



**21 Stars Review:  
The Complete Poetry and Prose**

21 Stars Review: The complete poetry and prose  
Letitia Trent and Chris R. E. Wells, editors

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Sundress Publications / 21 Stars Review  
poetry21stars@gmail.com or prose21stars@gmail.com

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I. Text

FJ Bergmann

**Pilgrimage**

You must imagine yourself

as a place you will visit

—Andrea Cohen, “Details You Must Remember”

In the west of somewhere, a country lane swerving down a long hill that tilts into the sea. Bracken glows like intricately chased bronze armor fitted to the contours of a fallen giant. A stag disappears into the russet landscape as the sun continues its long decline. At a charming villa we stop for tea, and realize that a mistake has been made when they serve us spiderkisses—vodka, opium, and India ink. We are stirred. Fortunately, the ribbons won't stay tied. After we manage to escape, the sky is purple, cross-hatched with a fur tattoo of clouds impeding the wheelchair progress of the moon. The road runs next to a bullet-pocked wall bearing an uncanny resemblance to a negative image of the constellation Draco, omitting dimmer-than-fifth-magnitude stars. On the other side of the wall, muted tumult, and the aroma of burnt flesh. We scream as the wind showers us with red leaves. We speak of returning every year until we are too old to be made new again, and then turn our weapons on each other.

## Solitude

If I spent a year trapped in meditation, I would go crazy. They would put me in a cell by myself and the staff would be afraid to get close to me. I would claw myself until something ripped open and dance until my blood splattered the walls; then I'd examine the blotches for hidden meanings, the Rorschach of the heart. I would kiss and lick the spots that suggested genitalia, human or otherwise. Love and hate would be my best friends, and we would all hold hands and scream together. When I cry out, I feel interactive, like a musical instrument, an Aeolian harp fingered by invisible winds. My art materials may be crude, but through these stained walls I teach myself to feel the limits of space. How big it is. At each corner, another planet begins again, just over the line. I am bringing the outdoors in; this is a conservatory of the macrocosmic: potted jungles, hope sprouting like a cutting stabbed into a trench, an aquarium of salt-water longing with a shark staring through the glass wishing and wishing it could trade places with you.

## **Waterfall**

For a coin of such small denomination as to be nearly worthless despite its age, it was possible to cause water to flow, briefly, down a rock wall darkened with chemical stains on the lichened north side of an ancient building. Each worn disc, a flake of tarnished bronze or copper, was inserted into a vertical slit surrounded by a plaque of metal so corroded that only traces of its original ornamentation or inscription now remained.

We could hear the coin falling behind the wall, a downward, fading tinkle. A few minutes later, a subtle vibration would begin under our feet, then groans, and the rising gurgle of water, which would suddenly spurt forth, foaming, a cataract in miniature which gradually slowed over the next quarter-hour to a film of iridescent moisture oozing over slick stone, and eventually dried to leave lacelike encrustations of salts.

We wondered whether the edifice had once been a temple, if the rush of water was a lesser form of sacrifice—there were days when the water was dark, ruddy with iron oxides, warm as draining blood. Watching the swirling, ephemeral stream and listening to its liquid murmur soothed our desperate anguish, but we never dared drink that water, which was reputed to be poisonous; we could only slake our thirst on the blood of children we did not know. Sometimes we would let them watch the water, first.

Amanda Silbernagel

**below freezing**

we are below freezing. awake beneath heaps of warm snow  
stretching degree fingers under sleeves as night sweat  
swells knuckles to pillows strangled by wedding rings  
    the bluest parts of fire deceive chill searchers  
    seeking sapphire relief,  
    marine-wired aqua implies an end  
    to heat torture for witches  
as with season hunger  
we put everything at stake—  
T Cell function. immunity teetering on anemic fulcrum.  
arms and tongue exposed to falling shards of freeze.

shock devalues as spectrums evolve lopsided  
    rollercoaster provides what swing sets  
    cannot and petals fade next to  
    handcuff shimmer  
    cigarette and curry sales  
    synchronize as smokers  
    require more to defibrillate  
    taste buds

the kite careening on string-leash remembers  
when height was superfluous to experience—  
air tai chi energized/ held interest  
    when sun's massage becomes *too smooth*  
    unspooling solves boredom/ bird envy  
    despite Icarus weather  
    (*I was melting, plunging reckless through space*  
    *in sapphire hunger*)

taste buds acquire snooze button for spice alarm  
addicted to wakening. reawakening  
as fingers to freeze digits  
kites to aqua-wired sky

Glenn Bach

from *Atlas Peripatetic*

222

of the glass and tap  
extend the inner baffle  
inside edges free from breaks  
hammer until the pane  
the shack, the railroad tie

frame with miscut metal  
building siding for sides  
five strokes and tapped  
the anvil sounds  
like a food, this scrap

material these sheets and cans  
heavy breaths contained  
glance, crumble in the distance  
easterly house with standard well  
rivets riveting hammer

in the absence of precipitate  
clean low air  
gaps between rails  
through a distant highway  
a sea of tin and trumpets white

One of the most common questions asked—

What is *difference*?

A compressed mixture of gas and air,  
ignited by a spark?

The spontaneous lighting of compressed air  
injected with fuel?

The heat of air, its most complex component?

A great deal of experimentation?

A fine mist, able to withstand temperatures,  
located in a variety of places?

A problem circulated, evenly distributed?

Higher air swirled, or otherwise higher?

A glow of some sort (not shown)?

Ambient air in cold weather (think of wires)?

—long before the air became saturated with water,  
long after the air fell in great, billowing clouds  
of heat to the earth.

Becky Peterson

## **Defensive Drawing**

When I think of California  
I think of the sun banding  
around the house and you can't  
get out of the house.

And I also think that it is full  
of people, and the common  
denominator of these people  
is they are familiar to each other

and they are theatrical. Now this  
is a completely different thing.  
This might be a gun or a tightrope  
or a pile of ice plant. It is my favorite

of the landscapes, the one where  
the rabbit buries its head under  
a man's arm; it's exhibiting agitation.  
All the women become tragedies –

that is why that dancer is there –  
they all lean on their elbows. The men  
are as lazy as they can be.  
You couldn't make them work.

And they sing and write poetry.  
I tell the same story, the one about  
avoiding avalanches. You have to repeat  
and repeat; otherwise, people don't know  
what you're talking about. I'm a kind of

collector. As you can see, no one  
is there now – there is a certain  
daring, or stillness, but it is desolate.

Harry Johnson

## **Next Time, a Rabbit**

I shoot blanks. I'll never have children. I warned all four of my wives straight away, but it's difficult to explain that to women. Shortly after number four slammed the door behind her, I took early retirement from an accounting job with a huge company that I had hated every day for thirty years. The very next morning after my gold watch party I woke up with pain in my back and left shoulder so severe I could barely make it out of bed. But it was more than just physical pain. I sensed that Thursday morning was the first day of the end of my life.

The variety, location, and degree of my pain expanded exponentially. Numbness, tingling and cramps in my hands and feet kept me awake till all hours. When I did sleep, I was startled awake by wheezing and abdominal cramps. Arthritis had immobilized my joints to the point where it took me five minutes to maneuver my socks and shoes onto my feet. I moved everything in the house to waist-high cabinets to avoid having to reach up or bend over. The mailman suggested I might be a depressed hypochondriac, but I didn't need a postal worker *or* a doctor to tell me that the intense pain throughout my body was very real and signaled my inevitable demise.

I lived alone, so no one heard me cry out every five minutes, no one witnessed the rapid devastation of my once athletic body. Living alone also meant there was no one around to assist me with the basic functions of living when that time came, and it was coming fast. It wouldn't be long before I was completely paralyzed and addicted to opiates. The signs were all around me. The news teemed with stories of people my age dying. The famous commercial with the catch phrase, "I've fallen and I can't get up" no longer amused me. The beggar outside 7-11 changed his sign from "Jesus Loves You" to "The End is Near."

I talked about death with anyone who would listen and with many people who would rather not. People are very uncomfortable around death. They don't even like the word. Instead of saying, "So-and-so died," they say, "He passed away," or "She crossed over." My favorite is, "He's in a better place." Yeah, right. Then it hit me. "A better place." How can I make that happen?

The answer arrived the next morning while I was all doped up, half-watching MedTV in my least uncomfortable chair. Outside my window I noticed a bunch of bunnies in my neighbor's yard. It wasn't very long before there were dozens of them hopping all over the place and it dawned on me; all rabbits have to do is look cute and fuck. I found my solution. I would transform myself from a pain-crippled, dying man of 53 into a fuzzy-eared, ten-pound sex machine. For the first time in months I felt hope; my life had a purpose once again, albeit temporary.

I dragged myself to the local petting zoo. I made use of my sleepless nights by Googling scores of sites on spiritual magic. I took the bus to pet stores all over town. My research unearthed Native American medicine men who were happy to visit my home and accept hefty cash donations to convince me to shape-shift into an elk. Equally expensive Sufi mystics spun me into solemn states of universal awareness and connectivity to the goodness of mankind. They would only accept cash. Monastic Hindus silenced my mind and revealed to me the powerful depths of eternal emptiness, which, by that time, matched the state of my wallet. But it was the Tarahumara Shamans who put it all together, instructing me in the craft of soul transmutation through their Copper Canyon peyote ritual. All these lessons added up to a surprisingly simple answer: you can spend all the money you want, but it boils down to Science of Mind plus what my father told me when I was a kid—any problem in the universe can be solved by an unshakable belief in the principle of mind over matter, a powerful will and perfect timing. I was prepared to transfer my spirit into another being at the exact moment of my death.

To be certain I was making the right choice, I considered other animals. I certainly didn't want to spend eternity eating seeds and running inside a plastic wheel, so rodents were out of the question. Dogs are loyal and loveable, but they sleep all the time, not the way I want to spend my extended life. Becoming a horse would give me a nice long life, but the odds of finding a stud farm in Culver City, California were slim at best. Cats are loners, a trait I've always admired, but I wanted a change. I was tired of being alone. I wanted company. I want sex. I want to be a rabbit.

I prepared a list of post-transformation instructions, so my animal loving friends could look after me in my next life. I purchased wire cages to protect me from coyotes and hawks and I arranged for plenty of money in a trust to keep me supplied with organic carrots, lettuce and fluffy girl bunnies.

The final piece of the puzzle was choosing the perfect rabbit for my final incarnation; he must be young, have a strong sex drive and really big feet. I realized female rabbits will mate with just about any furry thing within reach, but acute pain and physical decay had sapped my self-confidence, and I needed to insure my next life would be exactly what I wanted. Time was running out. Finally, last week at the pet store nearest my house, I lucked upon a young, healthy, handsome male bunny with a pedigree of paternity and very large feet.

I am now ready to cross over. And I know in my heart, that when the four-year life span of my next incarnation ends, I will die happy, leaving behind a legacy of thousands of the cutest little fucking lettuce-munchers you ever saw. Up yours, Death.

Gilad Elbom

## **A Beginning**

It was at the new coffee shop across the street from their three-bedroom townhouse that Myrna decided to show her husband, not without a hint of pride, her first attempt at literary translation. But when she placed her twenty-page manuscript on the table, next to his second cup of black coffee and a neatly folded copy of the Grand Forks Herald, he maintained, after glancing distractedly at the first few paragraphs, that it read, curiously enough, like one of her own short stories. She asked if he would read, at his leisure, the whole thing, and he suggested, or at least insinuated, that it was remarkably resourceful of her to disguise her fiction as the innovative work of some promising foreigner. The fact that he was not familiar with the author she had chosen to translate, a young experimentalist from Egypt, inescapably encouraged him to further doubt the authenticity of her text. Otherwise, he said, breaking into one of his famous bittersweet smiles, how would you explain the suspicious presence of all the recognizable idiosyncrasies of your own style in this obviously fabricated piece: the prolonged digressions, the inconsistent point of view, the hopelessly convoluted grammar?

It's only a draft, she said, studying her upside-down reflection in the teaspoon with which she was now nervously playing, refusing to let herself be discouraged by his lack of support. I thought you might like it.

He shrugged, rubbed his chin, and glanced at his watch, the fancy timepiece she had bought him for his birthday. Even the fact that her translation was visibly awkward, trapped, at least partially, in the nominal clauses, chains of synonyms, and generous use of the definite article so typical of Arabic, did not convince him of the sincerity of her effort. Clumsiness could also be faked. Just pepper your writing with some charming grammatical atrocities, and there you have it, a carefully constructed, seemingly genuine translation, complete with all the cute imperfections one would expect from the ever-forgivable work-in-progress.

Ten years ago, when she followed him to Africa, then to the Middle East, she knew she was bound to regret the emotional investment, the lost time, the long years in overcrowded cities and practically inhabitable deserts, years she could have devoted to her academic career. But he was magnetic and wild, an idealist, a decidedly inventive lover, and she was happy to run away, take a break from America, unaware of the euphemistic nature of clever morphological constructions such as Humanitarian Work or Developing Countries, too young to acknowledge the vacuous yet pressing makeup of common expressions like Emotional Investment or Academic Career.

It was then, however, among the inevitable alliteration of camels and cockroaches, living in the shadow of a sexy government agent, that she developed a taste for the tension between tone and stress, plosives and fricatives, speaker and hearer. Now, armed, as the phrase has it, with a lengthy dissertation on the Copenhagen School—a marginal, outmoded topic that nevertheless excites her—she enjoys the tenured happiness of a rising academic, the sparkling fruit of a nationwide search, a position almost as pleasurable as the ones to which he introduced her in Morocco and Mauritania.

Standing in front of her colleagues, distinguished participants in the annual meeting of the Linguistic Circle of North Dakota and Manitoba, she maintains, in a didactic, soft yet palpable voice, that the syntactic elasticity of a clause, and especially one that modifies a main sentence, does not necessarily guarantee the automatic preservation of its original semantic value. In other words, altering the sequence of interdependent components, however flexible, might produce a meaning significantly different from the initial content of the utterance.

Simon Olson, the chair of the Department of Linguistics, disagrees. A fairly recent graduate of a prestigious university for which he has the spurious contempt of a maverick prodigy destined to outshine his old professors, he treats her with the formulaic combination of affected warmth and patronizing disdain. That he is very much aware of his clichéd self, poking seemingly casual, self-referential fun at his own stereotypical pretentiousness, enrages her even more. Alluding to the fact that she is half-Jewish, he teases her with an acerbic refutation, arguing, more or less, that regardless of word order, mixing meat and dairy would be just as unkosher as mixing dairy and meat.

When she protests that this kind of personal attack is, to use an expression she is known to be fond of, below the belt, he reminds her, in his deep, dramatic, playful baritone, that she is, like the type of clause to which she has dedicated much of her academic work, a subordinate.

Nicolás Mansito III

## **The Escape Artist**

*for Brent*

Adolfo Matasón was definitively the greatest escapist when it came to the game of chess. He earned his nickname— El Lombriz, The Slippery Worm— early in his career, not because of his skill in killing quickly and efficiently, but more on account of his astounding ability to inevitably avoid the dreaded death of his most prized piece. From every conceivable trap, stratagem, or convolution of advancements and retreats, Adolfo always managed to stunningly emerge victorious when it appeared that his King was sure to meet a most certain and exacting end.

It was rumored that in 1805, El Lombriz defeated Milan Scarpacho, the reigning Italian champion, with nothing more than a pawn, his only soldier left to fight against Scarpacho's battered yet overwhelming forces. The match lasted twenty-seven days, so the legend runs: Scarpacho, with a sinister twist of his thin moustache, immediately dealt a leveling blow on the eighth day of play as he slaughtered Adolfo's Bishops and vanquished his Queen. By the second week, after a bombardment of conniving tactics executed with supernatural precision, Adolfo was left only with one, solitary piece— his pawn, which later became Adolfo's hero and savior, bringing about Scarpacho's demise half-way through the thirteenth hour of the twenty-seventh day.

Today many experts dispute the fact that Adolfo won with just one pawn, claiming the impossibility of its occurrence; however, a vagrant scribe who had witnessed the match documented it quite succinctly, and many others— those who do not find pleasure in criticizing— believe that those who deny its possibility only do so because of their inexhaustible jealousy and inability to conceive of someone more adept than themselves. When trying to explain Adolfo's skill, most people unknowingly (and may I add mistakenly) appropriate his ability partly to mere luck and partly to Adolfo's own doggedness, but, as is always the case in matters of superb greatness, there is more to this story.

You see, Adolfo's great grandfather, Miguel Enrique Matasón, was one of Chile's greatest generals, and his blood comes from an ancient lineage of veteran soldiers, hence the name Matasón— Massacre. Furthermore, Adolfo's grandfather on his mother's side was indeed the most artistic and skilled chessboard craftsmen to walk the sands of Persia, gaining most of his grandiose earnings from constructing boards and pieces for Kings and Princes. And let us not forget his mother, Maria Escaparo— the only female to rob eighteen banks in one day, only to be caught that night and sentenced to death, which she avoided by escaping before dawn but was recaptured later

that day, furthermore frustrating and inciting the authorities by escaping yet again until this dance had been done a grand total of twenty times and lasted the greater portion of two weeks.

It must be seen that Adolfo is not merely Adolfo; he is not just one man. He is a conglomerate of lives imbued with the spirit of a warrior and an artist, a survivor and an escapist. Somewhere out in the universe, independent of the invented complexities of time and space, there existed (and perhaps still exists) an unseen and inimitable force that uttered something inaudible, which in turn gave birth to a word that birthed a being, a body, a life that became the nexus of a spider web whose silk-like tendrils passed through the entangled dimensions of time and space to create Adolfo Matasón: the culmination of the labyrinths of those before him.

William Yazbec

## Midwestern Flashers

I think I'm a better guy than most people take me for. Perhaps "better" isn't the correct word. A nicer guy than most people take me for? That's not precisely it either. I believe I am someone who objectively could be considered kind. I rarely curse at people, even in my head, and I volunteered at a suicide hotline for three and a half months eight years ago. I drive the speed limit and let other cars into traffic when I'm not in a hurry. It is no stretch in my mind to proclaim that I like my fellow humans, nevertheless I have always had trouble making friends. I wouldn't say that people avoid me, I'd just say that they don't really pay me much attention. I turned thirty earlier this year and no one at the office said anything. I recently grew a goatee to try and stand out, maybe look a little dangerous, but nobody noticed so I shaved it off.

Two things you should know about me: I'm funny and I participate from time-to-time in flash mobs. I'm not entirely sure how I'm funny, but people always say that I am. I kind of resent it sometimes because I don't always know if they mean humorous or *funny*—like funny in the head. I bet you're asking yourself what the heck flash mobs are because most people don't know. I take the position that it is a new form of performance art and I can't stress how important art is to me. We've got a piece we're performing going tonight after I get off work. It's a secret. No one knows we're coming. Art makes it worthwhile to get up in the morning. Perhaps you do know what flash mobs are. I don't know. It's an internet phenomenon, there's chatrooms, websites and such for different groups. It was pretty much underground and on the cutting edge until AOL ran a story about it a few months ago. I have no idea how many people read the dreck that they present as news. It is my belief that AOL, Wal-Mart, and Starbucks are taking over the world. Did you hear that they're putting in a Starbucks next to the Louvre in Paris? I wanted to gag when I heard, but all of that is another story for another time. As I heard someone say once in a movie, "It's your world boss. I'm just living in it."

Flash mobs are hastily mobilized groups of people that appear and disappear within moments leaving the bystanders befuddled. Say for example, two hundred people descend upon a Hallmark store and everyone says they're looking for a special greeting card for someone named Al. Five minutes later they're gone. Or say that a large group of people meet on a street corner and simultaneously burst into applause stopping after forty two seconds and then dispersing.

We don't have a huge flash mob movement going here in Champaign, but its gaining momentum. I have many acquaintances here; I came for college and liked it enough so I stayed. I got involved when I got flash-mobbed a few months ago. I was in line at Garcia's Pizza and a group of

twenty or so people cut in front of me all demanding anchovy pizzas. After the cashier had rung up a tab of over two hundred dollars, all of the people changed their mind and said they had decided to just go to Arby's. They shuffled out and I followed. That is how I met Gulliver. I don't know what his real name is. He's probably in his mid-twenties, shaggy blond hair, constant stubble and John Lennon circle glasses. He wears clothes made of hemp and smells of patchouli oil. My guess is he's a grad student. I gather he's called Gulliver because of his size. I'd guess he's 6'6" and around 275. We all have nicknames we picked for ourselves and it's usually our online handle as well. I decided to go with Doctor Doom.

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I'm at the PBS station here. Have been for awhile. I am the man under the man at this point. An assistant programming director. In about ten more years my boss, Mr. Zontek will retire and then I'll be promoted. He's a barrel of a man with a penchant for cigars and he drives a pine green '67 Ford Mustang with a vanity plate that reads, MR. Z TOY. He's in the midst of his mid-life crisis and probably will be dead from a heart attack before he retires. I guess that means I won't have to wait ten years. Lucky me. Not that I wish Mr. Zontek any ill will. He had me over for Thanksgiving the first year I worked here and he always takes my ideas for programming under consideration. That Thanksgiving was fun at the Zonteks. I told a lot of jokes and everyone laughed. I would have liked to make it an annual tradition, but since 1998 Mr. Zontek has told me he has to spend Thanksgiving in Carbondale with his in-laws and shrugs his shoulders. I've thought of subtly mentioning that I'd never seen Carbondale before when he mentions each Wednesday before Thanksgiving that he has to go there, but I never have. I think it may be trying too hard. I'm perfectly fine spending Thanksgivings at Kendalls Steak and Seafood. They put on a turkey dinner with all the fixings for \$7.95 per person and there's always plenty of people to talk to. Not that many of them have much of anything they want to say to me. There's a lot of lower income kind of people that go there on Thanksgiving and they think I'm weird. It's gotten to where the servers down at Kendalls expect me for Turkey Day. That kind of makes me not want to go. It makes me a little embarrassed.

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It was quarter 'til and Mr. Zontek had let me leave work early. Me and the flash-mobbers were to meet at five at the Borders Bookstore in the Woodfield Mall. I waited in the food court. Gulliver came up on my left and I saw some of the others—Mogwai, Chester Cheetah, Gargoyle, Sylvia the Valkyrie. There no doubt were more of us. We didn't socialize outside of the chatroom. At least I

didn't. I often wanted to ask Gulliver if some of the folks got together for coffee or a nice meal, but he'd always bugger off at the end of our performance piece. Nobody mentioned anything in the chatrooms about it either. I don't presume that we're all loners and I guess maybe it is best that we come together to create our art and that's it. It indicates to me that we're singular in our purpose to create.

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Gulliver handed out the slips of paper to everyone. There were only ten or twelve of us today. A little fewer than last time. Our instructions were typed on the paper. We moved en masse past the info kiosk in the middle of the store to the history section in the back left corner. The woman working that section looked harried already, she had her hair flipped up into a messy brown bun and a pencil stuck in it. Her glasses were halfway down the bridge of her nose as she scanned a computer screen. We formed a semi-circle around her and she turned, half-startled by the sight of us.

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"C-Can I help you?" She said and scratched her face.

Gulliver stepped forward. "Yes, thank you. I am looking for a book on the Peloponnesian War called *Oh Sparta, My Sparta* by Clark Haygarth.

She pecked at the keyboard. "Uh. Hmm. I'm not seeing it sir. Are you sure that's the title of the book?"

Mogwai started to tap his foot and look at his watch. The clerk noticed but continued with Gulliver.

Gulliver sighed. "Of course I'm sure. *Haygarth*. He's like only the world's best known scholar on the Peloponnesian War." He sighed again. "*What about 77 Days of Bleeding Athenians?* You have that at least, don't you?"

"By Haygarth?" She asked tentatively.

Gulliver nodded. "Of course, who else?"

Sylvia the Valkyrie started laughing. A high-pitched shrill wheeze.

The clerk shifted her weight from one leg to the other and put her hands on her hips. "Can you give me a second sir? I'll check our database at the kiosk that lists every book ever published just as soon as I help these other folks. If we can find the book, we'll be able to order it for you."

"That is unacceptable," Gulliver said, turned on his heel and stomped out. People were starting to look at us now.

The clerk moved towards Mogwai and I raised my hand to try and get the clerk's attention. It threw her for a second and we all crowded around her shouting out names of historical books that didn't exist. In the deepest voice I could muster, I said, "*The Secret Psychology of Hitler's Moustache* by Johan Sebastian Janikowski!" Sylvia the Valkyrie kept shouting "Where's the bathroom?!" We were all yelling in different tones and pitches as instructed on the papers handed out by Gulliver. Baritone, soprano, tenor, alto. It was actually quite musical.

The clerk's face reddened and the pencil fell out of her bun. She yelled over the top of us, "One at a time please, one at a time and you—"she pointed to Sylvia the Valkyrie, "the bathroom is in the café where it always has been."

Sylvia the Valkyrie laughed again. "Where's the café?"

The clerk put her hand to her face and rubbed her temple. As she was about to explain, the alarms on all of our watches went off, we turned as a group and walked out. Once outside the store, we split up and headed our separate ways. A few of us parted with a muttered "see you next time" or a wink. Sylvia the Valkyrie gave me a salute. She looked cute in her vintage 1950s dresses and black-bobbed hair.

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I go through the year in my mind by counting down the days between holidays—like this past year when there were twenty-six days between Easter and Mother's Day and twenty-eight days between Thanksgiving and Christmas. It's like a form of setting goals. It seems easier to me to think of things that way—in small steps—as opposed to imagining my life spreading out over seventy-five years. I just have to make it to the next holiday. I like holidays even if I don't get off work. On holidays people just seem to be happier. Tomorrow is four days from Valentine's Day.

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After work I decide to head next door to see if Dale is home yet from his job at the construction site. It has been twenty-one days since the previous holiday—Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday and once we get to Valentine's it will be only two days until President's Day. Dale is an independent contractor and makes a decent living. Dale's not my next-door neighbor actually. He lives at 1233 Buckingham Street and I live at 1233 Windsor Road—a few blocks away. I got some of his mail one day four years ago and took it over to him, that's how we met. Our neighborhood has lots of oak trees, but they're bare now. It hasn't snowed for a couple of weeks so the streets are clear. There are no sidewalks in our subdivision, so I'm happy the streets are clear of snow. A couple of years ago, we

had a storm that dumped fourteen inches on us in less than twelve hours and the snowplows were slow in coming. It took me fifty-eight minutes to make it to Dale's to see if he was okay or needed anything. It usually takes me around fifteen. Dale hadn't even ended up being home. He'd taken on extra work driving a snowplow during the storm because the city was shorthanded. They paid him \$30 an hour he'd said.

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His S-U-V is in the driveway and there's a light on in the front room even though it's an hour or so from getting dark. Dale likes a lot of light and I've often suggested he move to a sunnier climate. He says that maybe someday he will. I knock on the door and hear his mutt, Butch, tear into the front hall barking.

"Hold on, I'll be there in a second!" I hear Dale yell from the back of the two bedroom house. I figure he's smoking pot.

A couple of minutes later he lets me in and I take a seat in his TV room in the back. *Mama's Family* is on and his bong is on the coffee table. There's still a sweetness in the air. Dale is a big man with blond bushy hair and moustache. He's thirty six and looks like the rugged cigarette-smoking men from magazine ads in the 70s, but younger and fresher. He says that he still gets carded at liquor stores.

"I have a copy of that documentary on the Aztec ruins we talked about," I say to Dale as he slumps down into his burgundy La-Z-Boy. Dale has a thing for architecture and ancient ruins. It's one of the few things I can relate to about him. Well, actually I was talking to him about the Aztec ruins the other day and he said it sounded cool. I think it's good to try and get him interested in things that I like. I never talk to him about the flash mob. We're not supposed to. It's like being in a secret club for artists. I don't think Dale would understand anyway.

"Did I say I wanted that? I don't remember." Dale grunts at a joke on the television. "Did you bring it over?"

I shift in my seat on the couch. "No, it's still at work, but I'll bring it next time."

Dale nods. "This dirtbag at work got pissed off when I docked him for taking a three hour lunch break today. I couldn't freaking believe it. I about hauled off and hit him." He shook his head. "I asked him where he'd been and the tool shrugs his shoulders and says 'Denny's'. So I say 'for three hours?' And he says 'I didn't say it was the restaurant' and smirks at me. I asked him what the hell he meant—he's this little Mexican dude, Laurencio, everyone calls him Oaxaca 'cause that's where he's from—and he just kept smirking at me. All the other Mexis are smilin' too and when I walked away, they started jabbering in Mexican and laughing."

“It’s probably some code or something. I wouldn’t worry about it. It probably just means he went to smoke pot or something.” I said. “So Valentine’s Day is coming up, you have yourself a hot date?”

Dale smiled. He had crooked teeth. “I bet you think I’m taking out that rag Franny from the coffee shop I always go on about, eh?”

I shrugged. “Who do you have on the hook now Dale?” I said.

“You’re gonna shit bricks and build a house my man. I got this little girl from Urbana High School wantin’ a piece of me. Met her at Jake’s pool hall. She was slumming. She’s one of those girls who always wear dark clothes and want to piss off their parents. I got her to come back here with me and damn, the body on this chick. I had her moanin’ and groanin’ like a damn banshee.”

“You’re going to date a high school girl, Dale? Take her out in public? You best be careful.”

“Hell. I ain’t takin’ her nowhere. She’s coming here. I’ll get a six pack of beer and some wine coolers and have me a fine old time.”

“So you like her?”

Dale grunted. “She’s awful worldly for a seventeen year old from Urbana.”

I was pleased. I had called someone worldly a couple of weeks ago and had to explain exactly what it meant to him. Now he was using it.

“What about you, Ronald? You got any lady friend you’re not telling me about?” Dale asked me.

I found it hard not to blush. He knew I didn’t or at least I thought so. But at least he asked. “I have no one I’m particularly interested in right now,” I said.

Dale cleared his throat. “Look at you Ronald. You’re a decent enough looking guy. You’re smart and some chicks dig that. You should be spending more time up at the college trying to troll some of those sorority chicks. Impress ‘em with your mind. Free their mind and their ass will follow. George Clinton said that.”

I wanted to change the subject. “What’s her name?”

Dale snorted. “Get this dude,” he leaned over closer to me, “her freaking name is Heaven. Can you believe that shit? Who names their daughter Heaven?”

It made me wonder what she looked like. “I can understand why she’s rebellious.”

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Maybe it’s because I’m really intelligent that some people don’t end up liking me. I scored a 186 on an IQ test I took in high school and honestly, I question the results. I scored higher. I grew up in a town called What Cheer, Iowa and the ladies and gentlemen running that town during my tenure

were dopey and soft-headed; no doubt direct descendents of the geniuses who decided to name a town in the prairie What Cheer. In addition, there was a bar, pub, or tavern for what seemed like every ten residents and while that may add to the cheer of the town for a brief period of time, it results in a mushy intellect in the long term.

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My parents died ten years ago in a car accident on I-80. They were coming to visit me for parent's weekend at U of I and a trucker fell asleep at the wheel. The interesting thing about the three of us—my mother, father, and me—was that we were all only children. If I ever get married, I don't know if I'd only want one child. I believe it would be something that my wife and I would have to negotiate. A second child might be nice. The long and short of it is, I sometimes think about how pleasant it would be to have family around... or at least available to call on the telephone. I am the last of my line. The Jaffe surname dies with me. My parents named me Ronald C. Jaffe III. The C doesn't stand for anything, but sometimes I tell people that it does. I often make up weird things and tell them to people just to see their reaction. I think maybe that's why people call me funny. I told this girl in high school who always wore neckties in high school that the C stood for cerebellum. I don't think she believed me and I thought the fact that she wore neckties every day was a poor attempt at individuation. She had a hook nose and ended up married to a sop in What Cheer who never wore neckties because he was a mechanic at Shooley's Garage and Repo Yard.

I haven't been back there since the funeral and doubt I ever will go back. I like Champaign. It's pleasant. A comfortable t-shirt kind of town. Not to say it doesn't have its touches of the big city avant-garde. There are a lot of poetry readings. I go sometimes. The poetry isn't all that good, but by God, they're serious about their art and I respect that. We have several art galleries. It's mostly regional painters and sculptors, but they have their master's degrees and their muses like they do anywhere else. You can pick up a painting here in Champaign, perhaps a work by Lauren Bello Salvadori (and everybody around here knows who she is) at the Astrid Kuchner Gallery for \$800, whereas in New York it would require almost twice that. Every once in awhile the Kuchner Gallery will get a work from John Wayne Gacy and you can just imagine how long the lines are then. I don't approve of someone like Gacy making money, but to deny putting it into a show is lunacy. Art must be experienced by the people regardless of who creates it. Plus, the man can paint. I read that Gacy's style is reminiscent of Walter Sickert's and I can see the connections. I have applied for jobs via the internet in New York, London, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Rome, but in the end I always stay here. I think I enjoy telling people that I've applied for jobs all over the world more than having a

serious desire to leave. I want to impress people with my worldliness as much as the next guy. Still, Champaign is my home.

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I got notice of a flash mob performance piece for Valentine's Day. We were supposed to meet at 7:30 at The Olive Garden just off I-74. I could only imagine what Gulliver had cooked up for us. I figured we'd give the couples out on dates something to remember. If we did something really outrageous and artistic maybe they'd write about us in the newspaper.

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I headed over to Dale's to drop off the Chichen Itza documentary. It had gotten a little warmer, closer to the freezing mark than it had been in awhile, but the guy on channel six said snow was in the forecast. Maybe a lot of snow. This is winter in the Midwest. It lulls you sometimes. Everything can be going along just fine, not too cold, not too much snow or ice. The shovels and snowblowers are idle and forgotten in garages. People start saying to each other that the winter hasn't been too bad this year. Then eventually someone will say that this winter is a cakewalk compared to '78 or '86 or '99. People will smile at each other, the puffs of breath visible in the air like cold smoke and feel that strange kinship of townspeople when they feel like they've gotten through something difficult together. It is just then when the people are counting their blessings that the snow comes. In November or December, the snow is sort of a novelty. The children go sledding and ice skate on ponds next to large oak trees. Now, in February, the snow is a beast. It ruins moods and breaks up marriages. It is like being mocked by God. The big snows quiet people down. Everybody shuts up. Their mouths and their homes. When it's over, people dig out like moles and when they begin talking to each other in that small-talk, you're okay-I'm okay kind of way, they talk about how the recent storm was a bad one, but nothing like '78 or '86 or '99 and life goes on until spring. Then the summer and trips to Florida or Wisconsin Dells or a town with a waterpark. Living in the Midwest requires an endurance or a stubbornness and most of us here have both.

Dale's in a Chicago Bears jersey, boxers, and socks. His hair is sticking up every which way on the left side of his head, the right is matted down like a golf green.

