and unknowing daughter. He tried to stifle these words at his ears, but they rushed through his spirit like lightning, forcing him to his knees in anguish. Already he was regretting the choice, wondering if he could change his mind, wondering if there might be some unforeseen salvation.

Bids devaluing his precious began in earnest; skulking, then bellowing from thirsty throats serving ravenous appetites that sought to touch and grope and force.

When the barter began a stooped man wearing a somber cloak stalked through the crowd to face the spectacle. His voice had long before turned to gravel by incessant protest. He saw the green eyed virgin on one scale and the pile of butchered dog on the other.

Looking first upon the moneychangers and then upon Wundan, he bellowed out the wrath of God, spewing fire from his raspy throat.

“Wretches all! Buyers and sellers of flesh! Robbers of the poor and innocent! Claimers of bones and lips and eyes and hips, pullers of teeth and cutters of muscle! Slaves of lust, drinkers of blood, tormenters of ghosts - why do you worship at the altar of woe and condemnation?”

Wundan knew few words of the Roman people and he knew nothing of priests or monks. But he sensed the holy man had denounced the selling of his child and had not been rebuked or punished. He was weary and nearly lifeless, but a shoot of hope forced upward from his dead heart and he leapt upon the feet of the prophet and begged that he take his daughter as disciple.

The priest leapt back from him and shrieked, shouting in lament.

“Away from me, filthy one! Do not stain me with your corrupted touch. You sacrifice flesh of your flesh for vermin. This child will suffer and die for your sins. I cannot save her. May God have mercy on her soul and free her from the demons you worship and from the curses you have brought down on her head.”

And then in a frightful whisper.

“They will come for her when she dies.”

The priest then disappeared back into the gathering, fleeing from the hopeless. He worshipped the One who smashed tables of robbers in temples, not the Healer of lepers and Companion of outcasts.

Slavers led Galentha down from the stand and toward the pen where other already purchased slaves were being held while a servant carried the bloody bag of butchered dog to the stooped form of Wundan. It was dripping heavily, staining the earth. While the blood was drying, the smell of ground flesh, of food, rushed upward into the brain of Wundan, comforting him, filling him with relief, hope. The scent slithered over his tongue and his lips and gums moistened with craving. His belly rumbled with anxious happiness, grateful for his choice. But this hungry elation filled him

with dread, for he knew the verdict of the gods and of Sakana was being struck against him. He blinked a condemning tear and wondered - could Agalest forgive him?

Then the voice of Galentha - musical, filled with surprise - cut through the storm that was drowning him.

“Papa, look who is here!”

Wundan’s eyes rose slowly, dread lowering over him like a stone rolled over a tomb. First he saw the small white knuckles gripping the wooden fence of the slave pen. The hand was covered with scars from the bite of a wolf. Then he saw the long brown braids framing a face that was a pale and flushed mixture of grief and rage.

Wundan opened his mouth to question, but was too guilty to speak.

“You sent me on a meaningless hunt, Papa. Now I understand. But I did not obey. I stole food from our enemy to feed my sisters, to feed you.”

Wundan’s eyes pleaded with the buyer of slaves, whose curt response assured him that Agalest was lost.

Galentha walked near her brother and wrapped thin arms around his waist. She was beaming. She did not yet perceive that she was standing in a mass grave with the other discarded children of her race.

“Papa, are you coming?”

The voice of Agalest was monotone.

“No, sister, he has to go Liuhada. He has meat now.”

“Oh, wonderful! We haven’t had real food in so long. Please save some for us, Father?”

Wundan struggled to his feet, clinging to his grave sack of betrayal. He did not look at his children. Turning his back, he walked toward the boats waiting to ferry him back toward his lonely hut on the dying northern shore to the black double death that loomed.

But Galentha’s spirit alerted her to the lie and she began to wail with such sudden and overwhelming misery that even the Ro-

man mob of traders, buyers and onlookers quieted under its heaviness. Birds hushed, dogs sat and horses stilled their hooves in awe so that only the haunting crashing, gurgling and meandering of the Danube could be heard accompanying the child's incantation of agony. A sudden breeze gusted low through the streets like the moaning of the gods, who also grieved the cruelty of their hands.

Wundan was lowered into the boat like a corpse into a grave.

* * *

The waters were rushing now, the current of the Danube vomiting the wretches back into the deadlands to the north. Wundan did not row home, just sat, arms tight around the bloody bag that leaked over his stomach and hands and heart. The boat ran aground, his journey nearly closed. He stepped into the shallows which drew back from the condemned and thirsty shore. The sun descended, flickering into a hasty shimmering burial within the waters while Wundan stumbled over the dying earth, seeking out his own death.

His guilty burden dropped carelessly onto the ground and the sand stained but dried in rapid turns, forgetful. Vacant eyes peered into the hut, into the blackening gloom, and he saw the grey form, yet sleeping, but without tremors of pain or halting undulations of a broken heart. He crawled inside the tomb and curled up next to his lost treasure, closed his eyes as the dust swirled in the evening breeze.

Duerme Con Los Angeles

LYNN HOGGARD

fiction

Poetry

photography

interviews

Deep into the night the two of us sat
on the curb outside our *casita*,
insects buzzing, children playing,
adults, up and down the street,
laughing, talking—a typical evening
in Chihuahua, where we lived then,
knowing Marta and Carlos across
the way. They invited us to meals,
watched *Como agua para chocolate*
with us on their TV, patiently explained
the complex rhythms of their land.
When we said good night, Marta always kissed
each of us, saying, “*Duerme con los angeles*,
Sleep with the angels.” And we did.

We learned that Carlos was a lawyer
who worked for the city and region.
Marta told us he was fighting
illegal practices in land and water use.
One night he didn’t come home from work.
The police report stated he was killed
in a one-car accident “due to excessive speed.”
“Carlos *never* broke the speed limit,”
Marta sobbed. “They killed him
because he was going to make them
obey the law.” We bitterly grieved
the death of this righteous man,
our friend. May he always
sleep with angels.

Above The All-Night Diner

JENNIFER TAPPENDEN

the sign cycles through
FRESH HOT COFFEE,
a set of gels in
green

red

blue

that make the sheets a mossy
nest for sliding limbs,
forest cool skin,

then scarlet,
as if we're a pair of flashing
squid: frantic, hungry,

craving our bodies'
deep, salty blue.

Newton's Law

MARIA COSTA

We'd like to think that we can fly
but have a tendency to fall
before we even singe our wings.

Our reckless bodies are packed tight with bones
that weigh too much
and break too easily.

We climb from the earth
and dive from the sky,
only to return from whence we came.

We are bound to the power
that is our own mass,

perpetually destined to pull ourselves
downward.



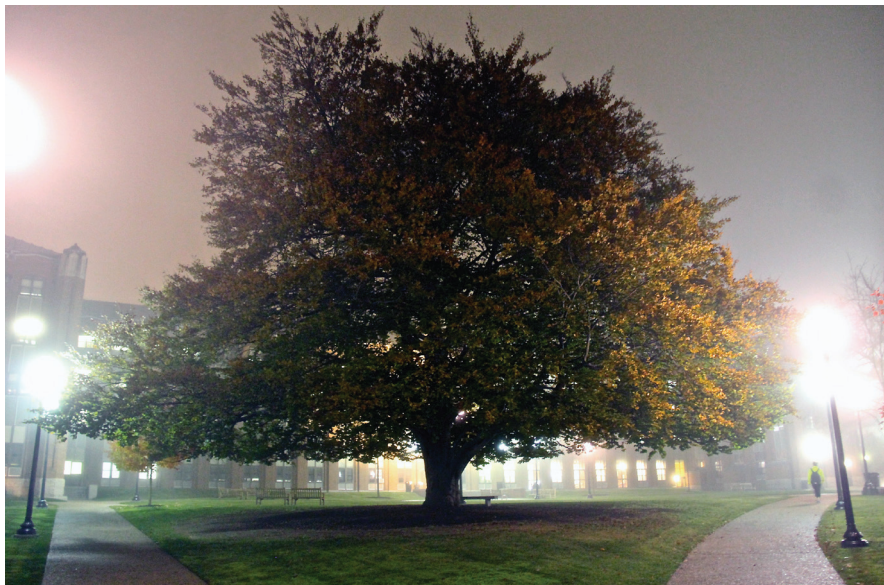
LA GARDIA Kelsey Blood



LIBERATION Giovanna Franciosa



SUSPENSE Alexandra Harbour



TREE OF LIFE Alexandra Harbour



**INSIDE CATTEDRALE
DI SANT'ANDREA**
Aubrey Moore



LIGHTING TEST 1 Jake Hurner

Captain Birthday Counts the Stars

JOHN F. BUCKLEY AND MARTIN OTT

He may come in winter, he may come in June,
the hero that all other heroes fear with the specter
of time and the gloom of a regifted wasteland
fueling his tachyon calendar and cha-cha-chas
popping off catchphrases like that birthday tune.

“Thock!” goes the corner of a razor-edged card-
arang, pinning the hem of a wailing mugger’s
coat to an alley wall. “Flumpf!” fall criminals
of Anniversopolis, cake-faced, unconscious,
lax tongues drooling soporific frosting. Gray

are the footsteps he leaves behind and those
unlucky to tread in one lose a calendar year.
It is rumored the mayor once turned to dust
staring at a sashaying skirt, unaware of both
feet planted in time. There is a villain dressed

as a crimson were-Swatch, a former phantom
pregnancy born at midnight on April 31st. She
only steals gifts in the darkness left by blown
candles. They find her gelid and stiff with
her arms spread at three and nine. She breathes

in the spaces between seconds and swears
that each anniversary of their meeting she joins
Captain Birthday for a kiss that spans until
a diamond is accidentally swallowed in cake,
and afterwards they battle over who is older

in Gregorian geological or Julian Jurassic
time, each strike matched by a counterstrike,
each fist by a second hand moving on a wrist,
each kick arriving like clockwork. On and on,
past confetti and balloons, over dunes of falling

hourglasses bereft of sand, beneath the polar
ice caps reconfigured into a honeymoon Jacuzzi,
they love to fight, fight to love, wallow in each
hemisphere until the northern lights turn the dial,
and they confuse magnetism with the divine.

Bears & Butterflies

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

Things long gone inhabit this space where the living
breathe
& butterflies are pinned to matted paper;
a bear's hide's wrapped around the mold of an imagined
bear,
their lives shortened & put on display,
their frozen figures lasting longer

than the ones who waved the hunting tools,
old men gathered in cloistered rooms
as their trophies lie beneath the gaze of emerald-shaded
lamps.
Brief funerals transport the hunters into cold anonymity,
into ornate, granite houses erected on plots of elms &
poplars.

