



RC REVIEW

2004-2005

*and maybe, just maybe,
someone might someday look back
through the dusty creases and
weathered edges and
through some
glossed-over ink-stain perturbation of thought
find some reflection of himself*



TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

Family Portrait of Three	5	<i>Anna Jonsson</i>
Lost Appetite	11	<i>Theresa Vandermeer</i>
Wyoming '97	12	<i>Mara Vahratian</i>
Lies	13	<i>Marilia Kyprianides</i>
Untitled	14	<i>Andrew Klein</i>
Grit	16	<i>Katie Gallegos</i>
Summer Directive	26	<i>Mara Vahratian</i>
We Had the Same Eyes	26	<i>Megan Giddings</i>
Okay	27	<i>Zach Hoskins</i>
Sunday Sleep	27	<i>Adam Falkner</i>
For the Love of Lonnie	28	<i>Adam Falkner</i>
Orange Poem	30	<i>Gabe Anderson</i>
Electric Guitar	31	<i>Katie Gallegos</i>
The Captain	32	<i>Nancy Cummins</i>
Untitled	36	<i>Greg Kress</i>
Salmonella	38	<i>Kurt Preston</i>
To My Wife of 24 Years	43	<i>Alexander DeWitt</i>
How I Like My Wars	52	<i>Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren</i>
St. Cyril and Kern	53	<i>Anam Sarkisian</i>
Friday Night, Winter 2004	54	<i>Greg Kress</i>
Saturday Night	55	<i>Laurel Chartow</i>
Amen	57	<i>Greg Kress</i>
Looking: Vacation Photos	58	<i>Anna Jonsson</i>
Pass the Time	59	<i>Gabe Anderson</i>
Homeless Woman #1	61	<i>Elizabeth Schmuhl</i>
Sketches of a One Night Stand	62	<i>Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren</i>
Diluted	72	<i>Margaret Czerwienski</i>

PROSE

Uprooted	6	<i>Katie Gallegos</i>
And the Teeth Came in Triple Rows	17	<i>John Meszaro</i>
Lay of the Wifely Witch	33	<i>Dayna Smith</i>
Corset Woman of the West	46	<i>Jessika Sorg</i>
In a World Where Coathangers Are Provocative	56	<i>Elena Satut</i>
Stains	65	<i>Laurel Chartow</i>

ART

<i>Paul Abowd</i>	20
<i>Gabe Anderson</i>	13, 15
<i>Kate Beachmau</i>	41, 50
<i>Katie Green</i>	25, 60
<i>Zander Honkala</i>	37
<i>Holly Hoover</i>	42
<i>Victor Pudyev</i>	Cover, 6, 54, 64, 71
<i>Brittlyn Riley</i>	4, 30, 47, 49, 55, 73
<i>Aram Sarkisian</i>	68
<i>Karl Schmeck</i>	32



Brittlyn Riley

FAMILY PORTRAIT OF THREE

To the beginning, like a stone?
Should I dig through wood,
pull out ants or insects?
Everything translates badly.
I pull Dad out of a felt hat
but now he isn't here
he's gone to Hong Kong
left nothing but a trail of Ambien

I call up Wood to hear her voice
those hollow creaks
that come at points:
convergence with destruction
her voice is lined with moss
in the distance, an explosion
in her skin? Shrapnel
lodged deeper than Ambien

we are confined, a triptych soaked
nothing but long-stringed telephones
if he went further, Perth
if I continued, Rejkavik
would line our voices
her creaky Michigan atlases
lost in the split and ruined
those perfect archives
to incomplete disasters

Anna Jonsson

UPROOTED

Katie Gallegos

I clung to my last and final move unquestioningly and with all my naivety, endlessly describing it to my friends, teachers and stuffed animals like an old woman who repeats herself. I'll never know if my eager response to these moves was a result of habit, denial or genuine appreciation. Had the option of moving not been presented, I surely would've never considered it. Like the greater number of us who run in constant pursuit of better things, my transient childhood still sends me running in search of a place I can call home.

"Marisol, tranquila! Stop kicking chair in front of you!" my mother hastily told me in broken English as she struggled to hush little Santiago's hysterical cries. Passengers shifted agitatedly in their seats, betrayed by their pre-departure hopes for a flight without crying babies. Several pairs of unsympathetic eyes shot well-aimed glares in our direction.

Turning to the man in seat 15-C, I inquired in a most dignified tone, "Perdóname, sir. Didn't your mamá taught you it's not nice to stare at strangers?"

The man's face, furrowed like the portrait of a wise Roman statesman, turned red with embarrassment, not expecting to be challenged in such a dismissive way by a nine-year-old girl. My mother tried her hardest to keep back the laughter, bracing herself against the stiff jet liner seat and turning her head away from the object of ridicule to crack her wide smile.

"Mamá," I whimpered, "is we going to be in España again?"

"¡Sí mi niña! I tell you already this many times."

Below us the olive trees, cathedrals and winding streets were shrinking to the size of a miniature diorama, until they became indecipherable dots on a landscape and then nothing but a memory tucked away by hazy clouds.

After catching the connecting flight from Spain to Chicago, we finally arrived in San Diego, California. This was our fifth and final move due to my father's job transfers, although my parents had always promised me it was a temporary arrangement and that we'd surely be reunited with Spain in a few years. Spain was my native soil, where I spent two years as

a child, and later returned for six more at the age of five. In between this brief parting, I lived in Mexico and Argentina for a total of two years.

As I stared out the window of our tightly packed taxi, the palm trees and white plaster houses roofed with terracotta red tiles reminded me of home. Detecting a moment of glum, I shut my eyes and started practicing my ABC's...

"E-meh, E-neh, Ohh, Peh, Coe, Arr, E-seh, Teh, Eeww, Vee, Dabul-u, Ex, Owai and Zee."

My first day of school emotionally scarred me like an invisible battle wound. While calling role, Mrs. Appleton, better known as La Dictadora in the confines of my head, mispronounced my name in her native tongue. Signaling her attention with nervous, wiggling fingers I corrected her, explaining that my name was pronounced, "Mah-ri-sol," not "Mare-i-sawl." Degraded in the English fashion, my name sounded like a disinfectant cleaner. "Introducing Marisol's Aerosol Cleaning Can! Excellent for eliminating those unwanted, pesky germs."

La Dictadora smiled at me, I her disobedient puppy, she my burly owner, and replied, "I'm sorry Mare-i-sawl, but now that you're here in A-mer-i-ca you must learn to accept our A-mer-i-can ways." I could hear kids snickering under their breaths. From then on, whenever Mrs. Appleton called role, I always made sure to answer with a resounding, "Yes, Mah-ri-sol is present!"

Bewildered by the steel jungle of towers, poles, bars, steps, slides, tunnels, chains and bridges, I circled the playground later that day unsure about how to approach it. My mind projected images of me trying to climb atop the monkey bars, losing footing and falling into the mulch below, sitting alone on the tire swing as I tried to push myself through the rubber doughnut hole with my feet, losing balance because of an uneven distribution of weight and tumbling into the mulch. All I could think of were moist wood chips clinging to my sweatshirt like static. I headed for the sandbox.

Three girls I recognized from class were building a sandcastle, quite in need of improvements by my standards. Back at home, I was an expert at molding drawbridges and cone-shaped castle tops. Sometimes I would trace hatch marks through the cone with a small beach twig and sprinkle seashell fragments on top to make it look like an ice cream cone. Smiling innocently and wiggling my trembling fingers to say hello, I cautiously inched towards them. I sat next to my classmates, reached into their bucket and scooped up some water to pour it where I intended to



Victor Pudjev

create our drawbridge. I knew they were going to be impressed.

Suddenly the freckle-faced girl contorted her lips in disgust, hurling a handful of gritty sand into my doughy eyes. My face wrinkled and reddened as tears streamed down my cheeks. Provoking me she sneered, "What are you gonna do about it, spic? Huh, Mare-i-sawl?"

What, I thought, did she call me? I hollered back, "Shut up eh-stupid!" Recess went on without me for several days. I remained in the classroom, looking up foul language in an English dictionary. The next time I encountered my sandcastle foe, I called her a "Mother fucking gringa!" I was given two hours of detention, while my antagonist was pitied and reassured that everything would be okay.

Coming to the United States as a foreigner didn't make me the center of attention. People were rather unaware of my "new student" status, unless of course they were foreigners themselves or hypersensitive dorks with bad hygiene bullied by the social elite. After being scooted away from at the lunch tables for three days, I resorted to sitting with the opposite sex.

At first the boys warned me that if I sat with them I might get the "cootie touch." Worried that this meant something sexual, I snapped,

"You touch me, I hit you!" The boys roared with laughter, one jokingly slapping me on the back, while another spewed milk from his rosy, piglet nostrils.

JD, as I would later come to know him, told me some encouraging words long overdue. "Marisol, you're not too bad! But please don't slap us around too much, because we can't fight back. You're a girl! That gives you an unfair advantage!"

"Eh, I mean no harm. What is your nay-mah?"

"Me? Oh, I'm Joshua David."

"Josh-u-wa, if I slap you I gonna blow you a kiss to makes it feel betta."

"Hey, watch out JD!" chimed in another. "She might just give you the cooties!"

After seeing me in action with the boys, the girls were getting rightfully jealous. I didn't flaunt my newly acquired status though. I simply ignored them, peered through them with vacant eyes as if they were invisible. I wanted them to suffer like I suffered.

As the years progressed, I mastered a flawless West Coast accent, but because of my loud, chatty family, I never lost the Spanish. I tackled hardships head on, which included being more sociable with my female antagonists. Far and distant places whetted my ache for travel, as I came to know San Diego better than most natives. I became a human map with a built-in compass, wandering so far that I got lost in areas where I was forbidden to go and had to call my parents to come get me. I always hoped that my mamá would answer the phone, but it was always in critical moments like these that my papá grabbed the phone first. Trying to explain oneself to an irate Veteran of the Spanish Civil War with a strict upbringing and a peg leg would bring even the most silver tongued, pompous defense lawyer to their knees.

I had conquered my environment exactly as I wished, but something deep inside still felt hollow and homesick. Despite having lived there the longest, San Diego never felt like home. I loved the city's pulse—the undulating tides and pink lemonade sunsets, writing in my seamless, cluttered journal at the end of the pier, the amateur Frisbee players on Coronado beach whose disks soared with the wind, peoples' overstuffed shopping bags on Ocean Boulevard, the Gaslamp District's martini nightlife - all the while still feeling a deep, but detached tie to the land and culture I had left behind. My friends never understood this position, many of them in disbelief of how Spain could mean more to me than the place where I

had been living, dreaming and succeeding in for years.

“Marisol, you’re not the same person you were as a child. Spain isn’t the same either. You’re remembering things the way you left them. You need to let go,” I remember my friend Catherine once telling me. I was advised to enjoy California for what it was, and stop comparing it to Spain. Friends thought I was “pitting independent variables against each other” and “harking back to my childhood too much.” I was not an embittered person. I was not plagued by a town I perceived to have me trapped within its imaginary walls. I did everything I wanted to do in that town.

Though it was almost as if, because of my successful assimilation and flawless English, I was more American than Spanish. What nobody could ever understand was why I constantly uprooted myself like a mobile home, not so much because of an adventurous spirit, but because I knew no other way. I got itchy feet once I had been in a place for too long.

