



# WAR OF NERVES

Hard Land, Hard Times



# RC Review

2015-2016



Today

Idolatry  
To Hell and Back

The eventual goal of  
people who pair-bond  
is to move beyond  
the thrill of early love  
and into the comfort  
of the Sunday-paper-  
and-coffee phase

From  
the horse's  
mouth

JOE JOE

"THE SEVEN  
DEADLY SINS"

Drivers wanted

MORE

BUT THEY'RE NOT  
FINE  
ART.

THE MAGIC BOX

The radio made voices glow. That's how it seemed,  
anyway. Perhaps it was the luminous dial or the flar-

Remember thinking, "What was that all about?"

## Editor's Note

Welcome to the RC Review...where we fight the war of nerves with words, paintbrushes, camera flashes, and the occasional sword.

Please do try to relax. There may only be a slight shock to your nervous system. But know that the student writing, poetry, and art you hold in your hands means no harm. Those jolts and zaps you're feeling right now? They are just the natural side effects that come when you start to see the world in a whole new way.

Maybe you should break out those x-ray glasses of yours to ease the excitement. (Didn't you get the memo for BYOX-Ray Glasses?)

Most of all, we'd like to thank you again for all your support. Enjoy your terrific adventure through our magazine. We had a blast making it!

-Cammie Finch  
Editor-in-Chief

P.S. Love what you see? Want a few more thrills? Access even more material in our digital copy on:

<http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/rcwriters/rc-review/>



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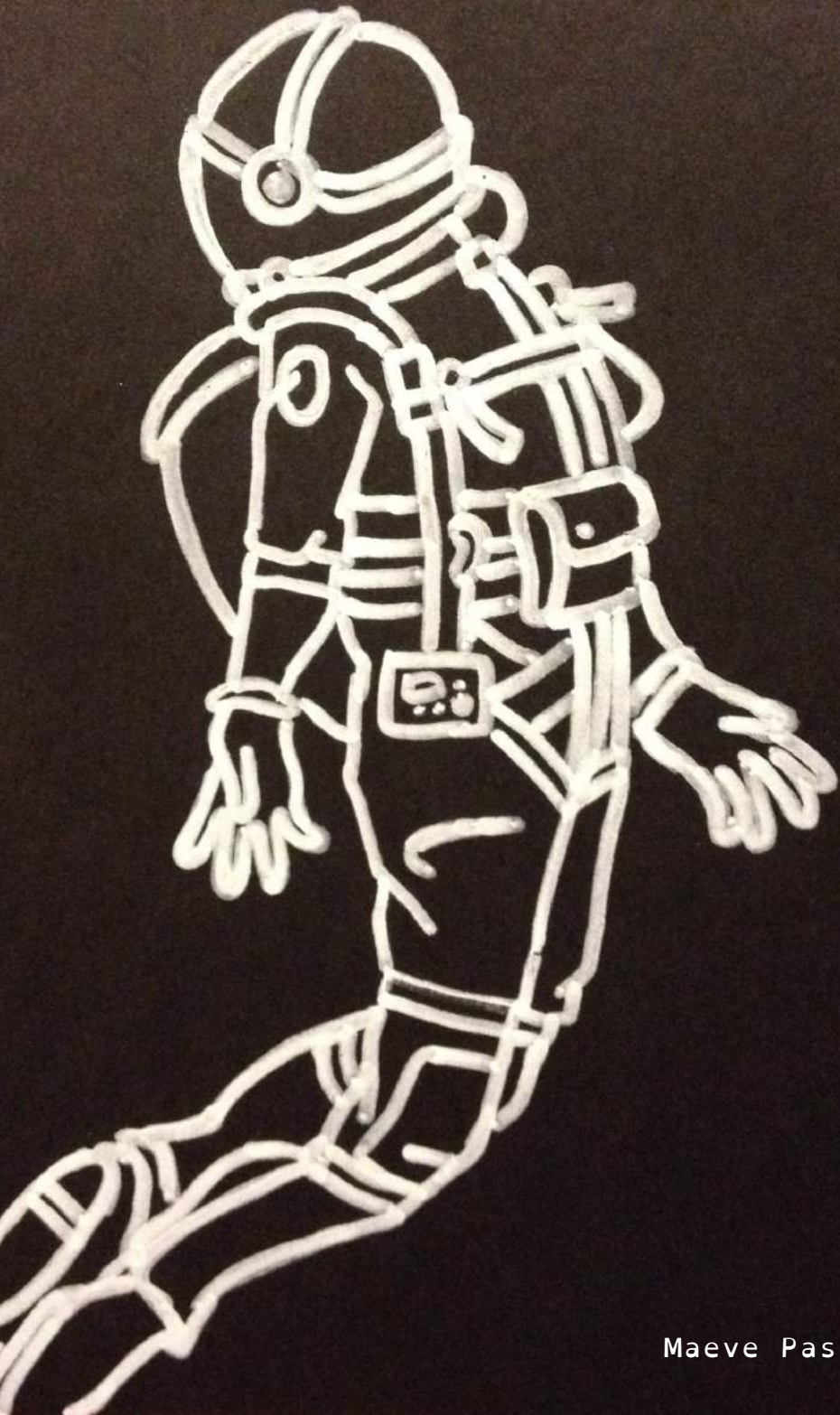
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## Fondly the stars

Keighan Glynn

*"I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night."*

-Sarah Williams

Swallow my stars  
and twist them into  
constellations.  
Breathe in the galaxies  
of my breath  
and taste the hydrogen  
on my tongue.

Skim your fingers  
on the aurora that clings  
to my skin  
and hold tightly  
to the zodiac  
that hugs  
the curve of my eclipse.

Burn your way through  
my night sky with  
meteors in your teeth  
and fall now  
into this nova  
of flesh and stardust.

## Differential Diagnosis

Stina Perkins

In my human disease class the other week we learned  
about ischemia– a fatal imbalance of  
blood and oxygen that leads to  
“myocardial infarction”

It’s a mess of clinical terms, sterile  
in their meaninglessness  
latin roots that clot the mouth like pebbles  
between teeth and pliers around tongue

(I think medicine is ischemic–  
separating the organs from the mind that controls them  
with textbooks and diagrams and pebble-mouthed latin  
and the hands of the mortician who never  
sees the face of the patient, who never  
hears the story of the patient, who only  
reads the diagnosis written beneath lifeless tissue)

But you had a face–  
it was long, stubble like moss sprung from  
a mouth that mimicked the monkey  
you had tattooed on your arm

And you had a story–  
it was short, shaped by your guitar-calloused hands  
and the plaid swim trunks you’d wear when you  
ran to the ocean without warning  
(I wonder if you wore them)

You died from ischemia,  
a fatal imbalance.

The world wasn’t big enough for your soul  
and you always had to bend your head  
as you entered our kitchen for second helpings of dinner

The world wasn’t big enough for your heart  
and all your philosophical ponderings  
your impromptu rough housing  
your free frisbee spirit  
weren’t much for paying bills and

You’d be alone at the end of the day.

You liked being alone, but not being lonely.

The world’s inadequacy seeped into your veins  
and no doctor could find the infection  
and no lover could extract the poison  
so you decided to do it yourself

taking your life  
choosing blood over oxygen  
to restore some balance  
that escapes diagnosis

(I wonder if they looked at your face)

## Survivor's Guilt

Petrina Talbot

7 billion people on a teeny-tiny-nothing planet  
with towers out of earshot  
wrapped in oceans that stretch salty arms  
around cardboard paper dolls

7 billion people and still we argue  
over the existence of one  
whether his bones gather dust  
in a sand swept cave  
or if on his head  
lies a crown of jewels unseen

7 billion people  
makes me ponder  
how many ghosts glide around us, through us  
as we tie our children's shoes  
pick up extra whole wheat bread  
sing songs in unison to pass the time  
on a long journey home  
in someone else's van

## The Tips of the Trees

Paul Mayer

the tips of the trees are red  
are they sunburned?

the tips of the trees are red  
are they ginger?  
are they bleeding?

the tips of the trees are red  
have they rusted?  
will they ever be green?  
are they blushing?

the tips of the trees are red

I worry that I might not love you



## Round and Round

### Hannah French

Alfred felt it coming a second before it came. He'd let his excitement take over, let electricity—the good kind—spill around his body. And then, ironically of course, as his life was wont to be, the seizures came. His arm twitched, a half pace up as if to wave goodbye for the cashier. Acting fast, Alfred whipped the small bottle of pills at the man across the counter in a heavy overhand. Without epilepsy, Alfred had often reflected, he would've made a great baseball player. The man, startled, caught the pills and stared dumbfounded as Alfred's vision fuzzed over with static fear.

Fear was a cloying emotion; it blotted out all else. It was the only sharp thing in his world once the seizures came. Not even the pins that rained onto his body could compare, tinkling like silver as they lay siege to his flesh. No, nothing but the fear. Alfred could feel himself shuddering violently, his limbs thrashing. If he'd been able to pay attention, he might've heard the cashier shouting, might've seen his cell phone slip from fumbling fingers and shatter on the floor.

And then a touch, which he felt through the thrashing limbs and shuddering and the needles and the fear. A hand gripped his, held it still as it bucked underneath. Somehow Alfred was aware of it, and he knew somehow that when it squeezed, it was saying it was all right. Help was on the way. It was almost over.

Leah was kneeling by his side when he came to. Her eyes widened as they always did, chronically surprised by his recovery. She held his hand, rubbing her thumb in circles in time to his pulse. You're safe now, it's over, you're safe now.

"Hey," she murmured. "Hey. Your name's Alfie. You live at Cornerstone. You're 18. You're at the drug store. You just got the pills. It's over."



Alfred frowned, releasing a flock of static sparrows into his brain and his vision. When it cleared, he blinked at his sister and rolled over, trying to sit up. With a gasp, he fell as his muscles gave out. He felt Leah slide her hands under his back and head. She propped him up against her as he looked around, beginning to assemble the pieces to puzzle back his reality. It was a drug store, small, with a clean yellow counter and bright shelves. Stacks on stacks of the pills lined the shelves, cures partitioned by their disease. The counter was unmanned; Alfred looked around for the cashier—the cashier—he remembered now. He'd given the cashier his pills.

Wesley, Alfred's caretaker, was pacing back and forth outside the drug store, on his phone with someone. Probably Alfred's dad. He was frowning when he turned and saw Alfred, but relief white-washed his features into something slightly more pleasant. With an indignant clang, the door burst open, its bells smashing against the inner wall, and Alfred heard the sharp taps of Wes's footsteps against the plastic floorboards. Wes crouched in front of Alfred and gave him a small smile.

"So. You just had to get in one last show, eh?" he said, brusquely. Alfred cracked a weak grin.

"I couldn't have stood to go down in limelight," he said. "Then again, I still can't stand. Speaking of..."

"Your wheelchair's over in that corner," Wes said. "And," he drew out the small bottle of red pills from his jacket pocket, "I snagged your holy grail, too."

Alfred snatched the bottle and rolled it gently across the palm of his hand. It weighed no more than five ounces, he would guess, but it could be the cure he so desperately needed.

"Anyway, the cashier's out talking with the police. Just routine check-up, no big deal. I talked to them too, and you're clear. Don't even need to go to the hospital. As soon as you feel ready, I can take you two home."

Alfred leaned further into Leah and rolled his head so that he could see her. "He bring you?" He asked her. Leah nodded. Alfred exhaled heavily, causing his heart to jump and a momentary surge of panic to overtake him. "I'm sorry, Lee," he told her. She kissed the top of his head.

"What are big sisters for?"

But he noticed the slouch of her shoulders, and the bags underneath her eyes. It was not her job to take care of him, but she did, anyway. She and Wes were his best friends—his only friends. He couldn't stand to lose her to the disease like he was losing himself.

The drive home was mostly silent, which was a relief to Alfred, who was absorbed by thoughts of the red pills. If they only counteracted the effects of his episodes, he would be grateful. He could live a free life. Leah and Wes could have lives.

At a stop sign, Leah broke the silence by saying, "Alfie, do you want to wait until Mom and Dad get home to try it? So they can see?"

He shrugged. "Nothing to see," he said. "That's the point. Nothing. If all goes well, we'll all have a very boring night." He grinned at the prospect, and glanced around at the other two, his best friends. Leah looked enraptured at the possibility, as if the entire burden of the world had been lifted from her. Wes's gaze drifted off into the horizon, no doubt running various scenarios and possibilities in his head. He lifted his foot from the pedal and they began to drift forward.

“Wes, look out!” Leah yelled. With a flurry of flailing limbs—rather like a seizure, Alfred thought, in a rare moment of still clarity—and profanity, Wes slammed on the brakes. The bumper of the car clipped the rear tire of the biker who was crossing the street. He tipped sideways on his bike, pumping his legs even faster as if the extra forward motion would correct his imbalance. Then, miraculously, he did right himself, and shot off, his wheels going round and round. Alfred watched him go, silently.

“Pedestrians,” Wes growled.

“He’s just passing through,” Alfred said quietly.

At home, Wes and Leah lifted first the wheelchair to the ground, then Alfred into the wheelchair. Alfred rubbed the rim of his wheels absentmindedly. In his head, he was shooting far, far away, wheels cycling faster and faster forward, his life finally upright. And then Wes took his handles and pushed him up the driveway toward the house. They skirted the stone-ringed flowerbed that Alfred had planted, on a good day, but his roses hadn’t bloomed yet. They did not stop.

Wes and Leah were all business as they outlined a large space in the middle of the living room floor with pillows. They began to fill it, stacking the softest pillows in the center and the larger, rougher pillows at the edges. This was to be Alfred’s stage. He paid no attention. He had moved straight to the filing cabinet, pulling out his medical history. He slipped this latest prescription card carefully into the side pouch, behind all the others. He frowned at them, thumbed the edges of that first miracle drug, Eprepheril, which had given him two years of normalcy, of walking down school hallways and of fetching mail, of swinging and kicking doors shut. Before it failed. They all failed, in the end.

On a whim, Alfred called out to Wes and Leah.

“Guys...I want to do something,” he said. “Something special. For a special day.”

He got a small, glazed bowl from the cupboard and put a handful of lint in it. Then he lit it with a match. He thought he saw his own face ripple across the rising flames for a second, but perhaps it was just a kindred spirit.

“What are you doing, Alfie,” Wes demanded, but Leah laid a hand on his arm.

“He’s moving on,” she said, her voice full of painful yearning.

Together they burned the prescription cards, one by one. Eprepheril, Sudanoved, Polynixen, Retovitsel, Mucitral. When all of his bridges were burned, Alfred pulled out the very last prescription card, the doctors’ last hope. Enevefrin.