Their descendants clear away the bear
with upraised claws & the yellowed book of butterflies
arranged by color scheme & size & other things left
undefined.
Then the bear's shipped at a low cost
to a distant thrift-store & soon stands by a wooden
Iroquois,

while young boys tear the butterflies' wings
& wrap tin soldiers in their faded array of rainbows,
dressing them with stripes & spots before interring them
in mass graves dotting their backyards
while wingless butterflies remain within their paper tombs.

The Wild

NEAL MERCIER

*italicized text is from
Christopher McCandless' own hand
found at the site of his death*

*Two years he walks the earth.
No phone, no pool, no pets, no cigarettes.
Ultimate freedom.
An extremist.
An aesthetic voyager whose home is the road.*

I am a descendent of Jack London,
An unlikely love-child of Tolstoy and Thoreau.
Bred on books and the belief that
A house built on hypocrisy is not a home.
With no place, I have only purpose:
The thirst for truth compels me.
I will not cease until I rest my head
And shut my eyes.

*After two rambling years comes
The final and greatest adventure.
The climactic battle to kill
The false being within
And victoriously conclude
The spiritual revolution.*

McCandless, the name of my fathers before me.
'McCandless' shall die.
I am Alexander Supertramp, son of none.
The North beckons me;
My great Alaskan Odyssey
Begins and continues,

Continues.
I climb the boundlessness
Because it's there.

*No longer to be poisoned by civilization
He flees,
And walks alone upon the land to become lost in
The Wild.*

Fading black paint proclaims '142' above
Tendrils of broken glass and rusting steal.
Magic Bus.
This is my home. Here I
Shed the shackles of society
That tether me to the womb of a world
Obsessed with social security numbers and indifference.
Here I find God.
Here I am God.

Happiness only real when shared.

Should I not return,
Know that I know you,
And although you may think I have left you,
I am not alone.
I sought answers but found more questions,
Sought truth but found bare beauty.
The road stretches open before me,
Swallowed by a sinking sun
I cannot catch.
Should these be my final hours,
Know I will rest my head
In peace.

I have had a happy life —

Four-and-a-Half Feet

NEAL MERCIER

Rich Davis killed himself, and of that there was no doubt. The initial rumors were ambiguous as to the actual nature of his death, but as the days went on the details began to slowly leak out: Rich had decided that the quickest and cleanest way to commit suicide was through asphyxiation. Because he lacked a sturdy rope, a noose was fashioned out of an industrial extension cord he had found in his garage. This he then secured to the rafters. The wake was open-casket, and the fact that Rich wore a turtleneck under his suit dispelled any speculation that the abovementioned rumors weren't in fact true.

• • •

“Well, that was cheery,” Marshall said as he climbed into the passenger seat of my car. He had to duck to get his head in, and scrunch up his legs once he was inside. “Jesus, I hope that’s the last wake we go to for a while.”

“What time’s it getting to be?” Courtney asked from the back.

“Half past nine,” I said.

“What are the chances you would want to drive me up to Boston?”

“Now?” I said to Marshall, pulling out onto the main road. “It’s a solid hour for the two of us to get back to school, and it’s gonna take us another hour to get you up to the city.”

“Well I don’t really feel like taking the train...”

“Boston could be fun,” Courtney said. From my rearview mirror I could see her face cast in a soft blue light, and could tell she had taken out her phone and was texting someone. Every now and again she would reach up to push her dirty blonde hair behind her ear.

“You do realize tomorrow is only Wednesday. I have classes. I’m assuming you do, too.”

Courtney looked up. “But it’s *Boston*,” she whined.

“We have to live, man. What would Rich have wanted us to do?”

• • •

Truth be told, I had no idea what Rich would have wanted us to do. I knew him only in passing, a name and a face and not much else. We had gone to high school together, but he was also a year behind me and there was little overlap in our respective circles of friends. I had gone to his wake out of a feeling of sheer obligation. We had gone to a small Catholic high school, and I still lived in state; I would be a jerk if I didn’t at least show my face. But I hadn’t expected it to be what it was. All wakes are sad, but it’s hard not to feel borderline sick staring at the dead body of someone who couldn’t even legally drink.

• • •

“Well, we’re here,” I said expectantly to Courtney. We parked on a side street downtown. A man was sitting on the corner drinking from a flask. His beard jerked as he muttered nonsense to himself. “What do you want to do?” I asked, addressing no one in particular.

Marshall started walking in answer and we followed instinctively. Past underground bookshops and a closed sushi restaurant were two hotels that stood alone together. Just beyond them the Citco sign projected a florescent glow. I looked at Marshall and his skin had the same pallor of Rich’s under the florescent lights of the funeral parlor.

“Those,” Marshall said, pointing to the hotels. The night drew us nearer to them. We reached the spinning doors and were spit out into the lobby. A pair of bellboys rustled past us, deep in conversation. We piled into the elevator and someone clicked 29. I counted as we ascended; no one stopped me. There was a pause before the doors opened and we found ourselves on the roof. Shadows lurked on the umbrellas of the rooftop bar like demons in a nightmare. Marshall expertly dodged all the cordons labeled “CLOSED” and approached the ledge. I followed. Courtney hesi-

tated a moment, but silently joined us.

Marshall heaved himself up onto the ledge. He towered over Courtney and I as we stood below him. He didn't move for a moment as he stared out at the adjacent hotel, and then he turned back to us. "Well, here goes nothing," he said. Before Courtney and I could stop him he had bounded off of the rooftop's ledge. He hovered momentarily in thin air before landing with a dull thud on the other side.

"We have to live." The words echoed in my ears. The gap between the ledge and the roof of the second hotel building was only about four-and-a-half feet. My record in gym class was five-and-a-half with a running start, and God knows I was shit at gym. I pulled myself up as Courtney watched and Marshall stared from the other side. I got my balance and looked down at the city below. From so high up it looked calm, almost peaceful. I turned back to the brink and then sprung off the ledge like a stone diving board. For two seconds I heard the traffic roar below me and I wondered if I'd clear the gulf to the other side. I wondered if it mattered. My feet slamming onto roof of the adjacent hotel cut off my thoughts.

"You son of a bitch," Marshall said with a grin. "You stupid son of a bitch."

"You did it first," I laughed. I turned to see Courtney sitting on the ledge, her feet dangling over the side. She was kicking the wall gently with her heels, humming a song I didn't recognize.

"Where The Streets Have No Name," Marshall whispered knowingly to the fidgeting cars below. We watched Courtney ease herself onto the ledge. Marshall leaned over our side and called out, "Courtney!" She was still humming but she was standing now. Slowly she twirled in a circle, dancing on the precipice. And then I saw Courtney's gray TOMS leave the concrete. I didn't know if I should look or turn away or jump into the four-and-a-half foot sea of air and pull her into my arms and onto the rooftop. Before I could decide she hit our side and landed with a tumble. She started laughing or crying or both, and then we all collapsed to the floor.

• • •

You hear about people killing themselves, but it always seems to be the unpopular kids, the shy kids, the troubled kids. Rich was none of these. Rich had been the starting quarterback for the school's fledgling football team. He had gotten good grades, solid A's with the occasional B+. He had lost his virginity to a senior three weeks into his freshman year at the budding age of fourteen. He had graduated and gone to college, and right now would be preparing for midterms had he not offed himself in his garage. The pieces just didn't seem to fit.

• • •

I couldn't get the pieces to fit. None of us could. It was a cold case that would haunt us always, hanging like a shadow. We left the roof and slipped out of the second hotel unnoticed. There's something about collective angst that makes a group invisible. Marshall led us down a street without a street sign or street lamps. A few turns later we found ourselves standing outside one of the countless frozen yogurt shops that had sprung up around the city like some bad fad.

The harsh neon lights of the Pinkberry sign made me claustrophobic. I ordered unconsciously and together we shuffled to a table. My eyes eventually adjusted to the lighting and the gaudy decorations and the bright colors. I watched Courtney find a cookie dough chunk and smile. Maybe this is living, I thought. Maybe it's not the grand adventures, the crazy nights, the one-off memories. Yeah, I guess those are part of it. But maybe it's the little things that really matter, that make life worth living. Maybe it's a smile. Or a laugh. Maybe it's the cookie dough.

"Ordinarily I would raise a drink," Marshall said, lifting his frozen yogurt, "but I guess in this situation the Pinkberry will have to do. To Rich!"

"To Rich!" Courtney and I cheered in unison.

I instinctively looked at my watch, but I didn't register the time. We were in Boston, and I had all night.

Burning

BRANAN DURBIN

She twirls a lighter in her soft hands,
thin hands,
looking at his lost face
with her lost eyes
and marble lips.
“I want to burn the picture,” she breathes,
quickly, nearly thoughtlessly.
As though it were simple,
small and clear as the birthmarks on her face.

It’s been slowly burning.
I’ve refrained from touching it,
for fear of the whole house crumbling
or my sanity going up in flames.
I’ve hid my eyes from the dim, painful glow:
nose down. Show no signs.
I wouldn’t even look at her,
for fear still greater to see her alit.
No, it’s slowly burned—
a hole in my heart,
her head.

And today, I see
ashes behind her eyes
as she puts the unlit lighter down,
and heads to sleep, instead.

Metal Hips

JILL LYNCH

We lay tarnishing on a bed of trampled orchids,
darkening roots beneath us.
We are heavy pewter welded to
metal, trunks and spokes entwining hips
twisted together like broken ribs of fencing.
In the day we sweat, hot metal under a red sun.
Buds beneath us slither through our silver
legs. At night the moon rolls
above us, the three of us naked
and shining, us and we and
the moon. In the morning we are king
and queen, watching dew
line our bodies. It drops like crystal slowly
rusting every crack and crevice.

Museum

JILL LYNCH

A pair of turtledoves wilts on the flag outside the porch,
leeches and torn from years of wind and rain.
The house hunches wearily, its appearance heavy
under its black shutter brows.

An old lover lives here.

She warms her hands around the ceramic belly of a mug
and watches the steam curl around her fingers,
lost in the web of lacy blue veins that cover

her hands like gloves.

Her skin is puckered and pocked,
loose now that she has grown thin; it hangs
like old clothes on a line, silky and creased.

She is smaller than she used to be, shoulders sunken,
lilting a bit to the right,
a summer peach left out on the table too long.
She is much too small

for such a big house.

She putters perpetually around the rooms,
slippers frayed, and always forgetting
what it is she wanted.

A garden of handprints blooms along the walls, more
and more every time she braces herself as she passes by.
The sun-bleached curtain on her living room window, long
and drawn against the breeze, drifts after her
when she walks past,
the illusion of a concerned companion.