I’ve heard a few times that it’s important to never get attached to the land after moving, because scenery and memories aren’t replaceable. I was told to devote my life to distractions instead, like friends, hobbies and activities. I found that these were intellectually and socially satisfying at best. They never satiated my hungry soul.

I was told that I could construct “my own culture” by surrounding my self with the things I loved. What bullshit! If that’s the case, then why couldn’t I surround myself with mosaic fountains, summon flamenco rhythms and supply the tavern dwellings in which its musicians play? Why couldn’t I destroy all the apple orchards and replace them with olive groves? Why couldn’t I assemble a group of soccer loving maniacs to unite on a once green field now balding with brown patches of dirt every Sunday night for a game? And why the hell couldn’t anybody pronounce my fucking name correctly?

The culture and the land I loved were lost. I remembered making a promise to myself as a young girl to return to Spain, and after considering everyone else’s prospects and opinions on my personal life, I decided to take my future into my own hands.

And now I stand outside the Barajas Airport in Madrid, Spain, eagerly hailing a taxicab and breathing in the jet-fueled air. Whether I decide to stay here for good is irrelevant to what I’ll learn by coming here. This was something I had to get out of my system.

LOST APPETITE

My family
takes dinner together
in a warm-lit dining room
with a candle in the center
of the table.
The ladies drink tea
and we take our water with lemon.
Our napkins
are folded;
they are squares,
perfectly halved
so that little paper triangles
litter the left side of every plate.
But on the right?
discreet white pills
(definitely not cream-filled)
whose presence might be
mistaken as an after-dinner mint.
Surely,
they are not the key
to something deep in all of us.

The women take a sip,
one swallow — for our happiness,
and then something else to sleep.

Theresa Vandermeer

WYOMING '97

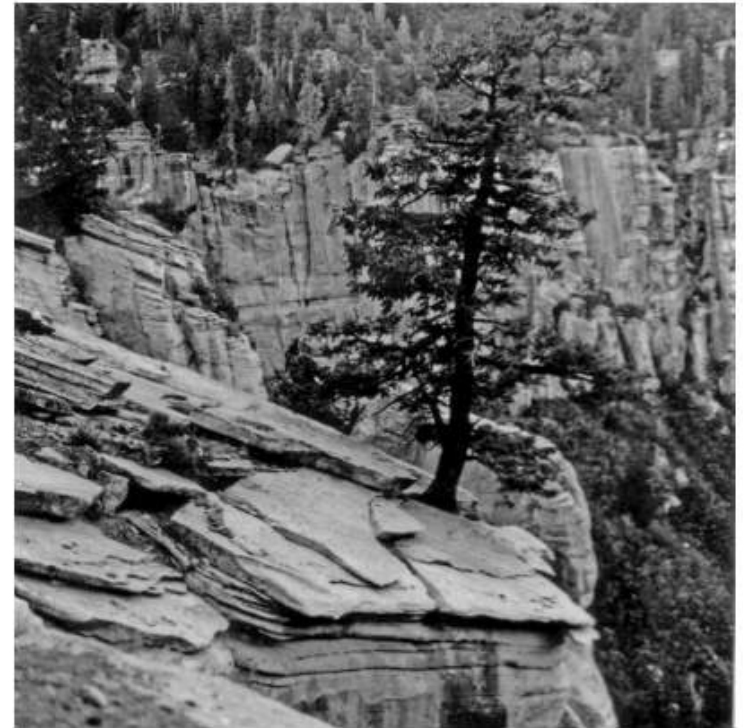
My mother stares into a glacier—
 If she holds her gaze longer
 it will break, and send
 an epoch's worth of ice
 into Jackson Lake—
 Our Lady of Threats
 I have named her—
 She has suggested, in a rage

that she might take money
 rental-car keys, make
 a move for the cabin's door
 and return to a quiet house—
 Today, I am sure she bore
 my smile into a blizzard
 —watch her watching the glacier—
 She knows the ache and shift

of mountainous things, the love
 absent in crystallization
 and inherent in rupture—
 She broke the bank to stand
 on this tour-boat and glance
 at thunderclouds, then back to
 snow—

A storm gathers above small sea—
 Somewhere in it, my father fishes

Mara Vabratian



Gabe Anderson

LIES

Ignorance
 is unbiased,
 pure

when
 the sky was blue
 just because
 that was the name
 of the crayon
 used to color it,

when all we knew was
 kitchen table
 conversations
 and evening news broadcasts,
 dessert served
 after everything they fed us

Marilia Kyprianides

UNTITLED

Lost in the acanthus leaves over
sapphire, beneath cool linen breezes
my eyes are closed yet I can feel
everything as if this place is tattooing
itself beneath my eyelids
The tanned people down below dart in
and out of everyday ruins, eyes sliding
past great fluted pillars framing the
sides of their vision
Hot afternoon sun cleaves the road in
half with shadow, accenting us to
appear as if we are of antiquity's lineage
The perfect acoustics of stone carry our
voices into each other's ears
Whispers of ancient memory in our
fleeting stay, we are wholly consumed,
yet though we have built ourselves a
new façade of terra cotta, our foundations
lie on the other side of a vast expanse
Would that we could walk the same paths
as those who look at us with all too knowing
eyes, then our roots would be settled like
the flowing veins forming light tracery
on the walls
But as it were, we must take these days as
the local fisherman beholds the sunset,
with great reverence and humbleness,
but knowing that its heart lies just beyond
his reach

Andrew Klein



Gabe Anderson

GRIT

In twos and threes we escaped the playground
 Along its edges for the lawless land
 Of boys against girls, brushing our grimy
 Fingertips along the chain-linked fence, like
 The wooden strikers we scraped across our
 Cavernous rhythm gourds in music class.

With a steep drop into the stone grit pit,
 Kids scattered like pellets of mercury,
 Pelting each other behind stockpiles
 Of geology, turning igneous
 Into bits and pieces, conglomerate
 Into a dense cloud of dusty crumbles.

Recess monitor came loafing around
 Our secret spot in her flowery dress
 That clenched her pound cake hips like drapes, wearing
 Those cat eyed, dove-gray frames that climbed down her
 Cherry nose, and halted recess for a week.

For one week none of us came to school, too
 Contagious with the slap measles we caught
 From the poisonous underbrush of the
 Grit pit. The limestone and quartz now sadly
 Lost in velvety moss and still in heaps.

Katie Gallegos

AND THE TEETH COME IN TRIPLE ROWS

John Meszaros

"There might be sharks, you know," Carol told her husband, "aren't you the least bit afraid?"

"Nah," Manny said, "you worry too much. They wouldn't let people do this if somebody was going to get hurt. Besides, the manta rays will scare away any sharks."

"You can't be certain of that," she said, fiddling with the armrest of her wheelchair.

The two of them lounged in the shade of the banyan tree in Lahaina Square and watched a Hawai'ian man carve wooden tiki.

"Besides," Manny added, "Hank at the scuba shop said we'd be lucky to see one, since all the boats make them skittish."

He obviously didn't understand what he'd be up against. Carol, on the other hand, knew sharks. She always taught a whole week on them just before the college kids headed down to Cancun for spring break. Sharks were an old race with alien, predatory minds. Only distantly were they related to actual fish. The average Teleost—a carp, goldfish or salmon—had more in common with a cow than a Great White. At least a cow and a carp both had bones. Sharks were supported by cartilage alone. They didn't even have scales; their skins were covered in denticles—literally tiny, serrated teeth.

"I take it," he said, "you won't be diving."

"No. And you better not either. I don't want to spend the whole time puking over the side 'cause I've made myself sick worrying about you."

"Oh, so you are coming, then."

"Of course I am. Just on the boat, though. No way I'm missing live manta rays."

They bought a tiki from the carver and spent a while eating Melano bars under one of the banyan's secondary trunks.

The tree filled an entire block, its branches supported by massive pylon roots that sprouted straight from the bark and stretched for the soil, clutching it with their wooden fingers. Carol would've loved one of these trees in her yard when she was a kid. The huge, horizontal branches would've been perfect for a little girl to scramble over.

* * *

Carol woke to find she'd shit herself again. She nudged Manny. He rose, half-asleep, automatically knowing what was wrong. He got her cleaned up quick and flopped back into bed.

"I'm sorry," She said.

"S'okay, babe." He began to snore.

"I'm filthy and hideous, aren't I?" she asked sadly.

"Aw, babe. Don't say that." He threw an arm around her and pulled her close. "Come on, you're gorgeous. I know those accidents aren't your fault. It's no big deal." He dozed off at the end of his sentence.

Carol stroked his hair and watched him for a bit. She smiled and kissed his forehead. "I love you," she whispered in his ear.

"Ahlubyatu," he mumbled.

The pain in her back flared up again. She slid out from under his arms and popped medicine from the cornucopia of amber bottles in her travel case. She was supposed to stay prone for a few days to keep the pressure-sore on her butt from getting bigger. But the warm night air was too tempting to pass up.

She eased into her chair and wheeled out to the hotel's parking lot. It was a clear night, although the lights from Lahaina were too bright to see the Milky Way. Mount Haleakala loomed behind the hotel like a sleeping god, its body defined by the hole it ate in the stars.

She watched a gecko hunting moths on a lamp splattered with bird crap. In Hawai'ian myth the geckos—the mo'o—were like Odysseus' sirens. They lived in caves by the sea and seduced men into the water to drown and eat them.

Manny, however, didn't need a mo'o to kill him. He'd rather let a shark bite his head off.

Carol wondered if he knew that live-born sharks fought for dominance while still inside the mother's womb. Not even born and already predators.

When she returned, Manny was hopping around in boxers holding a rolled-up newspaper.

"What's going on?" she said.

"I saw a spider. One of those huge stripey-legged suckers."

Carol saw a black smudge flicker across the floor. She snatched a glass off the dining table, plunked it over the spider and slid a magazine under the rim.

"Here's your man-eater." She wheeled to the door and tossed it out.

"It's just going to come back inside," he said.

"Then we'll let some geckos in. They'll hunt it down."

Manny unzipped his suitcase and took out a jar filled with blue water.

"Oh hey, speaking of man eaters: here's yours." A small, dead shark peered through the glass. "Neat, huh?"

"Where'd you get that," she asked.

"At the souvenir store."

"Please. Take it back. First thing tomorrow."

"Don't tell me you're scared of it."

"Honey, just 'cause I'm afraid of them doesn't mean I don't appreciate them. We're not supposed to kill predators. We especially don't make them into souvenirs. Please, honey—just bring it back. Okay?"

Manny shrugged. "Sure, okay. I kept the receipt." He set it down on the bamboo table next to the tiki.

They crawled into bed. She nuzzled into the curve of his body. He pulled her closer and kissed the back of her neck. She brushed her hand down the back of his thigh, stopping to massage the hollow behind his knee. "Mmmmm," he said. She felt him growing hard against her back. It excited her to know that she could make him feel that way.

"Honey," she said, "I know I'm not going to stop you from going down there. But promise me you won't stay under too long."

"Sure." He brushed her hair out of his face and gave her a little squeeze.

The tiki smiled at Carol from the table, its mouth wide open, lower lip bulged by the tongue, eyes bugging, arms on hips. Mocking her as Haleakala mocked the stars.

The shark in the jar ogled her with milky eyes. It stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the tiki, its mouth gaping open as if it was sharing a laugh with the wooden figure.

Carol gave all of them the bird.

She giggled, realizing she'd just flipped off a bunch of paperweights.

* * *

Manny wheeled her to the shore on a PVC chair with giant balloon wheels.