Slowly, he wheeled into the living room. He waved off Wes when he offered his arm. He didn’t want help with this. “Won’t be needing that arm much longer,” he told Wes, and flattened his lips together in a smile that wouldn’t reach his eyes, and as his eyes locked with Leah’s, he knew they were both hoping like hell and lying just as hard. He lowered himself with his arms onto the foot of his chair, his muscles whining with the effort. Crawling over the pillow bed his friends had made for him, he vowed this would be the last time they saw him helpless.

Leah and Wes sat down on the edges of the pillows, and Alfie settled into a cross-legged position. Leah and Wes wore identical grins as he shook a single, tiny pill from the bottle, capped it, and

solemnly handed the bottle back to Wes. He drew a deep breath in, but there was no jump in his heart this time, no surge of panic. Without much fanfare or ceremony, but with the phantom feeling of expectation sending sluggishness crawling from his bones, Alfie swallowed the pill.

Nothing happened. He looked at Leah, seeing his own despair mirrored in her eyes. Then with a flood of clarity, the energy came, chasing every inch of disease from his body, cleansing his mind and heart until he felt as if he could run a thousand miles without sweat. He could stand, walk, dance. He could feel a slack-jawed grin on his face, and he laughed, the sound light and carefree. Leah and Wes jumped up, shouting, and hugged each other. Alfred jumped too—jumped—and jumped again to make sure he still could. No longer bound to a chair out of fear, afraid to feel too much, afraid of the fear...

Alfred felt it coming a second before it came. He'd let his excitement, the pill's excitement, take over, let electricity—the good kind—spill around his body. And then, for the second time that day, the seizures came. His arm twitched, a half pace up as if to wave goodbye...He watched in slow motion as Leah and Wes's faces dropped into familiar horror, as Leah lunged for him, as he fell, as fear blocked out the pill from his system, as the pill lent itself to the needles, a thousand times sharper than normal, as he screamed, as his body hit the pillows, convulsing...and as his happy world shot away like a dream.



## orion

Freida Blostein

the belt of orion was the first constellation  
I learned to pick out of the night sky  
like apples on a below 40  
kind of October day.

you don't understand, the belt of orion  
is perfectly mirrored on  
my own skin in three dark irregular  
moles, bursting with promise of cancer  
but they the star map to the skies, and  
so looking at orion always felt like  
looking home

you don't understand, my father  
taught me my multiplication tables  
before first grade, he would take me  
outside at night, when sleep should be  
in my eyes and he filled them with orion instead  
he tried to teach me every constellation but  
orion stuck. orion called me back,  
orion picked up the space phone, and every  
cosmic inch of my body echoed response

astrologers or astronomers might know

orion is in some special place  
in Michigan winter, a different house, or the earth has  
turned her back again in pirouette  
or something  
but the sun sets earlier  
orion shines brighter, lower, maybe just closer  
to my house in particular or maybe  
I've just been fooled again

I looked it up. from November to February  
Orion is clearly visible, he is composed  
light of young blue giants,  
from December to February, the earth turns  
into the spiral arm of the galaxy  
toward the suburbs of the galaxy, away  
from its wattage center, so no  
wonder on January evenings when my breath  
is cold against my own cheek, I can raise  
my speckled arm in salute  
and trace the lines on my skin 1,359 light years  
away



## Mornings

Adie Dolan

I never said the end, I said good morning and goodbye.  
While you were trying to sleep, I crawled back through the rain. I said  
and it was fine, but I had work for dinner. We agreed  
there was a charge. This day is like wide water.

I never said the end, I said goddammit, we're trying to deal with it.  
I had to go talk to a stranger just to be heard in the head.  
I did say it takes time to know if something's good or bad, because  
it does take quite a while sometimes to know  
if something's good or bad.

I never said the end, but I usually notice when the light  
comes in to meet me every fall morning and afternoon  
and how all the frogs hop up from the ditch into the street and  
how it's all I can do not to cry when I'm running over them in my car.  
Every year they do it, every year they never learn.  
Every year I have to leave them  
there, dead in the street.

I never say it, but I think my motto is  
as long as you have good hair, people won't notice  
all the zits on your face that you popped this morning.  
We're all trying to deal with them,  
all of our frogs and zits.

I never said the end, I said something else but I  
crossed it off towards the beginning.

## City Stars

Chloe Herl

I look up at the sky and see synthetic darkness,  
The moon is the lone sentinel of space,  
glowing pale in the vastness.  
Electric lights illuminate the thick blue blanketing our Earth,  
Airplanes, cushioned within our stratosphere,  
blink gently across the sky.  
Sweat rolls slowly down my neck  
as I walk through the sweltering city street.  
Lamps spread safe beams of light across the sidewalk;  
lighthouses in the night.  
A breeze rustles up the crowded concrete road  
and I revel in the cool air on my skin.  
Closing my eyes with pleasure, the city lights disappear  
and I remember the northern woods.  
The sky, free from the glaring yellow lights, is dazzling.  
The moon is warm and dancing  
in the combined light of a billion stars  
that flicker and shine like diamonds on a velvet blue backdrop.  
I remember the Milky Way, a purple swath across the sky,  
crowning the Earth with its stardust jewels.  
The northern lights wave above the treetops,  
outlining the horizon in greens and pinks and orange.  
The constellations tell the stories of the stars in pictographs,  
epic sagas on a universal stage.  
Jostled by the crowd, my eyes open and I am blinded  
by the yellow city lights.  
The heavens are hidden again,  
the moon once more guarding the beauty behind the blanket.  
I blink, willing the stars to appear but the artificial light shines on;  
a shield against the night terrors.  
I think then that I would gladly fight the terrors  
to look at the stars again.  
I wonder if it is worth it, this facsimile of safety  
in exchange for the galaxies.



In the Pink  
Cammie Finch

## Dakota

### A. E. McCloskey

I am a little girl eating raspberries off my fingers one by one, tips stained red. I think they make me look like a witch. You laugh at me. We are at the lunch table and you are sitting across from me. I like and don't like this. On one hand, I like to see your face directly. On the other, I want you next to me. I say nothing though. I smile back at you.

We are in Ms. Johnson's first grade class together. The whole first grade takes lunch together but you and I, we are pair. Our teacher jokes that we are twins, we wish we were sometimes.

The bell rings and it's time for recess. What a perfect way to expend this newfound energy from nourishment. We race each other to the door, I win. You're slow, usually, and I feel like I should have let you win but you don't seem to mind.

I call you my husband as we kick sand back and forth at each other in the pits. Don't treat your wife like that! I holler. Ms. Johnson and Ms. Maelyn tell us to mind our voices. Inside voices they tell us. But we are outside.

After recess, we all trot back to the classroom. We learn basic arithmetic, vocabulary, and geography. I like geography because we get to color maps often. I make sure that no countries that touch are the same color. Ms. Johnson calls me Picasso and I wonder who that is.

You and I, I and you. We scamper home together. You are my neighbor. I love this. Most evenings, we play together until supper. Then it's bedtime.

Today when we come home, your mom is outside. She looks sad. She tells you to come inside, honey. I stand on your lawn wondering if I am to come too but no one looks back at me. I wait. You don't come out for a while. My mother peeks her head out the door and says oh, there you are. Come in. I tell her where you are and her face tightens. She suggests we play a game together. She gets out my favorite toys.

I play idly, thinking of you. The sun goes down and now it's bedtime.

In the morning, you are not in class. I am antsy all day, Ms. Johnson is especially nice to me.

I walk home from the bus stop and stand on your lawn. I see your face in the window, you reach out. Your face is solemn.

Your mother comes out, greets me, then goes into my house and fetches my mother. They confer for a moment. I am far enough away that I cannot hear them. I look at you, you look down.

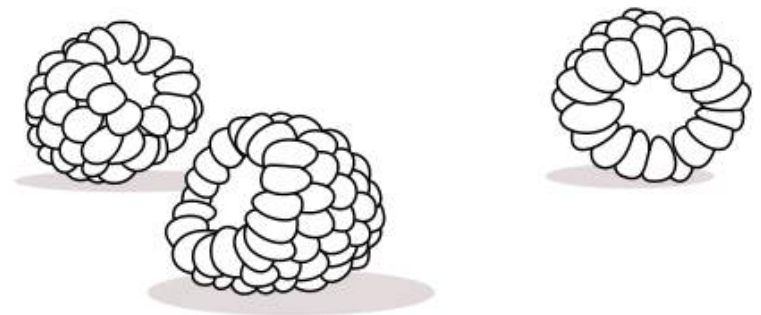
Then my mother steps forward. Your father has died, she tells me, and your mother and you and moving to your grandmother's. She lives two hours away. You will not be in my class anymore, you will not be my neighbor. Your house will be sold, she tells me. I'll have a new neighbor one day. These words bounce around in my ears, having no effect.

I don't fully understand until days later, trucks come to take your things. You haven't been in class. I've sat alone at lunch. I do not have someone to share colored pencils with anymore.

The new family moves in. They are nice, my mother brings them flowers and a casserole. There is a new boy to play with-

But-

Where are you?





## Limerence

Cammi e Finch

*WELCOME TO THE SHADOW EMPORIUM...*

The words still haunt you after all these years. They buzz and bite and nip at your ears. They swarm like fleas, like hundreds of them, impossible to bat away.

You came to the Shadow Emporium as a young child, begging for a bit of food and a flint of compassion. You had no family. You had no coat. You were eight years old and it could have been any ordinary door.

Now you are an apprentice, working as a Ravager in the Dark Room on weekdays and a Great Hall curator on the weekends.

Now you are in love.

That's your word for it, but it's unlike any love you've felt before. It's painful. It squeezes the instep of your feet when you walk. Your heart is a ball of twine, so knotted that you're ready to cut the string with the sharpest scissors you can find. She's imprinted on you, or maybe you've imprinted on her. It's hardest to tell when you rest your back against the canvas, her 2D figure matching perfectly to your curves. You color her within the lines. You can hold crayons while she cannot.

It wasn't meant to happen. This Love. Limerence. Total enamored captivity.

She had come to you, to the Emporium, as all shadows came. First, captured on film. The bright flash dazing her like a drug. You grabbed her flat ankles while Lichen held her thin wrists between

his index finger and thumb. We plunged her into the washbasin. Left her in confinement for three dark days. Stretched her onto the xylem canvas, elongating her limbs without the gift of sunset. She was elegant, lean, perfect. You chose Frame #3 on the left hand side, and stayed her ankles, knees, and wrists with push pins. A thrill rattled your hands as you touched her thighs, her slim arms, her neck, her pointed nose. Within seconds, you knew this shadow of a body. You promised you would care for it as if it were your own.

You thought hard that night of the world she had left, of the life she might had led before this savage act. Before your Ravage duty. Before you stole her away from love, with love as your witness. You had ripped her doubled form from the ground, like you did the band-aid on your thumb. Had you left a mark? You wondered who still uttered her name in their sleep, whose breath grasped for answers among the murmur of crickets.

The Master had warned you not to name them, the shadows. Names are attachment. Names show connection, a familiarity intolerable within the Emporium. You realize that your fellow Ravagers themselves lack that access to your intimate identity. Names are sacred. And yet, you knew this shadow from the start. You knew her innermost self. You took her name and rolled it around your tongue, curating it. Protecting it. Now you utter it in your sleep and keep it under your pillow by day. You promised you would care for it as if it were your own.

The shadow gets a sun spot. You surrender. It was you who forgot to draw the curtains as you closed down the Emporium last night. You who have damaged her. You ravager, you demon. You tell yourself it was an accident. A mistake that any decent curator couldn't have made. She is found this morning, with a torso drained of color. You feel the pang inside you. You feel your own belly leach its acid onto your skin, burning a cylinder through your middle. Your heart's fist tightens. You're sorry. No, more than that. You'd do anything to cure her.

They take her down this afternoon, while you are at lunch. You never even got to say goodbye.

And so, you decide to steal the key to the backroom. Easy. There has been a large rainfall and the southern atrium's roof is dribbling onto the floor. You offer to clean it up, despite your co-workers' scoffs. You have a reputation of dismissing dirty work, but then again, you aren't entirely yourself anymore. You are being compelled by an external force turned internal. Something that is turning you inside-out. A twisted tie-dyed rag in desperate need of sun. You've become ravaged yourself.

Bloch gives you his keys, but you're interested in only one of them. The GM. The key to your shadow. You start toward the Utility Closet to fetch the bucket that will collect the sky's tears, a bucket that no longer holds coins and bread and sadness. You start toward the closet door, then jackknife to the left. You slink to the Trash Studio.

This is the place where you know she is. This is the place where broken shadows come to die.

She is there, propped up against the wall. Next to her, a shadow of a man is hunched over in an upside down U. He is wearing a droopy nightcap and you feel nothing for him. All that is there for you is her. She is dusty, the sun spot spreading. She is the shadow of a Hollywood actress, so she looks to you. An Ingrid Bergman, chin demurely resting on her shoulder. You look into the place where you know those eyes would have been, and you see a victim. A wounded animal. She doesn't look back. She can't. It cripples you to think that she is suffering alone. She never was given the choice to become a shadow. One flash - and she faded to darkness. If she only knew what you would do for her to change everything.

You wonder if she thinks of you like you think of her.

She's a shadow. Reciprocation stops at the activated shutter lens.

In a desperate act, you find a can of black paint. You will single-handedly help her recover. Your body moves without consulting your mind. You hate yourself as you do it. You could get fired for this. But you can't stop. Dying occurs in stillness.

You don't have a paintbrush, so you have to use your hands. First, the left hand. Dipping beneath the surface of the thick black syrup, disturbing the morbid peace. You inhale deeply the toxicity of the liquid licorice and let it blacken your lungs. Then, the right hand cools into the paint can, opening, then closing. Grabbing onto as much paint as you can. You press handfuls of glop onto your shadow's stomach. Again, again, until the fingers mix with heels and the little lines of fortune teller's trade become invisible.

There. You've fixed her.

Beyond the doors, you hear the grinding of a wood chipper. A canvas has been removed from the Emporium. There is one less shadow on our Earth.

Your heart swells, considering what you are about to do. But you must do it. Your heart thinks first. Your head can only nod in agreement.

With hands dipped in painted leather gloves, you kneel in prayer at her feet.

You want to tell her of the freedom you can give her, but you don't want to ruin this silence. This love, this ache, that feels like forever. You can only hold onto this for so long. You falter. Then- plink -one push pin is out of her leg. A minuscule hole remains.

You should have never knocked on this door, you realize, all those years ago. You have been consumed. You have been changed. Who have you become? What are you now? You're not sure if this all feels human anymore.

Footsteps? You move quickly. Plink - the other side. You rise to her upper body. The two of you really do look alike. This just might work.

Two more plinks, and she slithers to the ground. Disintegrates into earth. The canvas is all that remains of her past. Like a shedded snakeskin. Like lovers' crumpled clothes on the floor.