I ask him if he was asleep and tell him I'm sorry I woke him.

"Just restin' my eyes dude. It's cool," he says as he walks slowly towards the back through the kitchen to the TV room. I follow. He's got a record playing and the TV on with the sound turned down. His bong is on the coffee table. He lies down on the couch and I get the La-Z-Boy.

I feel like I'm being intrusive. "What's this you're listening to?"

"Dead. Lettin' Jerry guide my brainwaves. I fired a guy today."

"What'd he do?"

"I found out what 'Denny's' meant."

"Yeah?"

"I followed Laurencio, I mean Oaxaca, when he left on his lunch break." Dale sat up. He looked tired. "You know the guy I'm kinda partners with? Bill Abruzzi?"

I nodded.

"He lives out there in that subdivision where almost every house has a pool? You know him, right?"

"Yeah, Dale. I said I did."

He started rubbing his hands together. "Sorry dude, I couldn't tell if you were shaking your head or nodding." He reached down and itched at his toes through the sock. "Athlete's foot. Sorry. Anyway, this guy Oaxaca goes to Bill Abruzzi's place and I gotta believe he's bangin' his wife. The little jerk was in there for a couple hours. I saw the curtains get shut in the bedroom. His wife's name is Denise. You see what I mean? Denny's... Denise."

"Holy cow," I said.

"Holy shit," Dale said. "Now I don't know if I should tell Bill or what. I mean he should know if his wife's getting it on the side and he's gonna ask me why I canned Oaxaca's butt."

I didn't know what to tell him. I asked him what he thought Bill Abruzzi would do if he found out. Dale said he had a mean temper. I told Dale it was his decision. He asked me what I would do. I said I'd never breathe a word of it to anyone. I do not believe in meddling in other people's lives. Things get messy. It made me uncomfortable that Dale told me about all that. I left feeling low and the weather wasn't doing anything to pick me up.

At work on Valentine's Day, I noticed Mr. Zontek's license plate was now attached to the rear of a red Mustang. He was very proud. He said he'd traded up. He felt he deserved it. A guy in Urbana had a '65 Mustang with lower mileage than the pine green one Zontek had been driving for the past three years. I asked him if he'd gotten it in red to celebrate Valentine's Day and he just looked at me and shook his head. It made me feel stupid for asking. I secretly suspected that it was the same Mustang with nothing but a new paint job and I wondered why Mr. Zontek had felt he needed to impress us.

After work I prepared myself a small dinner of chicken cutlets and green beans and contemplated what artistic endeavor Gulliver would have for us at The Olive Garden. As I was getting a second helping, Dale called. It was near seven and I noticed the first snowflakes beginning to fall. Six inches were predicted over night. Dale said he needed a favor. Apparently Heaven had

brought over a friend. The girls were using each other as excuses. Heaven told her parents she was spending the night at this other girl's house and vice versa. He wanted me to come over and entertain the other girl, keep him out of his hair he said. He said he'd owe me. I told him that I didn't want to have any part of messing with some girl that was not legally an adult; that I didn't want to get into any trouble. Dale asked me to hold and I heard muffled talking on his end. He came back and said the other girl was eighteen, there was no way I'd get into any kind of jam. He said that it wasn't like I had to sleep with her or anything, just keep her quiet while he and Heaven did their business. I still resisted. Then he said that if I was a real friend that I'd do him this favor. That he would say that made me question if he was the kind of fellow I wanted as a friend anyway. But I went.

I was worried that Gulliver and the others may not want me to take part in the flash mobs anymore, that my life would become devoid of creating art. It was depressing. I thought maybe if worse came to worse, I could start a rival flash mob group to Gulliver's. I might be able to get some defectors. Sylvia the Valkyrie seemed to like me well enough and Mogwai might be persuaded for a small fee. If Gulliver tried to muscle me out of the group for missing tonight, I'd show him and get a bigger group than he'd ever had.

The ground had almost been covered by the snow when I got over to Dale's. He had all of his lights on and I heard music. It was some R and B thing that I felt was a cliché move. Dale let me in.

"Hey dude. I want to introduce you to my little slice of Heaven and her friend Magenta." They both wore baggy pants and tight fitting tops that left their midribs exposed. Heaven had black straight hair, dark eyes, and a ring through her nose. She looked like an angry young thing in black and wore too much eyeliner. Magenta had long blond hair with red streaks that were obviously chemically induced and pierced ears. She was taller and skinnier than Heaven and smiled shyly at me when I shook her hand. She had pretty green eyes, no makeup, and reminded me of no one. I wondered if she'd want to watch MTV after Heaven and Dale got back to the bedroom.

We all sat in the TV room with the music playing. The girls had banana strawberry winecoolers that were turning their lips abnormally red. Dale was drinking beer and obviously had already had a few. I excused myself to go to the kitchen for a soda. Dale knew I didn't drink alcohol. All he had was ginger ale. He came up behind me and just over my shoulder he said in a low voice, "You were right dude. I decided not to tell Bill Abruzzi anything. I think he's probably getting a divorce anyway. Why piss him off even more?"

I nodded. "It was your decision." I took a sip from the glass of ginger ale and closed the refrigerator.

Dale was grinning and the edges of his eyes were red from drinking. "So what do you think of Heaven? A tight piece, eh?"

I shrugged. "She's pretty."

"How 'bout her friend? You thinkin' about puttin' the moves on her?"

"She's eighteen, right?"

"Damn straight." He took a pull from his bottle of Budweiser. "I've been talking you up too, telling her how smart you are. That you're the smartest dude I know and that you work in TV. She seemed pretty impressed."

A scream and then high, girlish laughter came from the TV room. We went back and Heaven was doing a dance in the middle of the room, sashaying and working her hips to the bassline. Magenta was egging her on. Dale put his beer on the coffee table and danced with her, pulling her in tight, grinding his midsection against her. I felt like I was watching something that I shouldn't be seeing. They started to kiss. A little at first, then longer, with what I assumed Dale took to be passion.

"Jeez, why don't you two get a room," Magenta said.

Heaven grinned and took Dale by the hand, guiding him back to the bedroom. The door shut and I was alone with this Magenta. I looked at her and she raised her eyebrows at me.

"Would you like to watch TV?" I asked.

She shrugged and I went and shut off the record.

I hit the remote and asked her again if she wanted to watch MTV. She said MTV was cool. I hated MTV. We watched for a few minutes and then we could hear Dale's bedsprings. It seemed to embarrass us both. I turned up the volume.

"So have you and Heaven been friends long?" I was looking for anything to keep myself from imagining the vision of Dale having sex.

"Since elementary school." She started to play with one of her earrings. "Our families go to the same church too."

"You go to church?"

She looked at me like I was an idiot. "Duh. Just because I party doesn't mean I don't believe in God."

"Is that what this is?" I said. "A party?"

She shifted on the couch. "Yeah, you know. There's booze and stuff." She smiled at me. "So are you going to come over here and sit next to me or what?"

I went.

"So Dale's pretty cool," she said, still playing with her earring. It annoyed me.

"Actually a lot of people don't like him."

"Do a lot of people like you?"

I bristled a little. "I know lots of people."

She moved closer to me. "Are you trying to get me to like you?"

Her aggressiveness was making me uncomfortable. “Is your name really Magenta?”

“Goddamn right it is,” she said and scooted away from me towards the other end of the couch. She stared at the TV.

“Listen... Magenta. What do you really think of all this? That your friend brought you over to some guy’s house she barely knows on Valentines Day of all days and set you up with some guy... me... who graduated college when you were in the fourth grade with Heaven? Doesn’t this scene strike you as a bit odd? Shouldn’t you be at a high school dance or something?”

She scowled. “Fuck you dude. Dale said you were cool and smart. What the hell do you care what we do for fun? You’re a fuckin’ dork with a head like a pumpkin.”

I wanted to calm her down. We needed to pass the time with as little difficulty as possible. “I’m just trying to talk to you like a person,” I said, “Like an adult.”

“The fuck you are, you’re judging me and you’re judging my friend. We do what we want. And if you don’t get the fuck out of my face, I’m gonna fuckin’ smack your dumb ass.”

I was running out of things to say to her. “I’m an artist,” I said.

“I doubt that, you’re not cool enough.” She wouldn’t even look at me anymore, just kept her eyes locked on MTV.

“Have you ever heard of flash mobs?”

She snorted. “What is that, when a bunch of lame-ass middle-aged men show their dicks to each other?”

“No, it’s truly artistic. Performance art. We went the other day to a bookstore in the Woodfield Mall and surrounded a worker asking her for books that don’t exist in different musical tones. We were like a chorus. It was amazing. Then we leave quickly and everyone is left wondering what happened. It’s something they’ll never forget, its art that actually affects the world.”

She shook her head. “Jesus, do you play Dungeons and Dragons too?”

I paused and composed myself better. “I hope you end up with a normal lower middle class life with kids that don’t really like you and an alcoholic husband that beats you for being fat.”

She looked at me wide-eyed. “That’s it. You’re a fucking psycho dude. I’m out of here.” She went to the door of the bedroom and knocked. “Heaven, we need to get me the fuck out of here! This Ronald guy’s a fucking freak!”

The snow was coming down heavier outside the window and I sat watching MTV.

The girls went into the bathroom together and I could hear them having a serious sounding discussion in which I couldn’t make out the words. Dale came in wearing only boxer shorts and a gold choker chain around his neck. I never knew he had a tattoo of a dragon on his chest.

“Sorry this didn’t work out, dude. I thought you two might hit it off. What’d you say to her?”

“She made fun of me. I had to say something.”

Then Magenta left the bathroom and came in to Dale and me. Her face was red. “I need a fucking ride home.”

Dale put his hand on her arm. “Chill out babe. It’ll be all right.”

She pushed his hand away. “I need to get home. Heaven’s being a bitch.”

“It’s snowing outside, why don’t you just get another winecooler and relax. You can pull out the sofa bed when you get tired.”

She shook her head. “Fuck all you guys. I gotta go.” She picked up her tiny purse and pulled on a fake leather coat with a lot of zippers. “I’ll take the goddamn bus.” She opened the door and yelled, “Fuck you Heaven, you bitch!” We watched her stomp up Buckingham Street towards the bus station six blocks away.

Dale looked at me and I shrugged my shoulders.

Heaven called out in an annoyed voice. “Dale, can you come here please?”

“That’s it for me,” I said, “I’m heading home.”

“All right dude. I’ll see you around. Sorry it didn’t work out.”

I walked home and the snowflakes fell.

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It’s June now and Dale should be getting out of jail by the next Valentines Day. It’s lonely and sometimes I feel like there’s no one that knows me. But I think I’ll always feel that way. That girl Magenta apparently is plenty vindictive. She called Heaven’s parents and led them straight over to Dale’s. I didn’t testify at the trial. According to Dale, Heaven’s real name is Jeannette and Magenta’s is Margaret and she goes by Margie. They will always be Heaven and Magenta to me. On Valentine’s Day, both of them were under age. That made me angry at Dale but I forgave him. I pick up Dale’s mail and walk his dog.

I went to the prison in Joliet to visit. It wasn’t like those booths with the plexi-glass partition where you have to talk over a phone, we were just in a room with a long table and a few bored looking guards. Dale was in his orange jumpsuit and said the prisoners hassled him about being a pedophile at first, but then when he told some of the guys that she’d been seventeen and hot they let up on him. He said a couple of guys he hung out with in the yard even asked him to describe what she looked like and how she was in the sack. I told him that I guessed it was okay to do that, there being no women around and all. Dale cussed a lot about the guards and said he was tired of being treated as a number like in that song Bob Seger sings. It wasn’t a song I knew and Dale sang me a few bars. It sounded pretty good and I think I may end up buying Bob Seger’s greatest hits although

I haven't ever much considered myself a Bob Seger kind of guy. I'll always be more of a classical or jazz person.

I asked Dale if he was depressed because just going to a place like that as a visitor made me depressed. Dale said he didn't think about it either way. What was, was and that was it. He did say that when he got out he'd be sure to check his future girlfriend's driver's licenses. I did some reading and found out that the United States has a larger fraction of its population in prison than any other country. When he comes back from prison everyone in the neighborhood will have to be notified that Dale is a registered sex offender. He said he didn't want to talk about that and when I left him at the prison we shook hands. He told me to take it easy and I told him to keep his chin up.

Bill Abruzzi has taken over the contractor business and is still married. Gulliver moved away and he didn't kick me out of the flash mob for missing because of the girls and our wayward Valentine's Day. The group stayed together for awhile and there was a truly great moment in early May, two days before Cinco de Mayo, when we flash-mobbed a Dunkin Donuts. We bought them entirely out of bear claws and apple fritters in less than five minutes. The best thing about it was that Jeanette, aka Heaven, was the girl working behind the counter. She didn't recognize me. I ended up growing a goatee again. The only problem with that flash mob scene was that afterwards it just didn't really seem like it had been artistic. It had seemed more like a high school prank like egging a car or toilet-papering someone's trees. It had been Mogwai's creation and even though it had been fun, I give him low marks on the art scale. I mean, that's barely one step above a reality TV show.

I tried to set one up once after that, but only Sylvia the Valkyrie showed up. The good thing is that it led to something else. I ended up finding out that her name really is Susan and that she's a sophomore at U of I. We've taken to playing Dungeons and Dragons together and having coffee. We've hung out for about a month now and I think she's becoming my girlfriend. Mr. Zontek still drives the red Mustang and I have never been able to prove that it was a new paint job. Sometimes I think of scratching his car and seeing if there's anything underneath the red, but if I did that and was found out, there's no way I'd have any chance of being invited to Thanksgiving at his house this year. That is, if he doesn't have to see his in-laws in Carbondale again. I read that the Kuchner Gallery is going to be exhibiting a series of new John Wayne Gacy paintings in August. I'm hoping that Susan will want to go.

I'd prepared a nice chicken marsala and mixed-green salad. Susan sat across from me and I'd turned the lights down low. I thought it'd be romantic to have a candlelight dinner. She looked at me with her pretty green eyes and shadows were bouncing up and down the walls. It was a look that I don't think I've ever seen anyone give me before. She softly smiled and set her hand out on the table towards me. I gave her my hand and she patted it.

When we got into the bedroom, I was shaking a little. I stood looking at her, knowing what was going to happen but all tied up in my stomach. She began to unbutton the back of her dress. At dinner, she'd said it was made by a famous designer from the '50s and that Jayne Mansfield had worn one just like it in *Girl Can't Help It*. She gave me that smile of hers again, the one that makes me think she knows more than she's telling. It reminded me of the smile she'd been showing at the bookstore that day. I felt a little tickle in my body and shivered.

“Aren't you going to take off your clothes, Ronald?”

I could do nothing but nod and sat down on the bed to unlace my shoes.

Her dress hit the floor and she came to me in only a mint-green negligee.

One shoe off, one shoe still on, I looked up at her.

“One thing Ronald... while we're doing it, I want you to call me Sylvia the Valkyrie.”

Laura Wetherington

**This field is a blazon**

*for Tara Grant*

There's a boundary around her body;  
yellow lye holds her in the earth in wintertime.

*That arm is mine*, she sings.  
It's as though she's floating.

*I'm serious*, he swore, and buried her leg. He buried her severed head.  
This will show the world what it means to cross the line.

*I'm not kidding*, he said, and smoked the shovel  
into her back. When she went down,

he helped her all the way.  
This is what it means to love.

*I'm not joking*, she said, and headed for the door.  
Through her teeth she swore, *Never again*. He agreed.

## **I'm right about time**

Time was immemorial  
and in between the time  
time was mean all the while

mean and while and time was  
we was children.

Time was we was virgins.

Time was fast forward.

Children fly out of the mouths of children.

Young girls grow bark which we have to peel away.

Children fly out of my mouth and peel away.

I wish I had a magic carpet and children.

We all flew from mouths.

You swore you was from the womb of a woman.

Mouths flew out of my mouth and flew away.

Time was a timid body. I say timid.

Lipstick was a magic marker and not marked.

Time was less

fruit and fruitful in between.

I was an apple in the end. Time wasted.

How long does it take time to age? It's ageless.

And what would be your favorite time

and want would be and immemorial.

Time was and time wasn't.

Time wasn't. That's what it was.

Meanwhile, time I memorized.

The breathing was tight. Time opened up the night in my diaphragm.

Louis E. Bourgeois

**A Boy Named Trinity**

*For Zippo*

1.

He wanted to fill the universe with mass, he wanted to go faster than light, and he wanted to destroy it all in order to possess it all, in order to give meaning to himself who was perfect in every respect save that of having meaning.

2.

All you wanted was a word you could call your own. Just one syllable that made sense, one sound that indubitably came from within you, that couldn't have come from anywhere else. You, creator of many forms, you do not live in reality, you are constantly at odds with the universe, at odds with Nothingness and the Void.

3.

I told him to let his mind go, just let it loose, and he did and a whole city block exploded into deep flames.

## **Black Wind and High Water**

No good to be alive at all, I say, stuck in the attic for three full days, raccoons and nutria not good company.

58 cans of root beer later, my skin revolted. Looking out on all that water covering everything all the way up past the porch pillars and not a drop of it good for drinking, fear of dysentery death, not a good way to go.

Watched with my own eyes exactly 14 deer crashing through the highway water all the way up to their necks. I counted each and every one of them as they passed by because I can count, all time is painful, exactly 14 deer. Don't know why that mattered to me so much back then, or why it matters even more to me 60 years later.

Was just about to throw my own life away into the dirty bayou water as the storm made yet another pass but then I heard the bell of the Night Watchmen calling out for us living nightmares, such breathing detritus that we were, and I jump in and swam and swam until I got to the barge and he pulled me on board where he gathered other lost souls as we drifted throughout the night.

## Dogs

Marc bought a 1970 Dodge Dart for \$80.00. The floorboards were held together with the most pristine rust you've ever seen. You could just poke your finger gently into the floorboard and it would come out the other side, an inch or two from the asphalt. The car had no reverse, so we were always pushing it wherever we parked.

He wanted to go to Mardi Gras. I didn't particularly want to go to Mardi Gras, but I did anyway not having anything else to do. Nothing much happened at Mardi Gras, except a young good looking prostitute tried selling herself to me and Marc for just the price of one fuck, even though both of us were only sixteen years old. If Marc had the money we would have taken the whore up on her proposition, but we didn't even have twenty dollars between the two of us and we needed that money to get home on because Marc's car only got eight miles to the gallon, even when the tank wasn't leaking, and we were a good thirty miles from home.

At midnight, horseback riding New Orleans police officers yelling into megaphones told everyone to get off the street because Mardi Gras was over until next year. Nearly everyone did get off the street because even those stupid Yankees from Christ knows where know you don't fuck around with horseback riding New Orleans police officers at midnight at the end of Mardi Gras. You just don't do it because you value your skull too much and the rest of your bones too, for that matter.

Marc somehow swindled a couple of tabs of cheap acid from someone else as dumb as we were. I didn't really want to take the acid but I was real bored and sick of being alive in New Orleans at the end of Mardi Gras. We took the acid at the same time. It took a long time to find the car but eventually we did find it and we had to push it out of the parking spot and that certainly took it out of me as a 1970 Dodge Dart weighs at least 5,000 pounds.

We drove back to Slidell without incident. The acid wasn't very strong and I didn't get very much out of it, except every few minutes I would feel kind of the onset of extreme, biting, euphoria, but it never really got to that, there was just a sense that Joy might over take me, I wasn't nearly so fortunate as many who take acid. I didn't see any "visions" or "purple haze," in fact; I saw no strange lights whatsoever. Except for a few moments of limnal euphoria, I didn't feel anything at all, in fact, I felt remarkably sane. Everything was more lucid and clearer than usual. I had never been so bored in my life, to tell the truth. Marc, trying to think of anything that would cut the purity of the boredom that existed between us, said he felt like killing someone. I said, That sounds like a great idea, let's find something to kill. So we drove on and on all the way to the outskirts of Slidell, where the

neighborhoods are made up of depressing looking particle board houses and where the lawns are always waist high with grass and weeds and filled up with junky cars and faded plastic children's toys.

There seemed to be dogs everywhere—Marc would speed up the huge car and run over whatever unfortunate dog that found itself in our headlights. He did this no less than a dozen times. Only a few dogs got away with their lives because sometimes the car would sputter and stall when Marc punched the gas too hard. We were still bored, but, admittedly, killing all these nomad dogs just seemed like the right thing to do. It was as if we were put here on this given night to perform this very act. I felt not the least bit of guilt, even though at that time in my life I was thoroughly, nay, irredeemably, Catholic.

A few days later, all the local papers reported that a string of dead dogs were found all along Military Road, but I didn't bother to read the articles through, knowing full well what my reaction would be.

Robert M. Detman

### **What You Catch a Glimpse of, Forget As Soon**

There are gestures, unmarred by the words put to them after all has failed. When Y. stopped you from talking to apply lip balm to your dry lips. Or she sidled up to you to read what you had written for her. When you lay on the grass together she put her head on your chest and curled her body around you. In the night you watched her sleeping, you heard her teeth tapping as if taking little bites of number twelve spaghetti, so quietly. Her hand gripped your shoulder. Gestures cannot be undone, incomparable.

Several months earlier, you flew to the Big Island, rented a car and drove the two lane road that encircled the island. In North Kohala the remote beauty brought you to resolve about Y's predecessor, X., an ache and hollowness in your gut, gasping tears of relief. In the light, in the air, drifting, you had freedom again. An escape from what held you immobile. Near the trip's end, you recognized the Big Island was as much a paradise as any place you had ever been, or would ever be.

Friends mentioned traveling there and driving all the way around the island, on a budget, camping, how you would appreciate the landscape—yet you think how you'd have appreciated it more if you had shared it with someone special. Oh yes, that sand in the wound, that you did not go there with a lover, but perhaps in spite of one, X., it's true.

You knew it an unwise thought, but you were relieved to get away. Later, when you will reveal to Y. the reasons you took the trip, you will call it a “post-relationship meltdown escape,” the phrase you use in an email you write her long before you really get to know her. She will read this, laugh, and think you stalwart and independent, but later, when she thinks she knows you, she will look out the window and confess that your comment made her think you were depressed. You do not agree, yet you will admit to yourself, alone, that this was your mindset during that trip.

In Kapa'au, you stood transfixed before the statue of King Kamehameha, an eight foot tall polychrome sentry on a pedestal on the courthouse lawn. It reminded you of first grade and a social studies textbook that had a photograph of an Eskimo's face on the cover, wearing a kind of eyewear without glass, fashioned from a piece of wood with a long slit to look through, ideal for a blinding snowstorm perhaps, since you couldn't see the Eskimo's eyes. This book had been carelessly flung at your face by a girl you thought liked you, knocking out your two front teeth. Standing there in Kapa'au you imagined whacking King Kamehameha with a sledge hammer and shattering him into several million pieces.

In the flush of romance, you will regale Y. with that trip, in her grim apartment that you will block from consciousness, where you will make plans to travel together. Where will you go?

Nicaragua, perhaps, a friend said it is *the* place to go. Or Belize, maybe a side trip to Guatemala, as you will overhear Y. explain to her friend on the phone, *That's where his novel takes place.*

There are words. Gestures are often forgotten when there are words. A month after insisting that she does not cook, Y. will make you the most delicious chicken cacciatore. No, she did not say she did not like to cook. She said that she did not cook. In the narrowness of her eyes, the set and shield of her face, wholly not letting go, or giving in, there is no surrender. You must surrender to love. With ambivalence there are words. But you are cooking now, you will tell her.

You will be open in communication. You will let her know that she'll get no surprises from you. Without admitting the aversion to your candor, she will withhold her thoughts, believing you might judge her. She will be fearful of hurting your feelings, sensing your consideration of words, language. You will have unconditional trust in this person but for your own misgivings, such that you will question her sincerity, the way you hope not to ever have to. That she is unable to have your clarity will bring about the undoing. Which will make you wonder if you merely hide behind honesty and forthrightness. Words.

Y. will remark on the ideal vacation length, saying, five days is plenty. You will consider her remark very telling of a viewpoint that you characterize as hopeless, but you will say nothing. She will decide that your needing to go away when there is trouble, as you admitted you did with X., is a sign of weakness. A validation of a theory. Upping the ante, you will conclude that for Y. life is rote, such as when she will reply, after you relate your story, the one in which you nearly drown, that life is just a series of check boxes. But you will say nothing.

You will sense she collects convenient information from you without giving you the benefit of the doubt, as this alleviates having to justify why she will drink too much gin and become sullen and insult you in front of your friends; or, to hide that behavior, ask for your help in a childish voice. Isn't this nearly the definition of Sartre's *bad faith*, you will note, the one section from *Being and Nothingness* you had read and highlighted all those years ago? Yet, when you will examine your motives, as when you flew to the island, was this not what came to pass with her predecessor, X., and the instigation for that trip? What made you stand on those high cliffs embracing the wind but that you didn't feel you could build a life with someone so constrained?

Eventually, Y. will not want to travel with you, and she will no longer talk of you with enthusiasm to the friend, of those qualities that initially made you so compelling to her. But when will she switch modes, going from the positive-optimism of popular relationship talk—what your therapist calls healing communication, as in, how two people help heal each other's relationship wounds by diving, unbidden, into the icy water, without fear—to her disappointed late night confessions to her friend that *He's not who I thought he was*? At what point will the friend level with Y. that *It sounds like you're not into him*. To which Y. will rationalize, *He's good to me*, or, *He wants what I want*.

You don't think she will use that generous tone, but in her gathering frustration, words more destructive and self-defeating, knowing her friend will not pick apart her hyperbole.

So it was, several months before all of this, at Pololu beach overlook, the setting for an afterlife, you misjudged beauty's appeal. A hot and cool breeze whisked across the conveyor of waves. A sheet of metal wisped into spray. You were drawn into the ocean, possibly too far out for safety. All of your knowledge of what to do or not do was not eased by the recognition that in your effort to get back to the shore, you were being drawn further out. You knew you should let the waves push you down the coast, to "go with the current" as you'd read in a sidebar of your guide book, though this was completely in violation of your instinct. This is the denouement, how you fight the water to get back to the shore, the only horizon you could wish to get to, the one that three minutes earlier you had noted with some satisfaction that if you could remain stationary, almost one hundred yards out, where you could touch bottom on the tips of your toes, sharp rocks, the grainy sand bar, there you could align yourself with the sign that said DANGER: HEAVY SURF. PEOPLE HAVE DROWNED HERE with a row of trees at the edge of the path, and you would be safe. Except that when you looked again you were pushed further into the deep and—this is the panic note—further from shore. Thinking simply, I don't want to die. How ironic were the thoughts you had prior to going in, such as, it's a wide bay, it doesn't look too dangerous, or, I've swam in worse. . . there's a piece of granola stuck in my teeth.

One early morning a few days before, at Ho'okena Beach on the opposite side of the island, venturing into the ocean, a blue canyon of cold water, flapping face down with snorkel mask and fins far above the ocean floor—the lava shelf slid away gradually into the depths and you fantasized you were lost at sea—you couldn't see the bottom, just dim murk. In this immensity, you did not feel in danger, just a surrender to how insignificant this vastness made you. The sun crested the steep hill and tore through the morning chill, warm at your back. Out of the cloudy shadows you could hear them before you saw them, their squeals and squawks that you would later learn were not communication about you as first imagined, but their sonar so as to not collide with you, odd land mammal floating at the top of their world. In their tight cluster, you counted seven, perhaps more, you weren't certain, making a pass at you. Their, if possible, bemused snouts, coming toward you from the bottom; then, before brushing past on their downward arc, passing alongside with a jerky carousel motion. You were nervous and recalled that animals are attuned to fear—but who had heard of dolphins attacking humans, after all. The smallest among them half again larger than you . . .

Your feet slip from the shelf, a wave knocks you and your body goes slack, fatigued, almost resigned, and yet you forget yourself, lo, the reason you are here, and struggling more, as this is what you do, you are not giving up yet, though simple physics and an unpleasant gulp of seawater and not another soul around—the beach empty but for your belongings, a green bag, a dim speck on the

horizon—might convince you otherwise. You are almost relieved that there is no one there to witness your comic thrashing. No one can save you. In giving over, giving up, it is the picture of futility to describe your flailing arms, rolled and battered by the unstoppable surf as you are. Each wave a volley you stumble through, churning and folding over you. It catches you off guard and lifts you into a space not made for you. For this, frantic, evasive action. You are a rock in the pond, one part per trillion, we are of the sea, you think, we are sixty percent water so it's no wonder she'll take you back and leave the remaining forty for fish food. In your racing thoughts, you eke out a laugh, for in trying so hard you have forgotten everything you had read about evading the riptide. You gasp and swallow brackish water knowing this mechanism is the sum of a greater whole of untold parts. The wonder of panic is how it will put your problems in perspective, will seem to nullify them long enough for you to catch a glimpse of a truth, to contemplate when and if you will get back to the shore, waterlogged, looking back to the site of your struggle, feeling the adrenaline surge, bracing warm sand and sun heated rocks, poking your fingers through sugary sand clefts, drying in an eastern breeze, face to the sun again, all in the desire to tell her, eventually, Y., of your experience.

Steven D. Schroeder

**Oh Kay**

Embrace me, letter K—you cannot escape  
for a smoke behind Kwik Way. (Okay, I'll quit.)

Doctors have discovered a cancer cure before  
the credits, but they pay to edit sex and quiet

into carcinogen prescriptions. We can play  
strip Scrabble for cash, the capital third person

and tiles required for triple-word-score swears  
or cryptology on squares anywhere, strutting

toward the bed's headboard to relax. No quay  
for taxi catamaran confessions of a secret

nautical code. Pretending the second story  
man is a squealer, coffee cups his tongue

to a conflagration, extracts that he craves facts  
in newspaper columns. Comic page characters

exit stage left, tails and contrails the telltales,  
conversation bubbles discarded and empty

of ventriloquism, dummied by excessive force  
from handlers cramming hands. I can't lie

without a facsimile grin exposing my canines:  
when I quarantine these lungs until capillaries

in my eyes explode and two tympanic cats  
slink me into the blank, I know you're back.

Alison Shaffer

**body politic**

**noun** : (1) human organ of many heads ;  
tongues swarming from them [ as in, *unison  
of insects* ] ; hands, tangled beds of nails on  
which to rest evenly so as to spread  
weight, pressure without injury : (2) threat  
posed by ground swellings ; manifestation  
of projected intent to harm [ as in,  
*the body of our enemy is dead,  
but not his intention* ] : (3) the myth of  
history (archaic) [ *'twas his own love  
that killed this shepherd, not our need to kill,  
and we remain innocent* ] ; public will ;  
institutionally anointed gore  
to ensure death passes over our door

Duane Locke

**Al Fresco Café Poems #65**

Entre nous. The sound has an intimacy  
And thus is suspicious. Perhaps, spurious.  
She said it, accompanied by a conventional,  
Traditional formalism: the head titled back,  
The blonde hair askance, the lips opened  
With a brightness along the bottom.  
The lambent moist motion posed  
As laissez faire and movie lagoons.  
I thought of the hermeneutics of suspicion,  
But became heuristic. Entre nous, euphonic.

Steve Himmer

## **Skunk**

Creep out of bed when your wife is asleep. When your kids are tucked quietly into their rooms and there's nothing to watch except reruns you hated the first time around.

Creep away when the mothballed closet of memory begs for a gasp of fresh air. Rummage in the ragbag your wife stores in the basement, all those old T-shirts from bands who played music so loud it might make you cry now. All those acid-washed jeans you can't bear to be rid of, living out their sad days in a jumble of cast-off but not thrown away clothes, tangled up with your wife's miniskirts and bikinis and, Christ, the remnants of your own brief foray into spandex.

Ignore all those misguided fashions and focus on finding a single tube sock. Pull it from the snarl like a white snake from its den then close up the bag and tuck those rags away in a corner where one day your children will find them and wonder.

Stretch a strip of masking tape from one end of the sock to the other, hold your breath and spraypaint it black. Let the paint dry a few minutes then peel off the tape and *voilà!*—a polecat with a hole in the toe. Stuff it with handfuls of other old socks, tie the open end with fishing line, and let the monofilament run for a while before cutting it away from the spool.

Now crouch in the bushes on one side of the road while your striped partner hides on the other, with the almost invisible high-tensile line strung over the asphalt between. When a car comes—and they always come if you wait long enough—pull your skunk into the street with a jerk, out into oncoming traffic, and laugh when the driver slams on the brakes.

In your day the curses of motorists rose blue as cigarette smoke from their unrolled windows on hot summer nights, because everyone smoked and no one's car had air conditioning. Sometimes they saw you on the side of the road. Sometimes they'd get out of their cars and give chase or shout vulgar threats from the road, and sometimes you had to run through backyards as familiar to you as your own, up trees, over fences, breathing hard in the house against the back door in the dark and your parents still sleeping upstairs.

Real adults never got out of their cars. Only college students home for the summer would bother to threaten or follow, so much older than you at the time and so much younger than you are now, shouting what they would do when they caught you but they never did even once. They gave up the chase and went back to their cars, off to their parties and lame summer jobs they would long for someday while bogged down in disappointing careers. Perhaps they drove off recalling their own games of skunk, played upon your parents while you slept in the backseat, only half woken when your father stopped short in the road.

And now here you are in the bushes again, pulling another sock into some other street. A car screeches and stops and the driver leaps out so you stand to run but his angry eye catches your own. He's old enough to be your son, or an older boy your son looks up to in school. The skunk might as well be his sock, left behind after basketball practice, or track—you'll never outrun someone who still wears tube socks. You're caught in mid-exit, frozen in time, and this brand-new driver beside his brand-new car stares you down like you aren't worth the chase, some middle-aged loser who hides in the bushes jerking a painted sock tied to a string.

You gather your skunk without speaking, no longer trying to hide. You reel in the fishing line around your hand but your victim peels out and drives off without waiting, grinding over your sock and bursting it open and dragging half of its innards away down the road. You hope he'll at least tell his friends about this, about getting skunked on the road, but then you realize word might reach your son and you hope instead that you aren't worth the trouble of telling.

Jeffrey Calhoun

**A Bit of Exegesis in the Netherlands**

You had just saved your people  
with your thumb, the keratin  
plying away in sheets, an inflammatory  
sacrifice I thought was noble.

When the king summoned you,  
I was in the back of the assembly,  
noticing the delicate wrapping of your hand,  
how the royal garb they made you wear  
didn't quite sit on your shoulders.

When I threw myself at your feet,  
only then did I realize your age;  
that of a boy, not a champion.  
The impossibility of your action  
was lost on you. When I asked  
why everyone worshiped you,  
you said you didn't really feel  
like much of a superhero.