*Paul Abowd*

He dragged her into the shallows and let the wheels tip her into the surf. Wearing one of his Scuba weight belts to make her body neutrally buoyant, she pulled herself along the sand until she was out far enough to float. He slipped a foam water noodle under her arms for support and held her legs so they wouldn't drag on the coral.

"See that," Manny pointed to a clump of white strings clinging to the coral.

"That means there are sea cucumbers around here. That's their guts. They spit them out when their harassed."

Carol's head whirled around, eyes wide. "Harassed by what?"

"Chill, babe. Anything will set them off. Somebody probably kicked one by accident."

He dove down and came up holding what looked unsettlingly like a dog turd covered with sand.

"Here's one," he said, wiping away the grit. Underneath, the creature's skin was dark red like wine. She touched it. It felt like silk. Manny let go and watched it sink.

They swam into deeper water. Carol slipped off the noodle and dove for the bottom, the weight belt helping her sink. She was at home in the sea, where the cradling water took away the dead weight of her legs.

Carol stared at the sea floor, watching the coral creep closer. Twenty feet down she looked out at the blue distance.

She panicked, realizing she was alone in open water, her husband far, far above. Out of reach. She scrambled for the surface, visions of dead, black eyes, triangular dorsal fins and triple rows of serrated teeth flashing through her mind. The sharks were out there somewhere. The most hideous part would be the jaws, which could jump five inches out of the animal's face since they weren't attached to the skull.

She couldn't rise. The weight belt was dragging her down. She undid the clip and let it fall.

She broke the surface, choking on a lungful of water. Manny caught her under the arms and hauled her to the shore. A man collecting beach glass helped him heave her into the balloon chair. He wheeled her, coughing and sputtering, up to the boardwalk, where she vomited brine.

Manny asked her what had happened. She told him.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I dropped your weight belt."

"Ah crap." Seeing the look on her face, he quickly changed his tone. "Hey, don't worry about it. I'll find it."

"You sure you still want to do this trip, babe," he added, passing her a Coke from a vending machine.

"I'm not missing this," she sputtered, gargling her drink, "no matter what."

* * *

The boat set out as Haleakala rose to eat the sun and stain the sky with its blood.

Manny leaned on the railing, sipping a maitai and wearing a foam hat shaped like a cartoon crab with bobbing googlie-eyes.

"Don't drink too many of those," said Carol, wheeling up and craning to look over the side, "the bathroom is full of spiders."

The sky bled to navy blue. The stars came out. Here on the ocean, beyond the Lahaina lights, the pale band of the Milky Way stretched from horizon to horizon, reflecting the sea. The boat chugged in amongst a knot of its sisters, their lights clustered like a school of fish. Safety in numbers, Carol thought. The sharks will have so many divers to pick from, Manny will seem like small potatoes.

Her husband suited up with the rest of the group and dove over

the side. They headed towards a floodlamp fifty feet down, where divers from the other boats were already kneeling on the bottom.

The lamp vanished, then reappeared, then went out and reappeared again. She realized it must be a manta ray feeding on the krill swarming over the light. The animal was black against the black sea floor, invisible to the surface until it crossed the glow. It seemed as if the sea itself was swallowing the light as Haleakala had swallowed the sun. Leaving the surface in cold darkness.

The wind whistled. Perhaps a mo'o calling her shark-husband out of the depths.

"Hey, miss, what're you doing here all by yourself?" The skipper came out of the cabin wearing a floppy Gilligan hat.

"There are sharks out there," she said.

"You afraid?"

"Cautious. I teach about them enough to know the danger."

He laughed. "Well, we can't let them folks below have all the fun." He pulled a tarp off a glass-bottomed pit in the center of the deck and flicked a switch. Floodlights came on underneath the boat. Krill gathered in seconds.

The skipper coughed and wheezed.

Carol leaned over the pit. The white grill of a Rolls-Royce flashed past the glass. She craned her neck. Black horns surged by, attached to a pair of sleek wings and a long tail.

The manta ray breached a few feet from the boat, flipping onto its back. Gills—the Rolls-Royce she'd seen—flexed and puffed water.

Another ray glided in from the darkness. They were gentle, cosmic creatures. Like geometric archangels who'd sailed out of the red glow of Beetelguese.

Their mouths were always open, sifting krill. Their lazy feeding reminded her of cows. Cows with wings. Holy cows. Hard to believe they were in the same order as sharks.

The skipper hacked and pounded his chest. He leaned against the railing and sucked air.

"Hey, you okay," she asked.

"Yeah, just heartburn."

She turned to watch another manta breach. There was a splash and when she looked back, the skipper was gone.

She wheeled to the edge. He floated face down in the water, unmoving. The divers were a hundred feet away and fifty feet down.

The night wind whistled; the mo'o calling.

Carol grabbed the railing, hauled herself out of the chair and tipped into the ocean. She hit the water and sank, then struggled to the surface and the skipper. She hooked an arm around his shoulders and pulled herself along the ship's side towards the diving platform hanging from the back.

Shit, this is dangerous, she thought. If he woke up and panicked, he'd start flailing around and end up drowning them both.

She knew the serrated teeth would close around her any second, the black eyes flipping up as the shark tore out her guts. She was glad she had no feeling from the waist down.

The mantas had fled from all the splashing, leaving her alone.

She reached the platform and pulled herself up. The skipper was too heavy and waterlogged to fish out, so she forced a foam lifesaver around his head and right arm. Good thing fat floats, she thought.

Maybe he had a walkie-talkie in his belt. She reached into the water, then froze. She'd seen a flicker of white five feet away. Was it the mantas coming back? No. Too small.

There it went again. This time she caught a glimpse of the staring yellow eye, the knife of a dorsal fin. Then the shark was gone. She snatched her hand back.

The skipper's lips were turning blue. She looked at him, then at the water. She screamed and thrust her hand into the cold, dark ocean and groped for his walkie-talkie. Her fingers closed around it, pulled it out, lost hold of it for one horrible moment, then caught it again. She hoped the dunking hadn't messed it up. It had to be waterproof, right?

Corded muscles wrapped in sandpaper brushed her wrist below the surface. She jerked back, sending the walkie-talkie clattering across the platform. She looked at the back of her hand. It was bloody where the shark had touched her. She trembled all over, but knew that she'd just cut her hand on the denticles.

She grabbed the walkie-talkie and clicked it on, hoping to God it wouldn't electrocute her.

"Hello," she said. "Is anyone there?"

There was static. Then a voice. "Yeah, I hear ya'. Who is this?"

"I'm on the Pride of Pele, out by the manta ray divesight. The skipper's had a heart attack."

A floodlight blazed from one of the other boats, blinding her. "Okay, we see ya'. Hang on, we're coming over. We got a doctor on

board.” The boat glided towards her, scooting around from the far side of the circle to avoid scaring the rays.

Carol collapsed, exhausted and cold. She looked out at the ocean. Something white bobbed on the surface. The shark, floating on its back. It didn't move.

The other boat pulled alongside. One man took the skipper and got a blanket on him. Another hauled Carol back to her chair. She asked if he could check on the shark. He pulled it in with a rescue pole from the other boat. Why the hell didn't I think of that, she thought.

“Deader than a doornail,” the man said. “Weird. They usually go way out to sea when they're dying.”

Manny crawled onto the deck and pulled off his mask. “Jesus, babe! Are you okay?”

“I'm fucking freezing. Come here and hold me.”

She thought for a moment. “And bring me that shark.”

Manny took the creature and passed it to her. She held the little, muscular body, feeling its sandy skin, the stiff, powerful muscles in its tail. Its mouth was open, allowing her to see the three rows of even, serrated teeth. Alone in the murky water, her mind conjured all sorts of unseen horrors. But now, with the animal lying in her arms, it was beautiful.

Her students thought she lectured on sharks just to freak them out before vacation. They were wrong. She did it so they would learn to respect the plaent's oldest, most elegant predator.

She held the body over the side, raising it to the sky. Haleakala loomed in the distance, a hole eaten in the stars. The wind whistled. She let go. The body dropped into the water.

A manta breached nearby, gulping krill.

Back at the hotel room, the tiki was still grinning. Though maybe now with a little less mockery. Manny had returned the shark in the blue fluid to the souvenir store earlier that morning.

A gecko rested motionless on one of the lamps in the parking lot, waiting for insects to flock to the dazzling lure of the light. Above it, some of the larger moths hovered safely just beyond the lizard's reach.



Katie Green

SUMMER DIRECTIVE

Stay close to the vines, these days
 never sprint toward sunset, or ask
 questions of ends and firsts—
 Stand on tarred pavement, it melts
 and your hair haloes under a cap—
 Call it a night without codes

because the air hangs palpable—
 Tell me it droops, like fruit—
 No, mold it into the figure of a girl
 for the first time in ages, like you've
 never seen one before—please
 whistle, as if I'm absent—

And know nothing but this—
 I move below you, a humid tongue
 and greenhouse hand—
 A mind, colored with lightning
 news from the mountains
 —and someone else's strong teeth—

Mara Vabratian

WE HAD THE SAME EYES

your car is so low to the ground:
 I felt every bump as we trailed along
 the roads and leaves and dust and corn
 towards home.

the moon shone bright:
 turning your car into an electric mantismobile
 and turning me into a ghost
 counting stars splattered on the windshield
 until we froze

and they froze
 in the supernatural supernova of our headlights.

Megan Giddings

OKAY

I saw myself today
 a silhouette
 on wet pavement
 looming
 in puddles with
 red
 autumn leaves,
 dissolving
 in footsteps and
 swimming
 back to surface.

Behind my back the water
 swirled and rippled underfoot
 but I was still there.

The leaves and I were still there.

Zach Hoskins

SUNDAY SLEEP

She is watching.
 I feel the butterfly blink
 of trembling
 eyelashes,
 stabbing pinholes
 into flesh like
 acupuncture voodoo.

Her breath:
 the condensation
 sticking to salty skin
 beneath the hair on the
 back of my neck.

Adam Falkner

She is the half-conscious
 dream from which
 I jump awake,
 startled as a cold
 water submersion or a
 lazy-toed curbside stumble.
 The heat that
 slows my blood flow
 to a donkey trot thump
 pounding the prison
 or my ribcage.

She is the rhythm
 that tosses my body
 as a shipwreck:
 broken and bottomed out.
 Sand stuck in my golls,
 I cough with every breath.

FOR THE LOVE OF LONNIE

by Adam Falkner

His scarlet symphony shoulders sink
 Like scales in sonata serenades.
 Speak-easy beats and
 Smokey shadows show shaded figure through
 Neon hues that highlight the snowcap
 Wrapped like Rockies around his head.
 Pedals pump with friendly fury,
 And find funkified fusions.
 Brilliant drops of sweat swing
 Freely from funk-filled finger fire
 Burning through a jungle
 Of ivory and ebony.
 The energy from this jazz thumping,
 Hindu-hopping funk wizard grips
 My stomach and drown it with beat bugs.

Lonnie's dynamic delivery dances through
 Adrenaline caged veins,
 Long crimson red cloak floats
 In evening air
 Arms erupt into the night sky
 Littered with the city's illuminating light.
 Detroit is alive tonight...