Curating now, your mind preserves a life once ravaged. She is free, you hope. She has returned to her body and has appeared suddenly, back on her bike, you hope. She buys an apple from the market, gets her hair cropped to chin-cradling length, you think. She walks under the sun and can't find her shadow, you know. She hasn't stopped to think about you once. No, not you.

You weep at the sight of the empty canvas. It's still so beautiful. Your memory, that monster, fills in the gaps of her absence. While your heart beats on. While the footsteps come closer. Their echoes push against your chest.

The camera is in your hands. You extend your arm and turn it away from you, so the viewfinder faces the opposite wall and the fish-eye lens convexes into your soul. Back presses onto canvas. It feels differently, now that she's not there. Rougher like burlap. There's nothing left.

Your shoulder perks up and your chin instinctively draws to it. You, her, and Ingrid Bergman, layered in this silhouette. Your finger shakes and presses down on the shutter. Release to gray.



## The Fall of Seraphs

Lang DeLancey

seventeen piss drunk angels fall into  
the armored bars of a hot dog stand at 4:15 in the morning  
protesting the questions and implications  
of the condiments, defending their  
innocence and holiness to a jury of raw onions  
and the judgment of a stately bratwurst  
and his bun-bread gavel

sixteen piss drunk angels escape  
from the ball-park clutches of a hot dog stand at 4:17 in the  
morning  
declared pious. but the culinary justice mandate condemned  
the last to a life of tending the relishes  
and swimming in the warm dog water for all eternity  
or until they change the dog water  
whichever comes first

sixteen piss drunk angels get lost in  
a supermarket at 4:18 in the morning  
wandering, pledging love and childhood to the asparagus  
and locked in combat with the frozen waffles of the second aisle

four piss drunk angels escape  
from the purgatory supermarket at 4:21 AM  
the rest are trapped having been mistakenly shoved  
into an egg carton

four piss drunk angels buy hot dogs  
at the stand outside the supermarket  
at 4:42 in the morning

## I don't want it to sound silly.

Claire Denson

I mean, it is silly. Everything's silly. She hit her. She  
slept with him. All this, you know, stuff, going on, these  
conflict-inducing interactions people have with one  
another, and through it all, there wasn't one of us who  
wasn't suffering terribly from a gripping loneliness.

## Anxiety the Owl

AnneMarie Torresen

The space beneath my chin,  
Above my shoulders —  
Delicate and slender trunk —  
Is host to an owl parasite.  
He burrows in a hole there  
Comes out at night and after meals.  
His coos replace hunger,  
His claws tear at sleep.  
When faced with fear he rises  
And pecks at me  
Behind my eyes.

## Excerpt from: Touch of Grace

Ashley Bishel

So, I used to babysit for the Dominguez family – they lived like, three streets that way. I could walk over there right now in.... two minutes? Their daughter is named Grace and she's a sweetheart. She's seven or eight now, I guess. I wonder if she remembers me. I started working for them when she was three, and I kind of remember stuff when I was three? Not too much, though.

She was a creepy kid. No, no, not like, in a bad way, like that little kid from the Sixth Sense or whatever. She couldn't help it, I mean, she was three. But like... oh no, no, I'm fine, it's just cold out here. I should have brought my jacket. You don't have a light, do you? Oh, that's okay. I shouldn't smoke.

...no, I mean, it wasn't horror movie stuff. It's just kind of like when...do you have a cat? Or a dog? Well, I have a cat, she's like five hundred years old and we've had her forever. Her name is Lucy, she's super fat. Anyway, sometimes she kind of just – stops and like, stares into space? And it's probably a spider or whatever, but you kind of have to wonder if it's something else? Grace was like that. I mean, she'd be totally cute and all that one second and then she'd blink a couple times and her face would get all serious. It was just - creepy.

Also, she couldn't quite talk yet. I mean, she could, I guess, but she didn't really like to. Some three year olds won't shut up but she was just really quiet, so whenever she said anything it just felt kinda important. And...oh God, okay. I'm drunk enough for this. You said you're not from here, right? So you haven't heard this yet. Everyone else here has, and I don't ever talk about it anymore. But I'll tell you if you promise not to listen to the whole thing before you judge me. Okay? You promise? Okay. I think she could see the future.

I don't really know when I started noticing it, I guess? Like it took a couple months for sure, it was mostly really dumb stuff, really little stuff. Let me think... okay, so like I would take her out to the park and she'd say "ladybug" and, like, Okay Grace, ladybugs, cool. But then it would rain, and I'd get back and realize her raincoat had ladybugs on it.

I guess I really started thinking about it after this thing happened with my boyfriend. Same asshole who got me addicted to this crap. I'm going to be so pissed if I get lung cancer because of him. The only reason I kept dating him for so long was because he was a senior when I was a freshman and I was flattered he was into me. Dumb, right? But what freshman wonders what kind of loser tries to date someone almost four years younger than him? Not fucking me, that's who.

Anyway, I was still dating him and I was playing with Grace one night when she crawls up to me and frowns and like...pats my cheek, kind of? Like that, see? Really gently. And she looks like she's about to cry and so I'm like Grace, what's wrong? or whatever and she thinks about it for a couple seconds and then says "ouch" really seriously. Which is... kind of weird behavior, right? So I was thinking about that for a couple days.

Anyway, sometime later that week my ex hit me. I don't really remember why he did it, it was definitely something small and stupid. In retrospect, I should've broken up with him on the spot, but I was just...in shock, I guess. Anyway, it fucking hurt so I put a pack of peas on it when I got home, and I remember looking in the mirror and I saw that it was right where Grace touched me.

I mean, I just thought it was a really freaky coincidence, not "Holy shit, this three year old can see the future". But I started paying more attention, and I noticed stuff like the ladybug when it rained, and whenever her parents were gonna get home late, she'd bring me the big book of fairytales to read her in bed and we'd have time to read the whole thing, and there was a whole week where she kept talking about "the purple" and right after that she got sick. Guess what color the cough syrup was. Yeah.

I kept telling myself I didn't really believe it, maybe she was just like...really intuitive or whatever. It was like that for a year or so. I didn't say anything because, again, I didn't want to sound fucking crazy. And she was a really cute kid, and I liked babysitting her and I guess I didn't want, like, an X-Men situation. I didn't want a bunch of doctors running tests on her or something. I don't know. I was fifteen, okay?

I'm pretty sure her parents knew. How could they not? I remember Dr. Dominguez was getting ready to leave one night, and she picked up Grace to tell her goodbye. Grace touched her head and said "wet" and giggled. She didn't say anything then, but I saw her grab an umbrella before she left. And then it rained that night! It had been dry the whole week and then – boom. Downpour. I remember there were even flood warnings.

But the only time I tried to say something about it – it was really vague, something about how she was super intuitive? Her dad gave me this weird look, and said, "I have no idea what you're implying" in a really cold voice and I chickened out. I mean, they had to know. But they wouldn't admit it, so I didn't say shit. You don't want adults to disapprove of you, especially when they're paying you money. So I shut up until the accident.

I didn't know there was gonna be an accident, but Grace definitely did. She was freaking out that day, crying and screaming, and she never did stuff like that. But this one day – I think it was a year later? I was still dating the asshole, but I could already drive, so I must've been about sixteen. Anyway, I had to bring her into her mom's clinic to get a flu shot. It wasn't like, going to get ice cream or something, I couldn't exactly tell Dr. Dominguez I missed her appointment because Grace threw a tantrum.

I didn't know what to do. She never acted like that with me before. She was screaming and crying and ...God, it wasn't like her at all. She wasn't really saying anything that made sense, she was just refusing to get in the car, and like, sobbing. I tried literally everything, I brought half her toys into the car for her and I promised her candy and everything and finally I just had to pick her

up and put her in myself.

That was probably the freakiest part, cause she got quiet right away. It was like she had an off switch. It was so fucking bizarre, and I was like...super on-edge the entire time I was driving. I should have listened to her. I know I should have. Deep down, I knew I knew something really bad was gonna happen. But... you have to understand that at this point I was trying to talk myself out of the whole idea she was a psychic. Her parents clearly didn't approve of it, or at least talking about it, so I was in the process of convincing myself I had an overactive imagination. I thought they'd know best. It's really amazing how impressionable I used to be. I know I fucked up, but...you get it, right? I just wanted to do what I was supposed to. I thought I was doing the right thing.

Well, what happened was a truck blew a red light when I was in middle of the intersection. It hit the passenger side of the car, and Grace was on my side, thank God, so it wasn't as bad as it could've been. But it was pretty fucking bad. The truck was going fast, like a good fifteen goddamn miles over the speed limit. And they kept going, those assholes. We flipped over, and they didn't even stop.

I don't remember any of that, though. I remember this huge, like, jolt, and being scared out of my mind that I was gonna die and then waking up in the ER. I had a pretty bad concussion, and bad cuts from all the glass. I needed stiches in like, five places. I've still got this scar, see? Grace was a little bruised up but she was mostly okay. Thank God. I mean... I don't know what I would've done if she wasn't, I felt guilty enough. But she was traumatized, she wouldn't get near a car for weeks. I didn't hear that from her parents, though. My mom talked to someone from their church, I think. I was afraid to talk to them myself, I felt so guilty. I felt like it was my fault even though I knew it was the asshole driving the mystery truck's fault, but no one could find them – that was a whole other big thing too, that they couldn't find it. This town isn't that big at all, like I said, so if they lived here we would've found them. It was on the news in the whole county

orchid

Esha Biswas

and everything. But no one got a good look at the license plate because they were all trying to help us or call 911 so they fucking got away with it. We could have died.

I know it's super cliché to say this, but something about a near death experience changes you. I broke up with my boyfriend, for one thing. I tried to tell him what happened, and he laughed. I went home that night and tried to think one good reason I hadn't already broken up with him and the only thing I could come up with was that I was scared to. Well, getting hit by a freaking truck was a hell of a lot scarier than some loser who couldn't find anyone his own age to date him. So that was one good thing that came out of it. Probably the only good thing.

I've been thinking about trying to see Grace while I'm back. I'm not sure if they'd let me, or if I even want to. I just wanna tell her I'm sorry I didn't listen that day. And that she should be careful, cause people can be cruel when they don't understand what your deal is. But I – I don't want to bring up any bad memories for her. Maybe I've already done enough, you know? And I think – I feel like she's probably going to be okay. I mean, she can see the future. I know that, even if no one believes me. And the gift of foresight or whatever – that's one hell of a leg up, right? So she's gotta be doing okay. She's gotta be.

magenta veins spread across translucent snow skin  
like  
cracks in weary drought earth gape for rain  
like  
rivers rush across gentle land-slope-scape  
like  
naked branches stretch for cerulean sky  
like  
blood vessels carry life through flesh  
like  
freshly paved highway snakes  
like  
green xylem in sister leaf  
like  
spindly arachnid limbs  
like  
oak roots buried in soil  
like  
violet stretch marks  
like  
sidewalk crevices  
like  
split ends  
like  
lightning  
like  
dendrites  
like  
thoughts  
like  
you  
and  
like  
me

## Autophobia

Miranda Hency

\*

I wish that the taste  
of oranges was still on  
my tongue  
like a pressing  
of buds that rubbed  
my mind senseless

\*

I would share anything  
with you  
if it meant that I  
could lie in your bed  
some other time  
and maybe I could  
take my tights off  
without bleeding onto  
the fitted sheet

\*

Tell me  
why am I so afraid  
that you'll disappear  
if you did so many  
nice things like  
my favorite time of day  
black tea  
a poem written on your wall

\*

I'm thinking about  
the books you read  
as if they are a way to  
get inside of your head  
so I can stamp them to  
my hand along with  
everything else they say  
I'm not supposed to do

\*

If time isn't linear  
I think I can get  
away with you  
I can get away  
with anything





## For the waning tree

Ziyang Huang

Are you dancing, tree?  
Dancing with the pieces of my heart,  
Shattered spectacularly across your branches  
You make it seem –  
As though the melancholy  
Was meant to be  
A part of me

## A Recollection

Alexander Miller

Before she left, Mma branded me.

'You'll always be mine, Arnold, always be mine.' When I cried, she slapped me.

Mma flew away the next day, far away from us. She didn't tell a soul. I watched her soar past the garden fences, past the aluminum roofs and the murmuring cows. Her shadow danced, alone. I wondered what color she'd make when she landed. Blue, I hoped.

I would never know.

'Pray she never comes back,' Rra whispered, standing behind me. 'Mosi-oa-Tunya can eat her right up'

Sometimes, when little Nnake is asleep, when the air is calm, my arm will cry for her.

Early morning sun. Orange.

I gather my things. Rra is gone. Nnake is slow to wake. She must cook before Rra comes back. She asks why she must stay and I must go. She asks if she can go with me.

No. The sun is beautiful because it is distant, Rra tells her when I'm gone.

School. Purple. Our class is half abandoned. Boyani tells me that some have flown to the city in search of pula, the rest in search of lost mothers and fathers. 'But we stay,' he whispers, 'because we have yet to grow wings.'

Miss teaches us English phrases. Miss often teaches us math, but not today. They don't speak in whispers in the city, she whispers, only in English. I learn how to say the things I am good at, like dancing and drawing. I learn how to say I am in search for employment. I learn how to say my name is Arnold. I do not like the words. The English sounds taste cold. They are not blue.

'You need not whisper anymore', Miss tells, 'no more'. How

am I to speak to Rra if I cannot whisper, I ask, how am I to speak to Nnake? Miss whispers that over time the words will grow palatable. It is a lie.

Later when the sky falls, Miss will dream. A dream of a false life.

She will soar. Past the smoke that thunders, past the oceans, to a place where all false dreams end; a land far away. She will bury her whispering tongue inside her, bury it deep, behind the heart. Soon she will see it, beyond, below and ahead. She will greet them in words well intentioned and understood. The men from the land away will welcome the Miss who soars, who flew on her own wings. They will accept me, Miss believes, they will accept me because I can be. She will land and she will be blue.

It is but a dream.

Miss will wake before the sky. Miss will wake black and branded, like the rest of us.

We whisper at dinner, after Nnake prepares pap. She is a better cook than Mma. Perhaps it is because Nnake cares for us. She is too young to be tempted by the air and the men in rich clothes. It is a fine meal.

Rra comes late. He works as a guard to a foreign man. It is a very precious job, Rra whispers, to safeguard the life of a foreigner. Rra often speaks of his adventures, his battles in the air, efforts to protect the foreigner. One story is his favorite, his duel with a man after Rra's employer, a man from the houses of stone, the home of Mosi-oa-Tunya. Rra speaks of how they fought for days, the stars their spectators, the clouds their shadows. When the fight is over, as the man of stone lies defeated, Rra is rewarded a gift by his employer. A card with his likeness. He shows it to all and us. So everyone will know, Rra whispers.