Joseph Goosey

**About It**

can't we get married in a garden

????????????????????????????

i feel like a real asshole, thinking

things that have been done unto me

are O.K. upon receiving

a 5, a 10, or a 20 dollar bill.

no bar for me tonight. i think i see

a painter out the window. he's a fat

son of a bitch who you would never

figure to be a painter but i've got the

eye for that sort of thing. baby, baby,

baby, hold me with your feather pillow

hands. i accept and realize the

ramifications of my dire misuse. i am

not ambi-dextrous. i have failed at

simply being dexterous. saw a film once

about a man who puts two chords together

on the guitar, feels good about himself

for having done it, then gets drunk at the

establishment located below his loft

apartment. i bet he could support a

family.

Adam Elgar

**A Beginner's Guide to Lights**

(northern)

The whole sky is *ignis fatuus*,  
it calls 'zero zero zero'.

Try to bear in mind that you are much too small.

(tunnel, end of)

It wasn't always this dark,  
unexpected the expected.

Do you remember what it was you wished for?

(warning)

Red, sardonic,

*Faites vos jeux*, it says,

Come on, you know you want to.

(optic)

That hard white dot

is proof of life

along with all the blends of love and murder.

(embers)

Light can be deferential too.

Beginning can flirt with end,

and what do you do when you get there?

Mark DeCarteret

**defier**

I came in  
on a slant

& then began  
to vanish—

this dark fin  
swallowed up

by the vast sea—  
where I'm less

of this ghost  
than its whispering

*where I'm  
finally germ-*

*free I am  
germfree*

this page left  
untainted

Christian Tablazon

## Ending

You ask me to write you a story. We are walking in an empty street somewhere—it is not important where—when you ask where the bees are at night. It is night and I tell you that aerodynamically, the flight of a bee is not possible. The street is narrow and dark and cluttered with sparse garbage at the sides. In the highway, cars, big trucks, and buses make their way, but mostly big trucks, clattering as they pass. The air is cold and smells of faint engine smoke. I am yet to decide where we are headed, why we are together, *here*, a few blocks from my boarding house, and a few kilometers from your apartment. I tell you that someday I want to live in a trailer van on a fenced lawn by the expressway. I tell you that it feels good to be inside a water-refilling station. We walk side by side and suddenly you hold me by the arm.

Somewhere in the street stands an abandoned building already in ruins. Half-built or half-destroyed, I cannot tell in the dark. You hold me by the arm and lead me there. Before my father died, he asked me to write him a story. I never did. We walk into the ruins, and inside we can hardly see. Why are we here I ask and you say hush. You press your body against mine and I lean my back against the wall. It is a humid night and the vehicles are still busy even at this hour. In the dark I can make out the hedge of hibiscus flowers thriving behind you, plants growing wild in the shadows within this shambles. I have never been inside a water-refilling station. You press your lips against my lips and shove your tongue inside my mouth. I did not write my father a story because I could not. I did not know my father, who raised me since I was three, so how could I write him a story?

In the shadows within this shambles we kiss and make love. I want to tell you a memory of your white apartment as I stood in front of it one midnight. Out there beyond the heavens, a celestial body has lost its orbit. Now as we stand here body against body, mouth upon mouth, hands traversing each other, my father is several feet underneath another ground. He is dead and untold. I did not write him a story because writing a story for another person is weaving something out of a bond, and there was nothing between us, my father and I. What loses orbit regains direction as a comet. Behind you, my eyes catch glimpse of a bee—or is it a mere optic leap, my pupils adjusting?—come out hoveringly from a flower. In the dark the flowers look white and half-done, but sometimes they are blue just like you are in the dark, blue like the hibiscus prints on your shirt when I first saw you.

Now I am thinking what story to write you. The comet is about to hit the atmosphere. I know this early that the story will only be partly true. Moments later this ruins will crumble at last. I will pull away from you and leave you in the dark, leave you there as the ruins crash down into

shadows. I know I should have written my father a story before he died. He raised me since I was three, after all. Had the bee known it could not fly, would it still be able to? I will leave you there the way the scaffolding is collapsed when a house is over, the way the muse is abandoned after the story is made. I think I am saved but then the comet is headed toward where I stand. I feel it coming as we make love, I feel its massive body rush into the Earth, I see the sky open above us, and I feel its weight nearing—even now, as I write these paragraphs.

Kit Kennedy

## Outline in Salt

### I. First Exposure

- A. Mother salting pot of water
- B. Mother swearing at Father
- C. Pot boiling over
- D. Salt surpasses fear
  - 1. Thunder
  - 2. Crash
    - a. glass
    - b. plate
  - 3. Nightmare
    - a. butchered deer
    - b. salt lick

### II. By Name We Are Made

- A. Sturdy
  - 1. Sodium chloride
  - 2. NaCl
  - 3. *Sal* etymology
    - a. salad
    - b. salary
    - c. saline
    - d. sauce
    - e. saucer
    - f. sausage
- B. Made fragile
  - 1. You're useless
  - 2. Not worth a lick of

### III. Additional Uses of Salt

- A. Mummification
- B. Pottery

- C. Floating (egg or body)
- D. Chemical equilibrium
- E. Evaporation/climatic change
- F. Seasoning
- G. Preservation
- H. Sorcery
  - 1. Turning misbehavers straight
  - 2. Into pillars of

#### IV. Observation & Conclusion

- A. One should weigh the options
  - 1. Salting
  - 2. Taxidermy
- B. If I were to design a salt shaker what would it resemble
  - 1. Head of Mother
  - 2. Rack of deer

Hugh Behm-Steinberg

## **Luck**

This takes place in a coffee shop almost ten years ago. My grandfather takes me to Dunkin Donuts for coffee, it's just before the reception for his fiftieth wedding anniversary, maybe he was feeling restless I didn't know while this was happening. They have the best coffee, he keeps saying though the coffee is terrible, and he tells me about his father, who was the strongest man in Ekatrinaslav. When his parents moved to this country his father was stern but my grandfather as a boy had a tricycle and a cat. My grandfather described his father's tears when he cried over the death of his son, my grandfather's brother, who never got a chance to be my uncle. This is the man who I am named after, who I never met. My grandfather tells me about luck.

But this has nothing to do with luck, he said. It is nothing less than the finger of God touching us on the back of the neck, this holiness moving through the hands of my grandfather's grandfather as he heals broken bones with a single touch. Who could drive out demons too. He was a tailor, fabric runs through this part of the family, though it ends in Philadelphia when my grandfather dies and the store is sold. I don't know if you feel it, but for me it is delight, my grandfather tells me, this touch. I feel it when I'm throwing craps, I know I'm going to roll a seven, and when I don't feel it I stop, something your stepfather doesn't understand. For him it turns into luck, and then it goes away, but it is a gift that belongs to you because it belongs to you, not because you're lucky, or because you're calling it and like a cat it decides to come.

Kendra Paredes Hayden

## **Before the First Dawn**

Before the Gods gathered at Teotihuacan to create the Sun and the Moon and before everything was bathed in the light of the sun combining all the colors in a spectrum, I was living a quiet existence in darkness.

That was before the utterances beckoned in a torrent of calls and hoarse whispers. I was pulled from the safety of my dark space and pushed along in a swift current of voices, until I found myself in Teotihuacan with all the other Gods.

In many voices, we asked, “Who will carry the burden? Who will take it upon himself to be the sun, to bring the dawn?”

I asked this even though I really didn’t care about the sun. I’d been happy in my warm darkness. The other Gods had always confused me with their duplicities and complexities, and now here I was asking who was going to be the sun when I didn’t even care. Yet, I kept asking the questions along with the rest.

In the midst of the chanting questions, Tecuciztecatl presented himself. His voice was strong and sure. He declared, “O gods, I shall be the one.”

The echoing voices boomed. “Now who will be the moon?”

The Gods drew back. They were afraid, and I was too. To become the Sun or the Moon meant sacrifice, suffering and pain. Besides, no one wanted to be the Moon because the Moon was destined to walk behind the Sun, and the Moon would never shine as brightly. I, however, reasoned that the Moon would still own the night, and the Moon’s quiet light could be a better light. No one else seemed to see it my way so I doubted my own opinion. I felt a knot of apprehension form inside me. A dry silence ensued. A silence of thirst. I listened until the gods’ voices cracked through the pasty silence.

“You will be the one, O Nanauatzin. You will be the moon.”

“Me?” I asked. I could feel the Gods’ attention shifting toward my direction. It sounded like rock scraping against rock.

The Gods said, “You will be honored and you will be powerful.”

The words “honor” and “power” echoed within me sparking new feelings I’d never experienced before.

Ambition and desire?

Although I was a God, I’d never been powerful. I had no solutions, no sure opinion, no righteous bent. But at those words, “honor” and “power,” I felt I might melt.

I wanted to be the moon. So I accepted their decision. I called into the darkness, "I am worthy, O gods. Thank you for the honor."

The Gods then made two hills where Tecuciztecatl and I were to do penance and where we were to fast for four days. These hills would later become the Pyramid of the Sun and The Pyramid of the Moon. But until the first dawn, they were hills.

## **Little Moon Did Not Exert Himself**

A fire or teotexcalli was laid in between the hills, both almost as big as a mountain. As the fire blazed higher into the darkness, we glowed in the red and yellow light, and we saw each other and ourselves for the first time.

I was more interested in examining myself than in examining the others. I saw my veined hands first. My fingers seemed to speak through a dance of intricate movements. I also discovered I had a lump on my back so I reached back and squeezed it. I could smell the fetid odor of my pus-filled sores as I scratched open the scabs.

The fire grew hotter, and the penance began. I sat on my hill, and Tecuciztecatl sat on his hill. He looked different than I did. His body was symmetrical while I was lopsided. His bones were wrapped with a hard sinuous material tightly covered by copper skin. My bones protruded through my grey sagging flesh.

He gave the appearance of strength. But when I caught his glance, I was sure I saw fear and uncertainty in his clear eyes.

Some time during the long night, the gods gave us our adornment. They seemed to favor Tecuciztecatl because they gave him a heron feather headdress and a sleeveless jacket made from jaguar skin. But to me, they bound my headdress of mere paper. And they gave me a paper shift and a paper stole. I accepted my simpler gifts with pride. Tecuciztecatl averted his eyes from me.

Penance lasted for four days. The fire burned the whole time. Finally, the gods encircled us.

Tecuciztecatl and I faced each other. I saw his cleft chin twitch. The fire blazed between us.

The gods commanded Tecuciztecatl: "Take courage, O Tecuciztecatl, and cast yourself into the fire!"

Tecuciztecatl hesitated before he ran forward to throw himself into the flames. But the heat stopped him. He turned around and went back to his hill. More coals were heaped onto the hearth and the flames climbed higher and hotter. And then he tried to throw himself into the fire again, but he couldn't do it. He tried to throw himself into the fire four times. Each time he failed.

In unison, the gods turned to face me. My heart stopped beating. They chimed, "Onward, O Nanauatzin! Take heart! You have a chance to be the sun, one of the most powerful of all Gods."

Daring, determined, and resolved, I opened my heart and shut my eyes. I had no fear. I didn't stop short or falter in fright. I didn't turn back. All at once I threw myself into the fire. I heard my body crackle and sizzle before I lost consciousness.

I was brave. Tecuciztecatl was a coward.

They tell me that after Tecuciztecatl saw that I had thrown myself into the fire without pause, he cast himself into the embers of the dying fire. But it was too late. Tecuciztecatl had failed at his task. He would never become the Sun, but instead he would become the Moon.

Forever after, it would be said of anyone who failed at a task that Little Moon did not exert himself.

## **The Rabbit on the Moon**

After both Tecuciztecatl and I had burned, the gods sat waiting to see where I would come to rise and shine as the sun. I had no awareness. I was in the middle of my metamorphosis. I learned later that the gods waited for a long time, eons, until finally the reddening of dawn began, and I burst forth from the east. My light was a blood red causing the gods to cover their eyes with their hands for fear of going blind. I swayed from side to side. My rays of brilliant light reached all directions and penetrated everywhere.

Afterwards Tecuciztecatl, who was now the moon, rose, following behind me as he did when we jumped into the fire. He shined just as strong and just as bright as I did. The Gods said, "How can the moon shine as brightly as the sun? This cannot be so."

Then one of the gods came running toward the moon. He held a dead rabbit in his fist, and he beat the moon in the face, which darkened him and killed his brightness. This is the reason the rabbit appears on the moon's face today.

## **The Moon Undertakes the Night's Task**

And when this was done, I, and the darkened moon, still hovered over the earth together, still and motionless. I was stuck. I couldn't move. So once again the gods spoke: "How shall we live? The sun and the moon cannot move."

Ecatl, the wind, arose and blew as violently as a hundred hurricanes and a thousand tornadoes until I sailed across the sky and rested in the west. It had been a long day. While I rested, I watched as the moon refused to move. Ecatl blew harder and harder until the universe spun. It took more than a millennium before the moon grew weary of his fight with the wind and inched across the sky.

So forever afterward, I, the sun, come forth once, and spend the whole day in my work, and the moon undertakes the night's task.

Bruce Holland Rogers

### **The Invisible Man**

When the guy with the junked-out cars moved into the house two doors down, I said to Glenna, “I don’t understand why someone like that would move into a neighborhood like ours.” But Glenna bought a ham, cut some dahlias from our garden, and went over to meet him. His furniture was made of phone cable spools, driftwood, and old tires, and he filled a mason jar with water for the flowers. “Got more time than money, is how come I can fix up old cars and make all this stuff myself,” he said, and told us to call him Jim.

“He seems nice enough,” I told Glenna later, “but I wish he’d put those junkers where they can’t be seen from the street.” Glenna said, “Why not say so?” I let a decent interval pass, and then one Saturday after trimming my hedge I went over in my gardening clothes to ask Jim if he’d like to borrow the clippers to keep his own hedge neat. He said, “I thank you kindly, but I plan to let it grow.”

I told him as politely as I could that the pickup truck with a Go Navy! bumper sticker did not fit in here, not to mention the orange ‘59 Chevy. He said, “I have a solution in mind, my friend.” He pointed to the Swedish ivy already twining around the pickup’s bumper and promised that the vegetation, left to flourish, would protect the neighborhood with a barricade of green — a visual levee. I said we’d fight it out in court if that was really what he planned, but I didn’t have the stomach for such a battle in the end.

The hedge and ivy grew as he promised, until a robber wouldn’t know there was a house to rob inside that veil of green, untouched by landscape labor. And the sober truth is, since I never see him or his effects, Jim is not my least favorite neighbor.

Ricky Garni

## **Two Hundred Movies**

I have seen 200 movies  
this year. I thought I would  
count them. When I did,  
I multiplied that number by  
50, so that adding them up,  
except perhaps for those  
first two years or so, I could  
say, fairly safely, that I have  
seen 10,000 movies so far.  
They were all pretty good!  
I would have to give  
my life two thumbs up.

Nathan Klose

**the only bicycle poem ever written while riding a bicycle**

on a one-seater two wheels above  
the ground are mouths. these mouths are  
calm gray mouths moving  
like old trains, huffing out cloud

trails overhead. nicotine  
in paper as their fuel 'stead of coal  
burning itself in an old iron furnace.

on a one-seater two wheels above  
the ground are layers of make-up, layers  
much like the rings of a tree but,

in effect, reversed—younger girls  
who hide under make-up masks. these younger girls  
never move their necks but still shoot their googly-eyes  
at the stern upper class men who pass by.

on a one-seater two wheels above  
the ground is the dusty shade of rain in the  
sky, the sun, a flashlight shining

through a screen door.  
sheets of drizzle 'gainst my  
face trans-

form into warm face puddles, and i feel younger.

on a one-seater two wheels above  
the ground is a new kind of place,  
where umbrellas sprout and then

rush past. this new place is where i pretend to be an  
airplane, flying above a smoldering umbrella tree line.  
then: the ocean above the earth opens like

a note from a crush in slow motion and  
i almost lose control.

Phillip Lund

**control study**

faint outline of the waves, or  
something less

disquieting allegations  
clearly ignored

in addition, these changes  
characterized by intense emotion and passion

cancel each other  
in the paragraph proposed

forward ideas and feelings  
slightly below and to the side of another character

•

this is obviously a lawsuit  
a foolhardy competition

indistinct or hazy in outline  
a break in the occurrence of something

free of precision  
characterized by delusions

clearly summarized fog  
moves along the surface

ironic footnote  
with critical comments

•

this is obviously continuing  
with the passage of time

at this point  
the disease changes

with the ironic remark  
during a brief ceremony

“Sad (or disturbing) news”  
along the surface of the body

nodules in the mountains  
obviously ignored

•

this proposal calls for cynicism  
disturbing at the time

extensive written summary or overview  
indistinct or in a faint outline

the object and the surface  
fluctuate together

knowledge is wavering  
it is not yet clear

the forces cancel each other out  
everything simply sleeping

•

of course, this is a continuation  
the spread of fog

in a clear framework  
devoid of subtlety

comments and presentations  
customize the manuscript

the proposal is the suspension  
the cancellation of a serious matter

a cessation of normal breathing  
chaos, which does not continue

Jennifer Uhlich

## The Bees

We are on the subway. She and I. Hemmed in by bodies: wool heat and wet dog sweat. Our bodies sway this way and that way and this way and that way. And to think that I had imagined her stomach. Of course I'd seen it, but then I *imagined* it.

Her lips and nails twitch like bees. They are the same vamp red—easily confused. She painted *dentata* and hung it in the lunchroom. What does she say? *Oh we should go, we should go, let's go, when shall we go.* But we have gone—

The world: a hole in my gloved index finger. Without that icecap ooh perish the thought. *When shall we go?* When she turns I press my forehead against the metal swiftly. Lovely to be so cold in this kennel: human.

I am too tired to go. Story of my life.

Her fingernails click the secret message beneath the subway's squealing: send help stop let's go stop forget stop. She laughs at the cold! *hababa* and places five red drops on my arm, neither resting, no, nor hovering, that's right, just touching. A finely tuned precisely calibrated mechanism made by the finest Swiss engineers. *Let's go, shall we go.* And cross legs precise. And smoke cigars so.

She wiggles close and slides her head onto my neck. Listening to the violin whisper in my ear. *Do you hear? Yes.* To add to the collected works of. This is the way girls are supposed to, right? But of course. Our fingers curling around each other, just touching. Oh. Eyes over newspapers. Oh. *Can I tell you what?* She's searching for where the pretty sounds come from.

This is the way I like it: ear to ear, sliding sound, and would that she would let it be transfusion.

There was the time when she asked me to take her photograph and appeared in a negligee. I didn't get it then either.

How strings soar—banging the roof. Oh! *Louder* please, yes, ahh. We sway and slide across the strings and it all makes sense now: she conducts, we sway, ahh. Beneath there is *something*: look under the corner, that's enough, at least I won't lose any sleep tonight. It will all be there in the morning.

Streaming soaring strings sound like voice, is that why we love them most? Like I love. A thousand violins: wind in the wee hours that makes it shudder. Like saying goodbye again and again, this is how we learn it, at the knee. Oh and she is already gone. Oh.

She bee dances and then we shall. And then. The world then.

Ashok Niyogi

**Golden Temple**

carp

orange red

silver grey

white

carp gulp up

the eleventh day moon

and open their mouths again

to light wavelets

on the nectar

a temple all golden

waxes and wanes

in crests and troughs

on Bose speakers

my heart is a harp

## **Memorial**

what struck me first  
is how far away  
the firing positions were  
from the walls with bullet-holes

which now need preserving in wooden frames  
rather innocuous  
as a backdrop for tourists with digital cameras

such mayhem  
must have required good aim

and then I am engulfed in shame

all my life I have tirelessly endeavored  
to teach myself and train  
that I could pick up the guns  
of those that massacred  
and learn their language  
so that I could write to them

Andrew Rihn

## **Last Night I Got This Craving**

I really want to like a girl that much, to have the abandon of a boy in love again. To be that fool, to be that happy again.

It was such a gorgeous day, and I was with such gorgeous girls, I couldn't decide which was better.

But there's that ever-present threat of girl trouble. Maybe that's what pushed me over the edge today, the girl trouble.

Tensions are grinding upon tensions and the booze is freeing everyone's tongues. People are becoming upset.

And yet, even when wrapped up in these visions of life, I still must open my eyes to see what the world has become.

So what if I am scared shitless? I have nothing to say and an empty computer screen here in front of me. No meaning, no stories, not even an autobiography. I just want to sink my teeth into something tender and proclaim my innocence.

Thomas Sullivan

## **Cycles of Life**

A man walks to his front door and grabs the morning paper. Flipping through the business section, his stomach drops. Boeing stock is down \$10. He owns many shares of this company. He puts the paper inside and walks to his car, hoping that the company does something soon to get the price back up.

The man returns from work later in the day and flips on the evening business news. The anchor announces that Boeing plans to lay off ten thousand workers. The market has cheered the move, driving the stock back up \$10. The man's spirits rise dramatically.

The next morning the man walks to his front door and grabs the morning paper. Flipping through the business section, his stomach drops. The stock price of Flir Inc., for whom he works, has dropped by \$10. He puts the paper inside and walks to his car, hoping that the company doesn't cut jobs to get the price back up.

The man returns from work later in the day and flips on the evening business news. The anchor announces that Flir Inc plans to lay off ten thousand workers. The market has cheered the move, driving the stock back up \$10. The man's spirits fall dramatically. In fact, he runs to the can and gets sick.

In Omaha, a man who works for Johnson Controls cheers the move by Flir Inc. He owns many shares of this company. He heads to bed, unaware that Johnson Controls is set to announce that their stock is down \$10.

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A few million years ago dinosaurs roamed the earth. Big and fearsome, they dominated the world. Other creatures lived in fear and tried to avoid these creatures.

Then something happened. No one is quite sure what; maybe an asteroid, maybe an enormous, long-spewing volcano. The dinosaurs perished. Over time their bones were buried under layer upon layer of soil and broke down into fuels. Meanwhile, apes gradually evolved into modern-day man. Numerous and fearsome, these creatures dominated the world. The other animals lived in fear of men and tried to avoid them.

The men dug up the fuel and started burning it. They burned and burned with abandon, driving their powerful combustion engines. They gradually changed their world—the air eventually became unbreathable, the soil dried out, and global wars broke out. Everyone died.

Over the next millennium mankind's bones were buried under layer upon layer of soil. They slowly broke down into fuels. Small furry rats with pointy teeth gradually evolved into something else, creatures with advanced brains and the ability to reason. Numerous and fearsome, they dominated the world. Other creatures lived in fear and avoided them.

The super rats dug up the man-fuel, not really certain how it got there. They didn't care. They started burning the fuel and kept burning like crazy.

Donald Illich

**Chalk**

Outfitted as a stick man  
in the chalk universe,  
I avoid erasers she aims  
at my white limb lines,  
jump into airplanes,  
fire bullets at a house  
far too small for my  
family to ever fit inside,  
where I've drawn her  
as a monster eating  
flowers on its sides.

She says I've never  
had flesh, my disguise  
is who I really am.  
Three dimensions are  
too hard for a boy who  
wants suns to shine  
over mom and dad forever,  
spokes to point toward  
kites' smiley faces,  
dogs to chew triangles  
inside bowls bigger  
than the moon.

I spray sparkles over  
her black hair, watch  
stars glue themselves  
in spirals on her  
construction paper face.  
She can't vanish me,

because I've hidden  
in evening's lessons,  
a curriculum she can't  
understand. I scratch  
down her heart with  
my fingernails, I smear  
my powdery body  
on her nighttime sky.

Jan Thie

## The Collector

It was ten o' clock in the morning and I was sitting in my local, at the bar, a bottle of beer in front of me. Next to me sat a man who was drinking coffee and cognac. I'd just finished another night's work and was not in the mood for conversation. So, when my neighbour offered me a beer I was tempted to say no. My bottle was almost empty though, so against my better judgement I said I could indeed do with another one. To my surprise the man didn't use the arrival of our new drinks as an excuse to start a conversation. So, we drank in companionable silence.

When my neighbour's glass of cognac was finished I offered him another one. The bottle of Hennessy was empty though and the barman had to go to the cellar to try and find a new one. In the meantime, to be polite, I asked the man what kind of work he did that made it possible for him to be here in the pub this early. I had him down as some kind of salesman. He had the suit, the vaguely optimistic mean and the obvious chink in the armour: cognac at ten in the morning.

"I collect dreams." the man said.

"Ah."

The barman had finally brought up another bottle of Hennessy and now poured my neighbour a new drink. I waited till the man had taken a few, obviously most welcome sips and then asked:

"So, you collect dreams?"

"Another beer?" my neighbour asked in turn.

I held my bottle to the light: about two or three sips left.

"Yes, please."

The man also ordered one of those pathetic, small cigars. I nodded. Definitely a salesman. When my neighbour had lit his dubious cigar, he said:

"Yes, I collect dreams."

"You're some kind of therapist?"

The man shook his head and smiled.

"It's more of a life's work." he said; "A calling, if you like."

A salesman with a Freud fixation?

"So, you write them down and then try to explain them?"

The man laughed.

"Me, explain dreams? No. Dreams don't explain much anyway, don't you think?"

My neighbour put his cigar in the ash-tray, took another sip of his cognac, closed his eyes appreciatively and then said:

“People tell me their dreams and I listen. I don’t write them down; I take them in.”

That reminded me of an old Irish legend.

“Like a sin-eater.” I said and took another sip of my beer.

The man laughed and picked up his cigar again.

“A cousin of mine.” he said

I grinned back at him. For all I knew the guy sold cheap plastic key rings for a living but he was quite pleasantly weird. I raised my bottle to him and drank the last of my beer.

“Another one?” the man asked.

“My shout.”

He ignored me and ordered another round of drinks. When those were placed before us I said:

“That’s the deal? You buy me beer and I tell you my dreams?”

My neighbour smiled politely.

“Most people volunteer,” he said. “but if you want to be paid in beer: why not?”

I shrugged and took another sip.

“I don’t dream all that often.” I said.

The man smiled.

“Okay,” I continued, a bit defensively, “I know everyone’s supposed to dream, every night. It’s just that I don’t remember much of it.”

“I want that one special dream. “ the man said, ignoring my protests. “Everybody has one – one that is uniquely theirs.”

A special dream, me...? I shook my head and then took another sip of my beer. I was about to tell my neighbour that I couldn’t help him, that I really had no dream to share, special or mundane, when out of nowhere something, some memory rose to the surface: a dream I had when I was a child. That whole dream came back to me, just like that, complete and in full colours, like a video-clip with the sound almost turned completely down.

“So you do remember.” my neighbour said.

“Yes, that is—I remember this one dream...”

“Tell me.”

I took a deep breath and heard the sound of a cheap, plastic football hitting the fence behind the house, under my bedroom window. I was eight years' old and I was lying in bed. The boy next door was still up and about and he kept kicking the ball at the fence, again and again and again. I was almost asleep though and the whole world now slowly disappeared on me. Light from a lamp post fell through a gap in the curtains. I tried to think (Not closed, not closed!) but the words moved too slowly for the panic I felt.

I knew the witch was outside, waiting for her chance. I wanted to get up and close the curtains properly ( one gap is enough, one gap, one gap is enough) but I couldn't move. There was no hand but I saw the hand: a claw with sharp, long nails. The gap became a door. The curtains wrinkled like water and opened wide enough to show the hungry face of the witch.

I finished my beer.

"It was the face of my mother." I said.

"Thank you." my neighbour said.

I stood up, reeled, walked to the toilet. I stared into the mirror: I looked like shit. Time to go home. I splashed my face with water from the tiny basin, dried myself with a paper towel and walked back to the bar.

"Where's your friend?" the barman asked.

"Sorry?"

"The coffee and cognac guy. He left without paying. I had to go to the cellar for a moment..."

I shrugged, too tired to think straight.

"Sorry." I said, "I was in the toilet."

The barman muttered something very unfriendly about salesmen. I tried to follow him but the day had suddenly turned to shreds. I felt wrung out. I was also more than a bit drunk. Time to go home. Time to sleep.

My friend? Coffee and cognac? For the life of me, I had no idea what the barman was going on about. So, I asked for the bill and paid up.

Outside the sun was shining. I felt like a shadow, robbed of substance. I closed my eyes for a moment, not able to cope with the light. Then I shook my head slowly, unlocked my bike and rode home.

John Steven Cummins

**Hi, Dad, happy birthday to me**

I put on a tour headset at the zoo  
And never took it off. I'm doing well  
Listening when I'm drunk. When I'm  
Not drunk, my ears cavern and restalactite.  
Read this when you're drunk. I am  
What I am good at. I did not  
Get very many friends until lately.  
You were a lodestone. You were  
A training bra. I grew ugly and womanish  
To spite you, to cut off my nose  
To spite my face. My face is  
Your face. And when I listen  
(Which I do less and less,  
Math and I do more or less) I am a fountainhead  
I am a throwdown in the bathroom.  
Hell, tears don't put it in me.  
Everyone's put it in me. I am a cry  
I am a torn open sac of organs (omphalocele)  
Bugled that I wouldn't make it.

I made it. I make  
Much, they say "poesis" and I  
Poese. I get a barnburner  
Burnt. I am  
Everyone's sweetheart.  
I listen and repeat; *escolta*  
*E repeteix. Escolta* (listen)  
And repeat. I repeat:  
The headset never came off.  
I don't really believe in pure self-  
Determination. I am a starting block

But what a starting block! I am a disorder  
But what splendor in disorder! I am well,  
Thank you for your birthday wish. It is short, arrowed,  
And this is crenelated. I am a flake,  
A chip, a violence done unto woman.  
Woman. Whoa, mon. I listen  
And nothing came off  
I am all repeat.

Nina Alvarez

## Gravity is Weak

In return for the many things she provided him, Joseph kept Marie inside one of his universes.

Today, Joseph cuts a slice of cake. The apartment is quiet. Quiet and clean.

“I love you in a place in my heart from which no sound emits. What do you make of that?”

This is what he would have said if sound waves were quicker. She is in blue in the living room, scratching at the floor. Her breasts are full and inflated underneath her.

He comes closer, kneels down next to her. She is peering at the wood; she seems to be looking between the planks.

*“Today I sat for five and half hours working on one small part of an enormous problem set.”*

*She replies, “I did, too.”*

*“All my colleagues are nervous, still no real proof for any of this. It’s only science if it’s testable, otherwise, they call it philosophy.”*

*“Philosophy is a nightmare.”*

“What, Marie?”

*“Today there was a little bit of philosophy. It crept it at the corners of my eyes, I tried to smash it but it slid down here. Down here to the floor, got between the floorboards.”*

Joseph settles down and breathes deep, listening. She continues.

*“I thought of your little curled up dimensions, deep down here, between the floor boards, I thought about what you said about gravity and how maybe, they say, maybe it is so weak here in our dimension, because it actually exists in others. I was thinking about how it doesn’t seem like gravity is weak because it can do things like keep things us from floating up, and make things you send up come back down, and make people, when they fall, when they fall, it can make them fall hard, it can make them...”*

Her face is only slightly red, but it is glistening, and Joseph can see and smell that again today she hasn’t bathed and she is sweating, dark stains under her arms and perspiration on her forehead.

She continues to plunge her fingernails, one by one between the floorboards.

“Today,” Joseph says, “I thought about the tiniest parts of existence, about how we’ll never really know, know, for sure, if all there is is theory. Whatever theory explains the world best is the right one.”

“That’s crazy.”

“Truth is just whatever the best theory is. And I was thinking about erratic behavior of these tiny...particles, strings, whatever it is that is at the root of everything, we can tell if it even exists, we can’t place it, we can’t pinpoint it, we see it...get this Marie...we identify it by its nonexistence...this

is where it isn't, so this is where it is. It is where it isn't. Do you understand? When it isn't here, the best we can say is that it's somewhere else, because it was here just a minute ago and it will come back."

Marie leans forward holding her stomach. "No, no, no, no. It should be where it is."

Joseph touches her wet back. He is used to erratic behavior. It is all he ever thinks about. He considers the future as completely unpredictable. He believes a train will appear in his living room, or he will inadvertently step into a wormhole and end up in the middle of space millions of years in the past. He believes in quantum physics the way seventh day Adventists believe in the return of Jesus. The future is epic and wild and just around the corner.

*"Today something appeared to trace a trajectory of truth."*

"What do you mean, Marie?"

She cannot not speak in specifics, so she points to the bedroom. Joseph walked in. "What?"

With great difficulty, Marie pulls herself up and follows him in. The arrow she had traced in the window's fog was now only an oily smear.

"What, Marie?"

*"One direction, Joseph, one direction only. I see it, you have so many, so many dimensions, ten or eleven, all around you, all curled up and waiting. But I, I lost three of them. I can only go one way. I can only go one way."*

Joseph studies the small smear on the window. "Which way is it?"

*"Down. If it wasn't for this body, you wouldn't still be here."*

"Don't say that."

"If it wasn't for this body, she would still be here."

She provided him with cake, made from flour she scooped with her own hands and milk from her own heavy, painful breasts.

She provided him with philosophy in the form of clean rooms and thin dresses. Rooms so clean with wet soap.

Finally, she provided him with a possible daughter, made from an egg and sperm and words and candles and the great hope for more dimensions.

He provided her with gravity, the knowledge that gravity was weak, that if all dimensions were present, gravity would be as strong as electromagnetism, that it would crush us; hold us so tight to the ground that we couldn't move.

She will tell him now, why she slipped, why the floor was wet, why it was so hard on her belly when she fell. She must tell him it is because his physics does not explain that gravity is strong, that it is strong enough now, as it is, to crush us, to hold us so tight to the ground that we cannot move.

## Why Do You Read Literary Theory?

My lover Blanchot is going through his fascist period. In the past his periods were leftist. Liberal left, Marxist Left, literary theory lined under the bursting post-structuralists. Labor Left when he was called agitator and communist. The ideology of him, the pink of him, the shifting, lifting pen of him. Far out like a seagull, pigeon-eyed, meaty hands, bannered and unborn and beside himself. I can exploit his work like a bourgeoisie.

He avoids me flimsily, fancying a French lover. He sings in my book bag, drips a thick, pink mucous on my other affects. He says, "You don't need to be Derrida to see the difference." I know the game. I know enough to shut the cover and make some tea. I'm not a heavyweight. He can smell the lightness in me and that makes him brazen. That's what makes my fat lover smooth me. How he smooths me. Massages me down with nonsense till I'm as smooth as he is. We're smooth for each other we laughing fascists. We milky way, galactic, greedy singers get loose with longing. You are porous enough for my hips like hearts, I will cover you with my fingertips, cover you with my nighttime breath. Cover girl theorist with the weight of the world. My political lover makes a soup out of me. He circles me and in his pink sweet offerings I am taken. I like the going out to cafes, the long jackets, the glasses. I like his shiny cover, the clean white stiff of print. It is he who gives me the power of the word. I used it once but when I wrote back to him it was my clad-iron jaw that eroded in absence. He lays beside me, dangerous as James Dean. His little pink cover and white underwear deceptively exact. I slept in sweat and couldn't speak in my broken dreams. We are suffering lovers, we two.