Her long avenue arms navigate
 Shoreline like lobster boats
 Lost in salty morning mist.
 From crimson lips
 Smoke slips into the hips
 Of her inner-city city curb sides
 Curved sides and sky scraping
 Streetwise thighs glide
 Through miles of Motown soul city saturation.
 Lonnie Liston's soul sweats through

Head wrap remedies like
 Sun melted soft serve.
 Soul devours his clothing
 Like coffee stains eating away paper napkins.
 Soul slips his fingers off the keys,
 It beats his heart,
 Breathes his lungs.

But it's only the colorful, abstract past
 Of many Miles of Blue,
 You know, the kind of shade and hue
 That Coltrane used
 To ooze blues through
 Fingertip moves... painting Portraits that
 Sketch Spain and dance
 To a Supreme Love scene between
 A Monk and his monastic realms
 Of Brilliant Corner borders
 and jazz landscapes,
 Or of beautiful Blues Roots that
 Mingus brings us on a platter of
 Brown and black back bass beats.
 It's the mastermind behind
 the Newport sets of Sir Duke
 And Herbie's Hunting Heads that complete
 This *soulful* Maiden Voyage.

But *Jazz is more than soul*
 It's history, and history in the making.
 As Lonnie splashes a new flavor into the Bitches Brew of Jazz
 He pours his street soul sound down
 Alleyways and avenues,
He is letting Detroit breathe.
 Her lungs heave at the sensation of Jazz
 Tattooing her every street corner
 And train track boarder
 With abstract portions of organ funk.
 And she *exhales* only when
 She can *feel it in her bones.*

ORANGE POEM

I can see
that we made love
around dusk
on the bare rock cliff
in your parents'
backyard.

I am sure they saw us,
or they must have been picking
the seeds from the pomegranite I
gave them.

The sepia
of your flesh
glowed against mine
as I lost your eyes
in the horizon.

I wished that
I could taste again
the tangerines that waited
for days on the dashboard.

They would be so sweet,
I would have been drunk
the whole night longs,
or was I?

Seeing my hand
above me
as I swam up to meet
the evening,
I was unsteady
but only for that moment.

Gabe Anderson



Brittlyn Riley

ELECTRIC GUITAR

My spider leg fingers have crawled her neck,
Have yanked nylon hair, harvesting gray roots.
I've oiled her shell for thumbprints and flecks,
Her body polished like orchard's fruit.
I've cried her faint like watercolor blue,
With twisted hooks and whiplash rock.

I have crunched her voice soundlessly through tubes,
Shoe-gazing as she caught my thoughts.
I've pushed her buttons and tweaked her knobs.

Manic to my ears but not to my eyes;
And strained and scratched for her elixir talk,
Sound-soaking white rooms with cascading skies.

A sonic sluber-rock machine duet,
With my creeping fingers along her neck.

Katie Gallegos

THE CAPTAIN

it is meagre to pull the skin
with a vegetable peeler
while muttering aloud
i miss every corner
of ears and dark hairs
that fall within a box
if crayons and the taste

kill the rabbit. assure so much
in nickels and dimes like tupperware.
licking your lips and your lipstick shines.

of chalk. dry, and wool and
the cardigans missing buttons,
the tomatoes from the farmers,
the apples from the orchards,
to be rewarded or punished,
in leopard print everything miserable.

Nancy Cummins

LAY OF THE WIFELY WITCH
(OR, A JAUNT INTO EDINBURGH'S
AIR OF PAST GROTESQUERIES)

Dayna Smith

In Edinburgh, there is a deep valley surrounding the castle, which sits atop a very high hill. In this valley is a park, a garden, and a cemetery. At the gate of the cemetery is a round tower, "to keep the dead in"—for grave-robbing was common, and a very lucrative job indeed. This valley used to be the lake in which they tried witches, who often subsequently and according to the wisdom of the times proved "innocent." Once or twice, if her anger towards such an unjust punishment grew too great, a woman might find herself "guilty" well after the trial. . .

My legs spread wide, as they should only for birth or duty, I feel the terror of weightlessness. To the largest toe of each foot they have tied my thumbs, my knees crushing any hope of air from my aching breasts, and my hoarse animal's throat calls to anyone, even distant God, for deliverance. I flail engulfed in jeering screams, the torches on water blind and hiss at me as finally my face blessedly wets—but it is only rain. I shriek, airless in the dry above, terror sending every organ in me to the back of my tongue, when there you are, there you are Husband, and for an instant I feel an uncruel hope. Then from behind you slides a long thin line of night-time, and you jab it viciously—once, twice, thrice, again—into my billowing skirts, your face grim but your eyes sneering as you crack at my knee, my shoulder, my face, when in your vigour you miss my dress. The weightlessness gone, the water sucks at my pale parts in an indecent adulterer's kiss. Lake fills my womb, and I accept its invasion for I have no choice.

Had we children, Husband, I would have understood. Had we children, and had I floated, you, I, each child born would have been dragged clawing bloody murder up the crook-toothed cobblestones to crackle and crack like pigs on spits in the high open courtyard of that great, stony castle. I, half-drowned from the lake, would have burned the slowest, greasy smoke pouring into the jubilant noses of the crowd, whose



Karl Schmeck

upturned nostrils would have drunk their fill of my damnation. I tell myself that nothing, nothing could destroy me more utterly than the high thin underlying string of my children screaming in the fires at my side, unable to comfort them with lies of good things, and light, and truth. But Husband, Husband—I have done you no wrong. We have no children.

Except the one I feel die before me, behind the thick protecting walls of my belly, my back. I feel that light go out as my face smashes through the rippled flaming glass and I succumb to the greedy pulling of the lake.

Words I never allowed myself to say bubble like poison from between my lips. Bloody. Bastard. Son of a whore. I curse you, and it fuels me, as unkind fingers wrench my hair to loose, ink in water that devours my eyes, slinks up my nose, and twines around my neck faster than any hangman's noose.

You always did like to hear the snapping of a neck, Husband. I see you there, image trembling as any ghost, but black and orange with the power of righteous manhood. The power of a word, of a finger, pointed.

You and your poles, Husband. I hiss the word into the water, thrashing possessed by demons I never knew in life. Those above may think it my life leaving me—God Bless her soul, the innocent, the dead!—but it is my body's command to free me— free me—

A sharp pain in four small places at once, and then a numbness. Less two toes, I sink into the bracken.

Very quiet, very still, I wait in the tentacle dark of my hair for the lights to waver, and disappear. I wait, and I ponder, head cocked to the side, body chilling, my thumbs turning black as I think. As I change.

I'm not scared anymore.

Husband, you killed our child— you and your murderous band. It was born tiny and black-green, grinning like a skull, a bubble of empty flesh in the darkening water.

I want to swear, I want to rage, I want to tear at my skirts and violate something precious— once myself, my body, though never mine, was prized above all else. I was willing. I was able. I was not what they

called me. I was not what you said. I was not the silence in my defence. But you have made of me something else. I stare at my strong, slender fingers, pale and red at turns with good, honest callouses, and I see them for what they were. A wife's hands. I stare at my dead thumbs, ringed with my two dead toes, and see them for what they are. A witch's hands. My power lies in silence now.

The water whispers to me, buries my unborn child, and warns me of men coming, long poles spiking into my twilight realm in rude probes. They search for my body. I'm to be given a decent, Christian burial, for my decent, Christian death.

My eyes narrow, and the water drags at my lashes.

No body of mine will be decent or Christian anymore.

The seaweed tugs back my lips, a whitening, bloodless smile. I release the last of the good, Christian air from my good, Christian lungs, and let gelid water christen my chest anew. Stalking off with stuttering twin ribbons of brown-red trailing from my feet, I leave behind my last benediction for the men to find, encased in three tiny bubbles, with a wish for all that is ill. It is all they shall find of me. Perhaps they would carry my message to you— I've told you just where to go. And how long I will wait.

Jerking and wooden as my limbs stiffen and numb, I tangle my body deep deep in the secret weedy hair of the lake. Here I will wait, for the next one to sink.

I will welcome her, and I will swallow her, as I welcomed the water as it swallowed me, and I shall grow cold and green and jagged as the most fearsome of those creatures you revile. I till bloat on their bodies as you bloat on your correctness, I will grind my teeth to pretty shards for you as you break in your new wife.

And when the lake is gone, and tailored gardens and proper boxy green push back the memory of screams, of water, of the briny sucking rush, I will swim still.

I will swim past the rows of headstones, with those decent Christian bones—

I will swim past the grassy patches where the murderers keep their homes—

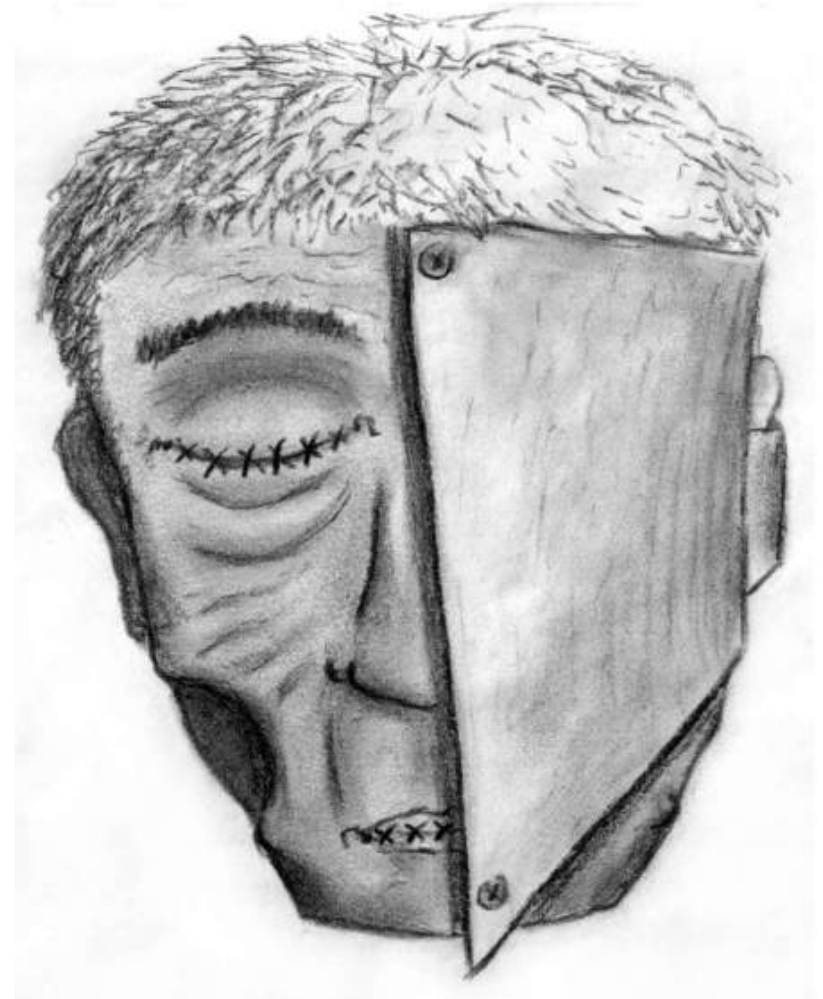
I will swim past the Resurrection Men, 'twixt open sepulchres
they roam—

And I will light me, oh so gently, upon your hallowed grave.
Here I bequeath my nightmares to your dried-up, pretty wife,
and pray your secondary brood receive a sticky end to life.
Your rotten eyes I will beguile with my waving pitchy hair,
that closes off the throat which nevermore shall speak so fair.
Your hollowed cheeks will feel my ragged fingers in their holes,
my knotted toes will dance a jig upon your bony nose.
Then shall my waters whisper poison in your softly sleeping soul,
conjuring your dead son and the memory of poles.
I shall savor all your silent shrieks, a sweet and bitter drink—
but for now I'll keep to waiting, for the next one to sink.
Husband, O Husband—did you expect thanks?