These rooms, some drawers, a few locked away places,

are special exhibits in this museum;

she takes out his artifacts, his peeling journal,
a note with his scrawl inked onto the page,
the water-ringed glass at the back
of the cupboard that she never washed
after he had left it at the breakfast table that morning.
These are the relics she rises every day to savor,
the dull gold ring that she wears on a chain
around her neck, her only price of admission.

Named By What Was Wanted

MARILYN RINGER

The poem in the shower wished for indelible ink.
The one by the trash can jumped into the red oak
shivering its leaves as I threw back the lid.

The mockingbird's poem is a trill of stolen songs.

I grab at the tattered hem of a racing thought hoping
enigmatic notes on scrap paper will reconnect me
to the moment that noticed itself,

and pray to find the baby Jesus baked in the bread.

It Is Not the Doing That's Hard

MARILYN RINGER

It is the commitment to the doing of any practiced act like
breathing,
survival at its blood bone basics, a dailiness that feels worthwhile
allowing the breath to go deeper, lighting up the neurons,

those little campfires of the mind, or the lantern of a firefly's belly
reminding you of summer nights and the Kerr fruit jars winking,
winking.

Oh where have I been so far from myself and why?

I have no answer especially on this green day bursting with the
sun
of itself as if there had never been a cold, wet winter, or that
despair
had not embraced me as if I were its lover. And so I swear a vow
unbreakable to now and now and now.

Big Yellow

BARBARA RYDER-LEVINSON

there

not to be hurried
 scoffing
 completely closed
 not a hint for days
 her feverish glory
 by some Divine responsibility
 won't open
 tight
 fat
 green
 healthy

closed

I feed her
 water her
 talk to her
 she has the best lake view
 incoming ducks and herons
 silly goose who barks
 silent swan
 a quiet anticipation
 of opening
 of spirit
 and sorrow
 all the bundle of life
 never easy

unless

you are satisfied enough
skimming the surface
missing the big yellow

thick crusty nourishment
not the crust
the deep center
where all pain flourishes
and joy

The Village

COLLIN ANDERSON

I

There wasn't much fog up in the pines this morning. Perhaps there had been earlier when his mother woke to take the corn to the mill. He would have to ask her, he thought as he stretched his lean, tired body. Julio emerged from his *casita* to wave to his father, and to wish him a good day on *la finca*—it was the family's calf that had woken him up with an exasperated call as its packs were filled by Julio's father. The calf did not like getting up early, but he had to go with *Papá* to *la finca* to get used to the hills. As the man and the young cow began to blend in with the morning, Julio gazed up. The traces of fog were thin, winding, and hugged tightly to the mountain like silver veins; there wasn't much fog this morning.

He could see one of the electric lights on in his *Abuelo's* house across the dirt road from his own; a sliver of yellow, bursting unnaturally through the small opening between the aluminum roof and concrete wall, was piercing into the dark blue air of dawn that just got finished consuming *Papá*. The house was humble by *Abuelo's* choice. The front face of the home pointed east to greet the day, and was the grey color that wood takes on years after its life, with one painted sapphire stripe running horizontally at knee height, interrupted only by the door that welcomed and saluted *Abuelo* everyday. He preferred the simplicity of only having three electric lights, a wood fed clay oven, and two rooms.

It was clear to *Abuelo* shortly after his worst day all those years ago that life was to always remain unassuming. The complexity of the farm, raising a family, and contemplating the past were enough thorns on his mind for him to willingly complicate anything further. A small inheritance waited for his death, at which time it would pass to his grandchildren. The inheritance was the final legacy of his family's European ties, and like those

ties, the small fortune had dwindled over the turbulent history of his *patria*, Nicaragua. Even so, *Abuelo* decided to live comfortably in what Americans, and those who pretend to know things, call poverty; besides, the austerity matched the paint smattered upon the canvas of his insides.

The plastic chairs on the uneven concrete slab of front porch stood tirelessly in front, always waiting for *Abuelo* to emerge and take his rightful spot on his throne. When he *did* appear through the door, he breathed in deeply, exhaling a cloud of misty breath that quickly mixed into the pre-dawn shadows. Julio crossed the road, eager for his *abuelo* to hear his story. After exchanging the greeting “¡*Buenas!*” Martín reached for his youngest grandson (he had two *nietas*, granddaughters, younger than Julio—Vanesa, y Esperanza) and pulled him in for an embrace. Martín cherished these moments above all else, being able to hold his own flesh and blood tightly in his hands, as if at any moment Julio could turn to dust, and dance with his breath in the cool sky. Julio hugged back, and pressed his cheek into his *abuelo’s* jacket—a black windbreaker that read “Pittsburgh Steelers, Super Bowl XXIV Champions!” He loved his *abuelo*.

II

Martín was looking down into Julio’s large green eyes. They were a dark and verdant green, but their color seemed to intensify depending on the boy’s mood. Martín could remember the day Julio’s sister and Martín’s only granddaughter, Esperanza, was born. When Julio saw her for the first time, his eyes turned the color of the avocados from Doña Laura’s tree down the road. This morning they were as dark as pine needles. Julio got a lot of attention for those eyes since it was local lore that green eyes meant German ancestry. It was Germans searching for gold that first brought coffee to Nicaragua. It was German refugees fleeing The Great War that first brought Martín to Nicaragua. Martín remembers his *abuelo* greeting him in a Bavarian accent with “*Guten Morgen!*” but the man died when Martín had only six years.

The last time Martín saw his grandfather was in the city of León, Nicaragua, and like any other day, the old man was dressed gaudily, wearing a large hat that Martín had only ever seen on generals in pictures books. He remembered the heat, and how his new school clothes were in need of wash. That afternoon felt like a hundred degrees, and he could still smell the oaky musk of his *abuelo's* cigar. The man looked ostentatious, and out of place inside the hulking white stone fortress that is León Cathedral. The locals passed by his *abuelo* as they searched for *Dios*, all while the ghost of the stalwart Spanish Empire, and the glory that built it floated through its cold height. Martín sat on a bench about 5 meters from the stone monument that his grandfather was scanning meticulously. Picking at the suit he was beginning to outgrow, the boy absently kicked his feet up and down. He wished he were taller, since his legs were too short to touch the floor.

He remembered his grandfather kneeling in front of that monument to Nicaragua's most dear poet, Rubén Darío. He remembered wondering how grandfather's cigar wasn't burning his lips, since it was barely more than a ring of fire and ash at that point. He distinctly remembered the somber look in the eyes of the stone lion lying eternally in front of the patriot's mausoleum. The lion's stature was resigned, yet protective; similar to those fathers Martín saw begrudgingly mourning sons that were lost to the trenches. Martín did not exactly know what a trench was, but *Abuelo* made sure thousands of miles separated them from what he called "the old world".

The lion was looking right at Martín with empathetic eyes, and the pained face of loss that a boy knows not. He locked his small green eyes on the lion, partially because his grandfather's tears made him uncomfortable, and partially because only then had he realized that his grandfather was going to die, and that he would be alone. That stone lion's gaze made Martín vow to never go back inside that Cathedral. When he fell in love years later, a woman made him break that vow in order to make another. The lion tried to captivate him once more that day, but his wife's cool hand in his own and her inebriating beauty shielded him from everything but her paradise.

In the early morning, Martín held his grandson, and clasped his face in his palms to look at those eyes. The old man always told Julio that *Dios* himself drew his unique eyes to resemble unripe coffee cherries. One night some years ago, Martín's daughter came crossing toward his home, cackling with laughter because her young son just asked her in a horrified voice if his eyes would change to red when he ripened like the coffee beans do in March. His eager eyes were just barely 11 years old. He still consumed every day, and all of its events, with voracity.

III

Esperanza had a bad habit of wandering off. She also had a very good habit of finding her way back. Her mother would chastise her, until one day when the neighbor's cow went missing—it had wandered off in the night. Search parties went out into the mountains, only to return, machetes on their belts, fearing the worst for the small steer. That morning, her neighbor, Don Bartolome, stepped from the group toward Esperanza's porch. Don Bartolome lost his leg in the war, but not because he was a soldier. Or at least, that's what her uncle Carlos told her sometime around last harvest. Esperanza never understood why anyone even pointed out the man's missing leg. He can still ride a horse, he tells good stories, he milks cows, and he does all those things better than most men she had seen that were unbroken.

"*Buenas* Esperanza... *Buenas* Doña Violeta," he took his sand colored hat off, kissed both on the cheek, and graciously accepted the mug Violeta, Esperanza and Julio's mother, spawned from nowhere. Violeta herself had made the mug of clay, and on the front was a windmill etched in the russet pottery. He sipped deeply, nearly finishing all of the steaming *café* in one gulp, before he continued. "There's not much else we can do. I hope *Dios* has a plan for the young animal, he must ... my wife warned me not to let..." Before he finished, Esperanza slipped into the house and out the back trails. An hour later, Don Bartolome, and Violeta stood with their mouths gaping open upon noticing a small girl on the back of the missing cow prancing up the road. She was

leading it home. Her mother bothered her much less about her expeditions since that day, and Don Bartolome still brings the family a half-liter of milk every morning in gratitude.

This morning, after waking early with her mother to go to the mill, Esperanza skittered up the dirt road to her cousin's house. Her mom's brother Carlos, his wife Lourdes, and her cousin Vanesa all greeted her with a kiss on the cheek. *Abuelo* made sure that his two children and their families stayed close.

"¡*Buenas!* How's *Abuelo* this morning? It's a bit warmer than usual for this hour," Her aunt put a tortilla in her hands, it was still hot, and smelled like the mill.

With a mouth full of food, Esperanza replied, "*Está bien.* He's talking to Julio on the porch. How many years does *Abuelo* have?" She'd never thought to ask. Esperanza loved her *abuelo*. When she thinks of him, she envisions the great big trees that watch over the village from the high peaks of the mountains. As far as she was concerned, *Abuelo* was these mountains just as much as the mountains were her *abuelo*. She told him about that one day, thinking he'd be happy, but instead he said the peaks were wiser than he, and older than man.

Lourdes was pouring small cups of sweet black coffee into mismatching glasses, and when four were filled, she poured the rest of the dark steaming fluid into a canteen and set it on the counter. "*Abuelo, Abuelo.* I'm glad he's well; your brother should keep him busy until the sun comes up. Your grandfather has a lot of years. More than anyone in the village, I'd wager. Go ask him yourself today," Esperanza looked at her aunt puzzled. Just as she was about to protest, her aunt put another tortilla in her slender hand, so she ate. Lourdes, of course, knew the answer. She looked down at her niece eating the tortilla in what seemed like one bite, and said to the little one in palpable Spanish, "*Pregunta a la montaña de su altura, porque el río nunca puede entender;*" Ask the mountain of its height, for the river will never understand.