In his picture, he does not smile.

I dreamed of Rra and how he sleeps in his booth outside the accented man's house. I dreamed of how he is seen and forgotten. I dreamed how he looks toward the sky and trembles,

remembering secrets we are all wordlessly told. He is no slayer of stone men. But Rra is more. He stayed when his brand called for him to fly. For that, I abide his tales.

When we are done with the pap, Rra tells us he will die tomorrow.

I am awake. The moon keeps watch blindly as the cows murmur in silent conversation. Purple. I must fly to the city. Though my wings have yet to grow, I must try. Our figurehead is gone and we seek renewal. All the tales have been told. Their wisdom needs to form actions. Actions need to form color. The color needs to be blue.

Tomorrow, the burning brand, the dull edacious cruciform, will devour Rra. It will be patient, nurturing, a fire burning the remains of the trampled leaf. There will be nothing to clean but the stone. Nnake will be grateful. She is too young to wipe away the dead.

Tonight, Rra tells me I must go to the city, to Gaborone. 'Take Nnake away', he whispers, 'away'. His voice gains weight, he breathes himself out. Only a few hours until he dissolves entirely, into air. I wonder if the wind will carry him. Perhaps the water, the tlou, the child will feel Rra's flavor.

Rra rests his hand on my sinking face. 'You, my son, you are in my blood. Believe it, for it is the only lasting comfort.' His breath slows. Rra is almost gone.

His grip tightens. 'You are more than branded.' Rra looks at me, the last time. 'Who are you, Arnold?' he whispers, 'who are you?'

The sun is beautiful because it is distant, I whisper to Nnake when Rra is gone.

It is bright when we arrive. Green. Bright enough for me to see.

The city isn't the reflection that had echoed in my mind the journey here. I dreamed of spiral towers, of noise, of movement, a

restrained but urgent movement that would fuel the city. Yet it is none of those things. It is much softer, darker, like the blackened lemon. From our distance, the city looks no different from our home we abandoned, the home Rra found and built, lived and died, existed and vanished. From the outskirts, we hear the melody of its many creatures. Did they know their color? My journey towards them? Their journey towards me?

Nnake whispers, How can this be the city? It is already dying.

But it is not dying, Nnake. I have seen death, the rapid consumptive being. This city before me, however, is soaring through time, moving against our tides. Its death is its birth, its end a strong sky blue that propels it back. And as the city flies, it regains the life it had never lost and never once had. It will grow until it is so full of joy and anger, of blue and red, of vengeance and retrieval that it will reach the stars. They will flock towards it, on their wings, from near lands as the melody rises, to join the song. Others will flock towards it, on their feet, from far lands, with concern, with envy, with premonition and will see how it grows and when it will fall. And as time moves against itself, as the city fills and ages to its true young self, as the melody is shaped deep blue and deep red, as it rises to the stars, as those stars dance around the highest towers, there will be a fracture. A soft tear from its side. Time will stop. The melody will stop. The city will be gone. The sun will rise upon the empty land and stay but a moment, before seeking a new friend to accompany her as she had in the past always and as she had in the future always. This is the city, the blackened lemon.

'An old tale', Nnake whispers.

Because my wings were not ready, we traveled to the city by water. We were not the only ones unable to fly, who had decided that the voyage to the city be taken on top of Chobe. Almost all of them were branded, the mark gently resting below their hand. Some tried to cover the marks with fabrics and clothes but then it simply glowed, a longing red. Some tried to tear it out, to rip the

brand from their body and they thought themselves rid of it when the heavy rock fell from their arms. But as they stood relieved, as we marveled at them (*I knew what was to come*), as the river calmed below the wood, their vacant bloodied forearm gave rebirth to it. Growing larger, brighter than before, there was no pain. With their replenished mark, branded as before and anew, they sat back down before covering it up in silence.

We are eager to find shelter and quickly find it, this abandoned shack of wood and foil. Orange. We are fortunate to have picked one so close to the city. 'And one so clean', whispers Nnake. It is clean and even some items Rra told me to find are already sprinkled across this new home.

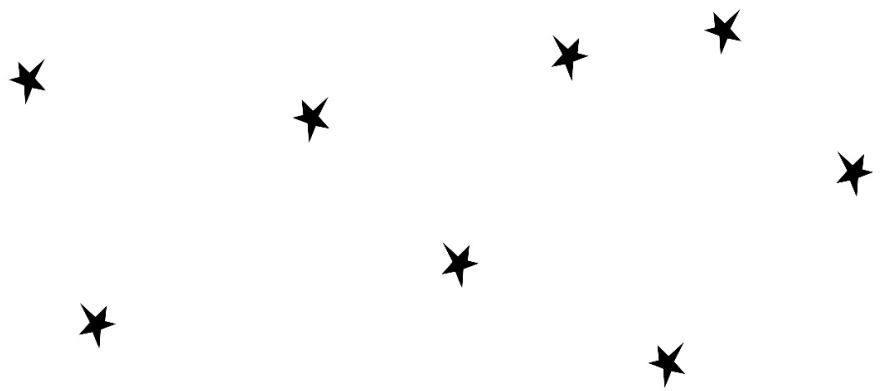
'Perhaps they left to another city', Nnake whispers. She drifts across sand and smiles when she retraces the lines of small drawings, hidden in a dark corner. 'Perhaps the family was too big', Nnake whispers, 'children need earth and sky to grow'.

'Yes', I whisper back, 'yes'. As she constructs her youthful tale, my feet brush against tender heated stones, densely stacked beneath the sand. Dull as Rra's had been.

There are glistens in our stream, flurries of quick and gentle motions, words on how the cruciform can be cured, uprooted. I heard the others, on that oceanic billow, speak of mystics and charms, sold to the men in high towers. Sincere or not, I must pursue the current. Whether I elude my growth or it devours me, I cannot allow Nnake to succumb. If it requires pula, I will have it, I will seek work. If I seek work, I must head to the mines. Nnake, lost in her flavor, divines the lives of these former keepers as I brush the sand over their lost, kindled remains.

The mines. Red. No soul that can sustain itself under their gleam, so far down. I have been here too long. The cycles of moon and sun pass over me, calling, but I can offer no response. I hope Nnake is well.

It has been two months since I woke, by the waning stars, by her side. Two months since I followed the men of the township,

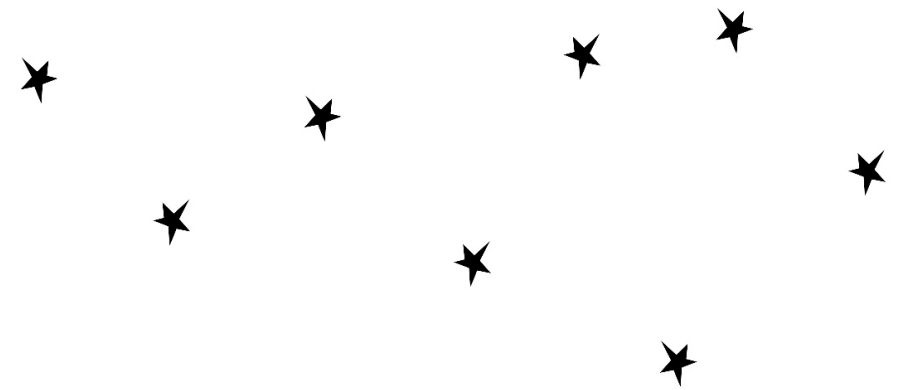


that soft dark melody, to these mines. Nnake was slow to wake. She must tend the home while I am gone. She asked why she must stay and I must go. She asked if she can go with me.

No. There is no sun to be found in this distance, I whispered.

An elderly man shouts behind me. He has found one, the glistening grain. His hands are as red as my Red, his brand as red as mine. A taller man squeezes through our legion. We must push our faces against the sharp rock to let him pass, my cheek protecting my naked neck. The taller man reaches the elder and gathers the glimmer. He puts it away and hands the aging brother of mine the pula he so desired. The taller man ascends, his pockets a shimmering cove.

Despite his age, the senescent man must be unaware. Once you find them, you hide them. Once you hide them, you wait, wait until you are alone with the taller man, receive your pula, then rejoin the legion. We make no sound as we keep away from him, waiting. The elderly man barely holds his worth before a hushed, heavy hand lifts his face to the sharped sides of our enclosure. We make no sounds. The heavy hand lifts his face again. We make no sounds. The hushed hand lifts his face again. There is one final sound.



That pained Nkgonne of mine drops the pula, raises his hands to wipe his red tears away, before reaching to the back of his head, hoping to stop the melting flow. He cannot. We make no sounds as that hushed, heavy hand pushes through and grasps the pula, all that remains. We continue our work, wiping our soiled feet on that empty, withered frame.

Nnake, I decay in toil. I will not be able to withstand it.

Outside, above the mines, beyond myself, below and ahead of time, the cycles of the moon and sun entertain the stars while you sing, sing of revival, sing for blue.

## Friend-Zoned

Esha Biswas

welcome to the friend-zone!  
a truly magical realm where  
loneliness is  
but a distant trouble  
here  
you'll always have a shoulder  
to lean on  
to cry on  
(and you best be prepared that  
they'll cry on yours too)  
this is a judgement-free zone!  
you can finally relax that  
tense jaw of yours  
let words flow freely like dreams  
I've heard that here,  
you may even be  
*understood*  
for the first time in your life—  
welcome to the friend-zone!  
you've finally made it!  
trust grows on trees here  
(please don't chop them down)  
and the rivers are filled with empathy  
this is where best friends dwell

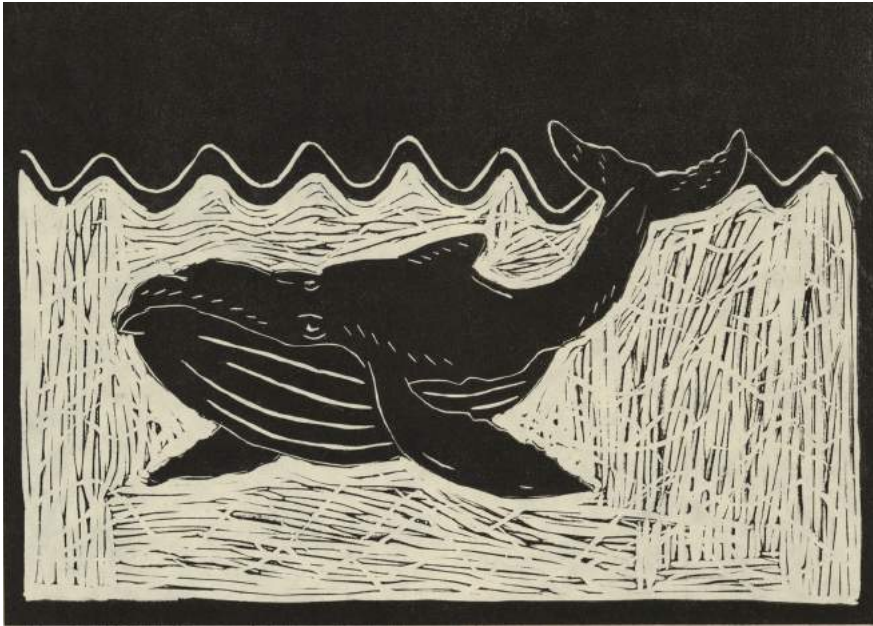
this is a world where  
you'll be drunk on the wine  
of sweet memories and  
meaningful conversation  
where laughter is the soundtrack  
where warm embraces  
lie around every corner  
a place where  
you'll never be alone  
where you'll always feel  
at home, you know  
some people never make it here  
they'd do anything to move in  
but their applications never quite  
get through so  
congratulations!  
welcome to the friend-zone!

now why the *hell*  
are you complaining?

April 15

AnneMarie Torresen

A whale has so much space to swim.  
What does he think,  
Gliding intelligently through all that space?  
Does he write poems for April?



"No Thanks"

Miranda Schaffer

I do not like to hold babies.

Being part of a society that views women as ones to nurture and care for the young,  
I know that this is atypical.  
I can't tell you how many times someone has offered their baby out to me as a rather supreme act of trust and kindness, a literal piece of themselves that they are willing to share, for however brief a moment, with *me*.

And I take that grand act of humanity and I say, "no thanks" because with taking that little human into my arms my heart starts to beat a little faster and my feet start to shift a little more and my head starts to spin a little more violently. And it's not because I'm some sicko who hates babies,

I just don't like the strings attached. And I don't just mean the ones that come sewn on when they're born, that one is of a less permanent nature than the other.

The longest string babies seem to harbor is helplessness. I've never been a fan of that. Surely we all feel helpless at times.

Sometimes when the sky falls it happens to shatter into a million shiny shards of silver shape shifting reflectors that require us to take in a hard honest reflection of ourselves before we can ever find the tenacity to put back together the world's most difficult jigsaw puzzle.

But that's not the kind of helplessness I'm talking about. I'm referring to true helplessness like the look in someone's eye when they know that this is the last breath they will ever take on this earth and they finally realize that whatever happens after you die, it doesn't matter.

Because the people you love the most won't be there  
*laughing*  
with you  
*crying*  
with you  
or holding your hand

**After.**

**This.**

**Breath.**

Sure it's the opposite end of the spectrum but babies have that look too,

Only worse.

Because the baby doesn't see it coming. With every truly innocent coo I am reminded that anything and everything that I do impacts this micro person until they too take their last breath, and that is a lot of responsibility for a sensitive seventeen-year-old girl who sees the world as one big picture.

Be careful what you *say*,  
around the baby.  
Be careful what you *do*,  
around the baby.  
Be careful of what you *think*,  
around the baby.

Because any one of those, solo or in grand combinations could have a lasting effect. I will not be held responsible for screwing up a member of the next generation.

But you see that bigger issue here is that holding a baby reminds you that everything you say and do, *does matter*. And sure that sounds excellent in theory, to matter, but in practice it is scary as hell.

I am by no means proud of every combination of seemingly benign poly-syllabic formation that wields from my tongue. They sometimes pick up sharp edges while grazing my teeth on the way out. They sometimes may cut a person down like an axe. Every action and reaction I have can shatter a grain of someone's confidence.

But most commonly I end up contorting myself into such a position that both feet end up in my mouth. And let me tell you, that does not taste good, and it stinks a little too.

And once I purge this strange mental image of a human pretzel  
from my mind and finally look the little darling  
in its unproportionally sized,  
but sweet,  
tender eyes,  
I myself,  
feel a little bit helpless.

And I wonder,  
as many often do,  
that if when I was a newborn dumpling,  
someone once held me,  
that felt a little bit helpless too.

And I like to imagine that person would say,  
“No thanks.”

Because they did not “like to hold babies.”