UNTITLED

It was a mistake to assume that I could see myself
In the convex universe of your mirrored sunglasses;
To see this balloon of conceit
 sharp angles and stolidity
 emotion incarnate
Reduced to a small, dark pearl
 faceless and too perfectly round;
A bastion of complexity, distilled
 to a disembodied dot, nearly lost
 among the backwashed light
 and in some insignificant corner,
So that the great temple of Self
 collapsed
and retreated, a grain of shadowed sand
in a gazing luminescent sea.

Greg Kress



Zander Honkala

SALMONELLA

Kurt Preston

She told me,
 through the translucent smoke clouds seeping from between
 her trembling lips,
 through the twilight sun strokes playing on her eyes,
 through her ash-tainted fingertips pressed to her face,
 that she didn't know who she was anymore;
 told me that she didn't remember me anymore, forgot me,
 had imagined me,
 and then asked me if I was there.

She told me,
 through the shadow crests of fallen leaves quietly rustling beneath her,
 through the trailing bird songs echoing invisibly in the distance,
 through the fading glow of the joint embers dissolving in the grass
 in front of her,
 that she had grown up in a town that smelled of dry sand
 and soapy bathwater,
 told me that she was sitting inside that smell, letting it soak into her
 and that the color fading from her eyes was the sun setting
 over the St. Edna's steeple.

She told me in sporadic outbursts
 that she knew the feeling the constellations get when their stars die,
 and the feelings streets get when their buildings collapse
 and their lights go out.

And after a long pause,
 asked me where she begun and where she ended,
 asked me where I went when she put out her lights,
 and asked me if I could smell her dusty air, because
 she'd forgotten which was her, and which was the smell of that town.

And, a child with its finger stuck in the electrical socket,
 I breathed in the pot smoke leaking from her clothes,
 and stared into her distant eyes, where the color was fading
 into invisible bird songs.

And I told her,
 through the hundred miles between us,
 through the raindrops beginning to gather overhead,
 through the chill that had snared the final glimmers of evening sunlight,
 that I dreamt last night of a pretty-eyed girl trapped in a
 locked iron building,
 and a man with no eyes and perfect vision,
 boiling blood and burning coals,
 who wanted nothing more than to watch her die.

And I told her,
 through the adrenaline seeping into my veins,
 through the fingernails pressing into my palms,
 through her timorous breaths,
 that I wanted nothing more than to see it,
 told her that I wanted to see the girl caught, and a knife
 forced into her belly,
 told her that I wanted to see a spear thrust between her legs
 and pressed until she choked on it,
 told her that I wanted to see her locked in an aluminum cage,
 spinning calmly over burning coals, and melting her skin,
 told her that I wanted to see the girl scream until she was
 vomiting blood,
 and smelling her flesh charring through the rising smoke.

I told her in tremolo whispers
 that I knew the feeling the constellations get when their stars die,
 and the feelings streets get when their buildings collapse
 and their lights go out.

And after a long pause,
 a long pause,
 I told her that I didn't know where I begun and ended,
 that I didn't know who I was in the dream,
 whether I grasped the knife's handle or felt its blade,
 that I didn't know if I woke up convulsing from the pain
 of my life burning away,
 or shaking from the rapture of locking the cage.

And, a limp wad of cookie dough tainted with salmonella,
 she blinked at the rain drizzling onto her face,

and stared into the distance, where the lights were falling like blood onto burning coals.

She told me,
through shivering whispers and salty tears,
through phantom blisters and bloodied spears,
that she didn't know who was talking anymore.
She told me,
through muffled gasps and sweaty palms,
through imagined scraps of fallen bombs,
that she had forgot which was me and which was her.
and I asked her,
through thickening rain and clenched teeth,
through water stains and tainted sleep,
if she could imagine what it would feel like to drown another's cruelty?
I asked her,
through lustful eyes and frozen sweat,
through broken lies and broken sex,
if she could imagine what it would feel like to bathe in another's fear?

A lightning flash, and the air shook violently with us,
the clouds vomited the water in torrents,
in aluminum cages and church steeples,
and she gave a weak snuffle and broke into sobs,
ripples in some shadowed puddle.
The joint unraveled in the grass between us,
soaked and smeared and falling into the earth,
the ashes running into the mud with driplets of her saliva.
The sky flashed a sun's vein,
which throbbed around us,
and looked prepared to drop brimstone and perfume, dirty bathwater.
The air crashed like it was in its death throes,
pounding on the walls of an aluminum cage.

And, a semen stain on a leather dress,
I felt the hill of my Grandfather's pocket knife against my soaked thigh,
and stared into my distant dreams, where the color collapsed like a constellation losing a star.



Kate Beachman

TO MY WIFE OF 24 YEARS

Alexander DeWitt

1.

There's a bench in that park
between the fluorescent city lights
and the deep, gray lake
where pale young boys dive
under a placid surface,
where thin hair mats
tight to white foreheads.

Here, they shiver as water consumes them.

Here, they become ghosts.

The dead boys stretch blue, iced
fingers towards me.

I am a reflection,

I am haunted;
these phantoms stalk,

brooding angels
guiding me towards the damp sand
off the lake.

2.

So many times you waited at that bench.

3.

So many evenings I've stood here,
hidden among the city's shadows, by the water,
waiting out a blustering silence:

wind's white noise
blowing off the lake.

As years have passed,
waves have grazed me;
they claw at the tops
of my wrinkled feet.



Holly Hoover

4.

You come to me in nightmare.

We float in pounding surf;
tide carries us
away from each other.

I begin to struggle,
and in foamy swells
am swallowed under.

My lungs pound.
I heave
and breathe in the dead lake.

Below surface,
I look towards your bench,
that distorted figure
against the background's sordid cityscape,
my vision skewed by the bending of waves.

My nightmare tears at us:
we have our own city down here
a darker mirror of yours
and I float down its street
in search of your fine black hair,
your eyes and rotting bone.

I will be lost between those city lights lit
and those lanterns that are dimming.

5.

I could stay alive
with retreat
to the dark half of your city
this time alone
into a damp alley,
dirt dully lit by scattered streetlamps
I would wait under shadows,
watery ghosts looking on with white eye
until their skin presses
against my own pale skin
and in feeling that pain
I would jump into the lake

What a waste, you'd say to my body
with your living, jet-black eyes

6.

We could stay together

6.

We could stay together
if you stay sitting on your bench,
blushed cheeks off the cold lake's slapping wind

You, with hair undone, graying a bit
would wait alone
for my weary absolutions
I would stay on the rocky beach
with chilled lake-water lapping at my heels
glimpsing your aged body
spread out along
the city's clenching fist

7.

But could you really see us old, Love
you stretched on that wooden bench
it beneath you, rotting?
All the while we would mutter
the passing of ghosts—
drowned boys lying pale in shallow water
until your own finger bursts of an icy chill
spread from me to you
the lingering of death so harsh
it would drag us both under tide

8.

So I let my feet lose their grip on the sand,
and in the moments before I am consumed
I see this:

You sit on the rotted park bench,
watching the city's reflection in the lake.

And the warm city lights
look back
at you.

CORSET WOMAN OF THE WEST

Jessika Sorg

In a previous life she must have been one of those corset-wearing women, who cinched up their waists so tight that their guts dripped out the bottom and cascaded out the top, and had so many ribs removed that they would make poor rib eye sandwiches. For this reason and this reason alone, they called her Bonnie. In fact, sometimes she did wear corsets and sometimes she did have a rib or two removed, but only occasionally.

It was from her obsession with the west that she became attracted to them—the whole group of boys, and when their spurs jangled in the hallways it seemed as though they had stepped out of the saloon with Jesse James. Each one of them drove a pickup truck, with mud caked tires that scraped up against the dried and crusty earth when they made a sharp turn the tires. During school they would stash their against-school-dress code huge belt buckles, chaps and cowboy hats in McGee's classroom, and at the end of the drab day they would rush to retrieve them, bidding her a goodbye and to casually flopping carefully shaped hats onto their sunburnt heads. Sometimes, if they were dating someone, they would tease her and make her wear the hat before she could get a ride home and a gentlemanly kiss on the cheek. No matter how cute she looked, they always took it back. Even if she loved it. The girlfriend never really mattered in the end; these boys weren't the taming kind.

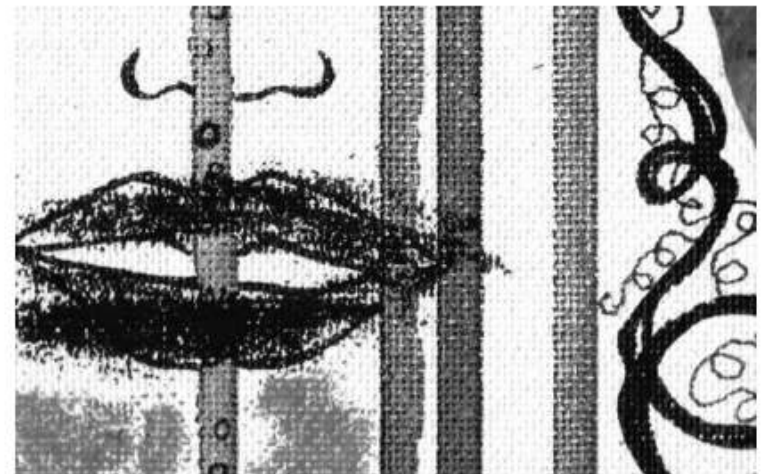
Despite her perceived outwardly appearance, Bonnie did not wear corsets like the saloon women, but she wore overalls like the farmers. No dresses for her—no hoop skirts or calico fabric swishing around her ankles, batting away the flies desperate to taste her flesh. She was simply not that kind of girl. She was a cheerleader, by chance, and while the other girls wore wearing pretty and frilly dresses to games and then changing into their short skirts that the boys lifted up in hopes of catching a secret glimpse, Bonnie wore her hair in pig tails, oversized jeans and a sweatshirt. No one ever suspected.

The Western boys all played football, and would take turns giving her rides to games and letting her wear their spare hats since she didn't mind hat hair. They wore their cowboy hats and Confederate flags flew from the beds of their trucks, in the Midwestern wind, but not at half-

mast. When she went to country concerts with them, they wrapped her up warm in the Confederate flag as they went, 'nigger hunting'. Even after they nearly beat a black man to death, even after they had beaten him to a bloody pulp that could barely roll down the hill to security, they were not arrested. Because football-playing boys will be boys, and nothing can be helped. Each one had a full ride to a big ten school; all turned them down and went out West where they thought they would feel at home but never found one.

Young Bonnie did her best to stay away from her mother and the moonshine she made in the basement or the cheap Five O'clock vodka and its like that she habitually purchased from the local liquor store. She had no longer had a license, and from a young age she allowed Bonnie to drive her there to buy. Or sent Bonnie in to buy for her when she was too drunk to stumble out of the van herself. When Bonnie got her license at sixteen she had already been driving on and off for four years. When she turned eighteen and was considered an adult, she had been an adult for longer than her own mother, a mere fourteen years older than her daughter.