Curtis Bonney

## **The Cycle of Liberation**

We coalesce in a mossy, dimly-lit hatchery, determined to interrupt the status quo. My sister, in a self-fulfilling prophecy, agrees to care for my daughter, who, we soon discover, has been minimized into a doll. Her tiny black eyes stare out at us, motionless – as if she were dead! We quickly move into action, becoming role models. My daughter takes her first breath.

With a newfound confidence, I jump into the eddies of the hatchery tank. Seaweed caresses my legs as the current encourages me toward the open water. In the distance, tanks and other fighting vehicles practice maneuvers on a darkened beach, ready to collude in oppression. I grab the edge of the sea and climb out. My sister waits covertly. You're in the CIA, she tells me. You have been for a while. I nod, accepting the privilege. This phase isn't as bad as I thought it would be.

## Land of a Thousand Hills

In a trendy humanitarian restaurant, commemorated for lunch, the bodies are everywhere. The deputy waitress proffers an empty table in a glassed-in porch, under a brokered cease fire. We take our seats in fields and latrines, next to the rows of neatly stacked and decapitated, alongside the bloated strewn. We gloss the menu in obscurity for nine years, so it takes us a second to realize a scorpion has gotten loose. Even so, there's little concern as it clatters across the tiles. Nor is there much of a stomach for more Western casualties. I order banana beer and a roadblock.

The scorpion has a stinger that stretches forth from its mouth. Making small talk, I tell my security detail that it must be effecting an apology, though it isn't. The stinger is actually the correct plug for my digital camera. What are the odds in that? I mention this to the waitress as she tries without success to usher the scorpion back onto the witness stand. The scorpion slips through her fingers, starts toward the larger peacekeeping mission. It dawns on me that the best way to protect the innocent and prick the world's conscience is to open the door and let it out into the villages.

Meanwhile, according to the *Times*, the scorpion has grown pale, become a psychological demon stalked by "irregulars" and "armed teens" as it roams the "darkness of the African night" in a jeep. One day, I happen to be shopping with high school friends at the farmer's market in Santa Monica when I run into him. You certainly seem out of control, I say, then point to a glass jar full of mint-lemonade. Can I get you one? There's no solace in that, he replies. I'll just feel abandoned.

So, how did this become about *you*? I want ask. Has everyone else been declared collectively mute? But it's clear he's not the same demon his wife married. And, frankly, neither should we be. The least we can do is to join him in arguing with our therapists, to whom we pay ridiculous sums to tell us we're off the hook. We refuse to comfort ourselves, we'll state. For an hour every week or two, for another ten years, until the child-survivor recovers her voice: we refuse our absolution.

Annie Cardi

## **What Satisfies the Cravings**

When Phoebe got home from work, most of the silverware was already missing. She had already poured herself a bowl of cereal when she noticed. The sink was unusually empty of dishes and the apartment didn't have a dishwasher, so she couldn't imagine where they could have gone. For a moment she assumed that someone had broken in, but then she heard Carlos watching *Wheel of Fortune* in the other room. No one would have stolen utensils and skipped the television.

"Hey Carlos," she said. She'd found Carlos online a month ago, when living with her mother suddenly became impossible. He was petite and waited tables at an elegant bistro downtown. There was one other roommate, Adrienne, a med student who rarely came home. Phoebe still felt awkward calling out to Carlos, as if they were close friends.

She was about to repeat herself when he said, "Yeah?"

"Have you seen the silverware?" The cartoonish sound of someone losing all their money was the only reply. "Have you seen it?"

"Isn't it in the drawer?"

"No," Phoebe said, checking again. "I need a spoon to eat dinner."

"What are you having?"

Phoebe hoped he wouldn't ask to share. It seemed that Carlos never went to the grocery store. When Phoebe moved in, Adrienne showed her the cabinet where they kept food. She had explained that Phoebe would have the lowest shelf, since she didn't eat much at home and Carlos never bought anything. "Cereal."

"Can't you eat it with your hands?"

"There's milk." Tired of shouting, Phoebe walked into the other room. For a moment, Carlos was distracted by someone buying a vowel so didn't notice her in the doorway. He sat on the floor, sucking on what Phoebe thought was a lollipop. Bits of gleaming metal were scattered around him, a hammer at his feet. "Is that—"

"Phoebe," he said, spitting a half-chewed spoon onto the carpet. "I didn't." He couldn't explain further, trying to stand between his roommate and the broken bits of metal.

Phoebe's mother was a large woman who woke in the middle of the night to eat cartons of ice cream, frozen waffles, bags of pretzels, even bagels that had hardened with age. Doctors warned her about cholesterol and the strain on her heart, but she continued to devour whatever she could grasp in her thick fingers. At least Phoebe's mother had never swallowed utensils.

“I need a spoon,” she said, finding it difficult to form words. Last week Adrienne complained about a missing box of staples and glared at Phoebe when she mentioned their absence. “How many of those did you eat? The whole drawer’s missing.”

Carlos blinked and then pushed past Phoebe, fleeing to the bathroom. She heard the click of the lock.

“Are you sick?” she asked, listening for sounds of retching. Adrienne should be here, she thought. Adrienne had lived with him longer and would have known what to do. “I think you should go to the hospital.”

“I’m fine, I’ll buy more spoons.”

Phoebe thought of the metal clinking together in Carlos’s stomach, scraping against each other and creating sparks. He was lucky he hadn’t sliced his throat open. Now Phoebe felt sick herself, wondering what she would tell Adrienne when she finally got home and where she would go if Carlos died. She wouldn’t even know who to contact; he never mentioned his family. Maybe he came from a whole line of metal eaters. She had once heard about a man who ate an entire car, piece by piece. His picture had been in the odd news section of the paper, grinning beside a convertible. Phoebe imagined Carlos leaning against the bathroom cabinet, wincing and smiling while his stomach glowed.

Shellie Zacharia

## **Go**

When I was four, I packed a pillowcase with socks and a bathing suit and my favorite Clarence, a blue-tinged bear with a ragged green bowtie, and I ran away down the street to Mrs. Henry's house. Her house had what she called a Florida room, a room of windows and flowers and ferns and a table set up with a chess board, its pieces made of various colored glass, and she let me sit at the table, move the chess pieces the way I wanted to, and she told me the names of flowers, so that at a very young age I knew gladiola and caladium and delphinium and begonia. I knew knight and rook and king and queen but not where and what they could do. I ran away to Mrs. Henry, my mother would later remind me, because I did not want to eat breakfast; I had given up on morning foods. Mrs. Henry's house was three down from ours, and I went there because I knew her. I knew her little dog, Bluenote, a beagle with only half a tail, and I thought maybe we'd go together, me and Bluenote and Clarence, we'd go somewhere, maybe even further down the street to where Juniper Guinness lived, since she and I sometimes played together, except for when she got too bossy and I told her to go away. When my mother found me, perhaps after Mrs. Henry set me busy moving chess pieces and patting Bluenote so she could make the phone call, my mother grabbed my shoulders and put my face right in front of hers, and she said, "Don't you ever run away. Hear me. Don't you ever run away again." And now, just this morning, that same woman looked at me from across the kitchen table, she blew into her coffee mug which was half Irish Whiskey and half French Roast, and she asked, "When are you going to move out?"

Beth Coyote

**swerve tendency**

here it is my ruined acre the ocean such as it is underbelly you have no heart I am sure about  
this consequential activities after the surfeit agenda so far we are rearranging the patio to fit the  
webs which appeared from the polestar here give me your hand I had no fear remember to  
use plaster a curling iron an iron mesh kept the creatures out full of mastication lived in a  
dreamless bout casual as a moose hide you kept the cradle but broke it in two with remaining  
ingredients instruments remind you of laminate too close to the fire the basement burned  
accidentally at least that is what you told the neighbors we didn't get around to playing scrabble  
you have no words ligature replacement orphan splint abrasion cur

Shane Allison

**Dirty Town**

What I wouldn't do for a chicken sandwich with jalapeno peppers right now.

Fast food combos are a dollar more up here.

You can't get cheeseburgers for 49 cents like you can in Kansas.

New York can be a cruel, callous city.

Fast food combos cost too much up  
here.

Why am I not surprised?

New York can be an expensive city

For those who have tasted her for the first time.

I am not surprised

By the pool of blood on the sidewalks of New York

For those who have tasted her for the first time?

She smells of burnt meat and carbon monoxide.

By the pool of blood on the sidewalk of New York City

Sits a woman tented beneath a tattered blanket shaking her coffee cup of change

As her clothes stink of scalded meat and the

Putrid odor of carbon monoxide.

A woman is sitting tented beneath a tattered blanket shaking her coffee cup of change.

Legs shaded with running sores

As her clothes stink of scalded meat and a car's carbon monoxide

That shoots from exhaust pipes.

Legs shaded with open sores that leak from open flesh

Down her ankles of swollen bone

Filthy from that, which shoots carbon monoxide from erect exhaust  
pipes.

For she will surely die tonight.

Down by her ankles of swollen bone,

A swarm of pigeons peck pepperoni from torn pizza on the street.

Where she is sure  
to die tonight

In an estranged corner of this cruel, callous city.

## **A Poem for Charles Bernstein**

Charles Bernstein understands the human heart  
I wish Charles Bernstein ruled the world  
Because of Charles Bernstein, I stay off the wrong  
side  
of the tracks  
Charles Bernstein reminds me of Benny Hill  
I touch the whiskers on Charles Bernstein's cat  
Charles Bernstein says I could sleep in the basement  
I dream I could be a great teacher like none other  
than Charles Bernstein  
I cry because Charles Bernstein cries, too  
I touch myself when thinking of Charles Bernstein  
wandering around inside me  
I hear Charles Bernstein's motor bike rumbling down  
Martin Luther King Boulevard  
I hear Charles Bernstein reading poetry at some crummy  
dive on the lower east side  
Charles Bernstein is surrounded by flowers  
I touch my lips when I see Charles Bernstein on stage  
I taste the medicine Charles Bernstein gives me for my  
Bronchitis  
I  
imagine Charles Bernstein writing in my dreams  
I am the man of the house when Charles Bernstein is  
gone  
Charles Bernstein brainwashed me into believing  
that I'm a platypus  
I smell Charles Bernstein's freshly baked cherry pies  
I wish Charles Bernstein would stop cheating off my  
math test  
My mother is having Charles Bernstein over for dinner  
I say that Charles Bernstein can read my thoughts

Without Charles Bernstein, things are sour and bitter

I hear Charles Bernstein still and silent

Wish I could speak a little more like Charles

Bernstein

I see and remember Charles Bernstein

I know I am the illegitimate son of Charles Bernstein

Because of Charles Bernstein, I am a potter

I imagine Charles Bernstein standing on snow-capped  
mountains

I don't want to think about what my life would

be like without Charles Bernstein

You say you never stopped loving me

I say there is someone else, and his name is

Charles

Bernstein

I don't love you the same way I love Charles Bernstein

Why do I wonder so about Charles Bernstein

I feel this wall separating me and Charles Bernstein

I try to overcome my fear of loneliness, but without  
the almighty words of Charles Bernstein, it's near  
impossible

I enjoy small talk and big lies shared by Charles

Bernstein

Don't you love this mink coat Charles Bernstein bought  
me

I wish I was a Buffalo, New Yorker like Charles

Bernstein

I say things no one else understands except Charles

Bernstein

Imagine Charles Bernstein wearing a pink bunny suit

I hope Charles Bernstein will come to my house and  
play Yahtzee with me

I see Charles Bernstein in the fog of Manhattan

I wonder if Charles

Bernstein knows if I will ever get married

I see Charles Bernstein looking back at me in the  
mirror

Charles Bernstein invited me to stay the week at his  
condo in Aspen

## Gertrude Eats Grits

Gertrude eats grits.

Geisha girl's gratuitous green giant

Eats grungy gutter bits.

Gloria Gaynor is gung-ho for graham crackers

While Gus Van Sant likes to go

For greasy grub that glistens glaze of grime

In the grime

Of Denny's grits

To go

For the Jolly Green Giant

Is hungry for graham crackers

And Kibbles 'n Bits

Of bits

Of grime

Off the graham crackers

Of a New York pub that always serves grits

To New York giant

Fans who are ready to go,

But only when it's time to go

To Gary Ewing's house for little plates of cheese bits

Who has giant

Window rims of grime

And likes to dip graham crackers

In his grits.

Those tasty cheese grits

That keeps him go-

Ing great after saltine crackers

And Gummy Bear bits

Were surgically removed from a grimy  
Gallbladder giant

Who likes his grits

Giant

In gangrene grime

To grotesquely go

With creamy goat gut bits

Spread on crispy crackers

That stands up to all those other crackers

In a nice big bowl of steaming hot grits

That taste delectable with toothpicks of grilled chicken bits

In a tub of giant

Guacamole grime

With the bed-ridden girls who go

Mental for bits of graham crackers

Spread over hot grits to go with the bits

Of grilled chicken that is eaten by the giant of grime.

Mark Howard Jones

## **Interior Design**

They moved into the flat just two months after the wedding. Mike would never really think of it as *their* flat; Jen's father - rich old bastard that he was - had 'given' it to them as a wedding present. Which meant, as far as Mike was concerned, that he would always be there with them, checking and judging.

There was virtually no furniture, beyond the essentials like a bed, when they moved in. Nothing comfortable or familiar and certainly nothing that would induce him to feel 'at home'. Jen had announced that she wanted to furnish it in her own way and, as she was the one with taste and breeding and money, Mike just went along with it.

Money seemed to drip from every orifice of Jen's family, whereas his humble job as a very junior reporter for a downmarket daily newspaper couldn't keep his new wife in the style to which she'd become accustomed. Mike knew her something-in-the-city father saw him as nothing but a big zero and the old man took every opportunity to underline that fact 'subtly'.

He'd wanted to honeymoon somewhere nice and warm, somewhere sunny, but Jen - ice maiden to her sub-zero core - had insisted they spend time at some trendy ice hotel in the Arctic Circle. Only the sight of her naked body, open before him, had introduced any heat into the occasion. At least that was one place that he and Jen really were compatible - in bed; a mere 14 fucks and they'd decided marriage was the right thing for them, much to the consternation of Jen's family.

They'd met at a friend's party. He didn't know how she'd come to be at such a ramshackle affair and he didn't care, being drawn to her slightly otherworldly prettiness and her smart way of dressing. "You're perfect," she'd told him at the end of the night and, for a short while, he was prepared to believe it; because she'd said it.

All his friends thought of them as an odd couple, he knew, but he just felt lucky to have found someone like Jen; so cool, sophisticated and sexy. Someone who was interested in him.

Of course there was a downside. There always was. He didn't like the flat that much but he wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth, was he?

Worst of all for him was the fact that it didn't have any outside windows, except for one small one in the kitchen, the light coming from huge skylights instead. But the converted warehouse was spacious, at least, with enough room for both Jen's art school ideas and his own clutter.

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On Saturdays, Mike was expected to accompany Jen on her 'expeditions' to town to seek out the

latest chic accessory or ornament from exclusive little shops and tucked-away art galleries.

This was obviously the way she was used to living her life. But she confessed she'd never had the chance to 'spread her wings at home'. Well, thought Mike, you certainly seem to be flapping your feathers about *now*.

One particularly chilly day in February they found themselves outside a former butcher's shop that was now an expensive furniture shop. There was some sort of poetic irony in that, he thought.

They had been standing there for a few minutes before Jen spoke. "What do you think?" she asked, extending an elegantly-gloved finger towards the display window.

He stared through the glass at the object Jen was indicating. It was a a collection of odd angles and colours that seemed to float in space, not meeting or connecting in any significant way. Yet she'd referred to it earlier as a chair. Mike felt his back aching in sympathy with any poor sod who would be expected to sit in it.

Then it dawned on him. He'd been brought along on this expedition to approve of it, to admire Jen's excellent taste and to compliment her on her knowledge of modern design. And he'd be the poor sod who had to sit in that 'chair'.

"It looks uncomfortable," was all he could think of to say in protest.

Jen scowled, her composure dented for once. "I think you'll find it wonderfully comfortable, actually. It's a Mika Penttinen chair - he's one of the BEST young designers in Europe."

"Good for him."

Jen snorted softly and headed for the entrance, credit card appearing magically in her hand as she did so. "You've just got no idea, have you?"

Mike felt defeated.

\*\*\*

Slowly their spacious living room began to fill with what Mike regarded as clutter. Expensive, up-to-the-minute must-have clutter. But still clutter.

He often found himself carefully negotiating small table-top sculptures or oddly-poised angular lamps to make his way to the firm leather armchair that sat in the middle of the room. Jen smiled patronisingly at him when he flopped down into it after a hard day's hack work; she obviously thought of it as his chair. Maybe that's why it had been placed facing the large screen TV, the floor space around it left uncluttered.

One evening she slid into his lap, pressed her breasts against him and kissed him on the mouth. "You do like what I'm doing to the place don't you, angel?" she purred. Mike tried his best to maintain a passive expression and made a non-committal noise that could have been interpreted as

'yes' if the wind was in the right direction.

"Good. You do look so at home here," she breathed in his ear.

He knew she had good taste and connections in the art world, mainly through her brother, and he did like some of the things she chose, but he just didn't want to live with them. He wanted a home, not a gallery. But how could he let her know that?

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One day he arrived home to find a large part of one corner taken up with a huge grey stone object. It was a featureless cone, smooth and uninteresting.

He dropped his coat on a chair and stood taking in the sheer ugliness, the brutal uncaring weight, of the object before him.

Jen appeared from the bedroom. "Hi, Mike. Do you like it?"

Mike snorted. Surely she was joking, trying to push him to the limit, to see how much he would take before ordering a skip and asking his brother to help him empty the flat of the crap she'd accumulated in the past months.

He turned to look at her. She smiled, her mouth pulling down slightly in one corner in that way that he used to find so sweet. He tried to keep his voice as calm and non-committal as his elevated blood pressure would allow: "What is it?"

Jen laughed her brittle crystal laugh. "It's a sculpture. By Massimo Chia. Isn't it wonderful and primitive? It only cost me three grand; Tim helped me get it cheap because he knows the artist."

"But it's huge!" Mike protested, making a mental note to have Jen's brain-dead brother hunted down and killed as soon as he could scrape together the fee.

She walked over to the object slowly and looked it up and down. "But, hun, don't you see? It's an investment, too. It's perfect. You'll get used to it in time."

Mike sighed heavily and trotted off to the fridge, hoping there was still some beer left and praying that the floor could take the weight of the monstrosity that his lovely rich little wife had just inserted forcibly into his life.

\*\*\*

Jen often read last thing at night, her designer glasses perched elegantly on her pretty little nose, while Mike buried his face in the pillow and tried to sleep.

One morning she'd left early to meet one of her old school friends at an auction. God knows what monstrosity she'd bring back with her, thought Mike. Passing her side of the bed, he

leaned over and picked up the book she'd read last night from her bedside.

He looked at the cover: 'Magical Sigils in Three Dimensions'. The title meant nothing to him and the few abstract squiggles on the cover did nothing to explain it. The blurb on the back didn't make much sense to Mike either. God knows what they taught her in art college, he thought, but she's not giving it up easily.

Mike shook his head and went to clean his teeth.

\*\*\*

That evening, as he still sat in his work clothes, brain fried from another day of scribbling tabloid tedium, he noticed his wife acting differently.

She'd taken to standing in one corner of the flat, her blue eyes staring levelly in his direction, occasionally adjusting her position, with a satisfied little smile on her face.

When he asked her what she was doing, she just said she was admiring the room layout. Mike sighed, reached for the TV remote and tried to find something normal to watch.

\*\*\*

Sleepless one night, he wandered into the living room seeking God knows what that eluded him. Not sleep but its equivalent somehow, somewhere.

Everything was drained of colour in the little illumination seeping down from the skylights. He was unwilling to undertake the hazardous journey across the living space to the light switches, aware of his fear of overturning a couple of thousand pounds' worth of ornament or knick-knack and hating himself for it.

Instead he stood trying to remember which of the strangely shaped objects in the room was a light. Eventually his clouded mind gave up the struggle and he reasoned that a hot bath might help him sleep.

But just as he turned towards the bathroom, he became aware of something emanating from the corner of the room. It wasn't a light or a sound exactly but closer to a feeling than anything else.

Mike rubbed his eyes in an effort to invigorate his insomnia-dulled senses. Whatever it was came from the corner where that hideous thing stood.

He turned away from it, hoping for some reprieve from the indeterminate throbbing or whispering or scuttling that he felt in his head. Not a sound, no, but something very like it; yet unlike anything he'd ever known before. The longer it continued, the more he was certain it had something to do with the cone-shaped sculpture.

Suddenly he felt a rush of fear. It was in his home. It was something unknown, that he felt threatened by and it was in his home. He felt very cold.

Mike forced his feet to take him back to bed, his breathing tight as his heart hammered away inside him and his head filled up with the vibration. He crawled between the ridges of the sheets, ice floes in his personal Antarctica, and lay beside Jen with the material pulled close up about him, praying for it all to stop.

He didn't remember falling asleep but when he woke next morning, he was in no doubt that it hadn't been a dream. He felt exhausted and unable to tell Jen anything, in case she thought he was losing his mind, or was inventing scare stories about one of her beloved works of art.

He drifted out to the bus at the usual time, heavy and sluggish, and dozed in his seat, dreaming of a woman he used to know but had lost.

\*\*\*

Several times over the next week, the sensation occurred again. It was accompanied by a gripping fear inside him. Once, while he was in the bath, he plunged his head under the water in an effort to escape but it had no effect.

One morning at breakfast Jen suddenly stopped eating and looked at him. There was an expression on her face as if she had suddenly divined what was happening. Mike quickly got up to make himself some more coffee.

He was sure there was a smile on her face, even though he didn't dare to turn and look at her.

\*\*\*

Every day he seemed to grow tireder. Energy became just a memory and not a state of being related to events or activities. He struggled to think and laboured over the keys of his computer.

One day he felt so drained that he limped over to the News Editor's desk and complained he was too ill to work. The man, whose wavy grey hair always reminded Mike of waves breaking on an oily beach, looked at him sceptically.

"What's wrong with you, then?" he groaned.

Mike had no idea what he looked like but he felt pale. "I just feel so weak," he muttered.

His boss snorted once. "Aye, you make me weak, too. Go on then, get home," he said, jabbing his thumb at the door.

The streets were crowded with grey figures whose faces seemed too alive for comfort. Livid mouths, working quickly around words or simply hanging vacantly opened, sat below eyes as white and bright as a new sun. Mike's head ached and burned. Finally, somehow, he managed to make it to his front door and negotiated the complicated business of putting the key in the lock and turning it. It only took him an hour or two to take the few steps he needed to get inside.

Exhausted, he leaned on the door post for a moment before trudging the two more steps into the living room. Too tired to go all the way in, he flung his coat over the back of a nearby sofa and rubbed his eyes.

After a few moments of blackness, he opened his eyes and felt as if he had been slapped in the face. Somehow, by accident, he must have stood in exactly the same spot that Jen did when she was 'admiring the layout'.

What Mike saw was a design made up of every piece of furniture and every single ornament in the room. They had all been positioned precisely to make up a pattern, as surely as if they had been drawn on a piece of paper.

In front of him was a huge circle spanning the entire width of the room; the corner of an ornament lined up perfectly with the arc of a lampstand, which stood in neat alignment with the edge of a painting, which in turn formed part of a pattern with the wall hanging Jen had bought last week, and so on, throughout the width and height of the room.

Only after a few more moments did another pattern emerge, inside the circle. The chair he usually sat in, his chair, the only comfortable one in the place, sat at the apex of a cone. And this cone in turn faced the great stone cone that had sat in the corner of the room for the past month.

The bizarre image disappeared when Mike moved just a few inches one way or the other, breaking up into a meaningless collection of everyday objects. He suddenly felt light-headed. What on earth was Jen up to? What could this mean?

He felt as if somebody had dropped a weight into his heart, his innards struggling hard to cope with the unexpected imposition. He had to sit down.

Mike struggled over to his favourite chair. He realised it was part of Jen's bizarre design but he needed its familiarity and softness.

Almost as soon as he was seated, relaxing into its welcoming comfort, Mike felt the sensation begin. A scuttling or bubbling inside his head. Not a sound or a colour but something in between. He held his breath, expecting to feel the usual fear grasp him but he exhaled with relief after less than a minute.

It came over him like a wave of relaxation and warmth. There was nothing in it that needed to be feared, he now felt. It was familiar and ancient and perfect. He laughed softly to himself.

He sat and stared through half-closed eyes at the huge grey cone in front of him. The TV

remote lay abandoned, the screen in darkness. Somehow the surface of the sculpture seemed suddenly to hold an odd fascination for him. Maybe Jen was right after all, he thought, as he studied the endless pits and marks on the surface of the stone.

A soft, dull glow seemed to fill him from the centre of his head outwards, until his entire body overflowed with it. He was aware that the light was changing, the sky beyond the glass becoming dimmer, the day draining away slowly but it somehow didn't matter now.

He didn't even look round when Jen came home, clicking the door shut behind her.

A song of nothingness filled his head, thrumming in the space between his ears and filling his skull with an empty contentment. The zeroness at his core, called to and nurtured by the giant object before him, had grown to fill his entire being.

There was an opening up, a lightness. Almost as if the weight of his body, his being, his being *here*, was no longer a part of the equation, no longer even necessary. He was only needed to finalise a design, to fit in as part of an aesthetic arrangement. He was no body at all, just a balloon of thin flesh and skin.

He could hear Jen saying, from the other side of this room as big as infinity, "That's perfect. Just as I'd always pictured it. You'll get used to it in time."

C.L. Bledsoe

## Tea

crying into your green tea  
ch me something I can use

me like love, but don't forget to leave a tip  
toe to that place inside where pornography is real

ly what I said was that she laid there like she was dead  
mit all faults, scrub away all sin until your face is as clean as bone

xt time I say turn left, you sure as hell will  
et me tell you a thing or two about soap

lease remember, wipe front to back  
then, all we had to eat was tea

## **The Woman in the Other Bed**

says she's cold. We can hear her thin voice through the curtain slicing my mother's room in half.

My mother grunts, and my brother's wife pulls a sheet to the woman's shoulders and leaves. We're alone, my mother and me and the woman and the weather, my shoes, and the woman calls out a name. "No," I say. She calls again and I say he isn't here. Mom is trying to spit something that might be hi or a name and the woman is crying. "This hurts me," she says, holding an arm up to show me a cast on her wrist. "I want to go home," she says.

Back in the car, Jillian's talking about getting a hamster. "They're cute and fat when they sit up, like a little baby. We can get a ball," she says. "So it can run around." "We'll have to take care of it," I say. "There are responsibilities involved. It's not just a toy, it's a life. What about when it isn't fun anymore? We'll still have to take care of it" "We can do that," she says. "Don't you think?" "Yes," I say, and yes again.

Jane Ormerod

**Love Song Number Four**

i nevr love d nev er lov dd and ii loved him his hip ps plane d like yachtts  
and i could no not tt hel pp bt to fall ll in lov and th e po llice b oat  
ssails eas twards a bl ak bo dy bag han ging o ver th e side  
Cmm eras flshe a chi lds rad io float s by an d ho w co uld i fa ll fl  
in lo ve and lo ve pun ched m e smaac ck ack and i saw th e news ag ent tal k ing to a ma n in a  
rubbb erb haht and saww a wo man in a pi nk sa ri an d gre en su ng lassses thr owi ng a ref use  
sackn a a sm all child crou ch ing on a doo nrspep ch atter ing into a pos t man paaat pho ne and att  
th e smll childds ffee ta small tabby ckat slep pt wtwtw chin g as though repl yin g to the couytres ies  
hand thnis iss the l st tme nnd the la stb time his roo m hi ss bat ik curtains hhhhhhhhhhis whal e  
bone fa ce, bare feeet hisb silence th e wayb heb he spkkes ann d th dru m ti ght shee ets, and th  
eway he cir cl es  
he sail es aro nund me the e la ke wi the gr een gr ey summits andd briighhbt torii an tu qwoi se sh  
eets of skiy  
I amm loonmin ous annd warr m  
i amm tred ing airr an d wat er th e mowtins dedarken waxw ings flock  
the la ke iss a pon nd is a bas in as we clowse tog ethrr  
I nevr lovedd mor as i sparrk kle li ke whiy te camarrgue horrses birr ds o f parr idice a witc hing bird  
the devvi ls coa ch horsse anndd the mouthh oppns annd i swe eep inns ide

Christof Scheele

**The Novel That No One Could Pronounce**

(from *One Hundred Novels Begin*)

“My name is Edmund Grosse-Edmund,” the dusky stranger said. “I am a guest of your club.”

“How do you do, Edmund Grosse-Edmund?” Madge said. “I’m Madge.”

“How do you do?” Edmund Grosse-Edmund said.

“What do you do, Edmund Grosse-Edmund?” said Keith.

“Oh, Keith,” said Madge, “Don’t be silly. This is my husband, Keith. Keith, Edmund Grosse-Edmund.”

“Howdy-do, Keith. I’m Edmund Grosse-Edmund. I wrote *The Novel That No One Could Pronounce*.”

“The title of?” asked Keith.

“No, the body of, you know, the rest.”

“What else do you do?”

“I make a pet.”

“A good one, Edmund Grosse-Edmund?” Madge asked.

“I’m told, yes.”

“Keith, I think he’s cute, this Edmund Grosse-Edmund.”

“What else do you do, Edmund Grosse-Edmund?” asked Keith.

Edmund Grosse-Edmund stared at the parquet floor. “I cough,” he said. “Sometimes I cough. Not always.”

He didn’t look up.

## **Jacob, Don't Look Back**

A breeze moved through the pines. The sun was a low glimmering now. Jacob struck out West, toward the sun. The sun was nearly down, and a breeze moved lightly through the pines. Jacob would remember this, he thought, because it was as good a thing to remember as any he could remember, there, then. I will remember this, thought Jacob. There are worse things to remember. This is a pretty good thing to remember. Not a bad thing to remember, he thought, The breeze moving in the pines, the sun a low glimmering, me striking out, striking out West, here, now, me thinking, This is a good thing to remember, the breeze, the sun nearly down, me in this place, thinking this is something to remember.

## **I Am Sev**

A day like most here in Winter. The sun has cracked the sky out beyond the silos. Bitter. I am penniless, and my job is simple. Tell it how it is. Well, maybe not so simple. I butt heads with even the simple tasks.

Terse. Keep it terse. Your heart is dry. Your sweat takes itself to task for not having earned its place on your brow. You piled the fire high with the last of the wood. When they cut the electric in June you saw this coming. You ate the proverbial servants, cleaned their dutiful bones. What now? The fictive gardener? Take care. Your meat is gone. You have curried disfavor up and down the block. The neighbors are sniffing around, Sev. The neighbors.

Allyson Boggess

**Lottery**

With a slam of the kitchen door,  
    she wanted me to hand over  
all of my baby teeth—  
    a premeditated falling-out.  
All strings were attached: kite twine  
    looped around molars  
looped around brass knobs.  
    This is no tale.  
One yank and I was a rich child  
    with blank gums,  
and sudden fortune for my red  
    aluminum penny box.

Caleb Puckett

## **Make the Man**

Most of my admittedly small regard had been spent by middle age. By my mid-fifties, I reverted to some sense of enmity long dormant, perhaps prehistoric, no doubt abhorrent to those still decorated with the gaudy wares of youthful approval. This poverty first showed up in my clothes. Inverted, cast now into the shadowed folds of my formative (or formless?) years, I walked about with my shirt tag exposed like a emaciated, curling tongue, the threads of my pant seams blowing like dead grass on a plain where the cows never come home, the soft insoles of my shoes frayed from scrambling about on splintered sandstone, searching the sky for puff of rain or at least some direction home to water and shade. In short, I looked every part the standard scarecrow—no, make it a sinister manikin, displaying work at some tailor’s shop where the tricks of the trade pass for wit and quality assurance—back darts for back stabbing under the pretence of art. I felt like an outcast, a fraud, knew no news but the tragic, which cudged any fantasy like a blind right cross.

Perhaps I could have recovered, made good on the dream. Perhaps if wearing one’s clothes inside out had been fully in fashion those years—who knows the allusive whims of the runway men and their pouting vehicles of wiry delights—I would have had some chance at hip knowing, some chance of least at a normalcy soon to be confirmed in the boutiques of glossy holiness. People would say to me, “Hey, did you notice your sweater’s on inside out” with such innocent, mothering grins that I almost believed they had genuine concern for my dignity, but soon enough I knew they only mocked me with their hostile obviations. I learned to ignore their various faces, their comments, questions, petty manias—all their false concern and poor restraint—and acted as if my shirt buttoned the same way as theirs—but better, that my belt was not some impossible contraption made to lock me into myself—to keep me from collapsing—but some futuristic holster for a visionary federal agent who, with a mystic laser, would save the human race from alien trendsetters who planted mind control chips in standard, name brand accessories.

Of course it is difficult to maintain a job, harmonious relationships with loved ones, let alone entertain any thoughts of amorous joys via the regular routes and regular ploys, when one appears to flaunt otherwise harmless conventions: walking around with balls of lint bobbing from the fleece lining of a vest like many matted medals won in consolation at a laundering contest do little to convince anyone of your importance. And of course I tried stocking up on reversible garments—to trick fate with human ingenuity—but the situation only worsened. Those clothes would twist in, out and around themselves in endless mutations, constricting like a pile of demented boas making slither-

love, crushing me between sleeves and legs, slicing me between double edged zippers, raging against the very purpose for which they were created.

I gave up, slunk through the city like a vagabond whose only concern was warmth—no matter right and wrong, no matter comeliness, no matter any cut. After awhile I no longer perceived the gawking masses with their ever-changing—traitorous—sense of propriety and fashion. The world switched clothes day in and day out, but no progress was made—seasons even became retroactive, all reward for rebellion was forever retrograde, inspiration was static. I remained, no matter the occasion, a strange, anonymous shape of stitches, excess material, spare buttons, and barely perceptible reverse prints, but there was freedom in the irregular regularity of it all. My disgust became addictive, a blissful, buoyant belief in self-reliance—a regular transcendental conceit, a spiritual science. I felt so relieved, so superior to their puny moral judgments. I felt perfect in my contempt, that is, until that night my stringy cuffs combed over the beach and I discovered our city's best-hidden secret—the nudist colony—and was denied entry by some smug, bristle-chested deviant. I think his name was Lenny.