## How Zeus Died Driving a Lightning Bolt

Tracy Scherdt

I woke up alone that day  
To the ringing of your  
Panicked heart,  
Cold and stoned,  
“I think he’s dead  
My best friend died last night”

He was driving too fast  
Toward December  
On a bolt of lightning  
Nonetheless

Willing the leaves to fall  
In flakes and patterns  
Not above but across  
Windswept

But his lane was narrow  
As it was when we met  
And it wasn’t his fault  
Or yours

I wanted to call today

Ask you if there was still  
Loose rubble in your chest

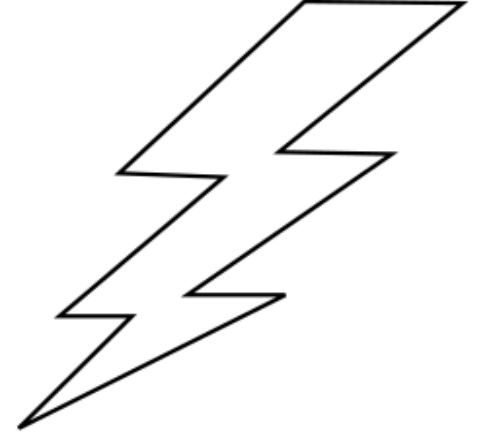
But I couldn’t

The cracking and faulting  
Of you, later us  
Changed me and still does  
When I give the sound  
Room to roam

I can’t erase the crash site  
In daylight, black  
And still glowing  
Metal bent and torn  
Almost sculpted  
Almost God

Some said the world  
Would end in fire  
Or bolts of light, but  
I never expected it to  
End in life

*For Garth Ray Cougill  
Feb. 18, 1996 - Nov. 12, 2014*



## Neurosis

Miranda Hency

It's a squiggly mess of lines I feel in my chest,  
stroking the sides of that snaking tube,  
cluttering, fluttering, sticking me to one spot,  
butterflies don't fly inside, I cry inside:  
get me out, get me out,  
the voice wants to be heard, it's not my choice  
that it can't be heard.

Cradle me please,  
I can be pretty if I try,  
give me that animal smile,  
I'll wonder when we gleam,  
what does it mean?  
what does it mean?

Panic is scratching,  
scourging, it cuts  
but luckily it's  
free from bleeding,  
just indents, intense  
uncertainty and defense.

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Where?

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August Sivec

“Wishing I could distance myself from this existence;

Where hearts can be broken, yet beats be still persistent,

Where each and every capricious moment consists merely of insistence,

Where pleasure resides sole(less)ly in the last nights binge from inhibition,

Where listless becomes vicious, and ignorance twisted,

Where each and all are wandering stars, desperately persistent in our lonely ambitions.”

## Antiseptic

Cammie Finch

We layered our handprints  
on the wall,  
dipped them in white  
antiseptic paint to  
purify the germs.

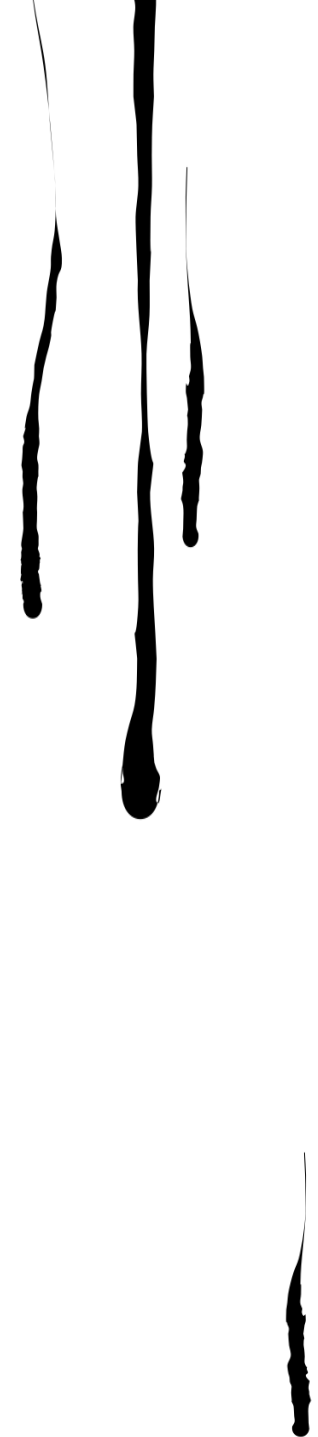
We crushed vitamins  
under our feet,  
poured the sweet  
ambrosia of IV drip  
and waited for  
the soil to detoxify  
the air we breathe.



We hosed ourselves  
down with clear gel  
sanitizer until we  
blurred like rainstorms,  
our fumigated eyes  
drooping with  
disinfectant side effects.

We laid in gowns on  
stark powdered beds,  
feeling our  
syn-co-pated  
pulses inches from our  
own because we  
were too afraid to  
touch and transmit.

We arabesqued to  
antiseptic, and still,  
the tinge of pain  
left its stain on us:  
a stale moldy pink  
that never seems  
to come out.



## The Stars Do Not Speak

### Julia Byers

The train whistle is so loud it vibrates the hard metal mesh beneath the soles of my tennis shoes, and the entire fire escape sways like it's dancing.

I lean against the wall and close my eyes, rough red brick stuck to the back of my t-shirt as the train's heat breathes across my cheeks, and then it's gone and the night is still again.

I open my eyes. The air is just cold enough that my breath reflects the light of the apartment building like a thousand shining crystals, or a hundred hazy puffs of smoke, before it disperses into the night.

I look away, over at the train tracks then down at the street, and try not to think. Everything is muffled, unable to compete with the high wail of the train whistle and the screams of the tracks. I want my mind to be muffled too—so insulated and detached that I cannot hear a single thought running through it. But it is so hard when the thoughts are louder than the blood that pounds in my ears.

I try to focus on the quiet. On the numbness.

I try to focus on the stillness and the calm.

I imagine stealing the nothingness away from the street and soaking it into my bones; holding it inside me forever and letting everything else go.

I want to shut out my thoughts and close a window on the ache and fly away on the train tracks, the way my breath flies on the wind. But I can't.

I can't.

The bricks press hard against my spine. My hair hangs on my shoulders, wet and cold and knotted into strings. My entire body feels like it weighs a hundred thousand pounds—so heavy the fire escape could break beneath me at any moment and send me

tumbling to the street below.

I suck in a breath, hold it for a second, then let it back out. Another cloud of crystals that dance in the light. I shiver and tuck my hair behind my ears. I slide down the wall and curl my arms around my legs. I rest my forehead against my knees.

My eyes burn, hot like the train and wet like my t-shirt, my hair. I can't tell if my cheeks are cold, or my jeans, or both.

He couldn't have waited until after I had dried my hair and done my homework, could he? He couldn't have waited until after dinner, when I might have been more prepared?

He couldn't have waited to tell me that he's dying?

*Dying.* It sounds so dramatic, so unusual—like it's a disease in and of itself. Like that one word, spoken aloud in the doorway to the kitchen as I wrung my hair with a towel and stared at him with my heart beating too fast, too hard in my chest, could be what's killing him. That one word. Like it's not the cancer at all, but the fact that he's finally had the guts to acknowledge the finality of the word *terminal*.

Dying.

My dad is dying.

I know I shouldn't feel the way I do, like he is at fault here and I am the victim. But that is the feeling clawing its way up my throat and making the moisture spring to my eyes. It separates me from the world behind a layer of tears.

That is the feeling that cuts inside me the sharpest and presents itself the clearest in my mind, so that my stomach churns and my fingers grip my calves so hard my knuckles tingle.

Dad is dying, and my mother left too many years ago to bother counting, and I don't know where that leaves me. Where does that leave me?

I want to be numb.

I lean my head back against the bricks, rough against my scalp, and blink away the tears just enough to be able to make out the stars. They are so hazy and distant with all the lights of the city shining up at them, a barrier, barely freckles in the deep, bruised

purple of the sky. The city is so much brighter and harsher than the stars. It is so cold it strangles the sob that catches in my throat.

The fact is that we all start out believing in life. Wishing on stars. But life breaks us slowly—one dream, one hope, one wish at a time—until eventually we all look up at the sky and realize the stars can't help us any more than we can keep them from burning out.

We are all candles, trying so hard to shine as bright and as long as the stars, but we are weak and small and so easily snuffed, and all it takes is a single breath to destroy us. A single breath.

Cancer.

"Ellie?" Dad's voice is hesitant, on the other side of the window just to my right. My jaw clenches and I close my eyes tight. My nose burns like I have been underwater too long. I cannot breathe. It's like he is a ghost already.

"Ellie?" he says again.

The fire escape sways as he inches open the window then steps onto it himself, delicate with his footing like he too is afraid it might break. It takes everything inside me not to crumple up like a piece of paper. To shut him out completely. My entire face is on fire and my fingers are numb against my legs. The sky becomes a swirling blur.

"Ellie." He doesn't touch me at first, just sits beside me with his back against the wall and his face angled upwards, trying to see what I am looking at up there in the sky beyond the clouds. I clamp my lips shut and he shifts closer. He wraps his arms around me, so strong it is impossible he will ever die, let alone die so soon. It is impossible that he is dying already.

Dying, dying, dying—the word is a mantra, a lifestyle, a promise.

He is dying.

We all are, really. But he is dying more than the rest of us. Or at least more knowingly.

"Ellie," he says as I bury my face against his shoulder. I bite the inside of my cheek to keep back the sobs. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, honey. I shouldn't have told you like that. I just didn't know how to say it."

"You're leaving me. You're leaving me like she did."

My voice is so stifled against the starched cotton of his button-down shirt, I don't think he will understand me. But he whispers into my hair, "No, of course not. I'm not leaving you. I'm never going to leave you."

"But you're dying." I practically spit it.

He grips me tighter and his breath tickles against the top of my head. He says, "There's a difference there, Ellie. There's a difference between dying and leaving. Leaving is a choice." He holds onto me so tightly it's like he's afraid that if he doesn't work at it hard enough, I will float away on the wind—like he is as afraid of losing me as I am of losing him. "There's a difference, can't you see? The difference is that I love you, I love you so much, and I am going to do everything in my power to stay with you for as long as I possibly can. And then I am going to give you as much as I can for your future, too. For when I'm gone."

His voice cracks. "Your mom made her decision to leave, and I'm so sorry that happened, but I'm staying. Do you hear me? I'm not going anywhere. I'm not going to make the same mistake she did. I'm going to stay with you until the end."

His voice is soft and floating, barely a whisper as he tells me, "I love you, Ellie." The words tangle in my cold, knotted hair. They float to the sky on a breath made of crystals.

My lips brush against the stiff fabric of his shirt. "I love you too, Dad."

The rest of the world is silent and far away while I am safe in his arms. At first I am peaceful, but then anger scissors through me—bitterness and the burning, piercing need to scream. Then I can do nothing but sob. It is empty and all-encompassing, like it tears my body apart muscle by muscle, fiber by fiber.

It is impossible to be numb. I don't know if I would want to be.

Dad rocks me on the fire escape the way he rocked me on the kitchen floor the morning after my mother left without a goodbye. He rocks me like I am five years old, and the clock still has so much time on it, you'd never even think to think that it is counting down to the end. He rocks me like he knows what I am thinking and what I am feeling, even though all I can do is cry.

He rocks me like he means it about not leaving.

He's not leaving me.

Not yet.

For a moment I feel as if it is not the fire escape that dances beneath me, but space, with planets and moons and entire galaxies stretching out beneath my feet. Everything, right there within reach.

My father is not a candle, but a supernova, spreading his warmth and light to me before he burns to nothing, to dust. So warm his arms nearly sear against my skin as he holds me to his chest and keeps the chill away.

## The Hunt

Clare Higgins

I put you in a corner.  
You spewed, all firecracker  
and hot sand, I held up  
my forearms to shield the blow.  
Wicked tears stung cheekbone.  
Their rivers in between  
your laughing teeth.

Now our silences  
are empty snowflakes,  
fogging up the windows.  
People say it's harder to breathe.  
Nice girls turned to ash,  
cherry lips made of monster-hide.

I'm full of "If you would"s  
like put down your dagger  
sing apologies and kiss  
goodnight, instead of clenching teeth  
as you tiptoe  
over mismatched spoons.

Each time we care to look,  
the other's eyes gleam with surprise  
and guilt—we have caught one another,  
bloody hare in mouth,  
slinking through the woods.

## Grandma's Selfish Move to the Nursing Home

Kate Cammell

No more Sinatra teetering from the speaker  
or thrift-sale art on entryway walls,  
a condo painted the same tan hue  
as bronx concrete in summertime,  
with dormant rooms, idle and empty  
except for the misplaced numbers  
of yesterday's Sudoku.

Stacks of books lie restless  
in gas chamber boxes, dust  
suffocates all sunlight sneaking through  
the cardboard edges;  
cardboard like barbed-wire.

What are Friday nights supposed to be now,  
without sleepovers and cheap lo mien?

The *Hello Dolly* dvd is wedged between  
blown glass vases and printer paper,  
the dvd nestled in bubble wrap made of  
our delirious nights spent giggling at the moon  
and out-jiving Barbara Streisand.

The Christmas decorations sit patiently  
in tubs, icicle feet shatter to fractals  
and the flannel tree skirt  
hangs onto their pieces,  
old Christmas cards strewn:  
*Happy Holidays.*

What to do now with an opposing schedule  
already full with bingo, opera, and lukewarm tapioca?

Saltines stay behind to guard  
the stale air of the pantry coffin  
where all fresh food goes to die,  
expired food a staple, crumbs left  
like Midwestern acorns,  
too many to sweep up  
too many to care.

The cane no longer a firm tree,  
venerable, annoyed with wobbly tiles,  
leaning against the front door, no more  
post-sleepover continental breakfasts  
sandpaper toast blackened  
and never swallowed.

You're selfish to leave me here too.



## Excerpt from: "Ghosts in the Night"

Shashank Rao

*On the train from Konjee to Bangalore I dreamt of a goddess and a hag. A familiar dream, the only dream I'd had for many years. There under the vines of a banyan tree I would be on my knees, searching for anthills until I found myself at the feet of Parvathi, bathed in the scent of nectar, surrounded by butterflies. But when I looked up to catch a glimpse of her face, all would turn to stone and where the goddess once stood, a witch with skin the complexion of vomit cackled away in the booming darkness until I awoke, forehead dank with sweat, beams of sunlight blinding me upon arousal. I was twenty years old in 1927, working for my father when I should have been at university. That day, I was returning from a particularly long business trip. I had been working as a guide and translator for our foreign beneficiaries on their visit to inspect the silk plantation we managed for them in Assam. But it was my rendezvous with my lover in Calcutta that was of the greatest importance to me.*

*In Calcutta, she had loved me. In Calcutta, she mused on the night we spent entwined in a rice paddy. In Calcutta, she waited and waited and waited.*

*But to Bangalore I went like a coin spiraling into a drain.*

*And it was on this train that I met Miss Weston, a sprightly young British woman of no more than nineteen years of age dressed entirely in white who entered and exited my life like a jasmine bloom torn from its tree, passing by on a sea wind.*

\*

"Never trust an Englishman," my grandmother would sing as she read the newspaper, "their skin is milky white and they move like ghosts in the night." My father would always chastise



my grandmother when she began the ditty, reminding her that the life he had built was due in large part to those untrustworthy Englishmen.