It was the results of her first alcoholic party that she hid; Bonnie never had a sip of liquor before that night. She really was not a saloon girl, even in the rare moments she tried to be. She was a farmer's daughter, an alcoholics' daughter. But that night she wrapped her torso in the corset



Brittlyn Riley

that her mother cinched as tight as possible as she sipped on jack and coke in the bedroom, a cigarette carelessly spilling ashes on the oak floor and in her black hair. Her mother was excited because she herself was looking for a young catch, and also excited to entice her daughter into her own world of ashes and empty bottles hidden in the trash, a secret only in her mind. Bright red rouge, sunset colored lipstick. Dark smoky eyes, gasping for breath because her lungs were like trapped balloons yearning for a full breath. Atop the corset there was frilly, low cut dress, with ruffles galore and a generous splash of perfume on her neck, where her pulse beat effortlessly, and on her wrists, where she would one day ironically draw a thin red line with a cheap oxidized shaving razor of her mothers.

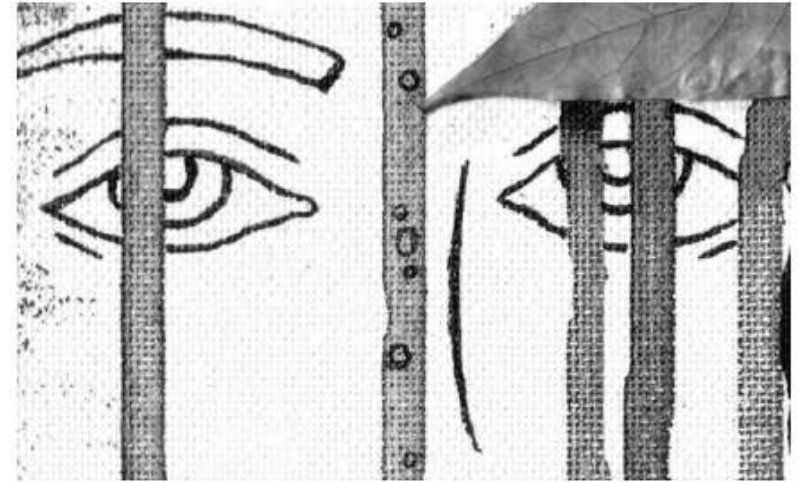
The cowboys arrived at the party, and it was just like the Old West. In the corner someone played upbeat music on a beat up Steinway replica, and her mother stood in the kitchen playing bartender until she was too drunk to pour correctly. The horses were tethered to an old oak tree with a tree house in its branches, amongst its leaves and nests. Bonnie smiled and shook her woman-made curls, her perfume enticing the cowboy-wearing hats to her more than normal.

One of her cowboys had brought a friend, a handsome stranger that hid beneath the shadow of his hat and leaned against door frames in a classical sort of way. He and his handsome blue eyes took a liking to Bonnie, who floated on the cloud of his affection. Vaguely she noticed the whispers of the other girls as he spoke softly to her, his lips so close to her ear that they tickled. Eventually she escorted him upstairs so he could proudly show her his prized revolver.

"I can't show you here," he said, "because these folks are trouble. Take me someplace private." And private she found.

Eagerly she led him up the stairs, past the time line of her childhood. Her mother was, at one time, great in her ability to pretend she was functional and led a functional family, raised a functional daughter although she wore overalls before and after the one corset. Bonnie's left hand, ringless, leading his right hand. As he is whisked away upstairs, he noticed the pictures of her childhood. She was, she is, has always been, a beautiful child. Child.

Upstairs he locked the door, put the skeleton key in his mouth and gave it a hard tug with his stomach. It is gone. He looked at her, a fire in



Brittlyn Riley

his eyes. He reminds her of the pictures she has seen of Jesse James; she decides to call him Jesse, because she does not know his name, only those untamed eyes. The cowboy hat, carelessly tossed on the floor and following it the holster, with the revolver she wanted so desperately to see, the chaps, the turquoise belt buckle, the vest, the red bandana he had tugged down from his mouth to his neck. He unbuttoned his starched shirt, dirty, and stood there before her, in thick and dark blue jeans.

"Original Levi's," Jesse says.

His fingers trembled; she fights him but he manages to rip off the corset, and her body escaped its clasp, flooding the space around her. The curls gone, the dark eyes running down her face in streams, puddles on her cheeks. The dress is a tattered pile on the floor, beside the revolver. She had never seen one before and now she never would.

Afterwards, he jerked up his pants from his knees, carefully reassembled his appearance in the now broken mirror. The holster went back on; she huddled under the sheets, the dark eyes gone. Jesse leaves, taking the corset with him; she throws away the frills.

Back to the overalls, no more dresses. Now there is even more to hide, another secret. There will be another set of pictures on the wall, beside the staircase. No more football games, no more cowboy hats to

wear. Bonnie stays away from all of them, and hides within herself and the overalls. Underneath them she wears a bra, a t-shirt from grade school that says, "Proud of '02" in blue block letters. It was fashionable at the time.

Over the t-shirt she wore an Alan Jackson long sleeve t-shirt, worn in and comfortable, and then her zip up cheerleading hoodie, her name embroidered over her heart in the shape of a megaphone. It's a good thing he took the corset; it would never fit her now. But she still had perfect attendance, despite the attire.

The first day of school she misses no one notices. Everyone thinks, 'So she gets sick, just like we all do. No one is perfect,' and they go on with their day. No skin off of their noses, no corsets off of their backs. She didn't even miss a whole day, only first hour honors English. Bonnie seems fine when she showed up later, just like normal. Overalls, sweatshirt. Hair down so she can hide behind for her convenience.

Rinnnnnnnnng.

No answer. Riiiiinnnggggg. Again; this time the teacher answers.



Kate Beachnau

"Who? Oh, ok. Sure, she's here. I'll send her right down. By the way, how is your grandbaby doing? Walking? How time flies, how time flies. She'll be right there, buh-bye."

Bonnie was called to the counseling office; no oooooohhhhs or ah-hhhs; they are too old for that. They don't realize that is the last time they will ever see Bonnie.

In the office she is just like always. Nothing has changed, she still doesn't have the corset back from Jesse James, who she has never seen or heard of again. The office woman brings her into a cold back room, hugs her, and says that she is her friend. Bonnie has never felt she was a friend before, and still hesitates to believe her. The police walk in and tell her they hate to do it. "We know how good of a kid you are, Bonnie," the younger one says. He is a friend and a former cowboy himself. Now she again hides behind her hair, her dark eyes falling down her face for the second time. 'Its fine, really,' she assures them, and willingly she places her hands behind her back. She is a dangerous bandit and she has been caught.

They say, an old wives tale, a tall tale of the West that the child would have lived. But it didn't; the wolves got to it. No one even knew. Sometime during English class, when the other kids were talking about Oedipus Rex and incestual acts, Bonnie sat in the dirt-rimmed bathtub, three months early, alone. A floor below her mother was passed out, another fifth empty in her hand and another pack of cigarettes listless. The saloon girl made sure the water was warm, but not too warm, and slide into it, like he had slide into her, like he had slid the Levi's off. It didn't even hurt, she was later quoted as saying. The babe did not cry, and its lifeline was severed with the cord from her cheerleading shoes. She laid him in one of the cowboys' forgotten football jerseys, on the bed, and fell asleep, exhausted. When she awoke he was blue, and after Bonnie showered she rode her horse to school and felt like herself.

They blamed it on the media, the cowboys, the cowboy hats and confederate flags, revolvers, cheerleading squad, alcoholic mothers, tobacco; and they also blamed it on overalls, large belt buckles, perfume, childhood pictures, high school English classes, horses, cars, skeleton keys. They blamed on it everyone and her, everyone but the problem. Yet the boys still wore their cowboy hates and Jesse still wandered the saloons, girls still had their mothers cinching up their corsets as they went to a frat party at the local university on Friday nights after sexual education and cheerleading practice all day long.

HOW I LIKE MY WARS

black and white photographs.
pretty girls kissing their uniformed men.
grainy victory day parades.

military offensives and retreats.
chronological dates and years.
sparse live footage that never shows
a soldier's fearful expression:
dark pupils cowering
in the whites of his eyes.

colorful maps in the books my friend reads
before bed:
red asterisks to mark battles.
a line of crisp digits,
grouped into threes by harmless commas,
to sum up the dead.

a thick headline on the front page.
a few brief paragraphs
in tiny black type.
a movie review right below.

hundreds of thousands of miles away,
on turmeric yellow deserts
baked into gentle slopes of hot sand.
in dark green jungles
with trees tangled like dirty hair.

this is how I like war to be:

finished each day after the nightly news.
disappearing into the glassy blackness
of the tv screen
with the click of the remote.

Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren

ST. CYRIL AVE. AND KERN

I never heard gunfire
in person before.
thinking back
I probably should have kept driving
quickly toward van dyke
and whatever freeway came first.

but I stopped

to sit on the crumbling steps of
the empty church
to try to make sense
of the forgotten sneaker
stained mattress
broken glass

listening for the siren
of the ambulance
that won't stop here.

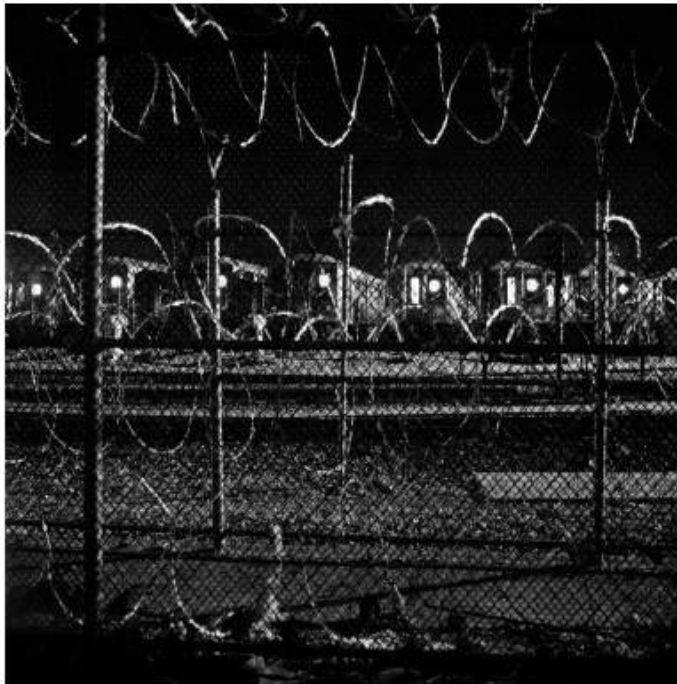
Aram Sarkisian

FRIDAY NIGHT, WINTER 2004

It was by no small quantity of thought that the people emerged slowly from their theaters, and ballrooms, and what have you, arm-in-arm, wrapped in furs and spinning yarns of fresh slang, waxing idiomatic, the look on their faces all too familiar.

As joints grew stiff in the cold, the last wisp of smoke having long since curled into oblivion somewhere in the vastness of space, a small, silent, ethereal dance of ephemeral opacity, evaporating around corners like so many theater-goers, like so many lines sung from a saxophone lost in half-hearted applause, I sat, bleeding what warmth was left into the thankless night, grabbing at the kite-strings of consciousness, immovable.

Greg Kress



Victor Pudyev



Brittlyn Riley

SATURDAY NIGHT

The window's eye narrows
 Yellow lights and tree fingers poke through
 The smell of wet pavement and worms
 Tense shoulders and the joints of hands, aching
 Hunching before a blue screen

Cloudful.
 And the computer whirs and hums
 Tkkt, the fingers are waving
 A car drizzles by, a hallucination of the headlamps
 Lazily gliding along white walls
 The hall light is on
 The night air spoons, kneads knots
 and the loud laughter echoes, on and on

Laurel Chartow

IN A WORLD WHERE COATHANGERS ARE PROVOCATIVE

Elena Satut

Lizzy wakes up. It's 12 pm. Saturday. She says something but I don't quite hear it.