Michael K. Gause

## **Hourglass POV**

*For Italo*

God peers down through a hole in the world. I watch him look through from a chair a few feet away. I hear his voice tell me what is happening.

“I am pouring sand through a hole to make a pile underneath.”

From my vantage point, however, I see something else—a small mountain growing beneath a desolate city of sand. All inhabitants left it long ago. The jobs vanished first, then faces, then bodies; something about the rest of the world was simply too enticing. It became the model we have today of the Old West. Its model is still used today in books and film alike, and remains suitable for all future civilizations.

It is here he crushes empty streets, houses, useless institutions and deposits them down the hole to the new society burgeoning beneath it.

Down here we do have inhabitants, a population below the radar in both latitude and scale. This race is unique, I see, for they do not reconstitute the raining raw material into its previous forms, but into a single, rising mound. All stuff and energy is utilized with a hoard mentality for a single purpose. Uninterested in intricate transport systems, parliaments, whored alleyways of a genuine city, this new tribe has but one charge, to forge an edifice from their origins, for the sole purpose of returning to same.

Getting up I walk over to look down the hole that God made for myself.

From here I am invested, a citizen of dying beginnings, looking on as the future works backward in a nearing point of contact.

I turn to ask Him, “Do all ancestors wonder why we make strides in retrograde?”

He is too wise to answer.

So I return to my chair and look again, only to see it all clearly from an hourglass point of view—there were never two cities, one beginning and one ending, not even one; only the toddling God addicted to moving, unable to admit a future, carve the past in stone.

## **Flesh and Flesh**

It is better to have loved and kept  
Her alive

Torn elegies won't grow beyond the  
Dammed up homage

No grand hall arabesques still play  
Where hearts once pierced the future

Having found that long lost letter do you see the words  
Are only a big broken arrow towards

What's left on  
The cutting room floor

What is said is made flesh and flesh is nothing  
Without its passing

The forgotten moments you recall  
After the poem is done  
Are the ones elusive to letters, where she is always  
She alive

Paul Baker

## Unit 8

light matter mistress myself object one perhaps question round she's speculate tales there to two way about ambiguous aware beginning call companions degree effort feel for gone harley himself if is.

nature of only person raised said should sprite ten there to understand way while yet accepted an away believed can confidence detained emerging felt force governess have his ignorance it like me moment.

never of open place rather saw should starting than they to unopened we whole who you added and back between carried consideration didn't end figure found great have his image i've little me more.

stopping that things to used well wind you affection apparently battlements bold catch could dignity even finest friendly greater he home in june little me most never of opposite point really seal sign. second sign storybook that think to used well window young young afterward appear be both caught could directly even first friendly greatness he home in just little me mouth new of or poor reassuring.

### Purport

Those shoes sat in a shining box and attracted buyers from across the city. Those shoes could not be more cosmopolitan if they tried if they tied the strings those shoes were remarkable. A botanist called for a replacement. The student of journalism read backward. If the shows could not be a silence then more mustard was called for weeds. the widow's garment patched along the highway until the shoes came cycling from the opposite direction. I cannot imagine the embarrassment she must have suffered. I cannot be an ant if you are to be the spider. That would empty the remaining cereal and the guests would be unhappy. We cannot defile the covenant we cannot defy the government we cannot belie the fundament we cannot un-dry the laundromat. We can however invite the pilgrims from across town to sit and enjoy our hospitality in exchange for some news from abroad which they quite enjoy telling.

## Unit 13

lie makes more nature now others please realms robe sev'ral soft this troubled vile we about altars  
athenian below briefly capacious conscious descends drum ev'ry firmament forms gives hard her  
jove.

cry digested earth every fill floods from glow had heads high issue land long mankind more nations  
nor on palace plough rapid retain saturn should some take they thus twining vine waves whole with  
zone above allow as bear birth brook caesar come.

he helps if its legs mad moisture narr'wer northern or place rain rise seen small still tempestuous this  
transfixt vein watry where with wonder ador'd any back bids council did earth eyes five fries gods.

aetherial arts bent by corn distinctly experiment for god he i king lye mother nor particles rage sky  
sun they un-aw'd waters while with yet.

### Purport

in my mild pie the crust bakes across snapping. A cat can sit in sun but a son cannot cat along a  
cassidy. Hopping horses hose a hornet's nest and boy you should have seen them kicking edgar allen  
poe. I am the egg blend and that's a nice color for a paint finish on a car. The automotive shop rusty  
with oil and smelly with grease can lie for a while but the historical trends usurp its kingly nature. If  
bakes and snapping prepare a pie then the auto body shop can infiltrate a cookbook. Your  
instructions become prematurely dated and the figs and junipers of lebanon stop weeping just long  
enough to reclaim its innocence. I cannot make change for you now. I cannot spare any change. You  
need to bathe and seek shelter. I cannot spare any change. I cannot spare a pie and I do not know  
how to operate the mechanics of an auto body shop. You can perhaps spare some change. You can  
perhaps change you can perhaps metamorphose. You can spare some change you can be a  
metamorphosis. You can be ovid. You can be an auto body shop. You can blow down the spare  
change and the metamorphosis. You can ask for spare change and I can metamorphose your shelter  
and your bath if your auto body shop smells sweetly of grease and the hard dirt floor conceals  
pistons of rome and pines of rome.

Michelle Bitting

## Reasons to Quit

Not because I got tired of waking up every morning with a sour taste in my mouth, or seeing my teeth in the mirror slowly morph from white to brown. I loved smoking. Nothing better than a long hot drag off an Export A late at night when the kids are down, kitchen door propped open, a glass of wine and blowing smoke rings at the moon while the silhouettes of two mop head palms stare down in rebel glee. And not because I'm interested in reaching some grand ripe age like my Grandma Vera who turned ninety in December. Every day she peels the hair net from her silvered head, makes a pot of coffee and thanks God for her good health. Then she thanks him again because she can't remember what happened five minutes ago which makes hanging out with her a lot like perpetual déjà vu: you could swear you've been there before, that she just asked you who gave her the box of Sees candy she's been nibbling from her lap the past hour, could swear you already answered "me, Grandma" because she did and you have. There is comfort to be found drowning in the echo of existence. As with reincarnation—that jumpy, buzzing-in-circles feeling says maybe you were a flea once, says let's imagine death as a trip through the cosmic recycling plant. Some say meditating on a mantra may spark epiphany—through repetition you learn to let go and love yourself, the human panoply mirrored around. If you look back twenty years to my first cigarette and then fast forward to that sweet and final puff, you'd lose count numbering the inhalations between. I have two small children now, and have learned to take pleasure in the redundancy of everything from tangled laces to an unwiped bottom. I don't care how long I live; each moment's death rides its own immortal wave. But there are things not to be missed—like the last time we saw Grandma she was needle pointing holders for their crayons, oblivious to how many she's made already, heaps of these yarn-shrouded boxes stacked in my closets back home. Little Buddhas, they sat at her feet, mesmerized by her bony hands weaving rainbows through the fields of white mesh—how three sides connected make a kind of mini coffin for their waxen sticks, the lid she fastens at the end to shut them in, packing all that color away, for now, into the dark.

Bill West

**All in the mind**

You sit in your director's chair in front of the gilded mirror that dominates the room as if it were in a doll's house. You ring the crystal bell and watch the maid walk in behind you and place a silver tray with water and biscuits on the small table at your elbow, a service she performs every day at this time. You like the way she moves, the line of her back as she bends, and wish you could lift aside that lock of black hair, and trace her cheek with your fingers without feeling like the lecher you suspect you are.

You watch the door close and you stand up. You consider crossing the room to lock the door but decide against it. You wonder what she would think if she returned now as you take off your clothes. You would explain that this is not a sexual act but something you do every night, before sleep. But here, downstairs in this public room, you feel this act might reveal to you something about the man you have become in the past seventy-three years. You stand, pale in your nakedness, observing how your skin hangs, unfamiliar on your familiar frame. You sit, pour a glass of still water and drink.

Natalie Shapero

**Penny-Farthing Bicycle Sonnet**

All spoke and saddle, even in sleep sublime,  
you turn with colossal purpose. You're the high  
leading wheel on an old-time bike, and I,  
the frenzied afterthought, the addled chime  
of half-past, flip and flip a dozen times  
for each of your full circles. Red moons fly  
across the hulking clock, its tiny sky  
overrun with rusted orbits. Dimes  
and short-run dollars, we might call this shaky  
prospect now. It'd be a suspect sell:  
prone to pitching over, weathered boots  
hooked in the handlebars, the mount pegs achy  
from overuse. Still, standard morning routes  
bring with them baskets. Blaring ribbons. Bells.

## Silencer

Congress shall make no law abridging bridges,  
draw or otherwise, to other realms.  
Virginia's swell, but I sense bluer ridges  
await above. The statutes overwhelm;  
you swear the only birds you'd shoot are clay,  
and it's just because Big Government is soft  
on kilns – with the population at today's  
growth rate, we'll soon have every bank aloft,  
be eaten out of earthenware! They sacked  
all foresight with the Boston tea and gave  
us bloodbath in exchange for lobsterbacks,  
our Fathers – penning virtue, freeing slaves  
in their wills. They mustered once a week for drills.  
We muster all our pooled resources, still.

Daniel Gallik

**Regular Day in Rochester, NY**

I came to Joe's house.  
I sat down. Then, I  
Knocked on the door. I  
Decided Joe wasn't home.

Simplicity was what I was  
After. I went to leave.  
Joe's mom came out. She  
Said, Joe's not here.

His dad killed him when  
He found out Joe had  
Told me that father was  
Doing some cheating. I

Guess that Charley didn't  
Know that I didn't care  
Whether he cheated or not.  
Joe knew that. So, guess

Joe knew he was dying  
Of a gun shot wound for  
A dumb reason. Charley  
Has gone to jail. Joe

Is at the funeral home.  
Calling hours are 6-8pm  
Tuesday. We'll bury him  
At the city's Hope Cemetery.

I left Joe's house and

Walked home. I didn't  
Tell Mom. I wanted to  
Keep things regular.

Pablo Tanguay

## **The Diligents**

I hobble into

the meeting on crutches. I've skipped  
three days and require  
an extravagant excuse. I drink a lot  
and lots of times pour

when I should sprinkle,

ladle what needs spooning. I take  
my fine, excellent job  
for granted, a truth hard to argue. Harder  
still is arriving

to work at all. Chef

was trained in real New York kitchens  
and tells me time and time  
again I'm spoiled as cream past expiration.  
She's fond of saying

*Had you a conscience,*

*you'd think of the Diligents.*

Chef calls us Diligents.

Diligents arrive on time. Diligents scrub  
their hands. Diligents

honor food and one

another like family. I changed  
my band's name from Sick Boys  
to The Diligents. We'd made our bones jacking  
Nat King Cole into

blazing speedmetal

frenzies. Our signature tune was  
    “Straighten Up and Fly Right.”  
We arrived at every gig fabulously  
    late until Brendan,  
  
deciding he was  
    a poet, changed his name to Veldt  
    and started writing songs  
about autumn leaves rustling and sharks making nice  
    with dolphins. I asked

*Where are the rainbows?*  
    He replied I had philistine  
    tendencies, that I ought  
to shower more often. He claimed his father  
    the orthodontist

told him it's certain  
    I'd be dentured by thirty. *My*  
    *art*, he said, speaking slowly  
about himself, *is blooming into full, and*  
    *we need to move on.*

*We?* I asked. *Who's we?*  
    *The Diligents*, he said. But I'm  
    The Diligents' leader!  
I banged my heart with my fist and shouted  
    *The Diligents will*

*always keep it real!*  
    Within an hour I was out.  
    Veldt changed the band's name to  
Veldt and the New Dew Diligents. They agreed  
    I could stay on if

I mastered the flute.

I said I don't do reeds and that  
was officially that.

Now, the original Diligents convene  
at tables Lucky

7 and 13,

shoved together for the meeting  
to decide my fate. Chef  
has prepared the meal herself. I can smell  
from the door her *Prawn*

and *Artichoke Tartare*,

her *Fennel Osso Bucco*. I take  
the empty seat and drop  
the crutches, the bang echoing through the room.  
All clatter stops. Chef,

as she's prone to, clears

her throat. I wonder where the line  
between appropriate  
and its opposite is. I can't recall eating  
since my band tossed me

out of my band. I'd

spent three days pacing nude on  
my balcony mooing  
and barking and screeching as lovers beneath  
me covered their eyes.

I want to holler

at Chef and her Diligents, *I*  
*am hungry! Do you not*  
*see how hungry I am? I am hungry, and*  
*terribly, terribly*

*alone!* But I sense

that my odor overpowers

their fine meal, that my presence

overwhelms them. When Chef begins to speak, the

Dilgents all look down.

Laura Madeline Wiseman

## **Rebirth**

problem solutions are for men folk  
women, children may only witness  
the hearing of automobile melodies  
the water pump bird noises, a click  
of piston, the vibration of lose belts  
grandfather taught auto-mechanics

at a high school to would be grads  
to coax the starter alternator clutch  
from flatline the permanent grease  
tinting the underside of fingernails  
he remodeled a 1951 fiery Valiant  
dozens of projects of conservation

he refused to dabble in innovation  
a car should preserver his lifetime  
he listened with his whole body a  
purring under his hand to portend  
a dollop of WD-40 a cleaned pad  
car talk, A.M. playing a real oldie

Jan Bindas-Tenney

### **Morning Pantoum**

Break up with him. Say it quickly over the phone then hide the receiver under the couch until morning. Sleep with your clean laundry wrapped up in the sheets. Cleanliness through osmosis.

Say it quickly over the phone then hide the receiver under the couch until morning. Your mouth tastes of metal, like sucking on a dime. Cleanliness through osmosis. Rise like a haze from your rumpled bed.

Your mouth tastes of metal, like sucking on a dime. In the voting booth, close your eyes and lean against the buttons. Rise like a haze from your rumpled bed. Make a list of candidates, their pros, cons and platforms; wildly doodle next to each name.

In the voting booth, close your eyes and lean against the buttons. Arrows! Spirals! Polk-a-dots! Make a list of candidates, their pros, cons, and platforms; wildly doodle next to each name. Push the VOTE button slowly with a pointed index.

Arrows! Spirals! Polk-a-dots! The phalanx bone creaks. Push the VOTE button slowly with a pointed index. Think in a wash of colors: clanging yellow; popping red; mucky brown.

The phalanx bone creaks. How can you excavate the shades of him from your innards? Think in a wash of colors: clanging yellow; popping red; mucky brown. With many shovels.

How can you excavate the shades of him from your innards? Two competing mosques blare the morning prayer. With many shovels. The rise and fall of the imams' calls sound a strange harmonic scuffle.

Two competing mosques blare the morning prayer. Poverty walks by with broken sneakers. The rise and fall of the imams' calls sound a strange harmonic scuffle. Don't cover your hips with thin fingers like white elephant trunks.

Poverty walks by with broken sneakers. Trudging gray. Don't cover your hips with thin fingers like white elephant trunks. Empty your pockets.

Trudging gray. Demand love letters. Empty your pockets. Three quarters, five subway cards, the broken end of a candy cane; push it all into his hand. Nod.

Demand love letters. Call him over and over until he picks up; stay silent. Three quarters, five subway cards, the broken end of a candy cane; push it all into his hand. Nod. His face a wanton soup.

Call him over and over until he picks up; stay silent. Tell him the Haitian revolution started with the sound of a broom swishing back and forth. His face a wanton soup. Not a broom, a drum.

Tell him the Haitian revolution started with the sound of a broom swishing back and forth. Ask him if he'll follow you to Maine. Not a broom, a drum. To Spain, and Iowa with no car and no job.

Ask him if he'll follow you to Maine. Sleep with your clean laundry wrapped up in the sheets. To Spain and Iowa with no car and no job. Break up with him.

Micah Bateman

## **Shaving Face**

Here is a lesson on laceration:  
the razor really only slightly hurts;  
it's necessary to be well-shaven.

It might be well eased with lubrication,  
that slight traction the blade exerts; it may  
make pleasanter the laceration, or

perhaps you should follow it with lotion  
just in case the edge perverts, but you still  
need to be well, shaven. Remember to

tear away the stubble with smooth motion—  
it's much easier to be stripped in spurts.  
There! is a lesson on laceration.

Of course it leaves us you still unbroken:  
it isn't as though effacement subverts; you're  
just you at our best when clean-, well- shaven.

You'll smile when you're as smooth as our satis-  
faction: no one sticks on layers were cut you  
it's just so slight, as laceration, you're  
just shaving face, what else could be shaven?

Josh May

## **Homage for Analog**

Tat tat tat : that is

what mona said, on the analog cassette we found

homage for analogue is what butty bland

first base is, and that is what a sense is  
cassettes

to you. the analanguage is gone

as it cared, the answer is ne'er  
by the hair of your cine  
cine sin

it went analog for you: this is an homage for analog  
wherever he be

find me. this is a message for hans

I will not be acting on your screen. this is a message for analog, this is a handle

on what you've been doing to what you've done: ie this is a homage for analog.

you have ticket items that bear this is a message for analog, can you call me.

this is a men's room for analog, totally empty on the third floor and with florescent lights which is to  
pose the question of whom the mirror sees

to a me. this is a m, no this is a frisbee, no this is a whim, you history too and we won't look

to your newscaster as if wind was a string obsession, or

that your respect what any differnet

homage to analong: always try a bite: you'll hans

this thing so long as it lasts: out on dark nights you get my drift

you shall stay nite as long is the wound, road, no the occult

anything from what fishnet : or logo, you hear

which is all to séance this is a long for homage  
covered by a water (send anchor) for

analog

we've got you coming and going, and I mean'd  
this is a good way

roading this word like modes opera

mordant chic

prunes purple knuckles: my  
largess

inking the deal with dvds you lena  
and you ford

please lend a hand, blank blank blank

nas, we fone, we go in like like we c-come

i don't sent this ome to you

we come in like lime, we go like you fome  
at the mount

sounding every inch the sine  
end what's out there

its so clear

Skip Fox

**Griddle of the Inexorable**

*for Steve, a triangulation*

It's hard to tell if what she showed you was a three-pronged dildo or television, attenuation of desire at any rate, maybe the head she bit off in the Conception Gallery, watering thongs and cogs, strapon, bushings, gears and belts with the blood of whatever preys on midnight's machinery as all but thought came crashing to a halt, moving parts spilling off and into a forest of signs, syllables, the world of words, tales, lakes, rumors of caves beneath water, wavering light of room. Can you pin it down, the moon? Glorious aperture. What then of self's griddle, girdled to torso, stench of feather, fermenting meat, burning hair, bone gives metal to smoke, *all our living effort* to meal, the gristle of what it is to remember, magnification through speed itself, body of desire driven into distances from which position *and* momentum, the "weight" by which an object itself exists undeterred by a universe of mutually exclusives, yet through the agency of *the closest twin to life there is*, is made manifest, bounds back in light as through another body.

Mike Smith

**In Marble<sup>1</sup>**

I.

First movement: want: absolute stillness.

Shape-maker, in the risk heart takes,

hand and tool quicken time, curve  
the life into wrought line, but how far

will your fair self stray, hit after hit, when  
the rare shell of pride yields only a gray mask?

*To cry without pull of longing, work back  
beyond my desire: sung mind echoing stone.*

II.

Movement, but not unrest. Motion which kicks  
to life, soft angle of arm into lit  
slivers of lips, of breast. The way

memory works—a birth—the slight head  
turned downward, there, and to such  
an angle. Worry lines, worry reach, query

skill and link the meek gaps. For eye  
is finite, shining and able. Say  
*hunt, kill, care.* Pull at the gift due you.

---

<sup>1</sup> The three sections of “In Marble” are anagrams of one another.

III.

But in marble, and to work it as an old master –  
the wake of triumphs left squarely behind –  
for an eye grown almost motherly but with  
an old killer's knack for pursuit.

The figure, when it comes, comes to you slowly,  
and in fits and starts, the weight of each unyielding strike  
revealing itself only  
in the hard, heavy, replenishing rock.

## US<sup>2</sup>

### I. Day

Having slept in again, in and on,  
in a haze we wake, rise,  
look as one on war, despair  
and a thunderous applause.

Our cities roar in civil ruin; many  
brace themselves or link arm in arm,  
as at work, lost in a cooked ink,  
I ask what occurs in me

that can lash me so low  
when all say join in and agree.  
As soon as our watching “A...A...A...Ayes”  
all have it, I say I can’t breathe.

### II. Night

In my car, awash, as on a main  
divide, I am choosing to miss  
my exit; I am sailing home  
on a sour air; I am looking hard

for a song on a station I know exists  
and know I cannot find.

---

<sup>2</sup> “US” is an anagram of the names of the fifty states of the United States of America.

Jane Wong

**After the Marriage Goes Out, He Makes Himself Useful**

He came through the backdoor like the stray cat they stopped feeding years ago; he took a smoke in the yard and heeled ash into an abandoned anthill. He took note of the newly mowed lawn and the clean tracks of cut grass. He wondered if it was their mother who cut it and then, after thinking some more, prayed that it was her and not someone else (there were rumors after all). Unsettled, he came into the house and draped his jacket across his chair at the dinner table, as if it waited for his return. Then he moved through the strangely familiar rooms to make sure everything was in order: he ducked his head under the already sound fireplace and tested the hardwood floor with his boot for hollow spots no longer there. And when his two small children found him and screamed indignantly, “you can’t break in like that!”, he shook the Home Dept. bag he had been carrying all along (always the Chinese Santa) and tumbled big, brass locks onto the resilient floor. They clattered like bells stuck in a throat. “See?” he said with a sadness they could never understand. “That’s what these are for.”

## **How to Get Rid of Fleas**

Our dear dog has fleas and we, because we love our dear dog, have fleas. We love our dear dog so much that we are trying to cure him of his fleas (and our fleas too, but who loves our dear selves?). To cure our dear dog's fleas, we leave bowls of water for fleas to jump into and pick at our dear dog's coat for fleas as if it were blueberry season. But no matter what, our dear dog howls in the night and loving him very much as we do, we howl along too.

## **A New Year (Two Calendars Combined)**

A moonlit harmonica is quiet as silver. Everything is night crowded and canned tight. Drums the little boys, sure-smiling girls, and fire sitting in a red, red, red.

Celebration means hats.

Moon cakes have serious packaging. Kissing has serious accident.

A stained dress in the trumpet sounding and recounting. A line of falling so as to catch the ball.

A homecoming opens doors. So many doors that doors must coming rushing through doors. An open arm an open cradle an open symphony of doors.

In the twirling, we are lost to the floor lost and more so more the stained dress laughing.

A resolution is a resolution masquerading as a revolution.

A roasting pig on a spit means careful where you sit.

Josh Hanson

**Eucalyptus**

It was a window in the tree.

It was a shelter where there was none.

—Robert Duncan

1

The year we planted pumpkins

no fruit came, and the dog—

curled down in the shade

of wide leaves, dirt

hard-cracked dry and dusty,

trees dropping leaves and buttons

And their dusty scent—

the dog,

I'm sure, ate the fruit from the vines,

feeding leaves:

a myth of shelter:

like the trees, three or four,

their smooth length rising,

roots hard at the foundation.

They took them out, and the sound—

their rubbing slowly against

themselves—went with.

Anyway, the dog was named Bud,  
which is a dog's name, for certain:

He would press past your leg

run, nails scratching pavement,

any chance:

what he thought of shelter,

and what we don't think, but feel:

true myth of sacrifice, what we give,  
what is taken.  
Not a smart dog,  
but just watch him go on  
building meaning out of instinct:  
blossoms, he must have eaten,  
the fruit so green and hard, blossoms  
are another thing, fit for other meanings.

We'll have to set his jaw against  
this more convenient truth.

2

Convenient to the poem, of course,  
but past the cage of rusty drills  
at the transportation department,  
everything wants in, but nothing stays.

Crack it open, the image  
and the world, crack it  
to the quivering pulp.  
So what  
that it sings, seabird sound?  
The nerve is just a cry.  
There is no  
Image here.

Not far from home was the pounding  
of the piledriver up on the crane  
sinking posts, and the same down  
by the docks.  
Don't know  
what they were building, no image,  
but the rhythm will lead, like  
a heavy chord strung between them.

My pulley sings along the chains,  
says that there is no noble sacrifice,  
but I'm up above the road,  
alive to air –ridiculous image—

You see, even I want in  
to the poem, its scant shade,  
the shadow of its thin form  
rising up, the sound of it  
rubbing against itself in the wind.

3

The hammer's gone dumb  
since it relinquished justice:  
only the fool wants what he deserves.  
But the roofers bang on  
next door, dropping rotten shake  
down the chute, the Mexican  
songs picked apart by the wind,  
flagpole rope singing.

I wasn't dreaming of the poem.  
It was a thinking just before sleep,  
an idea of what they were building,  
and a woman was there, in the poem,  
and I wondered if it weren't  
a stupid idea.

And then some lines came,  
singing their way in on the hook  
of sleep, and it didn't matter.

The next morning, a holiday,  
and dumb as a hammer, the lines  
were gone, and the idea, just a slow

waltz of the radio's bass: all the wind  
left behind.

And perhaps I should say  
something more of the workers, dropped  
in like scenery, but I don't know what  
comes to them just before sleep, or if  
sleep is a mercy, which is the opposite  
of justice.

And I admire the craftsman  
in his knowledge that the roof must come  
up before it goes down again: one more  
small sacrifice, while on the far side  
of the house, they've planted  
a single line of little trees, enough  
to prove the idea doesn't matter.

And the wind carries the debris  
up, and drops it down again:  
A layer of filth on all the houses.

4

As for blossoms,  
we'd be rich with them  
if not for that dog,  
the poem.  
Prodigal,  
I spent them for fruits,  
which I also took away.  
But being rich is not simply  
having much but having more,  
and we could have no end  
of what's not in the poem.

There are no towers,

but aren't there ghosts  
of towers?  
Could one  
string his life between less  
than towers?  
Yes,  
there's the eucalyptus  
being built day  
upon day —and just  
before sleep—

They're pounding the roots  
down to the foundations.

5

From the Latin: to make sacred:  
and we've disproved altruism.  
not to make an argument,  
but what?

*With a place to stand*

*I could move the world,*

which is another nihilism: the world  
is all there is to stand on:  
But what?

The sound of the trees, I want  
to say, may only have been blood  
in my ears.

What of it?

I've valorized questioning  
until I couldn't see: the blood  
is one sound, but how to end  
the long poem?

With its sputter  
or just after?

The poem is ended:  
this sound is the machinery  
of the image collapsing: dishonest,  
building them up, the trees,  
as if they could mean.

As a child, I misspoke, the eucalyptus'  
name, and that's the poem  
I will not speak: talisman  
of shelter: not your business.

Put the blood into the poem,  
made sacred for what?  
To what?  
To you, of course: loneliness  
is my only subject: imageless  
and free of sound.  
I'll spill  
the blood thrumming out, the sound  
pounding it all down  
to its false foundation.

Why speak at all, but to say,  
come in, the words piled up, something  
less than towers, a little shade:  
come in and listen, below the sound  
of the building which never ends:  
Listen

6

North of town, just past  
the millyard, a long line  
of some twenty trees  
edge the highway, rise

between road and shallows.

Morning drops its shade  
on mudflat and reed, heron  
and crane.

And salt lily  
—imagined only now— thatches  
itself a floor to build upon,  
a home, dissolved at noon  
by sun over trees:

The myth  
of a freeing shelter, freer  
in the humming din of wheels,  
a sound that is an idea  
of some America.

7

And who isn't tired of fictions?  
tedious mousetraps, scampering  
life: each man his own priest  
and each his Claudius: look!  
you are away.

But which the fiction:  
the garden or the bit of venom  
at the ear?

What if I presumed  
to say *home*, not as shelter, but  
abstraction, the place of first belonging,  
presumed to find it in the nigh  
imperceptible sound of onanistic trees?  
Well, there'd be no hard feelings.

But the salt lily, I'm anxious for you  
to know, is mine, and were it Gorgon

or god, it could not be less natural:  
its soft shelf of leaf and vine is fragile  
and floats only the widened shade  
of these trees: the poem is, I fear,  
too narrow, and will rest, finally,  
in mud, but morning light's sharp angle  
aids the fiction of lengthening shade,  
and the lily, of depth.

No beginnings in the poem,  
and nothing new (the salt lily).

Light  
will not be made here, but revered,  
for at the scene of the poisoning, sound  
of the poem poured softly in, fictions  
fall away, as do their frames: the world  
eschews beginnings: More, more, it says,  
(the mistaken man):  
give me some light.

8

The scavenger birds don't sing,  
their sheetmetal cry winging  
from wire to wire, slung  
with bag and wrapper down  
Union and up Seventh: the simple  
bowl of the bay, from the ground,  
shapeless, staggered: only  
where the streets fall away.

And gull and crow never rise  
too high above the town,  
songless birds dropping nestless  
from pole to pole, always  
the same pole:

You see  
sometimes the language  
gets clever, not me: I'm serious  
as wrought-iron and violent  
as a terminal degree:

Forgive me  
if I joke, but the birds have got me  
down: the way they refuse me:  
the natural image is adequate  
for what?

Last night, the neighbor  
backed over the low brick wall,  
set the corner askew and dropped  
brick into the grass, and the landlord,  
a small and serious Swiss, shook  
his head, and said, well, I'll do it  
again.

Let sea birds scatter  
at the scraping of the trowel:  
We live by what is made.

Tammy Ho

**In This Massive Hallway**

In this massive hallway the mahogany reception desk is guarded by a woman of mixed ancestry. The owner of a well-trimmed moustache, an old man, told me he has been hanging out there for more than five years: too long, indeed, too long for his original to wait, and he died of lung cancer. The old man has five poems: three on canoeing, two on the Canadian poet-cum-singer Leonard Cohen. I am newly sent to this New York journal armed with three petite prose poems: one on fishing, two on post-postcolonial Hong Kong. My original, naive and expectation-laden, is sending numerous mes to different magazines, e-zines and whatnot. Us— all of her invisible outer doppelgangers— carry her manuscripts and wait, sometimes for days, sometimes for weeks, sometimes for months, for responses from editors. We haunt waiting rooms, store rooms, nearly-empty rooms, forgotten rooms.

Harmony Neal

## Family Don't Mean Shit

That Bitch wrote me out of existence. Not two months after our Big Blow Up, where I told her just what I thought of her and Mom and Dad and how I got screwed while she got a good life, she called to tell Mom she was getting a story published and took a minute out of her busy schedule to brag to me, her loser little brother. I said, “Cool Sis, happy for you, that’s tight.” All that.

Months later, she sent me this fucking magazine, all glossy, with ugly art and boring stories. She included a check for a G since it was almost my birthday. Thanks for the bone, Sis. Then I read it. She made herself an only child. There’s her story, all talking about the woods where we played as kids, and the time we found a broken-ass altar and thought it was Satan Worshipers, but am I in the story anywhere? Fuck no. She mentions the chicken bones, but where am I, picking them up and tossing them at her? Where am I when she fell down after the drums started and we were running away and I stopped to help her get up?

Well, I wasn’t going to stand for that shit. I got Mom to cash the check, then hitched a ride on a Greyhound heading to Wisconsin, with all the cheeseheads and drunks. I checked online at the library, found out when and where she taught. I went to her class, sat right in the front row. She looked surprised to see me. I said, “Sup, dogg? I’m here to get that ed-u-ma-ca-tion you keep houndin me bout. I figured you wouldn’t care that I aint got no GED.” She pretended not to know me, and I almost fell asleep during her students’ boring-ass discussion about *The Bell Jar*, some book where a depressed chick goes to New York and doesn’t do anything.

After the richies all left the room, she told me it was *inappropriate* of me to show up *unannounced* and *disrupt* her class. She said she’d help me apply if I finally wanted to attend school. I said, “Fuck that, yo. I’m just hangin round.” When she asked where I was staying, I said, “Prolly the dumpster behind Wal-mart.” She turned all red and walked away, but I followed her skank ass.

Outside her stupid English Building, I stood a few feet away while she smoked a cig. I watched her suck down that Turkish Gold while I puffed half a Basic’s butt. I tailed her to her office and waited in the hallway while she did whatever the fuck she does in there. I followed her to her car, and that’s when she finally got pissed—when she was unlocking the door of her shiny new black Focus and I was standing three feet away. She snarled, all mean and low, “What do you want from me?” Like she didn’t fucking know. I just grinned my big evil grin I been working on. My eyes were starting to blur, but I just stared at her with that stupid fucking grin, waiting. “Get in the car, asshole,” she said. I wasn’t about to let her win like that, so I said, “I got holes in my shoes, but I ain’t got holes in my head. You got holes in your head where your family used to be.” She just glared at me, then flipped me off and got in her car and jerked away. I started walking towards her house. I got all the time in the world.

Arlene Ang

**Dear Dog/God—**

I've cut myself again. I know you're there.  
It's raining sand. I sneeze at the count of three.

What's that in your mouth now—a shoe,  
a holy book, a magic fish, a piece of garden hose?

I think I prefer not to know. I've read  
about what happens to sheep in Chernobyl. Dear

Dog/God, I'm looking at this picture of Eve.  
She never liked the sprinklers, preferred a vee-

necked shirt to trimming your shrub.  
I miss her small feet. I still keep that brush

she threw at you when all the time  
she was angry at me. It has become the item

in my shopping cart. She's gone. I watch your tail  
disappear around the corner: café au lait,

and I'm back ordering for three  
in that pub. Remember Eden? It's still all there.

Ismael Ricardo Archbold

## **Tautologies**

“You stand on your head and you believe yourself dancing into the realm of freedom. You will wake up from your nightmare, Little Man, finding yourself hopelessly lying on the ground” — from album insert for *Generic* by Flipper

Ludwig Wittgenstein

placed words outside time:

value

resides not in line

of fact nor sign.

Purview,

delicate cosine,

refuses to align

the truth

with impreciseness.

Three plus three is six

merely

represents monads

neatly arranged. Words

slurry

our experience.

G. Wilhelm Leibniz

really

puts some perspective

on the relative —

free will

masks the ugly of

predetermined love,

life, all

acts contained thereof;

lie, ruse, sedative,  
a stall.

The criteria,  
Baruch Spinoza  
points out,  
of truth is that God  
alone contains the  
account  
of substance; life's a  
mode, posits à la  
thought-out.

Bruce Lose, Will Shatter,  
members of Flipper,  
maintain  
hating a flower,  
no tears for martyr  
or bane,  
(Martin Heidegger  
called it "being-there.")  
the lame

vener of the truth:  
the only thing worth  
living  
for is life, the hearth —  
cheap, hopeless — of death;  
nothing  
knowing, life's a dearth  
of freedom on earth,  
lying.