"¡*Vanesa!* Go out back with your cousin and fill some buckets with water," Lourdes shouted over the radio, which her uncle had put on. Esperanza loved her *tio* dearly despite his

unique nature. He could hear fine, but when he listened to the radio, he had a peculiar habit of putting his ear right up to the speaker, as if the space between the two could gobble up some of the words before they got to his ear. *Abuelo* said it had to do with the war from years ago, but Esperanza failed to see the connection. So, she stopped asking him why he did this, since every time he simply answered, “Listening closely”

IV

Julio and Martín watched Esperanza skip up the road to their family’s house as their morning embrace was coming to a close. Martín’s eyes followed his granddaughter up the road. He sat only when he heard “¡*Buenas!*” loudly, signaling she arrived at his son Carlos’ house. The girl’s jovial voice pierced the thin air of dawn, and was followed by an equally penetrating silence as she left the morning. He watched his grandson rub the dreams out of his eyes, and petitioned the boy to go inside and pour them both *café* that he had prepared. While Julio clinked around sleepily in the kitchen, Martín lit a cigarette. His breath mixed with the familiar-smelling smoke, and he watched it billow towards the sky. The smoke was much more acrid than the cigar Martín’s grandfather had smoked in the Cathedral all those years ago—that smoke just reminded him of innocent melancholy. With these cigarettes however, each pull of smoke tasted like the day his wife died.

V

Martín had just arrived in Managua after a full day of travelling on the day his wife died. The bus that picked him up at the run-down depot in Chinandega (the third he had been on that day) made its way south towards León, before following the coast of the magnificent Lake Managua down to the capital. Descending from the bus, he took a deep breath. He did not go into the cities that much; they always made him uneasy. He was born with the land, and he would die with the land. As he exhaled, he could feel the hundreds of other lungs that the air had passed through; the thought alone caused Martín to let out a small cough as he glanced back toward the bus, which somehow had already gone.

Swallowing his discomfort, he exited the arrival terminal area and stood pensively on some nearby grass. The sun was setting, and his face scrunched up as his eyes adjusted to the scene. There were no sounds of birds, *las cascadas* in the valley, nor children running around, but there certainly was a lot of sound. The bus station was near the university, and as such, numerous young people, around the age of his children, were passing each way.

Every time Martín set foot in Managua, he could feel it pulling him. It was different from León or Granada, his country's two other cities. First, it was big; the other two cities were notable for their colonial past, Managua for its size. He learned that a third of the country lived in or around the city. Its gravity was an intensity that scared him. Even the young *nicaragienses* seemed to ask him to stay. Their style was some bastardized take on the American "hippie" that he had seen in *Time* magazine last week at the same hospital waiting room that was his destination today. The article featured a bunch of American university students who were protesting the Vietnam War dressed in strange blue jeans and multicolored shirts. The American government tried to disperse them, but the article said that "peace kept them safe". They knew nothing.

A group of students next to him was chatting, and one of the prettier girls was passing them slices of mango. As he lit the last cigarette that he brought with him, the group of students mounted a bus one by one. The pretty one was behind in the line. *Inhale*. She ate the last slice of mango, kissed the old woman selling them on the top of the head, and followed her friends. They knew nothing. *Exhale*. He got in a taxi and struggled to remember the address of the hospital. Managua has no street names, just landmarks and rotundas. As soon as he mentioned the hospital however, the cab driver slammed the subcompact Toyota into gear; like a special agent in an action film, he bobbed and weaved his way through Managua's veins. Around every turn Martín saw something that made him want another cigarette. The city was intoxicating as it invaded his mind.

He got out of the cab, stuffed a few Córdoba into the driver's hand, and surveyed the area. During his trek, the sun had

set, but day stubbornly held on as it does, and complete darkness had not yet enveloped them. The *barrio* that the hospital was located in must have had some money. It was not far from the center, where the rich from around the world enjoyed their nightclub-playgrounds. The small houses that packed the streets all had new American cars in front—a way to show off money, or power, or something. He could smell someone frying plantains in a nearby home, and on the curb near his backpack laid a bottle of *Flor de Caña*, the Nicaraguan rum, empty and discarded. The hospital stood taller than the rest of the surrounding buildings. In the reflection of the glass panes, he could see the neon lights of a small store. He stopped in, bought a can of Coca-Cola, and a pack of cigarettes he had never seen before. Outside the store he opened the Coke and lit a smoke. *Inhale*. The road was busy, but not chaotic like most in the city. The cars moved steadily, and kept rhythm with the city's glimmering lights. His eyes painted the evening in his brain as a symphony of warm breeze tossed his hair. *Exhale*. *Damn city cigarettes*, he thought, as the second puff stung his lungs and nostrils.

VI

“*Señora Julieta Luis de Santa Cruz, por favor*,” Martín answered the receptionist when she asked whom he was visiting. His wife was in the hospital for a regular surgery, as the doctors said. Her appendix needed to be removed. He was not able to be there for her recovery period, as he had to continue to work so they could eat, and pay for the surgery. It killed him to leave her there, for her pain was his, her fear like a hornet in his mind. After being led through a labyrinth of austere hallways, Martín was stopped prematurely by the nurse.

“Just a reminder sir, no smoking past this point,” She looked him in the eye coyly, and immediately averted her gaze. People always did that to him. His *abuelo* told him it was because of his sharp green eyes. Acknowledging her request, he took one more exaggerated drag from the strange cigarette, and rubbed it out on the ashtray. The second tasted as bad as the first.

“I prefer Marlboros,” the nurse chimed in a few paces

further without looking back. Martín did not respond. American cigarettes were a treat, but he preferred the brand he always bought from the stores near his hometown.

“Marlboros, such a... sexy way to smoke, don't you think?” Once again they made eye contact, but it was he this time that averted her eyes; Martín nodded slightly. She had fair skin--*una chela* in the local dialect, and indulgently blue eyes. Her Spanish was far more proper than his, and her words had the slight accent of foreign education.

“Are you American?” he asked. She stopped walking suddenly. It took everything to stop his momentum in time to not trample her.

“My parents are. I was born here. I'm Nicaraguan.” She turned back around with a purpose, visibly irritated, and walked with more vigor towards his wife's room. He hadn't meant it to be demeaning; he simply wanted to know where she got her blue eyes. He followed, confused.

When they arrived at Julieta's wing, the nurse pointed to a row of beds with white curtains surrounding them to give each patient some modicum of privacy. Martín still thinks about those beds some mornings when he sees a lot of fog up in the peaks. He thanked the nurse, and just as she was about to walk away her eyes lingered on the man, and she added mutedly, “Those cigarettes you were smoking smell like the tobacco fields near my house,” grabbed a manila envelope from the counter, and scurried back the way they had come.

After spending hours with his wife, he was told by the staff that visiting hours were now over. A particularly nice receptionist from the hospital had arranged a cheap room at a hotel right down the street from the hospital. He would have to leave his sweet wife again, but tomorrow they would go to her hometown of León together to visit the church where they got married before heading home. On his way out of the maze, he arrived at the no smoking barrier, and immediately lit another. His mind travelled to his children, he hoped they were well. They were minding the home and farm while he was getting their mother in Managua. Carlos was a man now by traditional standards; he

could use the practice of running the home should he find a wife soon. Another drag entered his lungs like fire as he arrived at the staircase down to the lobby. The two-dozen or so hospital beds flashed in his vision. He needed a beer. Gleaming white linens, chemical smells, moans and screams from behind those damn white veils...*exhale*. He had not yet reached the first step when the nurse from earlier yelled out “¡Señor! Ay, I knew it was you, I could smell home!”

At nine that evening, he found himself opening the hotel room door. He paused, blocking the causeway, and lit a cigarette. He was drunk. Her slight frame slipped under his muscled arm, which still remained outstretched holding the iron door open. She looked at him, clasped his face in her hands, and then pulled his smoking arm towards her and into the room. She shut the door, and turned the overhead light off, leaving them in absolute darkness. Since this night, he has always bought the same cigarettes. It was also the same night as the earthquake that destroyed most of Managua—its fault line running like a thick scar through the center of the capital city.

He remembers making a witty comment about how he could not see her. A deliberate stillness gripped the room. The blackness of the space around him was so complete, so penetrating, that in the few seconds of silence, he nearly forgot the nurse was there. When, suddenly, the bedside lamp triumphed over the night, she was standing next to him again. Her skin was the color of the sand on the beaches of the Pacific, and when she pressed against his bare chest, her skin was as cool as its waters. Shocked, and intoxicated with rum, the hum of the city, and the smell of spring that emanated from the girl in front of him, he longed for the darkness from seconds ago to safely hold him once more.

Martín was thrown awake by noise louder than anything he had ever heard. The room was still thick with smoke. *Inhale*. The girl was gone. The only sign she was there at all was the empty carton of Marlboro cigarettes in the trash. The glow of her skin seemed burned into his retina. *Exhale*. He wondered what the

sound was, and moved to the small window to look out on the block. *Inhale.* The hospital dominated the view...but as he looked around, not wanting to think of his wife yet, he quickly discerned that something was horribly wrong. As the room began to shake, he dashed for the metal door, managed to fumble with the archaic and rusty lock, and he burst through the door in just enough time to watch the hospital breathe in deeply, shudder, and collapse. *Exhale.*

VII

Esperanza had never been to this part of the mountain before. Or had she? She used her hand to wipe the mango from her face that she was eating. Every day Esperanza went to the same mango tree for its fruit. The flesh is golden and juicy. Sometimes she lost track of exact details, but she knew how to find that tree. She herself was never sure how she managed to navigate so well. The path below her always seemed to whisper which direction to step in, all she did was listen. Looking down from the height she had climbed, she saw her village settled beneath her; the sun was finally encouraging the day's temperature to rise. Bartolome's wife and her mother, Violeta, were standing in the path between their houses chatting. Julio was playing soccer with some of the boys. It was so fun to sit and watch from up here. And there was Martín, her *abuelo*, walking up the road. She raced down the paths she was so familiar with, some made by her, some by the numerous animals that explored like she did, and she beat him to his front porch. When he arrived, he gave her a hug. His hugs gave her the courage to explore. Those arms, and the strength in them could outmatch the incessant flow of the rivers that snaked between the peaks.