"What?" I say.

"I dreamt someone gave me a happy meal."

"Was it good?"

"I didn't eat it."

This doesn't surprise me. Lizzy doesn't usually eat much and she hates corporate greed. I love Coke and I hardly ever go to McDonald's but an Egg McMuffin sure tastes great when I'm on one of those 18 hour car trips with my parents to Boothbay Harbor, Maine. The orange juice, on the other hand, sucks. Later that day I buy three sets of bangles, a pair of earrings, and a wooden bracelet for 10 dollars inside the School of Social Work. My money will pay for 1/10th of a Varanasian child's education.

I'm sitting in the Carl Cohen Reading Room, legs dangling over the chair, writing a story. It's Saturday night. It's like 10. I know, it's lame. But we might go out later. My friend Chase is napping on an overstuffed crimson lounge chair wearing the soccer jersey she got from Paraguay this summer. She's been everywhere. I've been to Canada. Once. She's got her well-traveled Ugged feet on a footstool. They're kind of all stained because she got a whole bunch of Jell-O on them. She was at a house party and her friends wanted to Jell-O wrestle. She didn't. She wakes up.

"Shit. I'm tired."

"We should go," I say. "We're not getting much work done."

"I have to finish this chapter."

I stare at the wall and wait. Two minutes later we leave. Later that night we go to a party at a frat house that's not really a frat. We drink foamy beer and listen to the band Midnight Special. They take off their shirts when they perform. They play bouncy music. There's a girl who's amazing at looking like she's absolutely and completely bored. She's wearing turquoise stilettos. We leave early.

Benjamin and I are sitting and talking in the art room. I'm drawing my hands, he's drawing masculinity. We're talking.

"Why would you cry at the end of a movie because someone gave it to you?" I say.

And I knew instantly that was a question I shouldn't have asked because the answer could only be personal and create an awkward situation.

"Because. The girl that gave it to me. I think I loved her."

Right. And I want to say "I'm sorry," like he'd lost someone. But I just say, "Oh".

And I'm walking home and two are holding hands and my hands are stuffed awkwardly under my orange vest because it doesn't have pockets. It's cold.

AMEN

Religion is a fat homosexual
Squatting on the side of the road, hands-on-knees,
Squinting, and short-of-breath,
Thinning hair whipped in the wind
Of speeding eighteen-wheelers and a Corn Flakes Economy,
Who one day woke up coughing
And realized he had spent his life on a bus marked
NOT IN SERVICE;

Greg Kress

LOOKING: VACATION PHOTOS

My favorite athiest
 she comes home from Italy
 and visits with me, with her photos
 with pulled achilles tendons
 from arcing upward streets
 who loves Levi
 and others, easier loves

with her new camera plugged
 clean and calm into my screen
 we watch dirty street concertinas
 fall into Pompeii frames
 and fountains, marble and

too many, god pillars
 with names we mispronounce
 she stretches a heel on my carpet
 and pulls her hair
 'round her ears again
 conched as venus marble shells
 full, my wavered voice,
 saying that's very nice

heavier than the pictures
 but imagine us here
 the edges damp from sweat
 dirty as street corners
 that have mourned losses
 we are young with our expectations

Erin explains the process
 of plaster and ash
 that Pompeii left,
 we go back and look, each.

Imagine you zoom in
 zoom in again
 zoom until the little boy
 ash foreheads
 are only squares and gray
 zoom in further
 zero, one, nil, blip
 ask her another question,
 maybe about Pompeii,
 about Italian toilet stalls
 the wet streets
 that approach without names
 attached to the power strip
 imagine a cheese
 sandwich for lunch
 reduced to curbside crumbs
 attached to the power strip
 (zero, one, nil, blip)
 fool enough to think
 each question is any other
 as she answers them
 as she answers you
 hunched in memory
 her eyes the eyes, mouth,
 faces in a flecked-screen crowd
 paused in constant
 sublime or motion
 flecked screen did you
 blip

did you know her
 standing so still at the Vatican?

Anna Jonsson

PASS THE TIME

Legs cramped up like sardines too tired to feel
 the void beneath them.

I am suspended
 to watch with sleepless eyes
 the meld of horizon,
 galaxies of cities passing away.

My destination draws nearer.
 I couldn't stop it happening now
 even if I drank all the liquor in the cabinet
 before getting the call the drew me up here.
 No. I like this moment, cities fly beneath me
 scattered like tears.

But I hesitate at the last moment
 to use the name of the Almighty.
 I'm up so high and have slept so little and have
 headaches like earthquakes along the San Andreas.
 Yes. My feet will get back in touch with their element,
 my skin find the sun and rejoice.

My eyes regain their weakening power.
 I try to remember dreams
 like splotches of light on a midnight deser
 try to find composure
 within my aching spine
 No. It doesn't come easy with
 the world laid out below me
 and stiff nect, sore fingers, blown-out ears
 to forget by the time I land.

Gabe Anderson



Katie Green

HOMELESS WOMAN #1

At night Geraldine sits
on cool cement under the
Benton Harbor Bridge. City
cars travel above her purple hat covered
head.

The Lake Michigan wind
dances between the folds
of her orange London fog
trench coat.
She fingers a rusted ring
with her right hand, deepening
the thirty year old ochre
stain that lives beneath the family heirloom.

The moon rests in the sky like
a tired blue heron, one who spent the day
searching for fish and returns to Tiscornia Harbor
to find solace in a twig-woven nest.

When Geraldine was a child,
she wanted an Amtrak man to meet
her under May apple trees and help her
search for four leaf clovers
in the green hopper grass.

A spider runs across her cheek
and cuts her night thoughts into
2,000 stars.

Tonight, when Geraldine sleeps,
she'll dream of her
train riding man. He'll remove
the tarnished relic
stuck on her finger and replace it
with two strands of hair. And then,
he will kiss her with two wet
cement lips.

Elizabeth Schmuhl

SKETCHES OF A ONE NIGHT STAND
(A SESTINA)

Orange patchwork corduroys contrasted against sky's blue light,
and oil-paint stains on small chapped hands,
warned him not to unwrap any of his prepackaged pick-up lines,
not mention how he could spend an eternity
 admiring the shades
of green brown gold thrashing about in her hazel eyes—
instead, he slyly scribbled his studio's address on a scrap of paper.

Days later, at his easel, he patiently tapped the thick paper
until her face confessed beautiful bone structure
 under the scrutiny of the spotlight,
which he swiftly caged with an upward swoop of graphite pencil
 around cat eyes
before smudging her irises into a seductive haze
 with the side of his hands,
leaving his fingers and palms kissed by the various gray shades
that turned his subject's firm fleshiness into easily erasable lines.

"If only I could manipulate alphabetical lines
to say what I can with color and space on paper,"
he thought as he opened the shades.
From across the street, the bar's fluorescent blue light
dyed the pale palette of her face arms hands.
The indigo glow stained his eyes.

Lying in bed that night, he waited for her eyes
to close before dividing her body with imaginary lines—
measuring the proportions of toes thighs breasts hands,
Seurat-dotting, Picasso-cubing, Bearden-paper-
 collaging her in the fading light,
as the newest exhibition breathed softly
 behind the closed shades.

White-hot attraction fades to routine gray in subtle shades—
blackness leaking in as soon as two pairs of eyes
crash—Paintings, Statues, Desire, Light,
these are things as constant as the gypsy-interpreted lines
of my palms that know no muse will take my name on
 bureaucratic paper.
But I'll love you now before sunrise reveals
 the black stains on our entwined hands.

Head over heels fell fast to hands
overhead: acting rashly, knowing past shades
of bitterness sliced his present relations to paper-
thin depths, all the brief biblical bonds forged by fiery eyes
alone—lacking the curiosity of fishing lines
to test the waters and hook onto another's inner light.

Red sunlight through the window woke him just in time to see
 her ringless hands
setting a piece of paper with her number and some parting lines
 down on the dresser
before she slipped on dark shades so they could both give in to
 their wandering eyes.

Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren

*Victor Pudyeu*

STAINS

Laurel Chartow

Bill listened for the familiar sounds, and of course—he heard them. Faint pencil scratching and a hand, wiping eraser remnants off the Tuesday crossword, betrayed her presence. He went to the kitchen, where Laura was seated at the glass dining table, her face concealed by coarse, light brown hair.

“How was your day?” she asked, not glancing up from 34-across.

“Fine, I guess... and yours?”

“Okay... I finished the load of darks, your trousers are hanging in the bedroom closet... I think I got the stain out, but...”

Her voice trailed off. She flipped the hair out of her face, her tongue sticking out in concentration. Bill watched. Her speckled brown eyes surveyed with precision and careful detail; there were many prospects to explore. Endless opportunities for words to unite on that small gray paper grid. He turned his head to the window over the sink; it was getting dark already.

“Well thanks hon, I’ll need those tomorrow for this meeting I’ve got. Say, are you free tonight?”

“Laura?”

“...Honey?”

Bill turned once again to his wife, and examined her pale face. Never tan, she always wore those large brimmed straw hats in the summer; when they’d go to the beach she’d find refuge under trees and umbrellas. He looked at the clock, above the fridge; he was hungry.

Bill jumped when turned back to his wife. Though her tongue still stuck out, a new expression had formed on her face—her eyes exposed panic as they poured over the black and white squares of the half-empty grid, and her pale cheeks turned an even more lucid shade of white.

“Laura. Are you there?”

She glanced up at him, the look of terror vanished, tongue placed rightfully back inside her cheeks. The normal pallor returned.

“I’m sorry, dear, I got distracted.”

“You’re okay?”

“Yes... Hey Bill?”

"Yes, dear?"

"Can you think of a word for 'long lecture'?"

"I dunno, Laur, try... thorough."

She skimmed the black and white squares.

"Nope, it's only seven letters."

"Then I guess you're just on your own."

"Mm, ah well." Her head turned down once again to the newspaper.

Bill shifted his tie a little. He had planned to ask her if she wanted to go out to dinner with him—but now he lost interest. He walked past her to the fridge to see if he could scrape anything together for dinner. Laura rarely cooked, but that wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

There was one time when they invited Bill's boss over for dinner. After persistent begging she eventually complied—producing a remarkable disaster of blackened chicken, limp green beans, and soupy mashed potatoes. He remembered how his boss had said, out of an equal combination of politeness and disdain, "My, but your chicken is quit..."—(he chewed for a bit)—"...intriguing..." and proceeded to tell a not-so-funny joke about how in the middle ages, people ate in the dark so they wouldn't see the maggots writhing in their food.

Not to his surprise, there was little in the fridge—some old jellies, mustard, pickles, mayonnaise, a stalk of wilted celery, some cottage cheese, and some bottles of an expensive beer that Laura had taken a liking to some months ago. Now that she had tired of their taste, they laid in the bottom drawer of the refrigerator. He would have drunk them, but Bill didn't really care much for beer.

"Laur, have you eaten already?"

She shrugged, having given up the difficult 34-across, now working vertically.

"I dunno, I think there's some cereal in there... I finished the milk, though."