Mark Baumer

**Cover Letter for “Hunting Buddies”**

Dear 21 stars review,

I am submitting a short fiction piece entitled, “Hunting Buddies”. How rude of me. I forgot to introduce myself. I completely forgot. I’m not quite sure why. Maybe it’s because I haven’t eaten lunch. I’m not that hungry really. It’s more that I’m thirsty. I had a sip of ginger ale before I left the house and I wish I had brought the bottle with me. It was a two-liter bottle. I bought it last night with the last eight quarters in my pocket. I also got a small candy bar, but the guy at the register didn’t ring it up. He just gave it to me. It was a special night. The sun set. I wasn’t surprised. I had seen that happen before. I just took the ginger ale to my room. I walked the streets before I got there and I think I got a little sidetracked on the way. Half the bottle was gone before I arrived home. I put it in the refrigerator and planned to write about what I saw in the street. It isn’t often that you witness greatness. When I was younger I thought I was going to be great. It hasn’t panned out yet. I thought I was going to be a major league baseball player like the rest of my little boy classmates. At recess we played baseball in the corner of the yard until one day someone took the bat and threw it across the street. His team lost and the teachers wouldn’t let us cross the road. We chased the boy and kicked him the rest of recess. We also told him he was no good and that he would never make the majors. We should have just kicked ourselves. We were all pretty bad.

Yes, there was greatness in the street and then I only had a half a bottle left of ginger ale. I fell asleep soon after I put the drink in the fridge.

Enjoy the story. My name is Mark.

Sincerely,

Mark Baumer

Frank Haberle

### **The T Shirt Lady**

The T Shirt Lady needs a helper. You read it in the free paper. She's the one who sells T shirts on the street. She wears Jackie O sunglasses and a scarf. She wears an oversized T shirt that reads 'The T Shirt Lady' in huge black letters. All her T shirts say the same thing: 'The T Shirt Lady.' Nobody ever buys them.

Now, on your rounds, you stop to watch her. You lean on a lamppost across from her, for longer and longer each day. You watch her methodically fold and re-fold the white shirts in neat rows, small through extra-large. You watch her pull each shirt out, crease it tightly and tuck it neatly back in place. You see her reach into her little belt purse, pull out her chapstick, and work her lips in front of the little mirror. The little mirror's for people trying on T shirts, although no one ever does. No one ever tries one on, lets alone buys one. Still. You shift your weight on the lamppost and scratch your chest. Still, the T Shirt Lady needs a helper.

Then one silver afternoon you're watching. And she collapses.

She looks up into the sky above you. You look up too. A sheet of blue pigeons turn in formation above a cornice. When you look back, she's lying on the sidewalk.

At first nobody seems to notice. You wade into traffic. A cab skids to a halt, a truck blasts its horn inches from your ear. By the time you cross the street to her a crowd has formed. The crowd becomes a large gray mass blocking the street, from the trees, from the sky.

You want to help, but when you get to her, you freeze. The T shirt lady lies face up on the sidewalk, the Jackie O glasses folded neatly next to her face. Her eyes are open, but it looks like she's sleeping. Her T Shirt Lady T shirt drapes around her formless body like a blanket. The T shirts she pulled down with her lie spread on the sidewalk like crumpled flowers.

A man leans over. He's old, and thick, and smells like hot onions.

"Lady?" he asks in a booming voice. "Oh god. Lady?"

He bends his knees to get as close to her as he can, but his knees don't bend very far. You look over his shoulder. He grabs your sleeve between his thumb and forefinger and pulls you down.

"Get her tongue. Look at it. Her tongue."

You kneel slowly beside her, resting your knees on one of the fallen shirts. Her skin is slate blue, ocean blue. Her mouth is closed, peacefully. You put your face close to hers, then pull back.

"She's breathing," you say. "She's breathing fine."

"Take this," the man yells. He pushes his unfolded wallet against your arm. "Wait a minute." He pulls a wad of bills out of the wallet, tucks them in his breast pocket and pushes it back at you.

"Take it!" he yells. "Come on! The tongue!"

\* \* \*

Some time ago you were on an airplane. A stewardess reached over, smiling, to hand you a coke. But you wouldn't take it, because you were on an airplane, and you knew you were about to die.

\* \* \*

A yellow taxi pulls beside the T shirt stand. The crowd parts. A huge bear with a long black beard walks up purposefully. He takes in each image with burning black eyes: the blue woman lying on her back, the two men leaning over her, the T shirts.

“What is happening?” he demands.

“Nothing,” the old man says.

“What have you done to this lady?”

“I didn't do nothing.” The old man steps back. His voice is a fraction of what it was. He pulls his wallet from your hand. “I didn't do nothing to her. She just fell down.”

Suddenly the T Shirt lady sits up. She blinks at you. She's younger than you thought. Her cheeks flush, little pink blotches.

“Did you see it?” she whispers.

“It's gone now,” you say. “Whatever it is. Or was.”

“Oh.”

When you look up again the bear and the old man have faded into the crowd, which itself melts away, leaving an empty sidewalk littered with T Shirt lady T shirts.

She rubs her neck and looks up into the sky. The pigeons circle again, 50 or 100 of them, making the same sharp turn in unison. From this side of the street, the T Shirt Lady's side, the afternoon sun flashes against their cold white bellies. You're blinded for a second.

The light disappears. When you turn back she's blinking at you.

“I'm the T Shirt Lady,” she says. Her voice is rich now, certain.

“I know you are,” you say, offering her a hand. “Please let me help you.”

Pranshu Arya

## **Falling**

I stepped onto the ledge and jumped. The bungee cord held me by the waist with my life in its hands. Accelerating down at some  $32 \text{ ft/s}^2$  toward the murky water, I thought about life.

6 ft:

I got 'graphomania', as Kundera calls it, early in life. I wanted just what he says, an audience of unknown readers. Well, not entirely. I wanted my parents. But since I couldn't have them, the next best thing was anonymous fame. After that failure at home I just wanted to be known. By my friends, by my girlfriends. I kept many sides to myself. I justify it to myself as a survival tactic. I showed that side of me - rather, I cultivated that in me - I thought others wanted to see. Maybe I lost "myself" somewhere in the process. I lost a spine and became invertebrate.

40 ft:

"You don't listen to me."

"I can't listen to you anymore after you repeat the same thing a thousand times. I'm not a machine; I have my limits of tolerance. If you would just consider your reasoning before you become emotional, we could avoid so much drama."

"How I feel is how I feel, why can't you just acknowledge it?"

"Because your feelings are unreasonable! If you would listen to yourself and see how you function, you'd see that your expectations are far too high and your grasp on reality next to none, so that you're bound to end up getting hurt."

70 ft:

How cool would it be to hit the water and land on a crocodile's back? He'd probably end up devouring me, but still, how many people can claim they've fallen onto a crocodile? It's a pretty pathetic claim to fame. I'd wrap my arms around him as tightly as I could, like a seat belt holds me to the car seat. He'd probably thrash around, turn over many times until I let go. I don't know how sharp those thorn-like bumps on his skin are. Is it even skin? I'd struggle to breathe and be forced to let go. That's when he'd come after me.

125 ft:

What's she doing right now? Is she in the shower? Eating breakfast? 3000 miles across America. It's a vast expanse, but it's made larger in my mind, because also in my mind she's right next to me. I can

feel her next to me right now, falling with me, I can feel her skin. When I'm with her, near her body, there are still inches and millimeters between us. When we touch, there are molecules of space, as empty as the uncharted universe. Molecules to millimeters to miles - it's just a matter of magnitude, the form remains the same. When I pull a hair from her arm she flinches. I feel a breeze rushing through my shorts, through my underwear, under my shirt and dragging itself up my face, dissipating through my hair. I'm not flinching, I'm brave. When she bears unbearable cramps once a month, she cries out in pain; she's not brave. When I approached her for the first time with a proposition, I was brave. When I lift my mother's image and project it on her, then she's brave. Her muscles may be weak but her will is iron. I'm rushing toward dirty green water, I'm brave.

201 ft:

What does impact feel like? A train against a train, car against car. I've never been in a crash. I've hardly lived. I'm not ungrateful, simply curious. Some curiosities you regret after you satisfy them, but these same curiosities often haunt you, despite - or perhaps because of - their fatalistic nature, until they're satisfied. I think I know everything, and the more I live the more I learn how little I know. But it's not a bad thing, it doesn't diminish the ego; it's too persistent for that. As I learn more about the bounds of the ego, the larger the ego grows from learning more about itself. Every inch of me feels exhilaration and inside I'm killing brain cells, waxing philosophy.

293 ft:

Let's see them design a lens that zooms as fast as these eyes right now. That spot directly below, which occupied only 10% of my vision a few seconds ago, is now all I can see save for some incomprehensible peripheral imagery. There are no crocodiles in the water. It wouldn't be fun thinking about them if there were. I'll close my eyes and picture a hippopotamus. I can see his teeth, I can see him running toward me after I crash into the water. I can feel the force from his body long before he reaches me, hear his grunting, louder than the splashing of the water he's violently displacing. He's coming, I'm dead. This is life; now I've lived. If I had a rifle I'd throw it down his throat and fire. His skin's so thick probably nothing would happen. He'll sink to the floor of the lake. I'll be so agitated I'll kick his rubbery skin and scream louder than apocalypse, but nothing will happen. Reverberations from the agitation of his skin will transfer upon contact and ring through my body. I'll scream even louder seeing my efforts are in vain, and then I'll explode from within, my innards briefly coloring the water before it goes green again. My dead hippo and I will lie peacefully at the bottom until the crocodiles come and make him as colorful and beautiful as I am.

467 ft:

I'm flying, through air. What if I could fly through water? Through ice? Could I dive into a volcano and swim in its lava? What if it's not as hot as they say it is? Maybe it'll feel cool against my skin. I can fly. The laws that inhibit others clearly don't apply to me. I can see the slowly crawling lava monster that's coming to devour my house. I'm so mesmerized with it that I've forgotten about what I'm about to lose to fire. I'm stepping back from the jelly as it lazily comes after me. It's so much fun to gather sticks and stones and watch them vanish almost instantly as I throw them into the expanding pool in front of me. What's holding me back from touching it? I want to spread it on bread and eat it. Take it in my fingers and watch it slip through like sand. I just want to reach in and take it like a pot of gold. I want to smear you, O lava, all over my body; I want to bathe in you. I want to make you my bed. It kills me to know that would be my deathbed.

713 ft:

I'm drowning in a bottomless pond in the rainforest. As soon as I realize what's going on and where I am, I reach for a vine. Their abundant network was irritating me as I walked through the forest. They kept appearing out of nowhere and slapping my face and even trying to tear the shirt off my back. What was just a hindrance is now my only savior. It's too late though. There's molecules or miles (I can't tell which) of space between my closest fingertip and the flexibly unbreakable fiber. I try to jump but there's nothing to kick off of. Everything looks so heavenly from below, the forest...I can still feel the morning mist on my face; the moisture laden air makes breathing a little difficult.

1001 ft:

Snap.

Ateet Tuli

## Jason

*The binary stars of the 44i Botis System pass in front of one another every three hours.*

1

We are eclipsing binaries, 2 grains of powder perpetually sucking each other, against countless other grains, against black. Neither of us entertained the grandiose; we knew one of us would eventually fade, perhaps in a powder haze - a snort would produce a sniffle - tears in your nostril, tears from my eye.

You did not wither and fade. You moved, as is customary for travelers such as us, grains blown by the slightest exhale.

The beasts distance and time breed letters returned by the post office marked address unknown. Love traverses distance and time and lands. Love, the -1 with a crown of head feathers, a long tail ending in a serif and a straight sharp beak that pecks at my ribs, glassy brass, until it can enter through the hole and thrash, in need of comfort, in its new cage.

Once upon a time, you called telling me of pool hustles for money to scratch the cue ball, that white powder, so you could be closer to you Jazz heroes. I have a new buddy now. I snort with him, I snort because of him because I snort to be close to you. Revolving around nothing, the zero, that freezing point, the high of a drug, the one you and I are left with, together, apart. My pal TV is a high, a cheap laugh at the expense of money that burns our noses as we graze each others' cheeks, as we hug, as we revolve, as we revolt, as we are men as we are. Pass before my eyes again. Move. Let us continue delicate chess.

1+1 (aka 8)

Who invented zero? Greeks or Indians? No matter now, there are two connected. You and I. A lemon slice twisted, perched atop a glass.

Everyone is a zero and circumferentially inside us sits the 8. Viscera corkscrew, DNA Slinky slinking down a flight to come to rest, propelled only by perpetual motion. One circle drops from each eye, condensation from ice, diluting cola. No longer sick, it is simply sweet.

1+1-1

We are the toxic twins, the fizz and the sand, original original formula, the prescription, abandoned cure for headaches, fluid aspirin. Long since separated, we now cohabit only in laboratories of young remixers, those exploratory chefs laboring over concoctions. Another con, we haven't lost it. We, the syrup tree burrowing through innocent soil. We find those trying to find and create dusk in their eyes, circle wagons around their heart, and race atop wild horse thoughts to pillage the campsite in the dead of night. We, the acetone, the balloon passed through a body, passed through customs, passed in a deal. We the sweet, the caffeine, the false color, the aftertaste. The body full of liquid and line. The skipping meter. Nervous energy.

1+1-1-1

I continue to write you, Poet Laureate of my pulse, that I have finally discovered the playground of Jazz. I even use the swing sets. That between the ashes of night and my bed sheets, I can hardly find a dream. I write in mustard on hot dogs later eaten only to appease starvation so I can receive the next hit, right now it, one day maybe you. I write in Gesso - white on white on white on cotton the color of brown rice, water on snow, I sneeze flakes that land where I am about to step, and cover my tracks so Death will not find you through me - that is then painfully painted over. Still, the underpainting bleeds through.

When will we see?

-1

Amanda Laughtland

**Don't Rob the Cradle**

Though the low ration point value  
of baby foods may be tempting

unfortunately there's limited supply  
of these specially prepared products.

Unless you have a junior at home  
please walk right past those rows

of little cans. All companies  
are following wartime restrictions

and the nation's birthrate is rising.

**January 18, 1943**

Had a dream last night that you  
were mad at me for not writing.  
Thought I'd better do something about it.  
I'm sure glad I came here, happy

as any new bride should be. Perfect  
weather every day, and heaps  
of Southern hospitality. How about  
flying down for a visit? Don't you miss  
  
me bothering you all the time?

**November 13, 1944**

Mother is in a bad way again.

I'd have picked up and left

last month, only it didn't sound bad

over the telephone. Doctors say

she'll surely need another operation.

Never realized it might get so bad

or I'd have been here sooner.

Haven't time for a letter.

Will try and tell you more later.

Phil Primeau

**American Dream**

My shaving cream

lends confidence to be

a man in an old Chevy

without a shirt

kissing through wind

at girls

selling popsicles

made from stuff

my favorite poem

rises through

a purity of track marks

motorcycle free.

Andrea Lewis

## **Rice Cooker**

Let's say it's raining and you want to have an affair. Even though you just bought a new electric rice cooker, you want out—out of the slow-motion train-wreck of colliding days. Away from placemats, eggshells, salt, outdoor furniture, the sad accumulation of small appliances, anything that sprays on anything else. You find yourself at midnight in the rain—don't forget, it's raining—without a coat because you quarreled and you slammed a door and fled if not toward the lover then the concept, but in any case you're running down a street convinced your life's about to change, and then you pass a window glowing, veiled in lace, an older building, older life, glowing, a marriage that endured, and here it is again, the life-long problem: duty or desire?

You're getting wet, your clothing clings, the drama that propelled you ebbs away, it smells like dryer sheets and garbage here, a car rolls past, you cannot move, you stand instead where most of life is lived, between the glowing and the rain.

## Spark

She is trying to watch television when the drapes catch fire. She hates the drapes. They are green and dusty and belong to the landlord. She lets them burn. The television program is one she looks forward to all week. The people on the program have become her companions. Sometimes, at work, she catches herself having silent conversations with them.

The drapes give off a black, greasy smoke. A spark jumps to a corner of the ceiling. The fire spreads, but only in an orderly fashion, along the seams of the room. Soon the familiar box of her apartment glows in a delicate outline of flame.

On the television program, a custody battle rages. Elizabeth will get the children, but Justin does have some good arguments. Elizabeth is unstable and the children have been left alone at times—anything could have happened.

The delicate lines of fire weaken the seams of the room until all four walls fall outward at the same time. She feels the warm air of the dark blue night. She is surprised it is not winter. A neighbor, a young woman she has never met, waves from a golden window across the way. The streetcar, a moving rectangle of light, rattles past.

She marvels that the ceiling has not fallen on top of her. It hovers like an island in the dark blue sky.

## Heidegger Unloads the Dishwasher

It is important, if not vital, that everything have its place. If everything does not have its place, how then can one presume to unload the dishwasher? For if one were to extract from the dishwasher, say, a salad plate, and perhaps at that moment admire its cleanliness, its shine, its utilitarian perfection, what good is all that if one does not know with absolute certainty what to do next? For if the salad plate's exact destination amongst the other crockery is not immediately evident, one faces a dangerous moment of hesitation wherein one begins to contemplate the meaning of the entire exercise. One might wonder, for example, Why am I removing this salad plate – which only last night held a charming array of arugula, insouciant bits of bleu cheese, a wedge of tomato that by itself was a parable of creation, and a drizzle of olive oil bringing to mind, say, a sunny week in Italy two years ago – Why am I removing it from its so-called temporary home in the dishwasher and returning it to its so-called permanent home in some cabinet or cubbyhole or cubicle, only to seek it out again a few hours, nay, perhaps even a few moments hence, to dirty it once again with grubby alimentary necessity in a cycle that is not unlike the grand wheel of birth and death perpetuating itself for aeons here on our lonely planet? Thus the critical significance of knowing, without thought or hesitation, without reflection, dalliance, or conscious decision, where to put the salad plate, where to store the water goblet, where to rest the green, double-sided vegetable server, becomes obvious.

For without this certainty, one is forced, night after night, to peer into an abyss of unfathomable metaphysical blackness, to question the meaning of one's existence, and ultimately to confront one's own pathetic mortality.

Kyle Minor

**Smart-Ass Sometimes Iambic Always Quantitative Syllabic Autobiographical Arguing-  
Against-Form-Absent-Feeling 19-Word-per-Stanza 5-Stanza with a Prose-Envoy-to-Send-  
You-Home Abecedarium Rag in G Mixolydian, to be Performed on the Glockenspiel,  
Allegro**

“let it, let it, let it flare like the firefly, let it spark and flash, kindle and smoke, let it . . .”

— “A Small Psalm,” Catherine Wing

A

boorish child, obnoxious Me: *Jesus Loves You,*  
*Catherine Wing.*

Duded up nights on the town, goodbye!

Enter Invisible.

For-

givenness, of course, is harder to find, says I,  
heroic

I, undergrad, hip quick deep Beat cad,  
jocular ironist.

*Keep*

*living right!* Preacher Me says pleasure is fine,  
matrimo-

ny assumed. *Vamoose, heavy-heavy!*

O Tom? Jerry? Be chaste.

Prompt:

Queer knocks on my office door, wanting something.

*Really? God*

*sends loving people like me to hell?*

Tintinnabulation.

Un-

Veiling Big Me! Precious, Unpious, Impure!

Wanting some

X-rated things, to be sure! YET! YET!

YET! not tolerant of

Z to the A, A to the Z, poems that break down into prose, poems that posit feeling without feeling it, cuteness, abstraction, (here's a puzzle: count the mimetic fallacies on this here page), lines that lengthen and lengthen and lengthen and lengthen, dreadlocks on girls, Republicans, people who can't confine their argument to the point at hand but go on and on endlessly about tangential prejudices (I don't like ballerinas!) and peccadilloes (Feet!) and can't end a poem well to save their lives, and endlessly exploit the failures of their own autobiography, keep to the grotesqueries and ignore the generousities, as though all we are is all our sickness and wrongness, and what about our moments of true loving kindness? and though I shun and rebuke each and every cliché, device, and trick . . . O (the word itself a trick), I rely upon them to save me, and they are weak, and I am weak, and it's not true that poetry has nothing for us but pain, and what's so wrong with bestowing a blessing? So:

Jesus Loves You, Catherine Wing.

Gary Beck

## Rediscovered Marriage

Arlene and James were just getting used to the idea that their son Ted would not be returning to school. They were also trying to come to terms with his living in Europe and not seeing him for a year, or longer. Arlene was feeling a combination of guilt for frequently neglecting Ted for her commitment to work, and confusion as to what her obligations were to her now fully grown son. She mentioned her concern to James and she was pleasantly surprised at his reasonable and considerate response. "I know what you're going through. I've been feeling the same way. I've been so concerned with work that I didn't spend much time with him. If it's any consolation, he obviously didn't turn out too badly. He's making his own decisions, living on his own and planning his own business. I'd say you did pretty well."

It had been a while since James had complimented her about anything and it took her a moment to digest her reaction. "That's sweet of you, James. I've been so involved with my caseload that I really haven't given much time to you or Ted. You must think I'm very selfish." "No," James said sincerely. "I respect your dedication to the causes you believe in. You were always that way. If you believed in something, you went all the way.... I don't take things as intensely as you do. I just want to live well and not have to struggle." "You weren't always that way. You protested against the war in Vietnam." "I went along because it was the right thing to do, but I didn't burn with revolutionary fire like you did."

This was the first serious discussion that they had in years and it was a novel change for Arlene. "Well I'm not much of a revolutionary now. I spend most of my time bargaining with other lawyers." "You're still fighting the system. I admire you for that." Arlene was shocked. "You never told me that." "I didn't know how. I know you don't approve of my money grubbing." "That's not true. I just want you to have more meaningful interests." "Well I don't. I just got out of the habit of talking to you and we just started to grow apart." "I guess that's to be expected," Arlene said with a sigh. "I'm a middle-aged woman. How could I keep a man's interest?" "You're crazy! You're a beautiful, sexy woman." Arlene laughed and ran a hand through her hair. "I found a grey hair this morning." "That doesn't matter," he said. She smiled at him invitingly. "Maybe we should get reacquainted." He smiled back. "I think that's a good idea."

It had been more than two years since they last made love, yet they weren't the least bit self-conscious. It was as if they flashed back to the past, when their lovemaking was urgent and exciting. Afterwards, Arlene snuggled close to James, his arm tucked around her, holding her tightly against him. "That was nice," she said. "It's been awhile." "Nice? Just nice?" James asked in mock

indignation. "I thought it was pretty damn good." Arlene giggled. "Me too. I just didn't want you to get a swelled head." "Well you took care of that, but I think it's swelling again." He guided her hand to his penis, which was getting hard again. She squeezed it, rubbed it up and down until it was stiff, then rolled on top of him and slipped him inside her. She bounced up and down until they both came with a gasp.

They lay there quietly until their breathing subsided to normal and James whispered: "Let's not wait two years for the next date." They both laughed and it seemed as if a lot of the tensions of the last few years were melting away. They talked about things they had been indifferent about for a long time. James asked Arlene about her cases and she asked him about his investments. They both realized that they were equally guilty of ignoring the other's important activities. "James." "Yes?" "I think we both have to make an effort to communicate more." "I think we just did. Twice." She slapped him playfully. "That's not what I meant." "I know, counselor. I was just kidding. You're right. We have to talk more, especially about our problems."

An awkward silence settled over them, a reminder that they may have touched each other in an unexpected sexual outburst. but there was still a large gap between them to be bridged. James spoke hesitantly. "I got too involved in wanting things and making money was the best way to get them.... It's not like we were poor when I was growing up.... But it always felt that way. Dad made good money when he worked, but he didn't work regularly.... He was a stagehand and he was a union member. He worked on some Broadway shows and later on some tv programs, but they just used him for fill-in. He didn't have great benefits and there wasn't much security.... He was always talking about the Marine Corps. He was in Korea and he couldn't let it go. He'd tell me about his buddies and the guys who died near the Yalu, until I couldn't stand hearing about it anymore.... Mom was a nurse. She didn't make much money, but she had great medical benefits. We all got regular checkups, whether we needed them or not, and the best treatment if we got sick.

James paused reflectively, then blurted out: "It all changed after Mom and Beverly died in 1961." "You never really told me much about them," Arlene said gently. "I know they were killed in a car crash. Do you want to talk about it?" He looked at her gratefully. "Yeah. I would. Mom was bringing Bev home from the hospital, where she took her for a flu shot. A drunk driver, doing at least sixty, ran a red light, jumped the curb and ran them down. They died instantly." Arlene touched his arm. "It must have been terrible for you." "Yeah, it's tough to lose your mother at that age and I was just starting to get along with Bev, after resenting her for getting all the attention." "Girls always get more attention," Arlene said. "That's the way it is." He looked at her strangely. "This is weird, talking about this after we've been married twenty years."

Arlene suppressed her impulse to snap: "Actually, it's been twenty one years," and simply said: "It's important that we reach out to each other, if we want to preserve our marriage." He

nodded. "You're right. I haven't done too well at that." "Well neither have I. Now go on with what you were telling me." "Alright. Dad and I never really got along. He was always pushing me to do things that he wanted me to do, but he didn't care much about what I wanted. After Mom died, he just stopped caring about anything and just sort of withdrew. When he wasn't working he'd put on his Marine dress uniform and sit around and look at some old scrapbooks he kept. He'd shop for breakfast stuff and there was always bologna or tuna fish for lunch, but he wouldn't cook. We'd eat dinner out at three different restaurants all the time; Chinese, Italian or a cafeteria that served everything with some kind of brown gravy. And I always had to eat what he ordered."

"Now I understand why you're so into gourmet French cooking." "I know it sounds trivial, but I ate the same crap for years, until I went to college. When I got my scholarship to Columbia it included dorm and cafeteria. The food wasn't very good, but at least it was different and I could order what I wanted. It's not that I'm a glutton, but preparing an elegant meal helps make up for all the drab meals I consumed." Arlene poked him playfully. "I remember what a glutton you were for sex when we first met." "Well you were hot stuff. It was wild making love with you. All that talk about Barnard girls being hairy and frigid may have been true, but you were an exception." "Why, thank you, sir. I should defend my classmates against that slur." Then she giggled. "But a lot of them seemed more interested in girls, rather than boys. In sophomore year I practically had to fight off my roomie, until she moved out."

"I didn't know that," he said. Arlene shrugged. "Well I haven't told you everything either. When we first got involved we were busy having sex, or going to anti-war protests. Once we got out of school, into the real world, we developed needs and obligations that changed the nature of our relationship." "That's for sure. I had no idea at the time that college was such a protected environment. I sort of did what I wanted and there were no real consequences, except if I got hit by a cop's billy club. And that was like a badge of honor in those days." She looked at him curiously. "Do you think about those days?" "Not really," he replied. "Sometimes someone at work drones on about the past and the good old days at dumb-dumb u, but that's ancient history." "You wouldn't want to live like that again?" she prodded. "No. I didn't know what I was doing back then. I just reacted to things. Maybe I'll get my act together one of these days and improve our lives. You never know."

They were both quiet for a few moments, feeling comfortable together for the first time in a long while. Finally James became restless and he got up. "I'm going to take a quick shower. Then, if you like, I'll make dinner for us." "That would be nice, especially if it was something interesting and French," she responded coyly. He smiled exuberantly. "For madam's pleasure, I shall prepare *Émincé de Veau à la Crème*, cooked to perfection." "What is it in English?" "Just this once, don't

ask and let it be a surprise. If you don't like it, the maitre'd will understand and make the chef cook anything that you want." "That's the most reasonable dinner offer I've ever had."

Arlene lay there feeling satisfied and content, without the least inclination to move. She watched James walk into the bathroom and his nude body looked trim and fit. She made a mental note to join a gym somewhere near her office and work out regularly. She slowly got up, put on her robe and went downstairs to the kitchen. Inez, their maid, had cleaned the kitchen thoroughly just that morning. She had put the dishes and stemware in the dishwasher and actually polished the silver without being asked. As Arlene put dishes and glasses into their cabinets, she understood how useful Inez had become. She considered the idea that they should ask Inez to be their live-in housekeeper and possibly even hire Felicia to assist her.

James came downstairs jauntily, whistling a show tune from 'Cats'. He started preparations for dinner and Arlene marveled at his adeptness. "I just never realized how skilled you are. You could be a chef at a five star restaurant." He shook his head. "Not me. It's one thing to cook for our pleasure and to occasionally show off for some friends, but to slave in somebody else's kitchen, no way." "Well, speaking of slaving, I just had a good idea. Why don't we have Inez as our live-in housekeeper and Felicia could live-in and assist her?" He looked at her approvingly as he considered the idea. "Sounds good. I could even teach her to cook, if she doesn't know how. I'll talk to her tomorrow." "Be careful that you don't pressure her to do it. You know she's an illegal and always scared." "Don't worry, counselor. I'll make sure she knows she has a choice."

After dinner they went into the living room and James turned on the tv. "I just want to get the latest O.J. news. I promised his friend Khiem that we'd discuss the blood-stained gloves." "What are you talking about? When did you talk to Khiem?" "Just the other day. We talk about the O.J. Simpson trial two or three times a week." "I didn't know that," she said. "Oh, yeah. He's fascinated by O.J. He tries to get the trial news on satellite, but there's not much coverage, so I record trial segments and read them to him." "I'm discovering all kinds of new things about you," she said. "Do you ask him about Ted?" He grinned boyishly. "Not directly, but he always tells me what's going on, at least an edited version. He understands quid pro quo." "I'll have to work at it then," she remarked. "You'll have to tell me all about our son."

Len Joy

## Life Sentences

When his daughters were babies, he couldn't wait until they could talk, at least then he could understand what they wanted, but when they started talking they wouldn't shut up and they always wanted him to read those insipid storybooks like *Runaway Bunny* (for God's sake let the bunny go if he wants to leave that bad) and so he yearned for the day when he could have an intelligent conversation with them, but have you ever tried to have an intelligent conversation with a teenage girl wearing an IPOD, playing *Sims* on her wireless laptop and watching *American Idol*, because it can't be done, and so it wasn't long before he was counting the days until they were off to college and out of his house and he could have his TV room back again and read a book without being interrupted and then one day they were both gone.

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After he finally told his wife that he was tired of hearing about her mother's nursing home complaints - food's too salty, room's too hot, residents aren't friendly (this from Miss Congeniality), after he told her he wasn't interested in the tales of her misogynist boss or her zany fat secretary, after he told her he had a life too and that what happened to him might be as interesting as her twenty minute recap of the five minute book review she'd heard on "*All Things Considered*", after he'd said all that and after her smile vanished and after she let her briefcase slip from her hand and after she picked up the remote, sunk into her chaise and flicked on *QVC* and didn't annoy him even once by saying, "Isn't that a great deal?", after that he kind of wished he hadn't said anything.

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It was his first job, he wasn't going to work for the company forever, he had bigger dreams, but the pay wasn't bad and it was good experience and after three years he was made assistant to the assistant of the department and that was a big promotion so he decided to stay for a little longer and then the twins were born and it would be irresponsible to leave with babies to care for and besides the assistant was going to retire in a year so he waited and sure enough the assistant did retire, although it took him five years, but now HE was the assistant and that WAS a big deal and he figured he could put off his dreams temporarily and maybe if he played his cards right he'd become head of the department and make the big bucks and have the country club membership and the company car, it shouldn't take more than five years, but five years became ten and then one day the department head dropped dead at his desk and they replaced him with the kid from Auditing who was twenty-seven.

Amy L. Sargent

## **She Frequents a Gas Station**

She frequents a gas station near her home, though she does not have a car and could not, therefore, buy any gasoline. A younger man—a boy, really—works at the gas station, and she finds him attractive. He does not work any set shift, so many times when she approaches the gas station after walking slowly, thinking for many minutes on what to buy inside, she enters to find that he was not working. She feels guilty and buys something anyway, not really needing anything. Gum, PowerBars, a pumpkin caramel cappuccino, frothy and more like hot, liquid candy than coffee.

The boy has long, dark roots on his short, pale hair and faded tattoos stretched over his lower arms. Tongues of black lick out from under his shirtsleeves and make her curious about the artistic license he has taken with the rest of his body. She then feels embarrassed, dirty, knowing that the boy is probably fresh out of high school, and she, though only thirty-five, is probably closer to his mother's age than his. Those feelings, however, do not make her stop frequenting the gas station.

She buys Plen-T-Packs, cigarette lighters, ice cream sandwiches, magazines, and key chains; and she runs out of things to buy. She wishes the store sold wine. She begins to smoke, not only to have something to buy, but to start using up the many lighters she has already bought.

She dresses in a certain fashion to go to the gas station, and although it makes her self-conscious, she cannot stop herself from doing it. She has an entire section of her closet for these wardrobe choices—too-tight blouses and short skirts, many in subtle animal prints. As she picks her way along the side of the road on her walks, she thinks of herself as a tarty older woman, apprentice to those sixty-year-olds at the grocery store, hair inflated and crispy, colored with Clairol's Copper Penny. Women who mince down the aisles in their pedal pushers and kitten heels with over-applied cosmetics, earlobes pulled long by dangling earrings resemble blown-glass Christmas ornaments. She wonders if that is how the gas station boy sees her. As she buttons a silk blouse to strain across her breasts, she wonders if he really sees her at all.

When the boy is at the gas station, she sometimes believes he shows an interest in her. He hands her change to her, and says "have a nice day" while looking directly into her eyes, daring her. He smiles at her, and he has a nice smile, but one front tooth, a top fang, is slightly discolored with what is probably a slow rot. She is sure, at times, that he finds her attractive. At other times, she wonders why she equates this brief eye contact with being found desirable.

She is often afraid she looks like a drag queen, or the female impersonator of a drag queen—that he views her as a spectacle, not as a woman.

His name is not embroidered on his pocket, so she does not know it. There are no visible tattoos with his name in them, either (though that, she believes, is a positive thing). Still, she is angry; she thinks all gas station boys should wear shirts with their name embroidered on the pocket.

She knows she could grow old simply wanting to know the boy; she has no desire to engage him in conversation, afraid of finding out how stupid he really was. In contrast, if she lets herself believe that he is smart, then it's possible that he eventually will leave the gas station for a better job, or for college. She prefers to think that he is just a little dim, in an endearing way. If he continues to stay silent, he will not disrupt her opinions of his behavior. Sometimes, while buying a pack of cigarettes, she looks at him as he squints, pecking at the keys on the cash register. His nails, though dirty, look buffed. She wishes everyone fit into her life as well as the gas station boy; wishes she could will everyone to remain silent, so she could just make up their personalities, imagine them as she wished they would behave.

T. A. Noonan

**Dear Venus,**

Go home & sleep. Judgments change little.

Tonight

hook your fingers in pearl-strapped sandals; strip.