“Mother-in-law, please don’t be so irrational.”

My father, C.L Ragavendhra Murthy had been raised in a British household under the care of Ms. Elizabeth Reaugh. I knew very little of their personal relationship, only that Ms. Reaugh paid for his university education and helped start up his business. For that, he was forever in her debt. However, I cannot say I shared the same rosy picture of Ms. Reaugh. Towards me, she was uncommonly vicious. She would complain about me to my father, sometimes for stealing her favorite watch, sometimes for ruining her favorite pair of shoes, and I would invariably be beaten black and blue. However, I am quite certain I never acted in any such manner. From the minute I was born, Ms. Reaugh had cast her evil eye on me. I felt it. I resented it. I feared it.

She died not long after I turned fifteen, but her presence lingered on in my father. His once jocular persona eroded, replaced by an unflappable steeliness. Her wrath had possessed him. When I was not up to par, when the wrong words slipped out at an inopportune time, he would hurl the same insults, lob the same abuses till I heard her voice rising above the mayhem. Yet never had I once broken my stoicism when confronted by him. When the storm clouds passed and my father retired to his study to pore over his logbooks, my grandmother would come over to where I rooted myself look me sorrowfully in the eye and murmur “like mother, like son.” Even then I would hold my peace while typhoons and tidal waves battered the shores of my throat, the ghosts of drowned thoughts rising up from their bleached corpses, moaning for air and justice, but I would simply stand my ground while all the force of the Indian Ocean roared in my skull.

“What can you do?”

My mother, my amma, was the only reliable source of generosity and warmth during the dark days of my childhood. I would run to her, weeping, screaming in pain after my father or Ms.

Reaugh had finished punishing me, she would be there, at times sewing a patch in her petticoat, at times making chapathis, open-armed and smiling, and I would be healed by her embrace. But talk of her is forbidden in the household ever since she absconded with a Muslim man when I was thirteen. My grandmother cried for five days on end, my father not a drop.

“I always knew she was a tart,” said Ms. Reaugh to my father when she heard what had happened. “I warned you not to marry her, but you didn’t listen. No matter. This household is better off without her.”

When she saw me later that day, she dug her nails into my arm. “A mother who didn’t even care enough for her child. Poor thing, you are.” The nails pierced so deep they drew blood. My father, committing his last act of kindness, took me aside before I went to bed and bandaged the incisions. Five little scars now remain, running down my arm like tears.

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Miss Weston and I met regularly after we ran into each other in the bazaar shopping for mangoes, designating the Century Club as our meeting spot, where we regaled each other with stories; I with stories of the trials of preparing for Chandramukhi’s fast-approaching wedding, Miss Weston with tales of the mistress and the lover. Tales of uncommon sadness that belied her cheery countenance.

“They are not bad people, no. On the contrary, I find them quite lovely.”

“You know them?” I asked, unable to comprehend the notion.

“Quite well, really. The mistress is my ayah. She’s been with us since the time I was two, you know. Most girls no longer care for their ayah by the time they’re my age. My parents wanted to send her away and call in a proper English handmaid when I turned sixteen, but I couldn’t bear to see her leave. She had travelled all the way from Bombay just to be with me. Or at least that’s how I

saw it. It seemed wholly unfair that she be sent away so arbitrarily. I begged my parents to let her stay; needless to say, my father offered his emphatic support. Ayah is not a bad woman, Hari, I'm telling you! She didn't seduce him or anything!

"And my mother's clandestine lover, he's our laundry man. I've known him since birth and I'm very fond of him too. He always makes me handcrafted wooden birds. I have a shelf full of them at home. Mother even bought him some tools to help him along. He was very grateful. The way his face lit up when he received the toolset, I will never forget. I think that was the first day they slept together. I saw my mother scuttling towards his shed late that night. They have a secret little business now. He makes the wooden birds, my mother sells them to her friends, and they split the profit. No one is supposed to know about this, but I overheard them once when I was reading in the greenhouse.

"But what I hate about this whole game of affairs is that I can't tell if my parents are in love with their lovers. I don't know who had their affair first. For all I know, they could both be doing it out of spite, just working off suspicions. Ayah and the laundry man, they're just caught in the middle. They think they're in love with my parents. It's a bloody mess. Everyone is running around blind. Like moles at high noon."

"The sun is loving us too much," aiji would say of such curiously hot days. Perhaps it was so. The sun's passion guarded its embrace of the city so jealously the monsoons dared not come anywhere near Bangalore. Not a single drop of rain had fallen in the past week. The dirt roads around my house had begun to dry and crack, looking more and more like desert terrain and the afternoons began to catch fire as the red-orange flowers of the gulmohar trees began to bloom.

A waiter, dressed in a suffocating silk white kurtha and turban brought us our tea.

"So tell me," she said blowing the steam rising up from the cup, "what's your tale of woe aside from the many tribulations preparing for an Indian wedding? I'd shudder to think that my

misery is total."

"There isn't much to me Miss Weston. As I've told you, my domestic life is just that: domestic."

"Oh boo! I've exposed my family's darkest secret to you! I think I am not out of line when I say we share a certain closeness now, and yet I haven't so much as to have heard a single mention of your ancestry. I cannot be the only one so terribly lost!"

There was a glint in her eye, a madness. Darkness trembled just beneath. I sensed it.

"Very well. My mother ran away with a Muslim man. My father has lost faith in goodness. And I feel as if I am trapped within this city forever."

With no warning, I lost control of my own being and the story of my mother's absconding and father's fury spun out like a maelstrom, the sunken corpses of things left unsaid, of thoughts forgotten, of tears quivering unused, all dammed in by my own restraint flowed out with grace and force in joyous abandon, all out to bare, all out to receive proper burial under the kindness of the sun, all awaiting the promise of release from the stagnant, toxic backwaters of my mind, all out, all out, all out for me to see as I never had seen them before and how ugly they had turned, twisted, translucent, burning in the daylight.

The flood had yet to cease. My stomach began to lurch and tumble and like the mythical amrit offered up to the gods after the great Churning of the Ocean, ancient wonders began to surface.

My mother's warm gaze. My father's hearty laugh. An old memory of the three of us racing down the rock gneiss that rose like a wave at the center of the Lal Bagh Gardens. My amrit came up a little orb, a golden bubble ascending the dusk and wonder of my tumultuous ocean. Amongst the waves and tides it burst and within me, a new sun yawned on the horizon.

*Goddess Parvathi's elusive face flashed for but an instant. The hag moaned and melted.*

“Oh my goodness, you’re crying! I’m so terribly sorry! I shouldn’t have forced you to dredge up such things. I’m a selfish fool! Please find it in your heart to forgive me!” Miss Weston reached over the table and dabbed at my tear-lined face with her handkerchief. I must have sported a greatly bemused expression. I had only just been returned authority of my Self. Several other guests seemed to have turned our way to ogle the strange events transpiring at our table. Their faces blurred and for the first time, I could see how my grandmother thought them ghosts.

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## Ghosts

### Stina Perkins

I go to the cemetery to think, to bury the meaninglessness in my life—physics exams and fights with Mom and the smell of rubbery hot dogs that drips from my high school’s ceiling tiles. And instead I untangle my soul.

But my ghosts can’t really compete here; they’re outnumbered and naive. (I imagine them floating around and playing games of Jeopardy with gravestones, but they don’t know trivia nearly as well as Mr. Gene Goodshaw, who passed in 1841. In my head, Gene is like Alex Trebek—past his prime and vaguely sexist). My ghosts are young—my fear of failure, forgotten letters from my grandma, the words my ex-boyfriend called me—so it’s a pretty futile effort.

Yet I figure, if my ghosts can’t haunt a cemetery, then they can’t haunt me.

This gives me perspective.

It’s surprisingly peaceful here. There’s a perpetual dusk, shallow and kind, that hugs the place—it’s not the place that needs hugs, it’s the people, but dusk doesn’t know this. The gravestones themselves are endearing in their simplicity. They think a few words can capture the dimensions of personhood. It’s good for me to tackle this disregard to complexity.

I tend to overcomplicate.

There are tears on the ground but I never feel sad; maybe it’s the perspective, maybe it’s dusk’s hug, maybe it’s the pinch of the wind that dries my eyes.

I’m left with contemplation.

And so I tell stories in my head. I create a scene with Peter Lindsey (1986) and Samantha Dunn (2001), who fall in love at a smelly arcade where they play air hockey and trade paper tickets for things they don’t want but feel they need: a monkey stuffed animal, a stale jawbreaker. They’re both in their thirties, but love makes them childlike. Really, Peter was shot at age twenty and Samantha committed suicide at fourteen. They never would’ve met.

But the stories are more fun; I like to invert emotion, to play with context.

Cemeteries are deeply uncomfortable, but I’ve been comfortable my whole life.

## Sweet Nothings

Kate Cammell

The shattering of sentimental glassware;  
we are mosaic held together  
by coy words and concrete.  
Your lips caress my wilting roses  
and replace them with tomorrows bible,  
skin that tastes half-baked  
tender as craters of the moon,  
muscles tension then relax,  
you moan and the room is still,  
no wind could blow us away;  
sweet nothing is a stupid name,  
my empty everything.



Maeve Pascoe

## Press A for Dialogue

Kaitlin Bonfiglio

“Technology is amazing”  
says the dude  
from Pallet Town

“Yes,” I say  
“with this push-up bra  
my tits are more  
spectacular  
than ever

the estrogen  
doesn’t hurt either”

“Technology is amazing”  
says the dude  
from Pallet Town

he can’t say anything else  
he’s an npc

## Diary of Beautiful Hubris

Alex Kime

*Everything feels impossible before it's done. When you lead from pragmatism, not imagination, you shortchange your vision for justice.*  
-Eve Ewing

for this daydream another placeholder took the role of loving me  
and that was how we saved the world. the ghosts of old arms fell away  
and I visited the headstones before his faceless enveloping of sturdy, me looking up to  
a bright blue sky. we stood there, on the edge of a mountain  
and after everything, millennia of pain, finally it could end.  
it was absolutely that easy. we bore witness to the world we’ve always  
kept close in our heads. the just one we fight for and cry for  
and die for. the poems could actually be about the trees, and the craving  
to feel understood didn’t feel cliché, an entire planet away from colder logic.  
the need to be touched was urgent. I am certain there were flowers in this  
world enshrined, a golden horizon of brushstrokes and birds among the clouds.  
in this lonely, let me have my delusion. allow me to conflate two far-flung ideals.

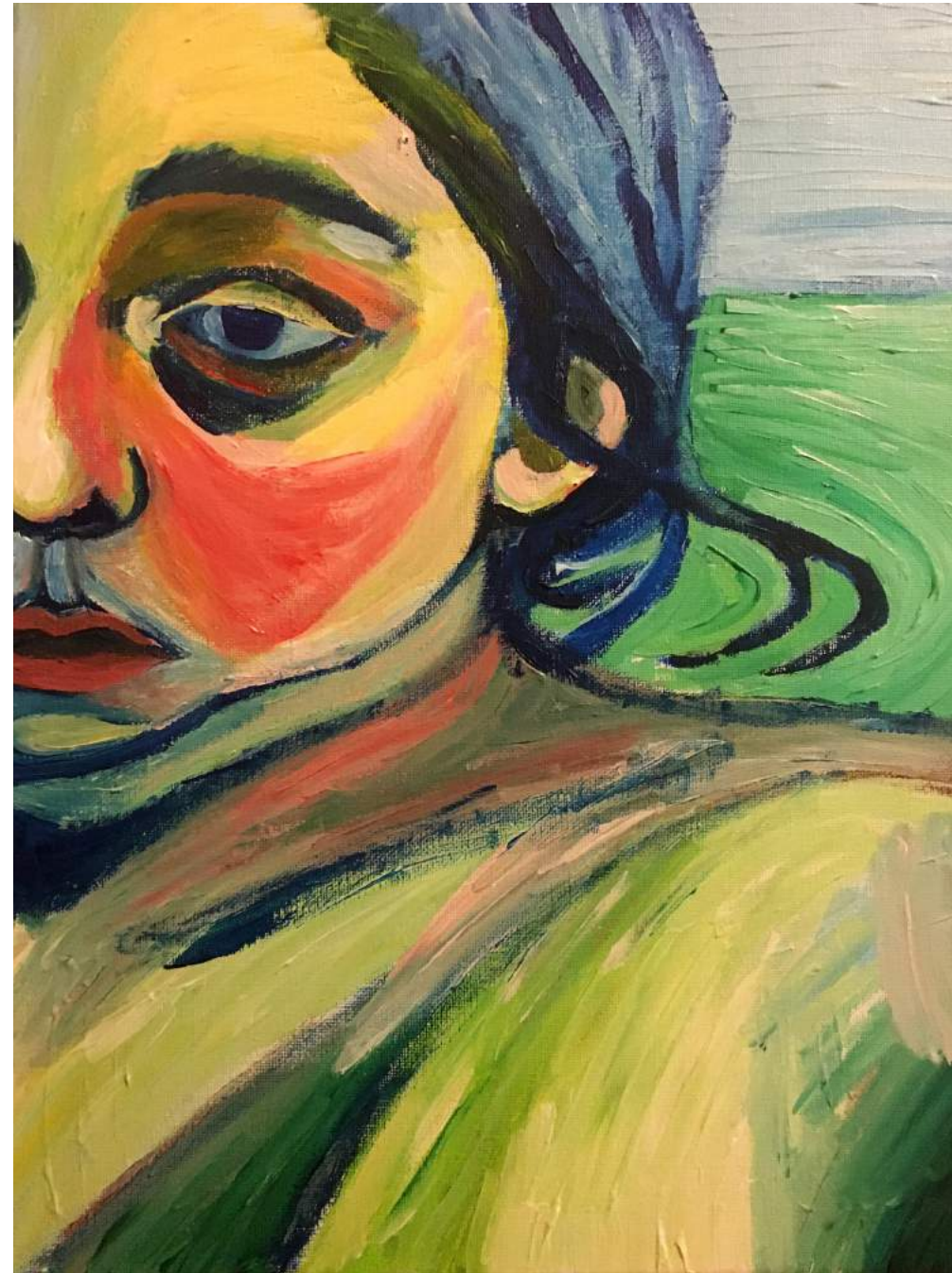
## A Cup of Joe, See?