“¿How old are you, *Abuelo*?” Esperanza asked, with her face pressed to his chest. The smell of those cigarettes lingered on him; it was one of her favorite smells. The only thing that she thought smelled better were the small flowers that came up along the roadside for just two days in late December. For those two days, Esperanza wandered the blossom-lined road with her hands

brushing the green stalks. Occasionally she closed her fist around a flower, and squeezed it tightly in her hand. The flowers were a shade of red somewhere between catastrophe and affection, save for a small golden ring on the inside of the petals. Esperanza named the flowers *angeles caídas*, fallen angels.

“¿Yó?” he looked back at her with a quizzical glance.

“Yes you, Julio used to tell me you were as old as the mountains, but that can’t be true if you were a boy once!” Esperanza rattled off, peering up at his face and clutching the worn polyester of his jacket. *Abuelo* settled into his seat on the porch, and asked his granddaughter to pour them both some coffee. She obeyed happily, and disappeared inside. He took the opportunity to light a cigarette. *Inbale*. The last of his pack from earlier he had smoked when he was with Julio, so he opened the fresh one he just bought at the store down the road. Esperanza reappeared quickly, whistling “*Cielito Lindo*”. The coffee, tobacco smoke, and warm air of late morning fused into a uniquely enchanting, yet comfortably familiar aroma.

“To answer your question, Esperanza, I am old enough that my grandfather gave me and Julio our green eyes. He was German. Born, and raised. He had a German wife. My father and my aunts and uncles were many, but only my dad chose to try his luck here in Nicaragua.” He paused for another purposeful sip, another drag, and another moment to direct his thoughts. When he turned to her, the green eyes on his face became cavernous yet radiant; “Esperanza, your eyes are the color of a perfectly roasted coffee bean. Bright, delicate, yet as mysterious and murky as night. Those eyes are your grandmother’s. I was the first in the family to marry a woman who was Nicaraguan, and she never let me forget it either!” He chuckled warmly as his attention wandered. His eyes fixated on the tall pines that survived on the peaks. Some days he tried to count them, but always ended up stopping to look at something else striking. *That’s why I love it here*, he thought, while tracing the top of his mug with his finger.

“*Abuelo*, I love your stories, and I want you to tell me more, but you never answered my first question! How old are you?” she sweetly persisted.

Martín looked at his granddaughter. Into her dark coffee eyes. “I’m old enough that I forget,” At this he put the tip of his finger to Esperanza’s nose, and then began laughing boisterously. If Esperanza was a bit older, a bit more concerned, a bit less innocent, she might have detected the uneasiness in his response, instead of mistaking it for eccentricity. She leapt to her feet, downed her coffee in one gulp, and put her hand firmly on his shoulder.

“*Abuelo*, I forgive you,” She said, and locked eyes with him for a couple of extra moments, before jumping down to the street, and yelling back to him, “*Abuelo*, I am going to try to find out for you!” and, with that, she was already halfway up the hill, towards the soccer pitch, deaf to the screeching noise of existence.

He took one last drag of the same cigarette, flicked it in the road, tilted his head back and blew the smoke straight up. *I hope you forgive me too*, he thought. He was sad. The only woman he ever loved was Julieta. It was hot, but the breeze was sublime and reminiscent. The day that he met Julieta was the day the Somoza dynasty took power in the country. So much had passed since because of that man and his family, but he still remembers the breeze in León that day in 1937, and how her hair shone like a dark night. With the cigarette gone, he was left with the taste of the day his wife died in his mouth, he could taste the tobacco, he could taste the harsh chemicals from the hospital. He could taste the nurse on his lips, and her Marlboros on his tongue. He could feel her cool marine skin. If he thought hard enough, he could still see the reflection his eyes made in his wife’s dark and glassy eyes, as tears filled his own. *Inbale*. It was almost noon. *Exbale*.

VIII

Julio finally caught up to his mother and asked her, “*¡Mamá!* ¿Was there much fog this morning when you were bringing the corn to the mill?” She shook her head no, and made a comment about it being too hot. Julio watched his mother as she put away the plastic plates, the coffee mugs, and the pot she

cooked his simple lunch in. Their cat, Chiver, probed under the table tentatively as he looked for a grain of rice, or perhaps a bean that fell from Julio's plate. With a kiss on the forehead, and a ruffle of his jet-black hair, his mom announced her love, and her permission for him to continue playing with his friends. Julio laced his worn trainers up, wiped his face with the cloth hanging on the door, and ran out the back to the sound of his mom firmly shooing Chiver away from the kitchen.

He poked his head out the door, and saw his grandfather breathing smoke straight into the air. He remembered his sister telling him that *Abuelo* reminded her of the large pine trees because they stood watch over the village. He tried to imagine his grandfather when he was younger. It was very hard to do, since his face seemed to wear everyday he had ever lived on it. Julio took a deep breath as his *abuelo* does, and he smelled the smoke *abuelo* exhaled. He always loved that smell. Mimicking his *abuelo*, he exhaled up towards the sky. He noticed the fog had cleared, and the little racetracks between the trees were gone. As he walked back up the street towards the soccer pitch with his friend Mauricio, he could have sworn he saw tears running down his *abuelo's* cheeks. It couldn't be, Julio must have imagined it...*¿does the mountain ever cry?*

M&M

BRIAN ORTIZ

She left with time tied around her neck,
A smile hitting so far home that no one saw it coming.
She looked back for a picture
And the flash hit her.
Eyes bloomed with the wrinkles
Of hair blinding her,
Only a moment.
A soft
 Bye, bye
Hits the concrete
With her steps.

The witching winds along her back,
The tides of the moon moving her away,
She was swallowed by a void.
One of empty stars shoving decrees
Yelling out her name.

With ears raised,
Looking up there was a sight in end.

Squirming to rise,
Her calves gently flexing.
Bringing her to her toes,
Standing taller than before

The mud, brisk air, and a scent of Malbec from
Her emancipating lips.

October was on fire,
Dancing daughters took her place,

But only for a moment's embrace

The intimacy they shared struggled
Arms flying out gently, if only a trance,
If only, if only
A trance.

Eyes welted,
Fingers clasping around the back of a cross.
No blood to be found,
Only empty iron nails, nailed in place.

The crown on her head one of play,
Her mind running again and again,

STOP

Yelling at it.
The lungs from autumn red burnt skin blasted.
Sirens following the blaring in place,
No sun to break and no bread to take.
Hate might have been the strongest here.

They just wanted to see, even from afar.
Hesitantly she took the first steps
Until she ran, and ran again.
Moon black hair shadowed her place,
That for the time remained a grave.

Mouth

BARBARA DANIELS

Your animal opening
mutters, grimaces,
pouts, wants, speaks

unbidden out of sleep.
Its smallest muscles
signal your secrets.

Kisser, air hole, frothy
spitter, it fashions stories
with teeth and tongue,

myths and truths
mouthed equally,
forms sweet syllables

that slide into ear and
heart, gossips, gripes,
bites its chapped lips,

gapes to your hot
red interior, reveals
the dangerous inner

armory, closes on gulps
and noisy swallowing.
If the soul does exist,

it may leap from
your lips as you die.
Your mouth will

stop gasping, singing,
puckering, stop
being seared by desire.

Broken Brain

SARAH CARDOZA

“It’s broken,”
Was the doctor’s conclusion.
The white room was isolating,
Translucent lights were incubating.
What a realization to have that
My internal hard drive was evaporating.
It happened to my friends
And my classmates
And my peers.
They warned me
Of this epidemic,
Slowly infecting this generation,
Bashed and battered with broken brains.
Gravitational pulls
To nearby liquor stores,
“It’ll set you free,” they said.
The staring contest ensued
Between me and the cure.
One glass down and I started to feel
The sweet release from my
Broken brain.
Convolutions began to reconstruct
As alcoholic poison aimed to deconstruct
The barriers and walls
Causing all the damage.
Half the contents gone,
I could think more freely,
As my eyes attuned to tunnel vision
I somehow could see more clearly.
The bottle now empty
Left me feeling whole.

The well-being of my brain
Restored and replenished.
But no one mentioned the
Temporary nature of the cure.
Voice of reason slowly
Coming back,
Maybe a broken brain
Isn't really broken at all.
The permanent cure lies
In a self-found drunkenness
Free of substance assistance
To let go of that resistance.

The Legend In His Mind

EILEEN HENNESSY

The so-many nights
in thousand-deep crowds
on Saturday-night floors
when the starlight within him
opened women's eyes

His drop-dead-beautiful mate,
omnipotent magician
crossing seeds and sex
with civilization,

his leap-year love affair
the summer garden
the silver girl
the garden in the girl
the girl a waterfall
he alight in glory on its ledge

his dips in the bay,
his drowning on long light nights
in buttoned-up tides of love

were games in which he found grace
so long as his dark thoughts stayed
locked in the cold cockles of his mind.

Visit to the City

BRUCE BAGNELL

the city is spread out in front of the fireplace,
the soldiers frozen stiff, surrounding the citizens,
fire trucks and rocket ships scattered around
while a bear sits atop a skyscraper—too large—
the story is hidden,
it will take the child to explain the illogic of it,
that mixture of fantasy-magic not yet scoured out
by caustic adult soaps,
which is why I always use baby shampoo:
it is gentle on the mind, I say to the guy on the train,
and he looks at me before changing his seat;
obviously he is not a poet.

Slow Storm

STEPHEN MASSIMILLA

Palm fronds
splashed the plaster sky
all after-
noon, finally cracked
over the quenched asterisk of your eyelash:

no other proof that God saw,
just the aqua glimmer of your gaze.

Under a waste-away wind heading

elsewhere, illegible masts shuddered
in an inky scroll. I looked and looked

in vain.

In the lull

before day-death, no-see-ums
pricked me, the tip of a cigarette lit
on the edge
of our hourglass of whispers
until I singed
a fingertip, fumbled it.

In the puddle, a smoking paper
steamer. It flashed only
for me, sinking into oblivion.

It was the pure and swarming dusk
of leather jaws jutting
from somnolent rushes,
of a reptile's-eye-
view of living

meat. Blinded by the odor
of fear (you were sick, my outrider,
my only life), our camouflaged mallard
was gulped. A buzzard wing
of charnel smoke
broke across every screen

that not a soul was watching
in a single local
living room. In the television
nerve-bank closing down
for the night, one shipwrecked washer-

woman wept,
her mop-top an incandescent neuron, a star
on the vast floor of emptiness.

Now the curtain
sea (behind you, forget it)

draws over the last
stubbled delta
of beach, where others' hearts
were never your heart. On the grounds

that it had never
felt as warm as your leg

once felt to me, trailing a whiff
of sex, of dread, the last steaming gator slips
from the sandbar
for home.