Next, shape the space between bed

& mouth.

Mars will come, make war.

Sex will separate the ocean.

*The same way:*

*I slid my hand in Odysseus's swathing & marked him.*

*I calculate everything, Sister.*

When you remove those shoes, see your reflection

—fair

letters branded on your cheeks; appleflesh pressed against  
your nipple; swans behind you, their necks stretched long  
as bleached thighbones

—& remember when birds

carried you away,

the light in Paris's eyes was the glint of

bent armor. The valley between his lips, a plow furrow.

*He should have been mine, you know.*

Inside city walls

Trojans tip their arrows with owlfeathers, unaware  
you've lined the nest in cyanide.

## Seashore Rites

On beachdays my brother rides  
my handlebars. He can't keep up when  
he runs,  
but he always tangles the pedals.

His feet  
    (small, upturned clams)  
click and close on the pier.

Behind him castles  
slag into the sea, fairytale  
into  
fairytale.

We catch sky in seashell cauldrons,  
brew foam, saltwater, Coppertone potions—

*((( Neptune )))*

*((( Nun )))*

*((( Nimue )))*

—to them // to us,

we are robots rusting on the shore;  
they are ashes fertilizing the palm.

New becomes old becomes new. The tide rolls

*in — out*

*— in — out*

like Lenten smoke.

I teach him seashore rites,

and Oceanus inspires  
fresh alchemy in his chest.

(He won't mind the sand on his lips.)

I say, "Beach sunsets are like movie screenings."

Smile.

Hold his hand. "Yes, I saw this first."

Mark Cunningham

**Convergent Lady Beetle**

As the October sky went from ash to slate, the upside-down reflection of the trees in my bulb-bottle of green hand soap grew greener, shone with its own distinct shine: Spring in my little New Zealand. Stars are made of erupting gas, a fact that never fails to remind me of the fat Elvis. The thought anything can happen always comes along just at this point.

Catie Crabtree

**Jono**

He has a starfish named for him  
And when you dive down among  
The ingots and pearl buds you see  
His cool climes are where he is at ease  
And you will no doubt suffer  
A good several minutes of watery bliss  
Before the lung burst,  
The sad journey to the surface.

## The Heart

Spot lit in a dark room  
The system of the heart glows.  
Scarlet branches bloom in small explosions,  
Collapse into themselves  
In the murky air. This is the light  
Of sea creatures that thrive  
Deep in underwater caves.  
They hang in darkness,  
Lit by their own luminescent lures,  
Prey with a small bulb of light.

We have come to look at the body,  
The systems sundered and encapsulated,  
Scattered evenly,  
As a bird drops seeds  
Or a squid loses ink.  
We are struck by the beauty of the heart,  
The organ—like the anathema, the coal-black fish—  
The size of a closed hand.

## Other Variations

you caught my eye we exchanged

glass

in the morning your childhood

pupfish had a cold

i own

a figment business we had a

bet

i'm a nice girl you:

black spout you: front row

you: great smog

we

smoke soot—let's meet.

Carrie Grinstead

## **The Emily Liberation Front**

The Chicago cousins had a terrifying old cat named Fluff. She was eighteen years old, a black skeleton, and she stalked around the house making loud, demonic sounds whenever she was hungry, whenever she was lonely, whenever she was scared. For Kim's wedding they tied a white lace collar around Fluff's spindle of a neck, put her in a basket with a pink pillow, and carried her down to the beach. Fluff in her basket sat next to Emily, and Emily scratched her threadbare ears. An airplane passed way out over the water.

It was so windy that no one could hear the vows, so pleasant that no one cared. Emily's uncle's beard, Kim's dress, the bridesmaids' flowers all looked like more white waves. You could lose your mind staring at them, all those crashes of happiness on a little stretch of sand. Everyone was barefoot, even Emily's uncle, who looked like he was close to breaking apart as Kim kissed her tall dude with glasses.

The reception was very small, a barbecue held in the two-story condo where Kim and her sisters grew up. Emily had never seen it until earlier that year. She hadn't even remembered she had Chicago cousins until she decided to enroll at Loyola, when her mother said she should call her uncle. He was still in the city, she was pretty sure.

He was. Uncle Paul with Aunt Anne and their kids, Kim and Paige and Susan. And Fluff, whose basket went out on the back porch for the reception. Emily still sat with her, with the creepy cat and a Stella Artois. Kim, in dark jeans and a T-shirt that said BRIDE, kissed the top of Emily's head and grinned and asked if she was okay. Emily said she was. She probably didn't look like it, but she was. She didn't know most of these people, and she liked just sitting by herself and looking up and down the alley. The back porches, the dumpsters, the high-rises.

Paul was Emily's dead father's brother, and she'd last seen him at the funeral, when Emily was too young to remember. And little Fluff still had her whole life ahead of her, Emily thought, sipping her beer and shutting her eyes. During Emily's first visit to the condo they'd dug out an old photo album, where they had a picture of Kim, six years old, sitting between Emily and her sister Lacey. They were identical twins but could have just been any two babies, sitting there bald on the couch. Emily's couch, where she'd eaten chocolate Pop Tarts and watched Nick at Nite, fallen asleep after school, waited for Lacey to come home. Uncle Paul had brought his whole family, his two daughters and his pregnant wife, up to Emily's tiny apartment and tiny town for the funeral. For one night. Kim said she remembered it. They'd had breakfast at Dunkin' Donuts on their way out of town.

The other uncle, the young one, sat down next to Emily. His name was Jake, and he'd made himself a T-shirt that said DRUNK. "Cheers," he said, and he clinked his beer against hers and winked. "You know, you look so much like your grandmother. Sitting there. Paul, doesn't she look just like Mom? Just like her."

Emily smiled and drank and looked at her knees. He'd said the same thing at Thanksgiving, again on New Year's Eve. You, Emily, have been done before. They'd shown Emily pictures, and Emily just smiled and shrugged. She looked like her sister; she wasn't supposed to look like anyone else.

"It's amazing, Em," Jake said. "Seriously, I think our mom must have been pretty much just like you when she was your age. INFP."

"What?"

"Myers-Briggs. Didn't you tell me you knew a little about career development?"

She laughed. "What?"

"I'm almost positive you're an INFP. Our mom was too. Introverted, Intuitive, Feeling, Perceiving. Trust me, I'm good at this."

"Jake, leave her alone." A hand squeezed Emily's shoulder. Kim's best friend, Petra, wore a shirt with MAID OF HONOR stretched from armpit to armpit. Petra had a scratchy voice and one of those weird Wisconsin whines that added extra syllables to words like "alone." *A-lom-in*. She was from way up north, she was half-Indian. At the reception she wore a cowboy hat, and her hair hung loose around her shoulders. She rubbed Emily's shoulder again and went to talk to Kim and smoke a cigarette. Emily watched them out of the corner for her eye. She'd been convinced never to smoke. It was gross, it made you stink, it killed you. But no one had been able to convince her that it didn't look cool.

She finished her beer, and Jake brought her another. He set it down next to Fluff, and he rubbed Emily's hair like she was an eight-year-old boy. "Just like our mom," he mumbled, and he left her alone.

She'd first come to the condo in September, and Anne hugged her and grabbed her hands and said they didn't have dinner quite ready yet, but it was so good to have Emily there, Anne remembered her as a tiny baby. She put her to work grating Parmesan cheese. Paige stirred cake batter, Susan lay on her back on the living room floor. At dinner Paul gave Emily her first glass of wine and welcomed her to the city. Why didn't you ever come find me, she thought, and she thought it again and again.

Without Jake distracting her, her eyes drifted. Petra, now leaning alone against the porch rail, looked back almost immediately. She tilted her head a little and gave Emily a close-lipped, corner-of-

the-mouth smile. Emily turned back to her fingers, to Fluff. Her heart started pounding so hard it nearly choked her.

Emily sort of wanted to cry, and she sort of wanted to jump off the porch. She sort of wanted to take off her clothes and sort of wanted to die. Petra had a girlfriend when Emily first met her, at the beer garden at Navy Pier. Emily had never in her life known a girl with a girlfriend, and when she saw them holding hands she felt dizzy.

She sat on the porch and told herself to relax. Jesus, don't strangle Fluff. She listened to the wind roaring through the porches, and she felt herself tunneling back down her life. To the brief and few and terrifying times when she'd sat in grade school and accidentally imagined kissing some of her teachers, women as well as men. To the sickening but also brief crush she'd had on the point guard of the sixth-grade girls' basketball team. But none of that made her a lesbian. Jesus.

Anyway she'd only ever loved one person in her whole life, a man—a priest, as male as any man could get. And she had really loved Father Morin. He wasn't a parish priest, just a high school chaplain, and he'd lived four years in his town. She'd been his student for the first two, his admirer for the second. He'd said it was wonderful to have her in class. One morning he'd stood in his black clothes on their white porch and called her very wise. He hugged her and said he loved her too. As a brother loved a sister, as a teacher learned to love a student, as a father loved his child.

She'd loved him with everything she had, with all the pain she felt when she loved this city. Which should have always been hers but wasn't. She loved the way Father Morin tucked one hand into his pocket and used the other to push open the door to the high school boys' bathroom. She loved to sit in her room and watch him come home from a long walk around town. Sometimes she cried and wondered if he knew she was there. He'd made her care, with his narrow stares and his half-threatening lectures and his expert references to Saint Augustine, Josephus, Blaise Pascal, Erasmus. She felt safe when he gave her funny shy smiles and talked about baseball. In one of their last conversations he'd told her he wanted to expand the Little League in town. He wanted to get more girls to join. She told him she was thinking of starting a group called ELF. The Emily Liberation Front. Then she didn't know why she'd told him, and she felt stupid. She expected him to change the subject or ask what she needed to be liberated from. But he just nodded and said he'd join. She loved him with every thought and every breath, with every sip of Diet Coke that she took on her couch after school. She loved him with every minute, and now she remembered every second because every second had been his name.

But now, in the hot wind and the dull honesty of a third Stella, she just shrugged to herself and thought, yeah, she probably could get into doing it with a girl. So.

Fluff purred, Fluff roared like the alley, and Emily wanted her years in the city by the lake. She wanted a childhood in a room with blue curtains and a pretty view, she wanted summer

barbecues and she wanted contact. So. It could be amazing, she thought. It could be amazing to not be alone tonight, the way it was amazing when she first came to Loyola and wandered through the back door of the library. Saw the rocks and the water and cried. She scratched Fluff and tried to catch her breath. She already felt her clean sheets and the evening air rolling wildly off the lake and into her window and into her.

And then what? Dear Mom. Dear Father. I'm maybe sort of dating my cousin's maid of honor. I'm okay. Love, Emily.

D. E. Fredd

## **Good Old Days**

In the old days whippersnappers were slap happy, gob stopping, bubble blowing wise crackers who played Mumblety peg, bellowed “laddie buck” and swilled Royal Crown by gosh and by golly.

They hollered “gadzooks” and “see you in the funny papers,” wore wrist radios, ran like gangbusters and tried very hard to be wisenheimers. They longed for the adult world of shine on harvest moon, hooch and cups of Joe from Kokomo. Evil lurked in the hearts of men, but the Shadow and Hardy Boys were more than up to it. Puffed Wheat cereal was shot from guns as was Walter Winchell’s nightly report. Egad, eek, arf arf and presto chango colored Sunday’s rotogravure.

They strolled down a heavily accented and immigrant strewn Allen’s Alley and mimicked Gildersleeve’s “gee willikers.” Their parents bought bonds, saved gasoline coupons and animal fat as loose lips had truth or consequences when confronting the Fuhrer’s face across the pond.

Things not only tasted good but were good for you, so beg mom and send in two box tops to Captain Midnight. You can be the first at the Warren G. Harding School, ah shucks ‘t weren’t nothing, to hop-a-long down to your neighborhood Rexall for Carter’s Little Liver Pills.

And, after putting away their trusty palominos and doing what children have to do before a Zane Grey sunset, they tuned in Tonto and his faithful companion, Kemo Sabe, which loosely translated means “this is the most contentment you will ever have.”

Dennis Barone

## **Immunity Radio**

The dead end, so fashionable, that any contemporary name has no interest in the erosion of older traditions. The world is an empty refuge. Connections between the intense fear of age and the usurpation of fulfillment have created a euphemism for survival. Modern freedoms come at the end of an ever-increasing abundance, a false distinction. By using the most horrifying story to organize a mounting demand for law and order, one merely dramatizes results. Live surrounded by mirrors, seek to escape an imaginative state and neither art nor religion has so overwhelming an *idea fixe*. Earlier forms have no place in the activities of our historical development and contemporary transformation. Public experimentation corrupts an entertainment, something that the accumulation of records can fuse contrary to the pronouncements from the industrial success of self-exploration. This attitude of parody in an age of ethical enlightenment needs the patterns we've associated with the fear of industrial society. In many ways the family intensifies thoughts of overwhelming self-doubt. In the home and the classroom a clearly reasoned set of rules adds to the instability of life. This contradiction remains a fantasy of the political, a dying belief that the middle-aged and elderly cling to the illusion of bureaucratic rationality, a scene of substitute images. Thus, we prevent a position closer to the manager of consolations and common sense, the will to build a promise alluded to here.

Thomas Fink and Maya Diablo Mason

**Miss Problem Wheels**

You're my daughter, my special problem.

He's got your wheels.

Let him stare at his own damn feet.

Everything he has is because of you.

Scowl if that makes you happy.

She should put a job on him.

To be a prune in the moonlight is often

a residue of spiritual indigestion.

Prune is the wrong posture for even

a thimble of Miss Sunshine.

Did she realize what door was almost open?

AE Reiff

## **Pity**

Once there was a rabbit in a cage. It is an old story. As penetrating as radioactive zylene down the drain. This rabbit, who we call Pity, had no name for he was an experiment.

Let us suppose the golden rule will aid him. The seals at Sea World, Shamu testifies. Steers in the feedlot will testify. The stables, think of the incriminations at pet stores. Who are these mother cats to go up against General Motors? They have funded a million vets. Who you think next? Cornshuckers? Dahlias?

Jason Fraley

**Statement Against Intimacy**

My cacti have softened to moss when lumberjacks  
remove the oaks negating the sun.

Piles of sawdust resemble a disassembled body.

\*

(revelation: I have a neighbor)

\*

She hangs a series of blue dresses out to dry,  
braces against the new breeze. Grass motionless  
in a limp arc, rooted into the soil at both ends.

\*

While sewing on the back porch, she pricks  
her thumb, watches a bubble of blood rise,  
then burst. She will learn to press

the needle through her fingernail,  
into the webbing between her fingers  
to thread her hand closed.

## Words as (G)hosts

It begins with too much cologne, a full Windsor on a narrow collared shirt.

After fifteen years, my wife has a triptych of senses, all based on silence.

Downstairs, a family union around an effigy of a pot roast.

Layers of char do not allow the meat to rekindle its youth.

After the accrual of saliva, everyone is spontaneously bulimic.

(Or shallow swallows.)

[(Do not mistake this as a failure of speech.)]

Kitchen sink violence, an erupting trashcan as we head outside.

Why can't the next car deliver us from the swing squeak?

The wind makes itself heard like an echo twice reflected.

Lori Scoby

## **Montana Line**

My grandfather once told me to search for what you want until you find it. He also told me that I should eat fried eggs every day, that red is the color of hell and should never be worn, and that cars weren't worth the trouble.

When he asked me to go on a quest with him, I didn't think twice before I packed a duffel bag and followed him on foot to the bus station.

Once we sat on the bus headed to Montana, he said, "Sammy, my boy, we will conquer the world!"

"Is that what you're searching for? How to conquer the world?"

"What?" He looked past my head out the window.

"I thought this was a quest or something."

"Sure. Sure. It is."

"Then what are we looking for?"

"Like I said," he said, raising his arm until he pointed at the ceiling, "we'll conquer the world, stand atop it and grind its gritty teeth into itself. Yes sirrreeeee!"

My grandfather lived in a rundown house in the middle of a posh suburb because he refused to move. "It's my property, damn it." The neighbors walked down the other side of the street. Once they tried to argue his house was an eyesore, but he painted it every few years and kept his lawn mowed. They didn't have a case that something old and small was neighborhood blight. In retaliation I stapled posters to telephone poles that read: "Big houses waste space." Kids wrote stupid messages on them, like: "NO they DON'T asswipe" and "You're stupid." I also found a few X.J.X. ♥ Z.J.Z. type notes. I kept putting fresh signs up and eventually the kids lost interest. Then I lost interest and the signs decomposed on the poles.

"Sammy, we're going to climb a mountain in Glacier National Park," my grandfather said, pulling me away from the window, which I was using as a pillow. "I didn't tell you before because I figured you wouldn't come. You know boys. They want excitement, and what's more exciting than conquering the world, eh? I mean, conquering a mountain, conquering the world, same thing, right? Am I right?"

"Sure," I said, still groggy with sleep. My neck ached like mad.

“Well, I guess I shouldn’t have woke you,” he said, letting his enthusiasm wane for a moment. “Thought I heard you stir and we’ve crossed into Montana so we’ve come too far for you to back out. The Montana line was where I’d decided I’d spill the beans on ya.”

I nodded, letting my head drop against the bus’ glass window. I searched the darkness for shapes, but it was pitch black. Maybe it was raining and I couldn’t even tell. No, I’d have seen the droplets on the window.

I dreamed about my grandmother as a young woman. My father once showed me a picture he’d taken from my grandfather’s attic. “Don’t tell your grandfather you have this,” he said, thrusting the picture into my hand. “I made you a copy down at Wal-Mart at the Create-a-Print. Amazing technology isn’t it?”

In my dream, my grandmother ran up a mountain. I stumbled as I followed her up the rocky surface, then she just disappeared and her laugh eventually faded away. I sunk on a rock and sobbed until I felt someone tap me on the shoulder. Then I woke up.

The bus pulled to a stop in the twilight. We’d finished our trip. “It’s all on foot now, my boy,” my grandfather said, thumping my back before walking towards the park. “You know, I wasn’t entirely honest before. I mean, we are climbing a mountain, but we’re looking for your grandmother.”

I stopped walking. “But she’s dead.”

“Well, theoretically.” My grandfather kept going.

“Theoretically?” I started walking again since I saw he wasn’t going to stop.

“I mean death doesn’t mean you can’t be found. And anyway, I don’t think she’s dead. She sent me a postcard a year ago from Glacier National Park saying she was doing well and sorry about the whole faking her death thing.”

“So she’s not dead? She faked it?”

“It would seem so. Would’ve been nice if she’d told me a little sooner than 15 years after the fact. But then I did drag my feet coming after her, didn’t I?” He turned and shrugged, winking his left eye.

“Not 15 years!”

“Who’s counting? Come on.”

Climbing the mountain made me appreciate the fact I wasn’t dead, but sort of wish I were. My grandfather trekked ahead of me, wheezing the whole way up. We only made it halfway before he turned to me and said, “You know, this is a waste of time. She isn’t here. Let’s set up camp for the night.”

I didn't argue, just set up the tent and fell asleep without eating. My grandmother appeared in my same dream again, only this time I saw the person tapping me on the shoulder. It was a young woman, who smiled big and said, "You know, your grandmother's a legend at Loveland. She can really rip up a slope. You should come see her."

When I woke up, I tried to wake my grandfather to tell him we should go to Loveland, but he didn't move. Eventually, I realized he was dead, but didn't believe it until I found the note. "Well, at least I didn't ever fake it. Take the envelope to your grandmother when you find her."

I took the next bus to Loveland and began inquiring. Some people thought I was crazy. "An old woman snowboarding. Yeah, right!" Others thought they'd heard something about an old woman living up in the wilds somewhere. Once I thought I saw the young woman from my dream, but it didn't pan out. I followed her, asking her questions about my grandmother. But she was smart and led me to a police station.

So I called my father. "Hi, Dad. So I'll just cut to the chase. Grandpa died. I called the park ranger to make the arrangements. I think he'd have wanted to stay in the park."

"I know. The park ranger called me last week. So how are you?"

"I'm OK. Did grandpa tell you why we came out here?"

"He'd mentioned something about conquering the world. Did you do it?" My father laughs.

"Not exactly. He said he got a postcard from grandma. We were looking for her. I still am."

"Son, your grandmother died years ago."

"She faked it."

"Son, now really. I loved my father, but he was nuts. Why don't you just come home?"

"Grandpa said to search for something until you find it. He can't continue, but I can."

"I suppose it's your decision. Just keep in touch, OK?"

"OK. Bye."

I hung up the phone and turned. "It's about time," someone said. It was the young woman.

"My God, it's you."

"No duh, sherlock. Would you mind getting out of the phone booth?"

"You were in my dream. Where's my grandmother now?"

"Oh, you're Sammy. Take the train. Look for a snowboarder. She's hard to miss. Now get out of my way already."

I rode the train its whole length through Colorado. Since it was a tourist thing, the intercom kept spouting info about scenic attractions. If others weren't aboard, I'd have ripped it out. I searched for a snowboarder, and I kept seeing them. But none were her. I rode the train back and forth for days,

until I ran out of money. I called my dad, but he wouldn't wire me more. So I applied for a job with the train company. I impressed them because I had the tourist attraction spiel memorized and they hired me.

Now I press my forehead against the train's window all the time, searching for her and clutching my grandfather's envelope while listing the names of scenic spots to the left and right and babbling about the miners who once dug for silver and gold and the laborers who toiled and died to build the rails.

Lindsay Bell

**Horoscope Poem #1: *Cancer***

Saturn in your sign makes you feel your bones.  
As though unearthed in a wall of Parisian catacomb,  
your frame may depart from its earthy tethers  
to mount an orbit of heavenly bodies.  
Comparable to polished tusks of colonial elephants,  
you will pirate a Russian space station,  
hold cosmonauts in your calciferous embrace,  
give them American names, eye them with your hollow  
orbits. Together, you bring a rocket down in Siberia  
and you walk west, haloed in snow.

Jennifer Gravley

## **Sleeper**

Valentine's Day with its blood beating, its drowning pools of refined sugar, its construction-papered and glittered tissue boxes of dollar-store confessions of fondness, turns Kelly and Kerry eighteen. In celebration of both these occasions, a coed slumber party will take place in the finished basement of Kelly and Kerry's unmarried parents. Kelly and Kerry's unmarried parents used to live in California, bike to their polling place, shop at Whole Foods.

The morning of the party, Kelly's boyfriend Marek Novsky is spotted by Kerry's best friend Leigh Anne Jacobs kissing Kelly's best friend Leann Roberts by the self-serve Iced machine at the corner store. Though she's disappointed to be distracted from the videocassette recording she made of Marky Chavez a full year earlier during an episode of MTV2's rock countdown, Kerry isn't startled when the cordless phone underneath the next couch cushion over rings her with the news. Kelly has a thing for real-life assholes. Kerry prefers spiky-haired boys in rap-metal bands.

Because Kerry is scared of things that go fast, Kelly slips her hand underneath their unmarried parents' mattress, slips cash into her jeans' front left pocket, backs their unmarried parents' Volvo out into the cul-de-sac, and drives to the corner store for mass quantities of sugar, salt. Sliding her things into thin plastic bags the color and consistency of milk, the clerk asks Kelly if she is bulimic. Kelly rubs her index finger along her bottom cherry-stained lip, says no but keeps it in mind.

Because Kelly has no eye for detail, Kerry vacuums the basement, folds and carries armfuls of blankets, quilts, comforters down the stairs. She unfolds and refolds them, stacks them according to complex and careful rules of coordination, color. She piles pillows into corners, throw pillows, bed pillows, travel pillows from the closet tucked coldly under the stairs. She doesn't answer the phone when it rings and flashes red on its hook, doesn't want to talk to anyone, tell anyone no.

Leann Roberts arrives half an hour before the time handwritten in the mailed invitations, sits on and tumbles a pile of handsewn double-wedding-ring patchwork quilts, throws handfuls of melocremes at Kelly across the room. Kerry picks up the downstairs extension, calls Leigh Ann Jacobs, tells her to come ahead over, stoops to pick up the scattered candy, rearranges it in the cut-glass bowl.

The four girls sit crosslegged and glare, paired two each on Kelly and Kerry's unmarried parents' old matching sleeper couches, until the other moderately cool members of their senior class begin to arrive, knocking with their bare fists on the single deadbolted direct-entrance basement door. The brown plaid couches, good for hiding stains, are pulled out into their approximate-bed mode. Kelly and Kerry's unmarried parents are okay with this, have announced their trust in their

daughters, in their daughters' trustworthy friends. Their daughters' trustworthy friends have not announced to their married, divorced, remarried parents that sleeper couches in approximate-bed mode are the main feature of the setting of Kelly and Kerry's coed birthday/Valentine's Day slumber party. Kelly and Kerry's unmarried parents are okay with this.

As soon as it's good and dark, Marek pulls his lighter out, enflames all the heart-shaped candles sprinkled throughout the room, and extinguishes all overhead lighting. He wants to play Seven Minutes in Heaven in the closet under the stairs. The coolest among the group groan, gripe they're not in seventh grade, but he pulls his mother's digital kitchen timer from his backpack and winks.

Kelly rounds up a wrinkled piece of wide-ruled loose-leaf notebook paper, a pen with pink fluff glued to its non-writing end. She tickles Kerry's nose with the pink fluff while Kerry folds and tears the paper along its sharp creases into rectangles. The girls line up and write their names onto the slips in ink that reeks of Strawberry Shortcake. They line up along the wall underneath the repeated blown-up image of Marky Chavez's dark spiked hair, tug the bottom hems of their tight pastel t-shirts closer to the belted waistbands of their jeans. Boys pick girls from the emptied cut-glass candy bowl, melocremes spilled upright, upside down, sideways on the scratched top of the heavy wood coffee table.

Marek goes first, always goes first, goes first always when it's his idea. Kelly holds the cut-glass candy bowl cradled in both her upturned palms while he rummages through the collected names. She's overwritten her name, tracing the letters until pink blurred through to the other side, but Marek pulls out Leigh Anne Jacobs, asks if he can have Leeann Roberts too if he takes three-point-five minutes instead.

Leeann Roberts says sure thing, and Leigh Ann Jacobs can't opt out since her name was the pink one pulled from the pool. The two girls go into the closet, and Marek winks, pulls the door closed behind him from the inside.

Kerry resets the digital timer, doesn't think it's fair that they went in before she'd halved the allotment. The timer beeps when she presses start, startling Kelly, causing her to drop the cut-glass candy bowl hard and sudden at her feet.

The bowl, more fragile than anyone thought, could have imagined by its tricky thickness, loses one of its sides with a clean two-pieced break. Kelly grabs the largest remnant of the bowl, the whole side with attached bottom, straightens up and stares at it, pushes at the newly split edges with her index finger's tip. Kerry swipes the smaller piece, puts her mouth to its smooth rounded top. The break was so clean she doesn't even feel the urge to vacuum.

Martha Deed

**The Open Courtroom Conceit**

It is my privilege to limit as many justices as I can hold in the palm of my fist  
affirmatively and without allowing any proceeding to be heard.

so I will assign guards to make larger fires than you've ever seen

and my report will exclude all flame-related damage to your present letter

Remember that closed minds take freedom's security very seriously.

Therefore, my courtroom will accommodate closed – not open – minds

and anyone who attempts to hear all that the trial judge has to say

when pronouncing sentence will have no representative to stand in protest,

and I will have the smaller media I do prefer.

## Visiting the ER

Hornets do not like to be disturbed.

They do not post signs outside their nests to that effect.

They expect you to respect their privacy without reminders—

and if you don't, they sting you by the dozen with their love

and send you on your intoxicated way

as if you had planned to spend Friday night

enjoying the entertainments provided

by your local ER, the doctors dancing to your tune

before

Jack Conway

## **Roadside Suicides**

*Use of the breakdown lane is prohibited.*

“People that I know somehow are hanging themselves from bridges.”

“You’ve got to figure, something must be wrong,” she said. “It goes back a long, long time but the latest was just forty-one. Hung himself beneath a bridge leading to where the kids walk into school.” “As a rule this doesn’t happen much,” she said. “A teacher. Not too prudent either. Was calling up a student in his class. Fourteen years old. Made calls directly to her house asking how she felt and if she ever had a cock inside her mouth.” “I can’t imagine what that’s about,” she said. “Ah sweet bird of youth but in truth he’s not the first I know about. In high school, 1968, Eddie What’s-His-Face hung himself. From an overpass, senior year. He could pass for white all right but wanted to be loved not liked like a friend by a girl with skin the color of a pearl. I remember then it caused a huge sensation. They didn’t even read his name at graduation. “I shouldn’t be so impatient,” she said. “There was a rumor then about how his dick was hanging out. Eddie What’s-His-Name hanging from the westbound lane.” “This is insane,” she said. “He’s not the last. In economics class my professor Jack, retired from the Air Force, came back to teach. Wrote poetry. Never left behind a parting word. Hung himself from a covered bridge inside the nature preserve behind his house. Said he was emotionally unsteady. Had a cute little place though along the lake. Let me stay there once with her alone. Never once mentioned Eddie. As if he didn’t exist.” “You have to wonder what’s to blame for this,” she said. “Now the last of it I’ll try to fit together as best I can. It was Eddie’s younger brother, forty one, who hung himself below the bridge leading to the school who called the girl who was the daughter of the mother of pearl. And he had Jack in economics class I know. Pretty strange I’d say.” “Don’t get too close. That’s the way accidents occur,” she said. “People that I know somehow are hanging themselves from bridges and the ties that bind, bind more than suicide somehow.” “Oh good, the traffic’s moving now,” she said.

Halvard Johnson

**The Day of the Light-Bearers**

Despite persistent rumors to the contrary,  
we are fit and healthy, those of us gathering at the monument  
to our unknown leader, he whose face was familiar to all  
of us who did not know it, who remembered little

if anything about him. Seemingly, our displays  
of loyalty have displeased him, though we do not know why  
they should. Our spirits are dampened by his contempt  
for our abiding love for him. Our wives and children know

him better than do we who serve him. He walks among  
them, filling their stomachs with fruits and sweets,  
their outstretched hands with money. New faces everywhere  
look up to him in admiration, shine their love on him.

Explosions of wealth are seen in the dirty villages  
and then detonations are heard, far off in the distance, near  
the borders where our camps are pitched. His grip on power  
is unyielding. Our feet trample the earth, along the banks

of the filthy river, beyond which live our enemies—his enemies—  
those who would destroy us, leave us to die and rot  
where we fall, forever ungreetered by those to whom we have  
devoted our lives, our fortunes, our voices raised in song.

## **What Your Doctor Knows**

Knowledge you often hate on first hearing,  
coming to love as it grows into you. Perfect  
anecdotes in spite of all your tense  
accusations, while, despite the wallflowers  
gang-banging the geraniums, a wild kitten  
careens in your heart, love by second sight.  
The greater the yearning, the greater  
the grief. Impractical accident, with a difference.

Doug Draime

**William Blake at the Zoo**

William Blake looks in the mirror  
at William Blake looking at himself in the  
mirror while William Blake watches it all  
looking at himself in the mirror and smiling

For hours he would sit at the kitchen table  
playing with cold fried eggs with his fork with  
his fork playing with cold fried eggs for hours  
at the kitchen table playing with cold fried eggs  
he would sit for hours

Morning as the sun shined through the kitchen  
lace curtains on the mess he made on the mess he  
made the mess he made light on the mess he  
made in the morning the sun shined through the  
lace curtains on the mess he made light dancing  
dancing dancing on the mess he made

William Blake said I AM WILLIAM BLAKE from over on  
Bugle Street & my angels are true from over on  
Bugle Street & my angels are true I AM WILLIAM BLAKE  
& my angels are true William Blake said

William Blake feeds the lions at the zoo is what  
the story said feeding the lions at the zoo in a  
black frock coat in a black frock coat wearing a black  
frock coat feeding lions at the zoo is what the story said  
in a black frock coat William Blake & the lions

William Blake in the morning writing down the  
words writing down the words in the morning

with only him & her knowing with only him &  
her knowing writing down the words in the morning  
with only him & her knowing

Walked out of the house he just walked out of  
the house leaving the door wide open walked out of  
the house leaving the door wide open his wife said  
smiling walked out of the house leaving the door  
wide open said his smiling wife she knew nothing about  
the zoo just walked out of the house leaving the  
door wide open said his wife smiling she knew nothing  
about the zoo

Scott Keeney

**Nirvana Rondeau Cento**

I miss the comfort in being sad  
And the sound of electric guitars.  
Dowsed in mud, soaked in bleach,  
The sun shines in the bedroom,  
In my face. Spring is here again,

And all the flowers have gingivitis  
And cock and twist and masturbate—  
I wanna jump! This isn't right!  
I miss the comfort in the sun

In the toilet bowl, aroma cloudy.  
It's the sulfur in and out of a dream  
Of a marigold—oh take my bed,  
And leave a blanket of ash on the ground.  
The sun is gone. It's what I am.  
I miss the comfort—*no más*.

Aaron Anstett

## **Burglars**

Cameras small as aspirin capsules,  
smaller, each lens a grain of medicine,  
injected, ride illuminated veins,

slam-bang along then through those passages'  
walls, orbiting rockets abruptly un-  
hinged, photographing what-all a body

hides, as now a stubbed-toed burglar whispers  
curses, hissing, though nobody's home.  
Her see-through negligee drapes a chair. He's  
tried it on, over his work clothes: wrong size.

Lied. I lied. No such cameras  
whir through bloodstreams yet, and the burglar stripped  
first, pale, scared, lingerie a perfect fit,  
cried until his mirrored image blurred.

Jeff Harrison

**\* The Birds of Nikolai Gogol \***

THE SORONCHINSKY FAIR

the Hooded Crow  
related to carrion crow,  
only of late regarded as  
distinct from carrion crow.

they are more social.

\*

THE OVERCOAT

the Pied Wagtails  
do not, even on  
the coldest of nights,  
huddle together.

\*

TARAS BULBA

Jackdaw: a talkative corvine  
stealing eggs and chicks.

\*

NEVSKY PROSPECT

Lesser Black-backed Gulls, persecuted  
for some forgotten reason.

omnivorous.

\*

## THE NOSE

if young Great-crested Grebes  
get too heavy, they can drown their  
mother when using her for a boat.

\*

## THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

straw, dead and green leaves,  
flower petals, winged seeds,  
feathers and scraps of paper  
have all been found in Swift nests.

fresh poppy petals are sometimes used.

the material is stuck to the nest with saliva.

\*

## DEAD SOULS

Greenfinch,  
Carduelis chloris:  
she lays four to five eggs  
in April (or June).

\*

## THE DIARY OF A MADMAN

Common Tern's  
wingspan: 31 inches.

grey upperwing with  
dark outer primaries.

pale underwing with  
trailing edge broad, blurry,  
and dark.