August Sivec

I've been crushin' on your kindness,  
While I've been blinded by my shyness.  
I've had actions imagined  
from an unmanned bastion of abstraction.  
Belittling and beguiling  
my bitter sense of self.  
Crippling and compiling  
my timid tense of thought.

With each hateful directed inflection,  
delivered in a formally informed impassioned fashion,  
your gorgeous ears gorged themselves:  
exposed to imposed suggestions of perfection.

The sureness of your existence  
is allowed for by the uncertainty of our  
- perception -  
coupled with an unrelenting persistence  
from a misattributed affliction.



Clare Higgins

Dawn:

When that ivory amber sun  
tiptoed over the house  
we laughed slow & soft  
bit into oranges  
ask me if I remember.

We were strong back then  
robots backs to the wind  
clean and healthy,  
pink like a new car engine,  
rosebuds or your sister's toothpaste,

deep.  
Like a ponderous fish.

That's what made us slick,  
the testing and tapping  
new flavors of gum  
and shaven legs shining strawberry  
learning how to touch  
and be touched  
under the Kansas sun.

Now, look at your daughter's wrists.  
Do your eyes match hers?  
What are you today,  
angry at the sky  
or pleased with the golden leaves?

Today I am licking a stamp  
gummy and rank  
hoping words float back to you  
cursing our ancestors  
and your spiteful tongue,  
why are you always right  
how are you wrong each time you are right.

I am taking one day  
to tell you I pity the leaves,  
that I waver wordlessly over our  
changing phrases that mirror and echo  
and cease to grow, I tell you  
I am worried.

I look back,  
grin when I think:  
your back bone bad mouth  
and three dollars with sixty two cents  
to back it up,  
you were once unafraid  
to say where you came from.

It is because of our mouths  
and tongue and teeth,  
it is because of skin  
and making love that we are  
who we have become,  
this time I pray you listen.

This time I pray  
you crack open the sky  
and hear sunrise voices,  
find your way back.

## Why Street Corners Are Dangerous

Lang DeLancey

a ghost asked me to light  
his cigarette. i  
didn't because i didn't know  
if ghosts are flammable

## Six Word Stories

Kathryn Orwig

Hope is both good, and evil.  
I lied. Truth. Damn, lied again.  
Paint a picture, close your eyes.  
Dawn, Day, Dusk, a moment, gone.  
Five word stories are harder.





Excerpt from: LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Mike Flynn

*To whom it may concern:*

*I'm onto you, Dr. God, Esquire. I know you exist.*

*How do I know this? Because a friend of yours recently paid a visit to a friend of mine.*

*I am speaking of course of Death.*

No, it's not a metaphor. Death literally walked into my friend Josh's house and paid him a visit. He told me this while we were playing Call of Duty in his parents' house. I was on break from college and he was still living at home.

"Hey man," he said while sneaking up behind my character and stabbing him in the back. "Death came to my house last night."

I glanced over at him. He had always liked to say weird shit to me, trying to freak me out. But usually I could tell that he was joking – he would sound smarmy and self-aware, like a news anchor. But when he spoke about Death, he talked in his natural, slow, Midwestern brogue, and his eyes would glaze over. That's when I knew he was serious – when he sounded like himself.

"No kidding! Like, *Death* Death? What did he do?"

"He just kinda knocked on the door, said 'Hi, I'm Death,' and walked into my house. Grabbed some chips from the pantry and sat down on the couch. Got crumbs everywhere."

I glanced down at the couch we were sitting on. There were still splashes of Doritos residue on several of the cushions. I looked back up at Josh, and he was staring at a chair on the other side of the room. He turned to me and pointed at the chair. "There he is. He's sitting right there."

I looked at the chair. The chair was empty. I looked back at Josh. He was still staring, shaking slightly.

"Josh," I said haltingly. "What are you on right now?"

"What?" he said nervously. He instinctively tugged on his sleeve, as if to conceal something on his arm. He looked at me. I looked at him. We said nothing for a few minutes.

The phrase "heterosexual life partner" is thrown around very infrequently these days, because it encompasses an incredibly specific kind of bond. One where you and another human of your same gender connect on such a deep, personal level that, at times, it seems like a kind of love. It's rare to get two boys feeling this way about one another – much more common in girls, it seems – but "heterosexual life partner" is definitely a phrase that could be used to describe the role Josh played in my early life.

We met in middle school. I was painfully shy and hadn't yet grown into my dashing man-body (in fact, I still haven't, but I'll just leave that in God's hands. Ha!) Josh was pretty small at the time, but looked mature for his age. His face was set to a permanent scowl, which made him look mean.

The first time he spoke to me, we were paired together for a group project in math class. He invited me to come to his house after school to work on the project, to which I agreed. We worked silently for about an hour, and once we finished the project, Josh broke the silence with a joke:

"Have you ever had a really bad day, where nothing was going right for you, where everything just kind of sucked. And then you take a moment and think to yourself: 'Hey, at least it's not raining!' And then right after you have that thought...you get hit by a bus?"

I thought about it for a second, and then burst into a fit of raucous laughter so intense that I almost asphyxiated.

"Jesus, man," he said with concern. "It's not that funny."

The main difference between the two of us was that Josh more socially competent, by a pretty huge margin. He would actually get invited to the parties I only heard about the following

Monday. Unless he was taking a girl, he always invited me to come along. I always turned down the offer, not because I didn't want to go, but because I was pathologically afraid of getting in trouble with my parents for drinking. I was also afraid that I'd end up being that one guy who overestimated his limits, drank way too much at a party, and died.

I never knew exactly what went on at those parties, but I know that Josh began to use drugs shortly after he started going. It escalated from there. His grades slipped. He showed up to class infrequently, and when he did, he was often asleep. A rumor went around that he drank so much at one party that he would have died if not for the insane amount of cocaine in his system. When I asked him about it, he just said, "Naw, man, that's definitely exaggerated." He chuckled after saying that, which made me doubt him. I never trusted him 100% after that.

We went our separate ways after graduating from high school. I went to Michigan, and he got a job at Kroger. We kept in touch, but didn't see each other until fall break. That's when he told me about Death.

That's when I saw that he had something to hide.

When I returned to Michigan from fall break, I began to notice that people started dying. People my age. Every couple of weeks, I would hear about a young kid from my hometown dying. Some drownings. One suicide. Mostly drug overdoses.

It was never anyone I knew.

But I thought of what Josh had said about how he had seen Death. I thought of his drug use. I thought of how he had pulled on his sleeve, out of instinct. Out of fear that I would see... something.

...

Holy shit.

Josh was right. Death was there. For him. Josh had gotten on some real bad shit, and Death was waiting for him to OD. Perhaps even *goad*ing him.

I can't even be mad at him. I mean, he was under orders, right? *Right?!*

When winter break finally arrived, the first thing I did was storm over to Josh's house and bang on the door. I confronted him about the heroin. He denied it. I got angry. He got angry that I was getting in his business. I yelled at him. I told him he was throwing his life away. I called him a pathetic junkie piece of shit. He kicked me out of his house.

I shouldn't have called him a pathetic junkie fuckup piece of shit.

I don't think college students are adequately prepared to deal with things like that.

That's a thing you get good at when you have a lot of friends who die.

We didn't talk for all of winter semester. When summer came around, I called Josh to see if he wanted to hang out. No answer. I tried his house phone.

"Hello?" a female voice answered. It was Josh's mom.

I asked if Josh was there. "No, he's not," she said. My heart skipped a beat. *It's happened.* I took a deep breath and asked: "Where is he?"

"He's in rehab."

I couldn't help but laugh out loud. "Great!" I said. "I was worried he died!"

I didn't see him until the following winter when I went on a trip to Kroger. He was still working there. We looked at each other for about a minute.

"Hey," I said.

"Hey," he said.

There was an awkward pause. I was about to turn around and say goodbye when he spoke. "Hey, um, so I'll see you later?"

"Sure," I said.

It wasn't the happiest reunion. It was awkward between us. But we'd have time to regain our connection. We'd have time.



## A Blackbird's Lunchbreak

(after Wallace Stevens' "13 Ways of  
Looking at a Blackbird")

Maria Robins-Somerville

I.

If your bed was made of pizza  
would you sleep on the cheese side  
or the crust side?

When I was small

I'd imagine my bed a boat  
sometimes I still imagine it.

II

*Splinter taught them to be ninja teens (He's a radical rat!)  
Leonardo leads, Donatello does machines (That's a fact, Jack!)  
Raphael is cool but crude (Gimme a break!)  
Michaelangelo is a party dude (Party!)  
(If you get this, A+)*

Their weird green muscles always scared me  
and still kind of do.

III

Pizza was one dollar and so good  
those 2 brothers on St. Marks  
always cut me a hot slice.

I consider asking them,  
"What is the first place you knew to come alive at night?"

IV

Me and you  
are one.  
Me and you and a pizza  
are one.

You and me are just two,  
there's nothing else.  
Sometimes you and me are hungry  
and we don't know it  
or there's just nothing we can do.

V

Sometimes I just want to be the table  
that holds pizza for people to eat.  
Is that too much to ask?

I promise I have never used a coaster  
and I am fine with that

VI

A man on the street holds up his fingers  
to form a triangle (he thinks he's being vulgar).  
I see pizza

I knew I had become a woman  
when a truck driver catcalled  
my mother and me in the same breath.

VII

If you say that my sister and I  
are cut from the same cloth  
I will cut you from your cloth-y skin.

But if you say we are cut from the same pizza  
I might let you buy me a slice and then some.

I'm not this vicious  
nor that easy.

VIII  
Nothing but the boys in their white t-shirts  
spreading sauce with their workboy hands  
and humming.

It's like this one moment  
where DiCaprio is Romeo.  
He screams, "I DEFY YOU STARS"  
and his Hawaiian shirt falls open  
like magic

IX  
Amidst the swirling air on top  
of hot coffee  
and the frothy angel-heads of beer  
pizza grease, I choose you

We climbed upturned lifeguard chairs, bunk beds  
& trees, rode roller coasters, rose crests of waves,  
got good grades, my dad's shoulders & stepstools  
didn't get high til much later

X  
Call it sacrilege, but I plan on forgetting Christmas this year  
string up lights by cheese strands around that holy triangle  
On Friday I had a cheeseburger and two pieces of pepperoni  
pizza  
shabbat shalom & baruch hashem

When their teenage daughter left lights up all year  
they hoped she was waiting to let God in.

XI  
When the moon hits the sky  
propose with an open pizza box  
No ring please  
that stupid plastic table is enough

or just tell him I would rather have  
a cool geode to use as a paperweight  
all purple and crystalline  
dripping in oregano oil

XII  
Good thing roulette wheels are not pizzas  
or else I would have a gambling problem'

Oh, but what I'd give  
to be sticky with salt  
barefoot in an arcade  
pulling tickets from the mouth  
of some skee ball machine

XIII  
Everywhere I look I see signs  
FREE PIZZA

I say,  
"unchain me now"

## a stranger

Kara Mullison

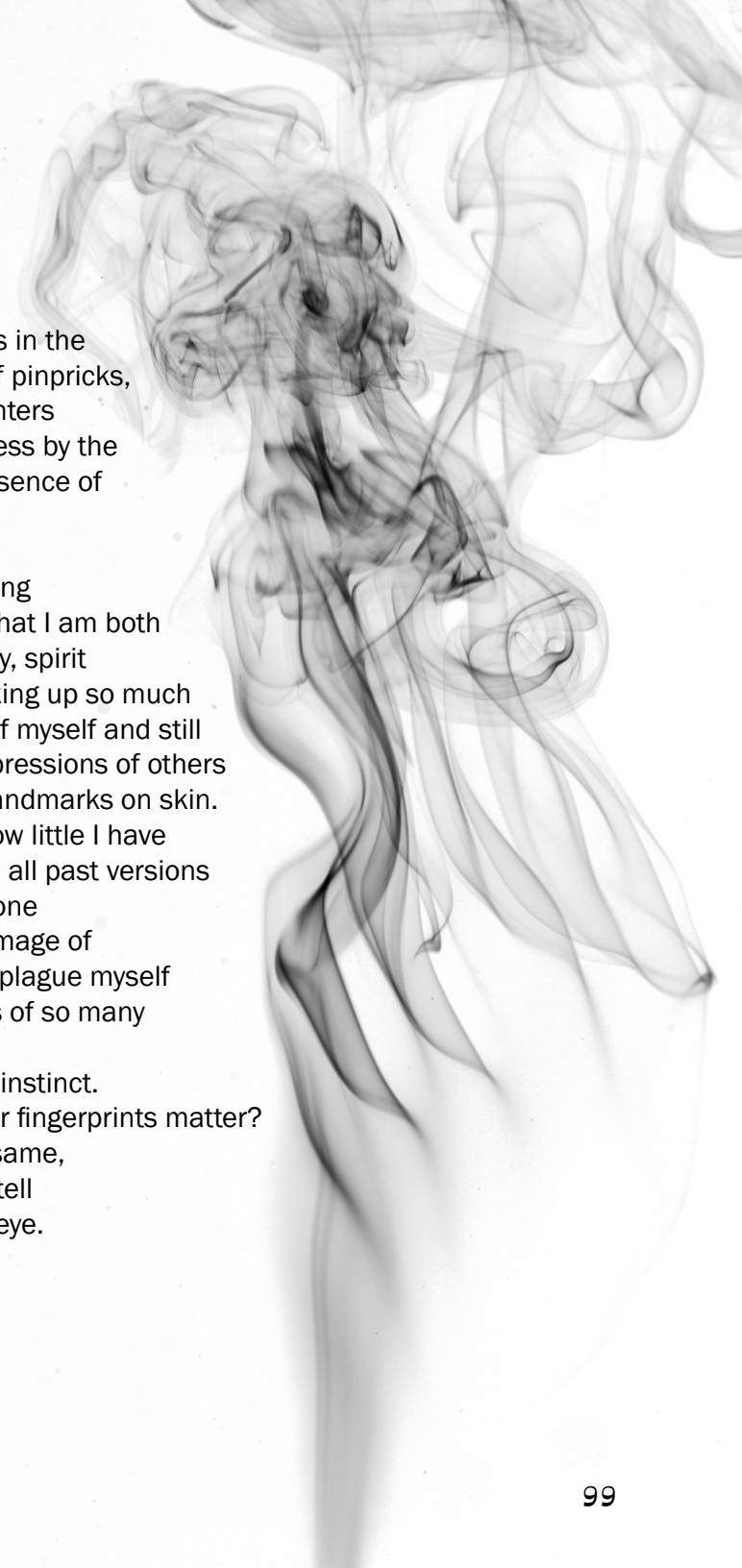
a stranger is smoking a cigarette, leaning out the window of the house in which my grandparents raised my father fifty years ago. the stranger's elbows sweat against the chipped paint of the sill. the stranger's lungs breathe smoke into the warmth of the night, where my father glimpsed the world in his formative years. the yellow slats of the siding crumble into 2015, and the ghosts of my grandparents -

but my grandparents are alive and well two hours north of here, and my father is safe forty five minutes east, and here I am kicking at green pieces of wine bottles glowing like catseye under the sodium light. I am walking home, caught in a contemplation of the space I am occupying, and whether I could say it is the same space in which my grandparents undertook their movements, so many decades before. I am passing through, thinking about what it means for the soil itself, that my grandparents once tread it with their young feet. I am watching smoke slither up into the darkness, wondering whether the earth below was made valuable through those fleeting moments of contact, and whether it happened then or it happens now - and maybe everything is an artifact and so everything is simply this,

the negative  
space of a surface  
where an array of  
ghostly bodies agreed  
to mark a boundary.

the value comes in the  
accumulation of pinpricks,  
careless encounters  
rendered priceless by the  
subsequent absence of  
that touch.

so I am wondering  
what it means that I am both  
person and body, spirit  
and artifact, taking up so much  
space outside of myself and still  
carrying the impressions of others  
like historical landmarks on skin.  
I am learning how little I have  
in common with all past versions  
of myself, let alone  
this perceived image of  
ancestors, yet I plague myself  
with apparitions of so many  
imagined pasts.  
a masturbatory instinct.  
do the particular fingerprints matter?  
no two are the same,  
but you cannot tell  
with the naked eye.