He went to the pantry and took out the box of cereal. He grabbed a bowl, placed it on the counter, tipping the cereal box to the bowl's mouth. Unfortunately, he heard the inner bag sigh as less than half a bowl poured out, followed by the ground down bits left at the bottom. The pitiful bowl of cereal looked up at him, smugly amused. The thought of going out to eat came up in his mind again.

"Say, Laura—would you be interested in coming to dinner with me?"

Her brown eyes were at the clock above the fridge.

"Oh, darling, I would, but I've already eaten—and this crossword is just killing me."

"Alright then."

"I'm sorry, dear."

"No, no, it's alright, I'll just go to Casey's and grab a burger or something."

"Is that alright?"

"Yes, dear, that's fine. I'm going now." He left the kitchen and his wife; she never lifted her eyes as he exited. He grabbed his coat from the wooden hooks in the foyer. As he opened the door to leave, she shouted from the kitchen—

"Hon!"

"Yeah?" he shouted back.

"What's an eleven-lettered word for 'sinking with the titanic'?" He thought for a moment; nothing came to mind.

"I don't know... sweetie."

The cursive-electric "Casey's" sign flickered against the slight evening drizzle. He walked up the steps and entered; inside, his nose took in a draft of smells—beer, steak, cigarette smoke, french fries. It was warmly lit. Bill seated himself at a booth, watching the bar in front of him.

It was made of polished dark wood and had copper fixtures; it reminded him of detective movies from the forties. The true spectacle was the wall behind the bar, which held a large, elaborate mirror. "Casey's" sprawled in gold cursive across the top; stained glass around the scalloped top-edge formed red and green flower patterns.

Two televisions flanked the ornate mirror, a baseball game silently in progress. A handful of college kids sprawled on the barstools, slackly watching the game, drinking with their freshly-turned-valid IDs.

Among the kids there was a young couple sitting at the bar; whether this was a first or fiftieth date Bill couldn't tell. The two lacked distinguishing features—a backwards baseball cap and jeans for the boy, a black turtleneck and skirt for the girl.

It was the girl's hair that shone out of the smoky subdued of the restaurant. Her dark curls surged from her scalp past her shoulders, glimmering red hues in the dim light. Small rivulets of auburn and copper



Aram Sarkisian

twisted through the spirals, and sometimes changed to gold as she shook her head and watched the game, running her hand across the boy's shoulders. When she turned her head, Bill became slightly offset—an abnormally large hooknose and crooked small teeth defined her face.

"What can I get you to drink?"

Bill finally noticed the waiter standing before him. "Umm... a gin and tonic, spare on the rocks, though."

"Alright, I'll be back with your drink."

The waiter quickly returned, he haphazardly flung the drink onto Bill's table and asked him what he'd like to order. What was the rush, Bill wondered. He hadn't skimmed the menu, but went ahead and ordered the steak fajitas—he'd never been disappointed by that dish here. Smiling, the waiter said "Good choice, sir", quickly turned on his heels, and ran back to the kitchen.

The couple at the bar seemed to be enjoying themselves; the gilded red curls bounced giddily, blithely twisting and untwisting down her shoulder blades. Backward-baseball cap was teasing her.

"Leave some for me, why don't you?" the boy said, muck-sullenly, peering into a near-empty basket of fries.

"Oh, there's still some left, see?" She pointed at the red basket. He stuck his head two inches from it, and examined as if he had a microscope.

He whined, "What? Oh come on, those are the little crap fries. No one likes the little crap fries. I'm hurt now."

"Oh, quit the melodrama!"

"She ate my fries, oh, woe is me, I can't stand to go on living now without fries in my life. What a horrible, horrible thing to have done, oh—"

"Stop it!" she cried, and punched him square on the arm. Feigning injury, we winced in false pain; he dramatically begged the bartender to call an ambulance. The girl, in turn, laughed and tenderly ran fingers across his wronged arm. Baseball-cap kissed her on the cheek—we'll have another round, he said. The bartender let out a gurgle of a chuckle; he proceeded to fetch their drinks. Bill was still offset by her almost serrated smile.

The waiter returned with a plate of steaming steak strips and tortillas; he said he'd come back later to see how Bill was doing. The waiter mechanically vanished once more. Bill began piling together his dinner, fajita juice dripping down his hands. He still watched the couple.

The beer foam cascaded over two glass' rims as the bartender slid them down the couple's way. Backwards-baseball cap, running his finger along the glass edge, said to her, "I bet I can drink this faster than you."

"I Bet you're a liar."

And with that, she flung her head back with a flourish, tipping the glass at a steep angle; her throat muscles glided up and down and she began to drink full-tilt. The boy, in turn, frantically began to gulp, foam falling down his cheeks and onto his shirt. Their attention drawn, the other kids began to shout "Go! Go! Go!" As the boy was working on the last third of his glass, the girl slammed her empty one onto the bar-ledge, wiped her mouth, and tossed her head back forward, the red spirals dancing triumphantly. The bar applauded.

Shit, Bill mumbled to himself. In the commotion he had forgotten to pay attention to his food—a large, spicy drench of fajita juice had splattered onto his pants. He wiped off as much he could; he crumpled the dirty napkins on the table. He took a long sip from his drink; the ice had thinned it down.

Bill remembered when he'd brought Laura here on a date; that was years ago. She looked really nice that night. They didn't sit at the bar though; instead, she retreated to a shadowy booth. Seated across from him, she grabbed his hands and said, "You know, you should be thanking me for suggesting we go out."

"Why's that?" he replied.

"So I wouldn't have to cook tonight, of course." They laughed. He squeezed her hands further into his.

When he returned his gaze to the couple, he noticed that backwards-baseball cap was gone. In his place, another young man had seated himself next to the girl. This one was smaller, and had glasses. Bill noticed that he used an awful lot of hair gel. He then saw backwards-baseball cap emerge from the bathroom, who then locked eyes on hair-gel; he briskly approached. In the back of Bill's mind, he envisioned a dramatic bar brawl, backwards-baseball cap shoving hair-gel, the girl crying "no" repeatedly.

But no such thing happened. Instead, baseball cap smiled at hair-gel.

"How the hell are you? Good to see you, man!" He grabbed hair-gel's hand; they shook.

The waiter returned. "Can I get you anything else for tonight?"

"No, just the check, please," Bill replied.

He grabbed one of the old napkins from the table and tried for a last time to wipe off any excess fajita juice from his pants. It looked like it would turn into a lovely stain.

The waiter came back and procured the bill. Bill pulled out his wallet and put down a twenty. As he stood up to leave, he looked over at the bar for a final time. Hair-gel said,

"So I said to him, no, that's my nut!"

And the three laughed hysterically, the noise reverberating through the smoky dim. Backwards-baseball cap once again kissed the girl on the cheek, who still smiled with those jagged, small teeth.

When Bill returned home, all was dark except for the kitchen. He placed his keys down and hung up his coat. He went into the kitchen, and saw the neglected Tuesday crossword on the glass table. She'd finished everything, except for 34-across, and 17-down.

He flipped the kitchen light and went upstairs to the bedroom. He found her lying in bed, eyes glazed at the television. Some sitcom was on, the laugh-track guffawing; she didn't say hello. Bill proceeded to undress. As he was taking off his pants, she suddenly turned, and looked

at him.

"Bill, look at your pants! What happened?"

He paused. Then,

"I dunno, I split something on them."

She sighed.

"I'll put them in the machine tomorrow..."

"No, no, Laur, don't worry about it."

She looked straight at him a final time.

"Bill—it's okay. I've got it." She turned her head back to the television. The laugh-track erupted again.

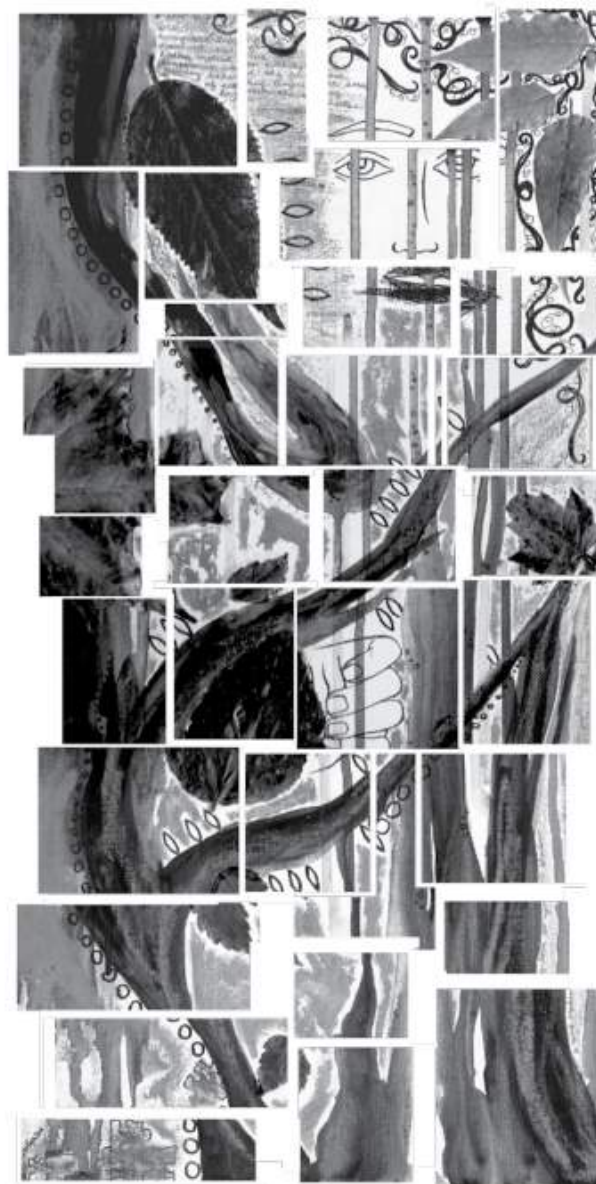


Victor Pudyev

DILUTED

Diluted, I have been drinking this coffee,
 forever. The time on the clock blinks 3:27, but
 I am no fool; I know time is a gut-wrench. I
 know this time is special for its emptiness and deadness,
 I know if I were in New York City and it were raining,
 you would be beside me screaming into neon signs
 about how much we bleed for life and how hard it is
 to know anything but vague destinations. Every one of
 us is up tonight, we have been up forever, drinking
 black coffee on front stoops with cigarettes and
 the notion of leaving. Little tendrils of love seep
 in-between our distance now. You have cut throats
 And I have long lines. Well, no wonder, since
 we have been waiting forever, with only
 caffeine and water colored dreams
 To waste the time we pass.

Margaret Czerwienski



Brittlyn Riley

RC REVIEW STAFF

editor-in-chief: Kurt Preston

prose editors:

Lara Campbell
Nayana Dhavan
Cortney Kellogg
John Meszaros
Elizabeth Schmuhl
Anne Zaccardelli

layout:

Margaret Czerwienski
Alexander DeWitt
Kurt Preston

publicity:

John Meszaros
Kurt Preston
Lana Kanitz

poetry editors:

Gabe Anderson
Margaret Czerwienski
Alexander DeWitt
Katie Gallegos
Elizabeth Schmuhl

art team:

Paul Abowd
Ben Crotte
Holly Hoover
Cortney Kellogg
Sarah Simmons

financial adviser: Ed Atkinson

funding provided by:

The RC Republic
East Quad Governing Assembly

Contact: *RCreviewSUBMISSIONS@umich.edu*

All works copyright © 2005 by their respective creators.