With a stab,

a cry
of rust, a heron tweezers and

wobbles off its branch, no longer like you
on fragile wings, shadow-
neck broken like
an “S”-link over bridges neck-

lacing their way
past where the ferry won't turn back.
Don't leave me in but not of

this world.

My aspiration ruined,
not even one plank of dock in sight,

you won't wait for the prow unescorted
by dolphins through dead

space—no tomorrows,
not even a now—
between lightning-stilts limping

with no performer to guide them
along magnetic hurricane peaks

from our lost islands
of thought and time

to the far, pusillanimous
half-lights of Tallahassee.

Purple Petunias

LEE VARON

He didn't have time to get his affairs in order, just like those women. There wasn't much to do by way of a funeral.

He was the town dog officer so everyone knew him—not necessarily in a good way. When I was little, people would tease me: “Bow Wow, Ruff Ruff.” If he thought an animal was rabid or just mean, he'd pull a black taser out of his holster and zap—dogs, raccoons, squirrels, once even a cat named Puffy. The owner, Mrs. Pillman—an old gal who wore pink sponge curlers all the time—went berserk. Threatened to take him to court. Puffy never was the same. But as he always said, *Things blow over*.

He had a real gun too. He wasn't supposed to use it except in extreme circumstances.

* * *

He's been gone for months now. No one cried after they cremated him—even my mother. I don't know what she did with the box of ashes. She got the cheap box. The woman at the mortuary, Mrs. Glasscock, tried to sell her a real cherry one. But Mother clutched her pocketbook and pointed at the one that looked like gray papier-mâché. “We'll take that one.”

He always said he was right. He was right about buying a house set back from the road. He was right about buying a van. He was right if he had to put down an animal. That's what he called it. *Put down*. He used to say, *You know when it's time*.

We knew not to question him when we saw his eye twitch. He had black eyes. Once he caught a mouse that scurried across the kitchen counter and dropped it in the garbage disposal. We heard the little bones crush and crack as the disposal pulverized it. When the disposal stopped whirring, he wiped his hands on a flowered dishtowel and walked down to his workroom in the basement.

She went through his things after he died, but she missed

some stuff. It was weeks later when I went down there and started to poke around. He used to make boxes. Boxes with inlaid wood. We could have used one of those for the ashes.

There wasn't much there. A Bible. A book with names of people he'd worked with. And scraps of paper with dates. Some circled. Like January 30, April 6, June 24. I write like him. Small block letters. Precise. But I have no idea what some of his scratchings mean.

One day I came home from my afterschool job early. She was down there, and her moon face peered up at me from the bottom of the stairs as if she'd seen a ghost. Could hardly talk. "What?" I asked. But she just opened her mouth, then closed it without saying a word. Looked like she was sucking on a communion wafer. Waiting for it to dissolve. But some things don't ever dissolve.

* * *

The basement is musty. Moldy. He never allowed people to come clean our house. She did all that. He said, *We don't need strangers up in our business.*

Once he came upon the two of us looking through some boxes down there—trying to find a missing shin guard I needed for my hockey game.

His slow, quiet burn erupted like a sudden flare on the road. Between clenched teeth: *What-are-you-doing?*

I stiffened. A sweet, dank smell wafted from her body. Smell of fear. The dogs next door barked, then growled.

He lurched toward us, grabbed the box I'd just picked up. *You. Will. Not. Ever. Come. Down. Here.*

"I'm...I'm sorry, Walter. We were just looking for..."
Everything is in the attic. There is no reason for you to be here.

Her face was like the slice of cloud I saw in the dusty basement window.

* * *

There was a brief obituary. "Walter Gaule died suddenly... cardiac arrest...at work." Nobody told us what his last moments were like. Did he clutch his throat? Or utter last words? It's the

usual business. People know things, but they don't say anything. Like he always said, *Nobody likes a gossip.*

His brother who lives across the country was the only one who sent flowers. The usual arrangement—baby's breath, red scentless carnations. Card written by the florist. *With Deepest Sympathy.*

* * *

He didn't expect to die. Maybe none of us does, right? Like those women. All of them. The ones that were killed. I was twelve when it started. Agnes Haggerty was the first. She lived out by the reservoir. They found her tied to the bed; blood was everywhere. On the mantle. On the beige rug.

She'd been tortured. That's what it said in the news report.

* * *

His workroom is a pile of boxes. Smells like kerosene, iron filings, glue. You can see out of the small basement window. See our neighbor, Billy Wainwright, walking back and forth. Hear him in his backyard, muttering. Once I wondered if Wainwright, during that time, had anything to do with those women. In this little town surrounded by the rustle of corn leaves three women. Maybe others. Maybe that one they found up in Champagne. Or that other one, years ago. Raped, strangled. There were signs whoever did it strung it out. Blindfolded them. But they never found any fingerprints. Whoever did it was too smart for that. He sent copies of Polaroid pictures—their agonized pleading faces to the authorities. So disturbing the chief never allowed anyone except the investigators to see them.

* * *

When Mrs. Howe was killed, someone put a white cross on her front lawn. Another person put a pink teddy bear. And her picture. In her thirties. Mother of two little kids. I used to see her holding the kids' hands and walking to their mailbox, with a cardinal painted on its side. I used to wonder what it would be like to be one of her kids. I could have put flowers or a note on her lawn when I passed every day. But of course I didn't.

On the way home I pass by her house. The blinds are all down. Sometimes I wonder how those kids are doing.

* * *

The investigators came around to everyone in the neighborhood. “Did you see anything? Anything out of the ordinary? Oh, hi, Walter. Well, if anything comes to mind, give us a call.”

They all knew him down at the station. He wasn’t a cop, but sometimes he had to bring charges against people: the guy who shot his neighbor’s dog because it whined all day; the guy who was running a dog-fighting ring in his garage. Jesus, people are so stupid.

“Well there was a red truck. Several people saw it.”

“Never that truck before? Mrs. Gaule, did you see anything?”

My mother shook her head. Her curled hair didn’t move.

“No, nothing,” she said. Her voice was so faint. Almost a sigh.

He shook the cops’ hands. After they left I felt there was something that wasn’t said.

I don’t like people coming into the house either. Never did. Like he always said, *Don’t know when to leave well enough alone.*

* * *

Billy Wainwright is one of those too-friendly jerks. I wondered about him back then. Where was he that afternoon when Sheila Howe was raped and murdered while her two children were locked in the bathroom?

On her license, her blue eyes pop out, and that smile makes something turn over inside. Like an animal gnawing.

When I look at her picture, it’s like she’s still alive. I found the license on the grass between Billy Wainwright’s driveway and ours.

* * *

Every season I had to figure out how to get him to write a check so I could go out for hockey. One time my mother signed it, but when he found out, he tore it up. I missed the whole winter. Occasionally, he signed the check. He never came to a game.

Once, I stole money from his wallet and he caught me. I needed it for a face guard. Usually my mother could pull it together for my equipment. But she hadn't that time. I was desperate. He took off his belt. Stripped me and lashed my back, my legs, and buttocks. I couldn't stop trembling.

I heard her walking around upstairs when he whipped me. It was hot but she made sure I wore long pants to school. She made sure things looked good. Like how she planted flowerbeds in the front yard. Purple petunias. Made sure they were edged perfectly. Weeded. Watered.

I think he killed Billy Wainwright's dachshund, Gordie, who was found with his little pink tongue hanging out like a wilted rose petal. Wainwright bawled like a baby.

I found the license but I didn't say anything. All that week he paced back and forth like a dog at the pound. I kept thinking of that shiny piece of plastic sitting on the grass. I shook, holding it. No one was home when I found it. I just yanked open the nearest door and ran down in the basement. The basement where I wasn't meant to go. I stuffed it in an old file cabinet that creaked when I yanked it. I was sure no one ever opened it. Even after I hid it, I could still feel it burning in my hand. Like it was dry ice that stuck to my skin and ripped when I tried to get rid of it.

Sherri Harris was alone too. Like Agnes Harrington. She was tied to her bed. Facedown. Gagged. Her eyes bulging from her head. That's what happens when people are gagged. Their eyes bug out like frogs.

Their last names all began with "H." Haggerty, Howe, Harris. Funny coincidence. Like him, I'm average height. Brown hair. Black eyes. Not thin. Not fat. No distinguishing features.

After he died I thought I should get the license. Bury it. I felt a rush of anger when I found her there in the slanted light coming through the high dusty windows of the basement. She was snooping like he always told her not to. She brushed past me on the stairs.

I was going to cut it in little pieces. Cut it up. Bury the

pieces. Out under the crabapple tree. There was an earring too. You know. Everything I'd found.

But it was gone. I searched everywhere, in every file.

"What did you do with it?" I asked her in the kitchen.

"With what?" Her eyes were vacant. I felt like shaking her.

* * *

They came around to get his gun. It was registered to the department. The taser too. "Anything else?" the officer asked.

She was standing in the kitchen wiping her hands on the flowered dishtowel. Purple petunias she had cut were on the table.

She was silent. I said, "No. Nothing."

"Well, if there is anything...other weapons...just give us a call."

I shook his hand.

I never asked her again. Like he always said: *Let sleeping dogs lie.*

Uncle Joe's Roadmaster

CHUCK TRIPI

Dynaflow transmission, eight throaty cylinders. You hear it coming halfway down the block, the fake exhaust ports gleaming, hood ornament a finned silver spike that could eviscerate an elephant. Good things on the way to you. The first water rocket and pup-tent, a silver dollar when you let go of his hand. And Bunny couldn't stand the way he slept on the floor snoring after arranging the shelves in the store all night, the way my father's sister was so all the time tricked-up, the way she smoked, the way she jumped in the pool with her clothes on, *the animal*. A trunk as big as your house—a plusher carpet, too.

Alone Time

TOM McHUGH

“Can you spare some change, mister?”

Coming from my own backyard for God’s sake.

Just yesterday this mottled man was testing his 9-iron on my car.

Inside the house, age-old filth and maple keys cover the stairs.

The sink and the drying-rack continue to wage their endless battle.

The carpet collects the day’s bathroom trips.

Inside my box, the bright white sheets ask not to be disturbed.

My mind can’t handle even one moment of silence.

Even the characters in my show keep me active.

The filmy Mason Jar, CVS pill case, and Day’s End candle,

Remind me that dark means done.

I will get no rest in this life.

Disconnected

SHEILA MURPHY

After your little sister heard those wires
crackle with voices wrought from crystal,
coils, and care, and saw your radio tinkering
expand into an attic workshop, a cache
of filament-filled tubes,

she listened, with you, to shortwave
messages and stories in sound—
*The Shadow, Tom Mix, and the thundering
hoofbeats of the great horse Silver!*—
reverberating from your resuscitated Philco.