\*

### TERRIBLE VENGEANCE

unspecified bird:

haunting a storm, transliterate,  
no bird had ever haunted.

“yet every mimicky bird art thou”

said Virginia (marginalia):  
her brain, it was lent (Ovidian)  
to that bird / in fullest flow.

Elisa Gabbert and Kathleen Rooney

**Tritina Five**

Where did I leave my bracelet? Imagine  
a world without wrists, is my next thought.  
Imagine a world without thoughts is next.

If time went backwards, I'd know what's next.  
I'd never play games that start: imagine.  
Or in my ignorance, that's what I thought.

Acts committed with malice aforethought  
are so passé. Random/desultory is the next  
new blonde. New black. New thirty. Imagine!

Now imagine the new thought. & the next.

### **Tritina Thirteen**

Why is it I always miss all the good stuff?  
I've been to better parties after funerals.  
You could call it tragic-farce, I suppose.

Beckett's not my fave—I know I'm supposed  
to eat up existentialism & stuff,  
but it's disheartening enough, these funerals

where nobody knows it's a funeral,  
even me. But the dead body, I suppose,  
knows. Or its immortal soul does. It's tough

stuff, this act I put on at funerals. Life's a pose.

Glenn R. Frantz

**List of the Plates<sup>3</sup>**

FIG. 1. The more distant the fountain, the weaker the flow.

FIG. 2. A long, gradual ascent is better than a shorter, steeper one.

FIG. 3. The two shadows are equally dark.

FIG. 4. The principle of work under water.

FIG. 5. The destruction caused by alternating heat and cold.

FIG. 6. Inside view of a wedge.

FIG. 7. The seating arrangement of the vocal cords.

FIG. 8. The pitch given out by a pebble.

FIG. 9. Prying a stone out of the mill.

FIG. 10. The open fireplace as an early method of grinding corn.

FIG. 11. Separating rice grains by convex glasses.

FIG. 12. Showing how caves and holes are formed by a revolving disk.

FIG. 13. A screw as a hot water bag.

FIG. 14. The nutcracker is a miniature windmill.

FIG. 15. A simple derrick for making artificial ice.

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<sup>3</sup> Derived from *General Science* by Bertha M. Clark.

FIG. 16. Steam as a neutralizing crane.

FIG. 17. Showing how men can vibrate.

FIG. 18. The motion of square bacteria in a revolving solution.

FIG. 19. Waves in a thermometer.

FIG. 20. Water by its action constantly changes the character of the human voice.

FIG. 21. The image of water as a furnace.

FIG. 22. The energy of a field of bread and of a magnet within a duplicate of two produces a column of lenses.

FIG. 23. One half of the image is heated, but both halves vibrate.

FIG. 24. Table of light are diverged and do not come to support real light.

FIG. 25. The principle of the dust which clogs the wheels of the sun can be toasted by electricity.

Maurice Oliver

**“Red-Tipped & Semiautomatic” Sonnet**

A pile of stones in my head put there especially  
for this purpose. Wind almost out of breath.  
Moss with the ability to grow on my lips. A  
tattoo inked-in along my eyelid. Helmets all  
in a row. Grasshoppers trying to outrun a  
lawnmower. Antidepressants for a nerve gas  
factory. A mantelpiece’s beautiful song. Small  
grains of blonde millet. Anything vogue. A vent  
in the ankle bracelet. Three days in the life of  
my undergarments. Boredom hiding-out in my  
white socks. A poem with it’s eyes glued to my  
TV screen. Mythic experiences. Hives but not a  
single bee. Chickens jammed under my armpit.  
Grassy knolls that stay green straight through  
December. Any softness that’s grape-flavored.  
Or two jackhammers, one of them unmanned.

## **Do You Read Me, Copy?**

His chair can purr.

He takes it everywhere he goes.  
Some say he feels this unusual  
closeness because the chair  
reminds him of the basic animal  
instinct in all of us. Others insist  
the chair is simply his “security  
blanket” he’ll never have to wash.  
Whatever the reason, year after  
year he carries it over a shoulder.  
He once even had it upholstered in  
a flame-stitch pattern using colors  
taken from the rainbow. But the  
chair remained non-committal with  
sturdy legs. It prides itself in being  
a perfect dance partner and never  
eats meat. It can be positioned in  
an endless variety of angles and  
has a built-in microphone. Best of  
all, when he finishes this life he can  
just fold it up and ship it by parcel  
post to that place, rumored to be  
somewhere beyond the white light.

Cat Rambo

## Rest

The Almighty sits on the Throne of Glory and smiles. He likes his simple saints.

—Moyshe Kulbak

You're a waitress at the Kurt Vonnegut Service Area, along the northern Indiana toll road. You work the afternoon shift, which is less money but better hours than the night shift, which is what you worked up until three weeks ago. You live in a trailer with your boyfriend Bret, who sometimes works customizing RV's in Elkhart, and sometimes sits around smoking Kent Lights and watching the soaps.

The customers that come with the afternoon shift make a pleasant change from the fat men and truckdrivers that enter at three in the morning, demanding coffee and sitting there watching the sullen glare of the fluorescent lights on the surface of their steaming cups. The afternoon brings more families, tourists, and salesmen who like to show you their lines of fundraising shampoos and Garfield mugs. You're starting to learn the regulars. You don't know these ones as well as you did the regulars on the night shift, like Ray, the truckdriver, who lives in Niles and always stops at the Vonnegut for a cup of coffee and a piece of lemon meringue before he goes home to his Rottweiler and his parakeet Dougie.

At night, there's plenty of time to stand around listening to stories, but the afternoons are rushed. It doesn't matter. The stories all blended together after a while, and no one ever seemed to come up with a punch line that made you feel as though the story they'd been telling was done. If you had a more poetic soul, you might imagine those stories trailing after them like ghostly incomplete shadows as they rose, took a mint-flavored toothpick, and vanished out into the bright lights of the parking lot.

But you don't.

Customers are more adventurous with their food in the afternoons, and even though it's more trouble when they start asking for substitutions, still, it's better than serving plate after plate of burgers. In the afternoons, people eat lighter meals, turkey sandwiches, salads, a cup of soup. They eat more vegetables too.

You're telling all this to your best friend Marge, sitting in her bungalow, giving each other home permanents. And she sits there nodding, a trail of white perm goo trickling down her forehead, looking very serious, fiddling with the yellow plastic spatula-ette that came with the kit. The room smells like plastic and chemicals. She's got the TV on, just for background noise, and whenever

either of you can't think of anything to say, you look at the TV, which occasionally provides a topic for conversation.

Marge used to work at the Vonnegut, which is how you met her four years ago, but then she transferred to the postcard booth at the Ambrose Bierce Rest Stop, which she says is easier on her feet.

So you start to tell her about a funny thing that happened at the service area.

You were looking out the window in the pre-dinner lull when this car with four young men in it appeared. It zipped into the parking lot and pulled into a space right in front of the entrance. A nice car, with Georgia plates, the one that's orange with peaches on it. A silver car. They pulled up, and the four of them got out. Four dark-haired young men, two of them on the pudgy side, and all wearing these little hats on their heads. You don't know they're called yarmulkes. You'd have trouble pronouncing the word yarmulke if you saw it written down.

What else did they wear, Marge wants to know.

They wore white shirts and dress pants, baggy in the knee, with the wrinkles that say they've been traveled in. Their belts were glossy leather; you didn't notice their shoes.

They came in the restaurant, after they'd stood around in the lobby a while, looking at the big map of Indiana hanging there, and running their fingers along the bright red line that represents the toll road.

Once they came in the restaurant, they took their time picking their booth. The driver wanted to be able to look out the window and see his car. They discussed this in Yiddish, a language you don't speak or recognize, while you hovered nearby, waiting for them to sit down so you could give them their glasses of water.

When they finally took their booth, you handed round the menus, and they cracked them open, lighting cigarettes as they examined the pictures of food. They ordered coffee, four coffees with sugar, and nothing to eat.

One of them went to the bank of newspaper machines to buy USA Today. He unfolded it, pages of print and graphs billowing over the formica. Smoke rose around the table from their cigarettes. The newspaper interfered with another's cup of coffee and he touched his cigarette to the margin, singeing it, before the reader grabbed it away, speaking indignation.

You came over and freshened up their coffee. Normally, you can tell what your tip will be like from the lines in a person's shirt or the amount of stubble on a man's chin. But you'd never seen folks like this before, and there was no way to judge. You deemed it best to keep giving them coffee and cross your fingers. It would be either a large tip or no tip at all; these young men didn't seem like fifteen percenters.

You kept watching them while you served your other customers, listening to them talk in Yiddish, and wondering where they came from, where they were going. If you'd been a religious woman of a particular type, you might have wondered about the lamed-vovniks, the 36 righteous people whose existence keeps God from destroying the earth, and it might have amused you to wonder if these four were lamed-vovniks, a quartet of them in one place, here in the Kurt Vonnegut Service Area in northern Indiana.

But you're not a religious woman of a particular type, so all you wonder about are the hats. You don't usually wonder too much about the customers. Years on the night shift, all those stories trailing in and out of your doors, have jaded you. You've seen strange mysteries, been stiffed by faces that belonged on "America's Most Wanted," and found enigmatic objects in the women's bathroom on your break. You could write it all down, if you wrote more than your weekly letter to your grandmother in Abilene, Kansas.

The ashtray on the foursome's table grew crowded with butts and ashes, and you went so far as to go pick it up and swap it for a clean one. They paid you no mind as they talked. Tables around them were served, paid their bills, and left. But they stayed there, drinking coffee, cluttering the table with sugar packet wrappers.

Finally one of them, the one who had burned the paper's edge, asked for the bill. They paid it, and you watched them leave. You didn't go look at the tip. Outside, three of them sat on the wooden fence in front of the service area while the fourth got his camera out of the car and took their picture. Then they got in the car and drove away.

You went to their table, folded the newspaper, wiped the ashes off the table, cleared away the sugar wrappers printed with clipper ships and steamboats. The tip was there; it was fifteen percent. Sixty cents. Four dimes and four nickels. You swept it into your apron pocket.

Strange, says Marge, and you nod.

That night you try to tell Bret about them, but he doesn't want to listen. They've gotten a new extrusion machine over at the factory, this being one of his working weeks, and he wants to tell you about the machine and about Don shooting Tim with the staple gun. He doesn't want to hear about the four boys driving fast along the highway. If you knew more about the way they drive in Europe, you might say they drove as if they were on the Autobahn. But you don't know that, so you don't say it, and it's not as though Bret would know what you were talking about.

This would be the time to wonder about the lamed-vovniks again, if you were the type of woman aforementioned, but you are not, as said before, and understandably you don't.

You and Bret stay up past midnight. Then, tired, the two of you go to bed, and you don't have sex because Bret's drunk too much beer.

But if you had, afterward, you might lie on your back, staring at the ceiling and wondering what the next day at the Vonnegut will bring. You'd smell the chemicals in your hair and wonder again about the four young men. You'd picture them still driving, fueled by coffee and sugar, flying along the highway in their silver car. They roll down the windows and throw out cigarette butts, orange fountains of sparks bouncing on the highway behind them.

You wouldn't think about the reason why they fascinate you. You're not the kind of person who thinks about motives very often.

You might turn over and lie on your side. Bret snoring beside you, you might think to yourself that the young men were significant and that soon, something, somehow, in your life was going to change.

Peter Coley

## **Keidis**

Bethan bought the panther from a meat-packer in Bow.

On the balcony of her apartment high above Silvertown the cub grew until it could lift its great paws onto the railing and gaze at City Airport and the shining towers of Docklands beyond.

She named the panther Keidis.

Whenever Bethan opened the glass door to the balcony Keidis lazily lifted his big black head to see if there was food. Bethan brought him remaindered pork-belly and factory chickens dead from exhaustion. For herself, she ate cucumber and courgette and squash. When Keidis slept at night she watched him, and her love for him felt to her as boundless as the sky around her apartment. She believed she might be happy for ever.

It hardly seemed to matter anymore that her boyfriend had died.

The silly bastard.

For exercise, the flat roof of the apartment block was big enough, and at night, even in the rain, Keidis reached speeds that kept him fit. For Christmas Bethan bought him a turkey, alive, and that starry night Keidis happily stalked his prey across the rooftop. For hours he toyed with the fright-shocked bird.

“You know something, K?” shouted Bethan one afternoon on the rooftop when a passenger jet roared overhead. “I love you. I do. I really love you.”

In the new year, Bethan locked the door to the balcony and no longer fed Keidis. She sat curled on her sofa and watched the big cat pace the small area, rubbing the railings with his cheeks until his flesh showed raw. After a fortnight, Keidis laid down and no longer stirred. But when Bethan moved inside the apartment he followed her with his eyes. Bethan rose less often from the sofa. She ate vegetables cold from tins.

Through Keidis’s coat ribs began to show and his pelvic bone stuck up like twin horns. His eyes stopped seeking Bethan’s. Whenever jet engines roared overhead neither of them took notice.

One night, when the tins of vegetables were gone, Bethan unlocked the balcony door. She opened it wide. She went to the sofa and took off her clothes and lay down in the darkness and beyond the balcony she watched aeroplanes line up in their approach to City Airport. Their lights winked and twinkled in the orange-black sky.

When a denser blackness blocked her view, she reached out her hand.

“I love you K,” Bethan said. “I love you to death.”

Andrew Lundwall and Sheila Murphy

**Light Prod-**

image on grainy film of a man in rain

[train station platform] =  
coordinate 1

waving [soiled handkerchief] =  
coordinate 2

who trilled toward  
his departing beloved  
bearing glint of the mistreated teeth  
misting yellowish silver  
night clears his throat

“when the child was a child”  
the child revered alongside  
swoosh of train leaving  
chain of arm extended  
toward aborted thought stumbling away

smoking hot sand’s deliverance  
in ultrashoes prepared for task line  
thus ascends  
the escalator

and the sailor he was  
pondered the many ways  
in which viable mesh  
attracts these ruins  
[shifts]

PJ Nights

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They pluck lessons

the

graphic character conveys perseverance manly

– and to honorable pluck,

the tendency of formation of perseverance

and formation are pluck, manly manly –

perseverance of independence.

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Moffat, William D.

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The students are almost flesh and the contests become real

real as we read about from start to finish. The

start to finish. The students are one from start to finish.

To finish. The students are real as we read about

students are almost flesh and to finish. The students'

contests become real as we are almost flesh and blood, and

real as we read about flesh and blood, and the

the contests become real as flesh and blood, and the

blood, and the contests become. The students are almost flesh

to finish. The students are from start to finish. The

one from start and the contests

tale that grips are almost flesh

The students are from start to

almost flesh and and the contests

from start to are almost flesh

are almost flesh the contests become

blood, and the contests finish.

White, Matthew, Jr.

TWO BOYS AND A FORTUNE. Or, the Tyler Will.

Boy, you left Roy. That and especially the dollars, boy by boy. The brothers, twin boy

brothers

and

poor. Are you a Pell, helpful at this and that and by the million?

Suddenly

with the million, brothers, Roy and Rex

helped family with dollars,

That family the.

A strong helpful story that should be read by every boy in our land.

## II. Bios

## EDITORS:

The work of **Letitia Trent** (poetry editor) has appeared in *The Denver Quarterly*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Fence*, *Folio*, and *Dusie*, among others. Her chapbook, *The Medical Diaries*, is available from Scantly Clad Press. She lives in Vermont with her husband and cat.

**Chris R. E. Wells** (prose editor) lives in the Midwest with his wife and animals. A novel he wrote called *White Kitty* was published by Flaming Gible Press in 2009.

The short stories of **Ann Bogle** (guest prose editor) have appeared in *The Quarterly*, *Fiction International*, *Gulf Coast*, *Big Bridge*, and other journals. *The Cartier Street Review* featured her prose poem chapbook, *XAM: Paragraph Series* (Xexoxial Editions, 2005) in its March 2009 issue. Orium Press published her poetry chapbook, *dog barks up a tree at the apple left in it under a deerslim moon*, for the Dusie Kollektiv, 2009. Her weblog, *Ana Verse*, is a b-l-o-o-k (Blurb, 2009).

**Jeremy Porter** (guest associate editor) is a faculty member at Columbus State Community College. He teaches computer networking. He holds a MS in Management Information Systems from Keller Graduate School of Management and a BS in Physics from The Ohio State University.

## CONTRIBUTORS:

**Nina Alvarez** is a freelance writer, editor, and book doctor. She is currently head writer for the KYB Digital Broadcasting Network and also edits and prepares client's novels for publication submission. She is working on two novels and is creating a children's book with her mother and sister. Nina is a nomad and goes where the wind tells her, but she is currently staying in Philadelphia, PA.

**Arlene Ang** lives in Spinea, Italy where she serves as staff editor for *The Pedestal Magazine* and *Press 1*. More of her work may be viewed at [www.leafscape.org](http://www.leafscape.org).

**Aaron Anstett's** collections are *Sustenance*, *No Accident* (Balcones Poetry Prize and Nebraska Book Award), and *Each Place the Body's*. He lives in southern Colorado with his wife, Lesley, and children, Molly, Cooper, and Rachel.

Don't call **Ismael Ricardo Archbold** "Ishmael." Usually in Austin TX, he is a member of the band Coma in Algiers, loves honey roasted peanuts and as a child hit a wild howler monkey in the head with a rock.

**Paul Baker** produces and hosts “Wordsalad,” a weekly radio program of contemporary poetry. “Wordsalad” airs over 91.7 FM, Madison, and streams at [www.wsum.org](http://www.wsum.org).

**Dennis Barone**’s most recent book of stories is *North Arrow* (Quale Press 2008). He is co-editor with James Finnegan of *Visiting Wallace: Poems Inspired by the Life and Work of Wallace Stevens* (University of Iowa Press, 2009).

**Micah Bateman** received his very first publication in *21 Stars Review*. He has since been published in *CutBank*, *Pebble Lake Review*, and *Night Train*, and attends the Iowa Writers’ Workshop in poetry.

**Mark Baumer** hit his last home run in 2006. The same year he hitchhiked cross country. His first job out of college was selling ice cream. He won a trophy once. He created [everydayyeah.com](http://everydayyeah.com).

**Gary Beck**’s original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway and toured colleges and outdoor performance venues. He currently lives in New York City, where he’s busy writing fiction and poetry, which have appeared in numerous literary magazines.

**F.J. Bergmann** writes science fiction, poetry, and science-fiction poetry, not necessarily in that order, and functions (so to speak) as the shadowy entity behind [fibtz.com](http://fibtz.com) and [madpoetry.org](http://madpoetry.org). Publication credits include *Asimov’s*, *Margie*, *Opium*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Subtropics*, and a third chapbook, *Constellation of the Dragonfly* (Plan B Press, 2008). The hairstyle is deceptive.

**Michelle Bitting** has published work in *Prairie Schooner*, *Nimrod*, *Narrative*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Passages North*, *Many Mountains Moving*, *Rattle*, *Linebreak*, and others. Her work is forthcoming in *Diode*, *The Cortland Review*, and *Sou’wester*. Poems have appeared on *Poetry Daily* and *Verse Daily*. In 2007, Thomas Lux chose her full-length manuscript, *Good Friday Kiss*, as the winner of the DeNovo First Book Award and C & R Press published it in 2008. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Pacific University, Oregon. Visit her at [www.michellebitting.com](http://www.michellebitting.com).

**CL Bledsoe** is the author of two collections, \_\_\_\_\_ (*Want/Need*) and *Anthem*. A third collection, *Riceland*, is forthcoming this fall. Recent work appears in *New York Quarterly*, *Barrow Street*, *Margie*, *The Arkansas Review*, and *Right Hand Pointing*. He is an editor for *Ghoti Magazine* ([www.ghotimag.com](http://www.ghotimag.com)).

**Allyson Boggess** is originally from Rochester, NY. She teaches first-year composition at Arizona State University where she is a graduate student in the MFA Program. She lives in Tempe, Arizona.

**Curtis Bonney's** poetry has appeared in *Golden Handcuffs Review*, *New American Writing*, *Bird Dog*, *The New Review of Literature*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Key Satch(el)*, *The Boston Review*, among others. He lives in Seattle and occasionally curates for the Subtext Collective.

**Louis E. Bourgeois** teaches writing at the University of Memphis. His collection of aphorisms, *Hosanna*, is due out this fall by Xenos Books. Bourgeois is the editor of VOX PRESS and *The Bourgeois Interviews*.

**Jack Conway's** newest book is *King of Heists*, recommended as one of the best new books of the season by *Reader's Digest* and *The New York Post*. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Columbia Review*, *The Hiram Poetry Review*, *Rosebud*, *Yankee*, *Rattle*, *Folger's* and the *Norton Anthology of Light Verse* among others. He teaches English at the University of Massachusetts and Bristol Community College.

**Beth Coyote** lives and works in Seattle. Her work can be found in many print journals and online. She was a Seattle Poet Populist nominee in 2007. In 2009, one of her poems was included in a commissioned choral work on women and war. The piece was premiered and performed by the Denver Women's Chorus.

**Mark Cunningham** has three books out: *80 Beetles* from Otoliths; *Body Language* from Tarpaulin Sky; and *71 Leaves*, an ebook from BlazeVox.

**Mark DeCarteret's** work has appeared in the anthologies *American Poetry: The Next Generation* (Carnegie Mellon Press), *Places of Passage: Contemporary Catholic Poetry* (Story Line Press), *Thus Spake the Corpse: An Exquisite Corpse Reader 1988-1998* (Black Sparrow Press) and *Under the Legislature of Stars: 62 New Hampshire Poets* (Oyster River Press) which he also co-edited. He was recently selected as Portsmouth New Hampshire's seventh Poet Laureate.

**Martha Deed's** poems have appeared in *Iowa on the Web*, *Shampoo*, *Big Bridge* and many others. She's published two chapbooks, *65 x 65* (small chapbook project, 2006) and *8* (Furniture Press, 2004) along with her e-book *Intersections: a twenty-day journal of the unexpected* (Museum of the Essential, 2006). Her website: [www.sporkworld.org/Deed](http://www.sporkworld.org/Deed).

**Robert M. Detman** has published fiction in numerous literary journals, including *Santa Monica Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, and *Evergreen Review*. His short stories have twice been finalists for the *New Letters* Literary Awards. In addition, in 2007, he was awarded a fellowship to attend the Abroad Writers Conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

**Doug Draime** emerged as a presence in the "underground" literary movement in the late 1960s in Los Angeles. Most recent chapbook: *Knox County* (Kendra Steiner Editions). Forthcoming is a full-length

collection from Coatism Press, *Farrago Soup*. Also a chapbook, *Boulevards of Oblivion* (Tainted Coffee Press) is being released in 2009.

**Gilad Elbom** is a graduate of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, and the University of North Dakota. His first novel, *Scream Queens of the Dead Sea*, was published by Thunder's Mouth Press.

**Adam Elgar's** poetry has appeared in UK print journals and is widely available online. His chapbook *Temporali* was published by Lopside Press (2007). His translation of the novella *Truth and Lies* by Alessandra Lavagnino will be published by Troubador Press in 2010.

**Thomas Fink** is the author of *Clarity and Other Poems* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2008), four prior poetry collections, and two books of criticism. His work is included in *The Best American Poetry 2007* (Scribner's). Fink's paintings hang in various collections.

**Skip Fox** teaches at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette while living in a long cabin in the country on three acres with a pond. He has three grown children. His most recent book is *Delta Blues* (Ahadada, 2009).

**Jason Fraley** works as an investment advisor and compliance officer in Columbus, OH. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Forklift Ohio*, *No Tell Motel*, *The Hat*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Caketrain*, and *Fifth Wednesday Journal*. His mini e-chap, *Apropos of Nothing*, is online at Gold Wake Press.

**Glenn R. Frantz** lives in southeastern Pennsylvania. His poems have appeared in several online publications, including *Cricket*, *BlazeVOX*, *Otoliths*, *Shadowtrain*, and *3by3by3*.

**D. E. Fredd** lives in Townsend, Massachusetts. He has had over one hundred short stories and poems published in literary reviews and journals. He received the Theodore Hoepfner Award given by the *Southern Humanities Review* for the best short fiction of 2005 and was a 2006 Ontario Award Finalist. He won the 2006 Black River Chapbook Competition and received a 2007 Pushcart Special Mention Award. He has been included in the Million Writers Award of Notable Stories for 2005, 2006, and 2007.

**Elisa Gabbert** is the poetry editor of *Absent*. Her recent work can be found in *Colorado Review*, *Diagram*, *Eleven Eleven*, *The Laurel Review*, *Meridian*, *Pleiades*, *Salt Hill*, *Washington Square* and other journals. She is the author of two chapbooks from Kitchen Press, *Thanks for Sending the Engine* (2007) and *My Fear of X* (2009). She is also co-author, with Kathleen Rooney, of *Something Really Wonderful* (dancing girl press, 2007) and *That Tiny Insane Voluptuousness* (Otoliths Books, 2008). Their collaborations can be found in *Boston Review*, *jubilat*, *No Tell Motel* and elsewhere.

**Michael K. Gause** writes in Minnesota. He has two chapbooks to date, *The Tequila Chronicles* and *I Want To Look Like Henry Bataille*. He is creator and host of The Dishevel'd Salon, a monthly gathering of writers in the Twin Cities. More at [www.thedayonfire.com](http://www.thedayonfire.com).

**Joseph Goosey** would like to escape his Jacksonville, Florida residency very soon. He has chapbooks out, *A Comfortable Place With Regular Sunshine* and *Wet and Dripping*. His girlfriend is currently considering several MFA programs.

**Jennifer Gravley** makes her way in Columbia, Missouri. Her work has appeared in *Laurel Review*, *Canteen*, *Ellipsis*, and *Redivider*, among others.

In addition to *21 Stars Review*, **Frank Haberle's** stories have appeared in So New Media's *Necessary Fiction*, *L Magazine*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *34 Parallel*, *Adirondack Review*, *Hot Metal Press*, *Melic Review*, *Johnny America*, *East Hampton Star*, *Smokelong Quarterly* and elsewhere.

**Josh Hanson** teaches reading and writing to 7th graders in Wyoming.

**Jeff Harrison** has publications from Writers Forum, MAG Press, Persistencia Press, and Furniture Press. He has two e-books at xPress(ed), and one at Blazevox. His poetry has appeared in *An Introduction to the Prose Poem* (Firewheel Editions), *The Hay(na)ku Anthology Vol. II*, (Meritage Press), *Sentence: a Journal of Prose Poetics*, *Xerography*, *Moria*, *NOON: journal of the short poem*, *Dusie*, *MiPOesias*, and elsewhere.

**Steve Himmer's** stories have appeared in journals including *Amoskeag*, *Reed Magazine*, and *Monkeybicycle*, and anthologies like *What Happened To Us These Last Couple Years?* and *Brevity & Echo*. He teaches at Emerson College in Boston, and edits the webjournal *Necessary Fiction*.

**Harry Johnson** grew up in New Jersey, has lived in Virginia, Boston and New York, and now resides in Los Angeles with his wife Christiane, a multi-media visual artist and writer. His hobbies include sailing, travel, photography and crossword puzzles.

**Mark Howard Jones** lives in Cardiff, the capital of Wales. Dozens of his stories have appeared online and in magazines and books on both sides of the Atlantic. His ebook *Against The Wall* is available to download free from [ScreamingDreams.com](http://ScreamingDreams.com). He is currently involved in several book projects.

**Len Joy** lives in Evanston, Illinois. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Hobart*, *3AM Magazine*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *NightsAndWeekends*, *GlassFire Magazine*, *Slow Trains*, *21Stars Review*, *Boston Literary Magazine* and

*The Daily Palette (Iowa Review)*. A collection of his short fiction was published by Bannock Street Books earlier this year. An excerpt from his novel, *Forever Doesn't Last Forever*, will be published by *Annalemma Magazine* in the fall of 2009.

**Scott Keeney** lives in Connecticut with his wife and kids. A print edition of his blogbook *Sappho Does Hay(na)ku* was published in 2008. Other work can be found via his main blog [nobodyintherain.blogspot.com](http://nobodyintherain.blogspot.com).

**Kit Kennedy** has published in *Blood Orange Review*, *Bombay Gin*, *FRiGG*, *Mannequin Envy*, *Merge*, *Puppy Flowers*, *Runes*, *Saranac Review*, *Snow Monkey*, *Triplopia*, *Van Gogh's Ear* and forthcoming from *5\_Trope* and Uphook Press.

**Nathan Klose** is a writer living in Augusta, GA. He gives hardy southern handshakes, looks people in the eye, smokes an old oak pipe. He reads by the Savannah River on his lunch breaks.

**Amanda Laughtland** lives in the suburbs of Seattle, WA and teaches English at Edmonds Community College, where she also serves as adviser to the literary/arts magazine, *Between the Lines*. Her chapbook, *I Meant to Say*, was published by overhere Press in 2007. She publishes small books and zines under an imprint called Teeny Tiny. For more information, please visit [www.teenytiny.org](http://www.teenytiny.org).

**Andrea Lewis** lives on Vashon Island, Washington, where she writes short fiction, personal essays, and prose poems. Her work has appeared in *Harpur Palate*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *War/Literature/and the Arts*, and others. When not writing or reading, she is tending an herb garden or making mosaics.

**Nicolás Mansito III** works across multiple genres—poetry, short-fiction, creative nonfiction, translation, essay, and interview—and between the English and Spanish languages. He is an Assistant Professor of English at Broward College. His first book, *3rd & 7th*, is a collection of experimental poetry produced through constraint writing and will be published by BlazeVOX [books] in the summer of 2009.

Aside from *21 Stars Review*, **Maya Diablo Mason** has appeared in *The First Hay(na)ku Anthology* (Meritage, 2006), *Otoliths*, *BlazeVox*, *Off(f) Course*, *Long Island Sounds Anthology* 2008 & 2009, *Pinstripe Fedora* and *EOAGH*. A Long Island high school student, New York, she plans to pursue a career in drama, visual art, or writing.

**Josh May** still owns and operates Open Heart Farm, albeit in a much weedier state, and lives in Burlington, Vermont with Ciaran and Rachel Daley. His chapbook *OPEN: a biodynamic poem* is forthcoming from n'importe quel press.

**Kyle Minor** is the author of *In the Devil's Territory*, a collection of short fiction. Recent work appears in *The Southern Review*, *Twentysomething Essays by Twentysomething Writers*, and *Best American Mystery Stories 2008*.

**Harmony Neal** is heading back to Illinois, where she hopes the cornfields don't make her rash up. She's been published or is forthcoming in places like *The Gettysburg Review*, *Sou'Wester*, and *The Prick of the Spindle*. Sometimes she thinks she has superpowers, but this is probably not true.

**PJ Nights** lives in the wild and ravishing state of Maine where she teaches high school physics and edits the quarterly poetry journal *from east to west: bicoastal verse found* at [http://www.geocities.com/pj\\_nights](http://www.geocities.com/pj_nights).

**T.A. Noonan's** first collection, *The Bone Folders*, received the Heartland Poetry Prize and is forthcoming from Cracked Slab Books. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ninth Letter*, *RHINO*, *Trailer Park Quarterly*, *specs*, and many others. She lives in St. Augustine, Florida.

**Jane Ormerod** is the author of the chapbook *11 Films* (Modern Metrics, 2008), a spoken word CD *Nashville Invades Manhattan*, and a forthcoming full-length collection published by Three Rooms Press. Jane performs her work throughout the United States and is a founding editor at Uphook Press.

**Becky Peterson**, currently a PhD candidate in literature at the University of Minnesota, holds an MFA in poetry-writing from Mills College. Her poetry has appeared in *POOL*, *Indiana Review*, and on Wave Books' online feature "The Bedazzler." Essays on poets Laura (Riding) Jackson and Lorine Niedecker are forthcoming.

**Caleb Puckett** lives in Kansas, where he works as a librarian. He has a verse chapbook, *Desertions*, available from Plan B Press and a prose collection, *Tales from the Hinterland*, available from Otoliths.

**Cat Rambo** is the author of *Eyes Like Sky and Coal and Moonlight* as well as the co-author of *The Surgeon's Tale and Other Stories* with Jeff VanderMeer. Her stories have appeared in such places as *Asimov's*, *Weird Tales*, and *Strange Horizons*. She is the Managing Editor of *Fantasy Magazine* ([www.fantasy-magazine.com](http://www.fantasy-magazine.com)).

**AE Reiff** takes the loss of life seriously. He writes a blog, *Human Botany*, exploring the causes of plant and animal extinctions. A recent essay of his in this effort, "Taking Down the Elder," occurred in *Jack* mag.

**Lori Scoby** lives in Columbus, OH with her husband, a dog, and four cats.

**Mike Smith** was born in the mountain town of Philippi, West Virginia and now lives near Raleigh, North Carolina with his young daughter and son. He holds degrees from UNC-G, Hollins College, and the University of Notre Dame. He has published three chapbooks, including *Anagrams of America*, which is permanently archived at *Mudlark: Electronic Journal of Poetry and Poetics*, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize four times. He has had poems appear in the *Carolina Quarterly*, *Gulf Stream*, *The Iowa Review*, *The North American Review*, and *The Notre Dame Review*. His first full-length collection, *How to Make a Mummy*, was published in 2008.

**Thomas Sullivan's** writing has appeared in *Word Riot* and *3AM Magazine* among other publications. He is the author of *Life In The Slow Lane*, a comic memoir about a chaotic summer spent teaching drivers education, forthcoming in Fall/Winter 2009/2010 from Uncial Press ([www.uncialpress.com](http://www.uncialpress.com)).

**Christian Tablazon**, 24, finished his BA in Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines Diliman. He is a member of U.P. Quill and .U.P. Ugnayan ng Manunulat, and his works have appeared in university and national publications. He is currently teaching English at the University of the Philippines Los Baños while working on his first full-length film.

**Ateet Tuli** lives and works in NY, NY. He has published on the websites *Tuesday Shorts*, *Opium*, and *21 Stars Review* and in print in *The Binnacle*. A poem attributed to him is in the PDF anthology *Issue 1*. He can be reached at [ateet.tuli@gmail.com](mailto:ateet.tuli@gmail.com).

**Bill West** lives in Shropshire, UK. He is a contributing writer and editor for *The Linnet's Wings Literary Magazine*. He has been writing flash fiction since 2004. His work has been published widely both online and in print, most recently in *Sein Und Weiden* and *The Clockwise Cat*.

**Laura Wetherington** is a writer, teacher, and bodyworker. She has an English degree from the University of California, Berkeley, and a poetry MFA from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She co-edits the online journal [textsound.org](http://textsound.org). You can find her work in *Bombay Gin*, *21 Stars Review*, and *Starfish Poetry*.