And when your first and only record,
Glenn Miller's *In the Mood*,
circled again and again on the makeshift
sturdiness of a turntable you made,
she would long, sometimes, for quiet.

But now, your sound forever stopped
by the static of an errant driver,
she is unwired by silence.

The Line

TOM McHUGH

As the ice-cold water crashes over the bow,
My body is a stiff, but steady board.
I'm smiling scared.
We sit on the verge of winning the race or losing our lives.
Time stops as the captain's effort
To fight the gust ends and we are plunged into the echo.
I wake itchy-hot.
My mind is tired from its long rest.
This hope for peace points toward the hazy horizon.
I speed safely ahead in the left lane
As the lazy wheels swerve back and forth.
The blare makes us aware that we are here...
But not for long.
You may pass the test and fail the class.
Open up and be alert, the ship is sinking now.

The Shadow Field

JEFFREY C. ALFIER

1959, a vacant ballfield at Wiesbaden Air Base.
My brother Charles and I chase balls our father

hits into the outfield. Dad speaks the edicts
of what makes a good hitter, words memory spells

only with images: the new white ball, dad's obsolete
bomber jacket, the gray German sky, an olive-drab

duffel bag of spare gloves. The three of us take
turns retrieving the ball from the uncut outfield.

Dad suddenly kneels down with his pocketknife.
I watch the blade cut into earth I think the ball

must've sunk into. But instead, the blade only
extracts dark green leaves of dandelions, all talk

gone from baseball to the edible wildness
of the world at large. Kneeling there, he appears

to my child's mind that huntsman etched
in a storybook our parents read us each night—

the tale of the wicked queen needing Snow
White killed, the huntsman taking pity, walking

away, leaving her to retreat into dense forest.
We turn back to our apartment, chewing sinuous

leaves. My brother and I glance back at the field, all
the dandelions scattered deep in the rising grass.

San Pedro River Night at Fairbank Willow Wash

JEFFREY C. ALFIER

You are fallen darkness
threading thornbush
and granite, the ghost ship

wake of the quarter-moon.
A blue grave looking back
from burial at sea. Your depth

is so infusive over the campfire
my hands are russet shadows
lustering against the lightless

river, my palms folding
like prayers over
the embering heat

of driftwood and deadfall
retreating into ash.
You are heaven's shoal

of dead stars. The obsidian
lip of shoreline
I approach without light,

the shallow groundswell
of sand un-printing my tracks,
as if to refuse my sunless steps,

like streetlamps left behind me
back home, softening now
beyond their dead-end streets.

MEET THE EDITORS

Colleen G. Gardner is currently pursuing an English major and Economics minor at Providence College. Recent distinctions include the 2013 Delasanta award and a creative writing showcase with the Shoreline Arts Alliance. Originally from Deep River, Connecticut, she devotes much of her time to hiking, coffee shops, and the *New York Times* crossword puzzle.

Sarah A. O'Brien studies Creative Writing and Studio Art, with a concentration in cheap red wine. She will be graduating from Providence College in May 2015, so you should probably hire her. Sarah's work has previously appeared in *Snapping Twig*, *The Screech Owl*, *The Alembic*, and countless homemade birthday cards. She has been following her dreams for a while now, but has yet to receive a follow back: @fluent_SARAcasm.

Danielle E. Watkins is currently a senior at Providence College and is wondering what she can do with her English/Creative Writing major after she graduates. Although she grew up in central Massachusetts and attends school in Rhode Island, Danielle has a love for travel. She studied abroad in Ireland in the spring of 2014 and got the gift of the gab there. Besides writing, Danielle enjoys reading literature (and teen dystopian novels), singing some classic Justin Timberlake, and watching nerdy TV shows. Danielle would like to thank everyone involved in the making of *The Alembic* and Randy Moss.

Robert F. Cleary is a simple man, born and raised in Rochester, New York.

John P. Connolly is a junior English major and German and Italian minor at Providence College, depending on whom you ask.

He has no definitive place of origin, and some say he was raised in a small, homely family of migratory Canadian Geese. However, he claims to be from the unusually quiet land of Connecticut. In his free time, he does things, and often you may find him playing music or reading literature in medieval languages that he does not fully understand.

Anna C. Dumais is a junior at Providence College majoring in English and American Studies. She is from a small town in the middle of nowhere in northern Rhode Island, and she ran a marathon once, which is the only interesting thing she's ever done. If she could have dinner with any three people, she would choose Bruce Springsteen, John Steinbeck, and her mother.

Megan E. Manning is a freshman at Providence College. She came to Providence from Portland, Oregon after realizing her lifelong dream of becoming a Disney Princess would go unfulfilled. Her hobbies include baking, long walks on the beach and binge watching *The Bachelor*.

CONTRIBUTORS

Brianna Abbott is a sophomore at Providence College, double majoring in Chemistry and Creative Writing. She is a member of PC Women's Track and Field team, works as an Opinion writer for *The Owl*, and is involved in Campus Ministry. Her hometown is Wrentham, MA, where she lives with her parents, her younger brother, and her cat.

Jeffrey C. Alfier is the winner of the 2014 Kithara Book Prize for his poetry collection, *Idyll for a Vanishing River* (Glass Lyre Press, 2013). He is also author of *The Wolf Yearling* (Silver Birch Press) and *The Storm Petrel- Poems of Ireland* (Grayson Books, forthcoming). His recent work has appeared in *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and *Tulane Review*.

Collin Anderson is a senior Global Studies major with minors in both Spanish and Latin American Studies. After graduation, he is aspiring to get his PhD in some form of Culture Studies. His story was inspired by authors such as the Márquez, Sartre, and Hemingway, but more so by the magical realism of his travels.

Bruce Bagnell holds an English degree from Fairleigh Dickinson University and a masters from John F. Kennedy University. A retired USAF captain, he now works exclusively on his writing and has been published in *OmniVerse*, *The Scribbler*, and *The Round*, as well as several online magazines.

Blake Bergeron is currently an MFA candidate in the MFA Program for Poets and Writers at The University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He currently lives in Florence, MA.

Kelsey Blood was born and raised in the suburbs of Massachu-

setts. Although beautiful, she longed for something more. After graduating high school, she left home to begin her secondary education in Chicago, IL. Originally, she attended The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but she transferred to Columbia College Chicago after her sophomore year. She is currently getting her BFA in Graphic Design—however, she loves photography. She is very grateful for this opportunity to display her work. This picture is one of many she took while studying in Italy.

Melissa Brown was born in Providence, RI and grew up in a small town in southeastern MA. Her family used to take weekend trips throughout New England with the goal of taking as many photos as they could. She has always loved documenting life's tiny moments. Photography has deep roots in her family; her grandparents were professional photographers who started in the early 40s, and many of her cousins are photographers. As a biology major, she likes to think about the science behind photography. She enjoys working with film photography and studying the technical aspects behind getting a great photo.

John F. Buckley and Martin Ott began their ongoing games of poetic volleyball in the spring of 2009. Since then, their collaborations have been accepted into over seventy journals and anthologies, including *Drawn to Marvel*, *Evergreen Review*, *Rabbit Ears*, and *ZYZZYVA*, and gathered into two full-length collections on Brooklyn Arts Press, *Poets' Guide to America* (2012) and *Yankee Broadcast Network* (2014). They are now writing poems for a third manuscript, *American Wonder*, about superheroes and supervillains.

Sarah Cardoza is a senior English major at Providence College. She appreciates any manipulation of the English, whether it's a story, poem, song, or film. Sarah hopes to pursue a career in any form of the arts, if the arts will have her.

Michael Carrino holds an MFA in Writing from Vermont College. He is a retired English lecturer at the State University College at Plattsburgh, New York, where he was co-founder and poetry editor of the *Saranac Review*. He has published his poetry in numerous journals and reviews.

Marissa Como is a sophomore from Long Island, NY who is majoring in both Computer Science and Mathematics. At Providence College, Marissa enjoys hosting a radio show for WDOM 91.3 FM, tutoring Computer Science, singing in the Liturgical Choir, and blogging for the Providence College Admissions Blog.

Maria Costa is a junior English/Secondary Education major and Dance minor. She is most likely to be found with her nose in a book, her feet swiping across the dance studio floor, or glued to the latest Netflix series. She finds joy in creativity and seeks personal expression through writing and dance.

Jennifer Cyr is currently a senior Biology major at Providence College. She enjoys writing creative fiction and poetry in her spare time, which she also dedicates to hiking, dancing, and singing in a campus band.

Barbara Daniels' book, *Rose Fever: Poems* was published by WordTech Press. She also has a pair of chapbooks titled *Black Sails* and *Quinn & Marie*, by Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press. She has also appeared in *WomenArts*, *Spillway*, *Mid-American Review*, and *The Literary Review*.

Marisa DelFarno has been fascinated with photography since she was thirteen. She enjoys taking photos of nature, especially macro shots. Marisa is part of the photo staff at *The Owl*. She has also been published in *Photographer's Forum*: Best of Photography 2013. She is majoring in English and is a member of Providence

College's class of 2018.

Heloise Dubois took this picture as she was exploring Paris one hot summer day. The mime was there all day entertaining the young and the old without making a single noise. The power of silence can be just as strong as the power of speech.

Matt Gillick is a senior at Providence College, ready to go into the world both terrified and excited after he, hopefully, graduates in May. Ever since he was 12-years-old, he's had the delusion that his calling was to be a writer and hasn't diverted since. After college he plans to spend a few years in the publishing business and to continue to improve as a writer and a person.

Jonathan Greenhouse received a 2014 Willow Review Award, *Prism Review's* 2012-2013 Poetry Prize, and was a finalist in *The Southeast Review's* 2013 Gearhart Poetry Contest. Her poetry has appeared in *Brittle Star*, *The Dark Horse*, *The Malabat Review*, *Miramar Poetry Journal*, and *New Millennium Writings*.

Judith Grisser won first place in the *Virginia Writer's Club's* 2008 and 2010 regional contests, and won the Golden Nib poetry award in the 2010 state competition. She was awarded second place in the Emma Gray Trigg Memorial and was a finalist in the Sow's Ear poetry contest in 1998.

Alexandra Harbour is a sophomore at Providence College, studying biology and secondary education. She spends her free time hiking, reading, and taking pictures. She listens to music constantly and drinks unhealthy amounts of coffee. Her dream is to travel the world and she lives for adventure.

Austin Harney is a sophomore philosophy major at Providence College. He likes writing poetry involving themes of melancholy and immediacy. He enjoys coffee and pretzels.

Eileen Hennessy, a native of Long Island, holds an M.A. in English/creative writing from New York University and an M.F.A. in creative writing from Farleigh Dickinson University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous literary magazines, including *The Paris Review*, *Columbia*, *The Citron Review*, *Folio*, *Inkwell Magazine*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Sonora Review*, amongst others. Her poetry collection titled, *This Country of Gale-force Winds*, was published by New York Quarterly Books in November 2011.

Lynn Hoggard received her Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of Southern California. She taught at Midwestern State University where she was a professor of English and French and the coordinator of humanities. She was an arts writer for the *Times Record News* in Wichita Falls. She has published five books and her poetry has appeared in *13th Moon*, *The Broken Plate*, *Crack the Spine*, *Descant*, *Forge*, *New Ohio Review*, *Soundings East*, *Summerset Review*, and *Tower Journal*.

Stephen Jarrett is a candidate in the University of Alabama's MFA Creative Writing Program. His work is also forthcoming in *Quarterly West*.

Blake Kilgore Half Texan, half Okie- Blake Kilgore fell for a Jersey girl. He teaches history, coaches basketball, and performs original folk music. He is grateful for his wife and three sons.

Walter B. Levis was nominated for a 2006 Pushcart Prize and is author of the novel, *Moments of Doubt* (2003). His literary fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in a variety of publications, including *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Amberst Review*, *The Cimarron Review* *Connecticut Review*, *Forge*, *New Plains Review*, *Noth Atlantic Review*, *Permafrost*, *Storyglossia*, *Serving House Journal*, and *Willow Review*, among many others. His nonfiction has appeared in *The National Law Journal*, *The Chicago Reporter*, *The New Republic*, *Show Business*

Magazine, and *The New Yorker*. For more: www.walterblevis.com

Catharine Lucas is a graduate of Bryn Mawr College and is a professor of English, emeritus, at SFSU and a National Writing Project Teacher Consultant. She studied poetry at UC Berkeley with Josephine Miles and at Mills College, Oakland, CA, with Rosalie Moore. Her creative writing appears in *Digital Paper* (University of California, Berkeley), *Magazine* (San Francisco State University), and *Asilomar Poets, 1974-1980* (Equinox Press).

Stephen Massimilla is a poet, critic, professor, and painter. His co-authored book, *Cooking With the Muse*, is forthcoming from Tupelo Press and he has won numerous prizes for writing. Massimilla has recent work in *AGNI*, *Barrow Street*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere. He holds an M.F.A. in Writing and a Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University; and he teaches at Columbia University and The New School.

Elizabeth McQueeney is a junior at Providence College studying Global Studies and Mathematics. She is passionate about photography, teaching special education, spending time with family and friends, volunteering for nonprofits, and traveling. She hopes to one day be a graphic designer and photographer for an NGO, a travel agent, or a special education teacher.

Neal Mercier is a resident of South Kingstown, Rhode Island and a senior at Providence College. He is studying math, film, and writing. A self-diagnosed cinephile, he enjoys making short films, playing guitar, and hanging out with his cat, Whiskers.

Patrick Milian is a winner of the Joan Grayston Poetry Prize from the University of Washington. His work has appeared in *Denver Quarterly*, *Hayden's Ferry*, *Meridian*, *Copper Nickel*, and *The Baltimore Review*.

Rosemary Dunn Moeller taught at Ecole Normale Superieure in Bamako, Mali while in the Peace Corps; Miyasaki, Japan as a Fulbright Scholar; Huron College/University SD and UND at Grand Forks. She was published in *Rockhurst Review*, *Summit Avenue Review*, *Colere*, *VLP*, *Dust&Fire*, *CAIRN*, *Feile-Festa*, and *Pilgrimage*.

Aubrey Moore is a senior at Providence College, studying Political Science and Global Studies.

Elisabeth Murawski is the author of *Zorba's Daughter*, which won the 2010 May Swenson Poetry Award, *Moon and Mercury*, and two chapbooks. Hawthornden Fellow 2008. Publications include *The Yale Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *FIELD*, et al.

Sheila Murphy received a BA from Albertus Magnus College, an MA from Boston College, and an MALS from Wesleyan University. She taught English and Latin for 34 years in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Hawaii, to grades ranging from seventh to college-level. She also served as a field consultant for a textbook on writing poetry, *Getting the Knack*. Her poetry has appeared in *Caduceus*, *Peregrine*, and *The Litchfield Review*.

Brian Ortiz was born in the city of Bridgeport, CT and raised in Worcester, MA. He is currently on his way to completing his time at Providence College as an undergrad. Brian is of Puerto Rican decent and his mother tongue is Spanish.

Laurie Patton holds a BA from Harvard and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and is currently a professor at Duke University. She has published two books: *Fire's Goal: Poems from the Hindu Year* (White Clouds Press 2003) and *Angel's Task: Poems in Biblical Time* (Station Hill of Barrytown 2011). She also did the translation work for Penguin's 2008 edition of *Bhagavad Gita*.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Osiris*, *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *Almost Rain*, published by River Otter Press (2013).

Richard King Perkins II's work has appeared in hundreds publications, including *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Bluestem*, *Emrys Journal*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Two Thirds North*, *The Red Cedar Review*, and *December Magazine*.

Donna Pucciani holds a Ph.D in Humanities from NYU and has been published in a variety of journals including, *America*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Seems*, *International Poetry Review*, *Christianity and Literature*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and *The Pedestal*, amongst others. She also has five complete books of poetry published and has won several awards for her writing.

Marilyn Ringer has a BA in Social Sciences and an MA in Experimental Psychology, both from Southern Methodist University. Her work has appeared in countless reviews, and she has a chapbook out called *Island Aubade* (Finishing Line Press, 2012).

Stephen R. Roberts lives on eight acres of Hoosier soil, pretending it to be wilderness. He spends his time nowadays with grandchildren, trees and poetry, not necessarily in that order. He has been published in *Rain City Review*, *Sulfur River Review*, *Blackwater*, *Black River Review*, *Talking River*, *WaterStone*, *Riverrun*, *Connecticut River Review*, and to get away from all that moisture, *Dry Creek Review*. He also has a full length chapbook titled *Almost Music From Between Places* (Chatter House Press, 2012).

Barbara Ryder-Levinson has been published in *Shofar*, and her work is forthcoming in *The Delmarva Review*, *The Minetta Reien*, *Organs of Vision and Speech*, *Stickman Review* and *Willow Review*. She holds a B.A. in Philosophy from the University of Southern Cali-

foria and spends much of her professional life travelling. She has been to 53 countries on 4 four continents and counting.

David Sapp is a writer and artist living near Lake Erie. He teaches at Firelands College in Huron, Ohio. His publications include articles in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*; chapbooks, *Close to Home* and *Two Buddha*; and novel, *Flying Over Erie*.

Sten Spinella is a writer who splits his time between Storrs, Connecticut, where he attends the University of Connecticut, and Chester, Connecticut, where he waits tables. Sten is an English and political science major at UConn. He is twenty-years-old, as well as tall, pale, and, physically, the picture of mediocrity. The themes of Sten's fiction are alienation, freedom (or lack thereof), relationships, culture, depression, and drug use. Sten is most interested in examining the individual's place in the world versus the world itself, and the struggle that is borne out of that. Sten is constantly in love and greatly enjoys rap music.

Jason Tandon is the author of three collections of poetry including, *Quality of Life* (Black Lawrence Press, 2013) and *Give over the Heckler and Everyone Gets Hurt* (Black Lawrence Press 2009), a winner of the St. Lawrence Book Award. His poetry has been published in *Boston Review*, *Harvard Review Online*, *Esquire*, *Poetry International*, and many other venues. He teaches in the Writing Program at Boston University.

Jennifer Tappenden works in public health research and has received her MFA in poetry at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Her poem, "The Tooth Collector," published in *Slipstream*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Other poems have appeared or are forthcoming online at *Compose Journal*, *Ithaca Lit*, *Terrain*, and *Stirring*, as well as in print in *491*, *Flyway*, *Euphony*, *Cairn*, and elsewhere. Her interview (with Karen Lewis) of Thom Ward was featured on *Poetry Daily*.

Eugenie Juliet Theall completed her fourth degree, an MFA in poetry from Sarah Lawrence College, and has workshopped at various locations, including the Robert Frost Place and the Summer Literary Seminars abroad program. She has been published in numerous collegiate and literary magazines, including *Carquinez Poetry Review*, *Curbside Review*, *Slipstream*, and many others. Her work won first place in the Elizabeth McCormack/*Inkwell* contest.

Judith Thompson is a classically trained pianist who received her Bachelor's degree in Music from Occidental College. She has worked as a senior executive for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony, and the New York Philharmonic, in addition to serving as an on-site evaluator for the National Endowment for the Arts. She brings to her poetry a highly developed musical ear. Judith lives in Taos, New Mexico with her husband, Michael Thompson. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in the *Journal for Feminist Studies in Religion*, the *Taos Journal of International Poetry and Art*, and *Crack the Spine* Anthology.

Guy Thorvaldsen received an MFA from Vermont College and now teaches English at Madison College in Madison, Wisconsin. He received the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets 2013 Kay Saunders Memorial New Poet Award, and won the 2009 *Madison Magazine* memoir contest. His work has been published in *Barefoot Review*, *The First Day*, *Flyway*, *Perfume River Poetry Review*, and *Verse Wisconsin*.

Chuck Tripi's work has appeared in *Confrontation*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Poetry East*, and *Poet Lore*, among other publications. He also had a collection published in 2013 called, *Carlo and Sophia* (Cyberwit).

Lee Varon is a writer and social worker. Her poetry and short stories have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and published in *Artful Dodge*, *Atlanta Review*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Euphony*, *Existere*, *Crack the Spine*, *Hawai'i Review*, *High Plains Literary Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Permafrost*, *Pleiades*, *The Round*, *The Somerville Times*, *So To Speak*, *Soundings East*, *Stone's Thron*, and *Willow Review*, among others. Her short story, "Until the World Brought to Me Again Its Gold Its Vermillion," won the Briar Cliff Review Nineteenth Annual Fiction Contest.

Diana Vlavianos will graduate from Providence College this semester, moving onwards and upwards to Graduate School at NYU. She comes to Providence from Long Island, a small tribal colony of New York City whose population is well known for having highly poetic souls and strange social cult rituals. It has been said that one her greatest skills and passions in life is literally hugging trees of all species and sizes, and she hopes to continue to pursue that activity for quite a long time.

Helen Wickes received an MFA from Bennington College in 2002. Her book of poems, *In Search of Landscape*, was published in 2007 and her work appears in numerous other journals, including *California Quarterly*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Bryant Literary Review*, and *Crucible*.