## shapes I found in the clouds

Esha Biswas

1. the twang of a new banjo being molded into tune.  
(we've been waiting)  
(sharp flats, flat sharps)
1. the strength of a million suns.  
(temporary white static)  
(hot blindness)
1. the sting from an unexpected paper cut.  
(zingggg)  
(baby humans scream loudest)
1. the tastes of chocolate, cilantro, and licorice.  
(separate)  
(yet together)
1. the speed of love.  
(infinite light years per millisecond)  
(we thought light was fast)
1. the touch of blue damselfly on bare ankle.  
(nerves whisper)  
(tingle)
1. the possibility that demons exist.  
(one burst out of my back in december)  
(left a scar)
1. the thought that angels exist as well.  
(i think one kissed me in my sleep)  
(left a scar)
1. the flavor of uncertainty.  
(a rare brand of sweet)  
(aftertaste like honey wine)
1. the reminder that time existed before it was invented  
(blowing with breezes)  
(fading into blue)

## Dimensions

Lauren Stachew

We lay under freshly-rained sky,  
Limbs splayed over the damp earth.  
You are telling me that our planets orbit around our sun  
Because they obey the bend in space  
Its heavy fire creates.

Imagine me – a tiny worm,  
Inching across paper – my flat world.  
Oblivious that *flat* could really mean  
*Ignorant*.  
You could reach down and peel me from the surface –  
Your fingers like pale circles to me –  
And twirl me through a dimension I cannot perceive.

“That’s what it’s like,” you say,  
For us in the third to image the fourth.  
Where their cubes, unfolded, flattened,  
Still swallow sides inside sides.  
Where their faces can look at our faces and see all angles at once –  
A mess of nostrils and lips and earlobes.

I look at the sky and stare at the blankness –  
Lingering drops of grey trailing eastward –  
But I know that blank space is like spinning noise on paper, creased,  
Bending and unbending to the pulses of a realm beyond one  
My own limbs can understand.

## Plane to Newhome

Paul Mayer

nuggets of light. seat  
4A snores great multitudes  
of air, on ice, in the sky  
a burnt radius of human influence skates below

sphere of love come sooner still  
'til I've tilled my corn  
until harvest's won, until you  
tell me but ever so gently to

taste you in stages  
lick every doomed orifice  
extracting the biblical form  
beyond doors of expectation  
participle of reason ex  
plain, and simple, why  
I've got two more tries  
than all the tired lovelies  
rosemary grandmothers, black lungs strung too far  
split reasoning of pleated two-tone heart  
Jefferson, the continental breakfast of manifest destiny  
tests the tea, Boston can't wait to repudiate

hours spent not doing right by me,  
by my family, by any rational soul  
but lowering into familiar cowers, familial

tower toppling slowly into esoteric limbo my  
mother cries in the car and hits the wheel I  
paralyze and internal catalyst splits wisdom thick he  
has a problem we all do the we was a see-saw, the problem  
the world was wasted on wishes fathomed bleakly by the three  
...we

and the more important four age really is  
a pain in my fine ass

master of arts? fine  
master of farts? mine  
master of marts? shine  
master of starts? whines

fuck a life coach  
moved a seat back to  
redistribute weight

I wish I could do that in my head sometimes  
take parcels marked mimicry and mock them  
move to front replace with old recognition  
Jordan Liu and the 10:52  
18A to BTC, how nice to see you egg!  
entropy lifting shades to hark the hearing, hubble heroes

egg entropy egg entropy finally

a practicum I can get behind



## Vacant

### Cammi e Finch

when the mailman came,  
i hid around the bathroom door,  
gauging the day's content  
on the heft of the bundle  
shoved through the slot

when the jehovahs came  
and stood side by side on my  
wedding cake doorstep,  
i lingered upstairs,  
witnessing their steadfast  
presence from above

when the shovelers came  
and smeared their frostbit  
favors among my doorbell,  
I pressed myself flat to  
the back of the door and  
waited for the wind to whistle  
them to warmth.

then you came, waited,  
never a ring, never a knock.  
there you watched me, alive  
in my house, you watched me  
take an ignorant breath.  
i never even thought  
to pretend  
i'd gone out for the day



## The Cabin

Katie Irani

Being north is an uncomfortable reminder of how much we depend on to survive. Up at the log cabin there isn't anything to occupy the mind. We're too over-stimulated. Cabin is couch to television to fridge to coffeemaker back to couch. I'm so blank I don't even feel like reading. Maybe I'll enjoy the cabin more when I'm older. Everything feels at stake now, but just wait—they tell me—it gets even worse. Now it is not as simple as physically removing yourself. Your shit can follow you across every border, across every ocean. The cabin used to be fun because we didn't know any better and spent the entire time drunk on cheap whisky or high in front of the television. I used to pass the time alone upstairs touching myself to sleep but I don't feel anything anymore in the stale rooms with mouse pellets in the lining of my pillow. Now that you're gone it feels wrong to get fucked alone. Even during that time I think I was missing the point of the log cabin. During the winter it's beautiful; ice on the water for a hundred feet out and maybe you'll see a coyote walking across. I enjoy the mornings because I stay wrapped up in blankets while coffee steams my nostrils and watch small, dark figures walk through snow and frozen leaves to get to the ice. If I'm lucky someone has started a fire.



Blossom and Be(e)

August Sivec

Let your stalk burn — as the ends of appendages flutter and shake: you are the bee and it's buzzing. Incorporate troughs to feed and crests to seek, fallen pollen is, too, symbolic; allow the last bite(s) of information and kinky procreation to be taken from your budding surface, as you slowly shrivel and shudder back to the earth, having shared, with a raised voice, your very best guess with your own personal void, having populated and seeded for all your flavor and greying color could muster; we may pass.

## Beautiful Objects

### Lauren Stachew

They were walking back from church when they first saw the angels on the side of the road – drenched and muddied in the lake – or rather, what was left of the lake. Little, ornately painted figurines, their bellies pink like salmon, lying head-first in a mass grave. Edith stood behind her mother, watching the pained faces of the townspeople as they began to weep, trudging through the mud to gather the treasures in their arms and wiping the faces of the angels clean from the mud with the sleeves of their tunics. Edith looked up at her mother and tugged at her skirt, but she didn't budge. She remained silent, staring out into the lake puddle. She was clutching one hand onto the other like Edith knows she does when she's nervous or scared. She did it the night they waited up for their brother to come home (and he never did,) and the day their cow got real sick and almost died, (but she didn't.) All of those times, her mother had her hands clutched together just like she does now. She held her hands tightly, and the tips of her fingers turned white.

Edith peered closer at each of the angels cradled in the dirtied cloths. Their faces were simple. Two black dots for eyes, a pointed, pale nose, and a single stroke of red for a mouth. Their skirts were shaped into ripples by the four craters that were pressed into their sides with fingerprints, glossed with bright orange. The fingers folded together on their hands were implied with thin, black lines, and their arms wore rows of turquoise curves like waves, elbows flowing into pointed, triangle wings marked with white shapes like fish scales, as though these angels bore fins instead of wings.

The lake puddle used to have a name, but Edith never knew it. Back when her mother and father were as old as her and her sister, it had a shore and a beach, and didn't look so burdensome on the side of the road. She knew it started to dry up some years ago before she was born, and she supposed that it had decided, about three-quarters of the way through its decay, to stop. Ever since then, it remained as it was: soggy, filthy, blistering sludge.

She watched as one of the old folks hobbled towards her and her mother from the puddle – her snarled, gray hair in knots, and dusty clothes in tatters – cradling one of the angels in her hands. Her left arm was exposed from the tears in her sleeve, where her skin was pierced with tiny raised bumps. “Bee stings,” her mother had said to her the week before, while they were preparing supper in the kitchen. “Every morning that woman wanders out into the woods and shoves her hand elbow-deep into fallen nests to gather honey. I know some people who tried to stop her at first, but she kept on going – still does. Those bees tear at her arm like dogs. Your father was out in the woods not too long ago and saw her, hunched over by a tree, fishing out handfuls of honey into a bucket. Said it was like she didn't even notice the bees were there.... I don't want you running out in those woods, Edith.” She told her she wouldn't – she didn't want anything to do with that woman.

The bee woman mumbled something incoherent and stuck her hands out in front of Edith. She looked up at her mother, who smiled warmly and said, “It's alright. Take it.” She reached out and picked up the angel from her hands. It felt hollow and reeked like the mud. The bee woman's big, droopy mouth fell agape into a toothless smile. She turned on her heel, stumping back towards the mud, and threw her hands up to the sky, wild eyes, sputtering out indecipherable sounds.

She didn't say anything to her mother. She stared at the angel's face, two pitch black dots staring back at her. She blinked at it, but it didn't blink back.

Her little sister threw a fit when they returned home. She hollered throughout the house for a good twenty minutes about how it wasn't fair that Edith got one of the pretty angels and she didn't.

"Here, you can have it," she said, handing her the figurine. "I don't want it." She spit in her face and hurled it at her stomach.

"No! I don't want *yours!* I want mine!" She burst into tears and ran off into the attic. Her father came in silently from the kitchen and picked up the angel from the floor. He gave it a quizzical look.

"Got some funny eyes, don't it?" She nodded. He walked over to the fireplace and set the angel on the mantle next to her mother's crocheted cross.

The angels in the mud weren't as strange as what had happened a week later. Night fell, morning rose, and on that day everyone in town began to offer away their belongings to the angels, perched high up on the mantels of the fireplaces. Lamb stew, painted wood bead necklaces, silk scarves, and porcelain china cups. Edith overheard people bragging at church, naming off all the beautiful objects they laid out onto their dining tables for the angels. Their eyes were wide with pleasure – the expressions on their faces sculpted in a permanent, disturbing awe.

The odd thing is that those objects disappeared. The folks would make their offering, and next morning it would be gone – completely vanished – they would say. These angels with fins instead of wings, now worthy of consuming another's possessions, gnawed at the beads and the cups in their flat, pink stomachs. The delight on the faces of those that she watched buried a sick feeling inside of her

Her mother and father were unfortunately afflicted, too, by the gift-giving. Edith woke up each morning to see them kneeling in front of the mantle, always a different object held in their hands. Her concern didn't settle in until the day she saw her mother holding her grandmother's ivory jewelry box with the painted red elephants to the angel's dotted eyes. Her grandfather had it specially made for her as a wedding gift. She remembered when her grandmother died, her mother had sworn that box was the last thing she'd ever rid of, even more than the family rosary. Edith stepped back behind the door and watched them through the gap in between the wall. They stood up after a few minutes and set the box on the table. She waited for them to leave, then approached the box. She reached out to lay a finger on the lid, when she heard her mother hiss, "Edith! That is for the *ange!* Don't you touch it!" She rushed over to her and swatted hard at her hand. Edith could hear her growling irritably under her breath.

As expected, the box was gone when she woke the next morning. She asked her mother about it, but she replied that she didn't know where it had disappeared to. Her face showed no remorse. Edith shifted her glance to the angel, its praying hands folded proudly over its stomach, still flat and pink, but guilty. Its quiet face lay unchanged, but she knew.

Edith and her mother stepped into total uproar upon laying foot in the church that following Sunday. Among the commotion of stressed, chaotic shouting, Edith overheard a woman say that a young couple living in the bungalows near the river had offered their angel their newborn baby girl. The loss of necklaces, scarves, and tiny cups didn't bother anyone, but the loss of a human life, let alone a baby, was apparently enough to unleash a clarity over everyone that what they had been doing was wrong. The townspeople quieted down and settled the matter: everyone was to go home at once, remove their angel from their mantles, and

return them to where they were found. Edith and her mother fled home along with the rest of the town, and without a word to anyone, her mother burst into the house and snatched the angel from its venerated spot like a feral cat. Her little sister jumped from the couch and trotted after them, wailing, "No, Mama! Don't throw that pretty angel away!"



The town gathered around the lake puddle with the angels gripped in their hands. The voice of an older man called out, "Now!" and Edith watched silently from behind her mother's skirt, holding her sister's tear-soaked hand, as everyone flung the angels back into the mud. The bee woman stood silently among the crowd.

Within three days, the lake puddle had buried the angels within a massive dome of dirt. The lake was a lake, then a puddle, and now a mound. No one was reckless enough to dig and see if the angels were still there. The mound concealed the sight of anything that might be hidden beneath, and that was enough.

But the mound was angry, perhaps, at its neglect by the townspeople, for on the third Sunday following its arrival, the townspeople quietly disappeared. The mound, previously puddle, previously lake, now a slightly larger mound, was certainly involved, Edith thought. She was left behind in the consumption, along with the bee woman, who stomped circles around the mound, punching hard at its sides.

Edith accompanied her to the woods the next morning to help in the honey-gathering. She squatted, holding the bucket between her knees, far enough away so that the bees didn't sting her. The bee woman whittled out a hole big enough for her arm with a sharpened stick, and reached inside. Edith could hear the soft, low roar of swarming as the bee woman swam her fingers through the hive. Once she gathered up a handful in her fist, she

crawled on her knees over to Edith and sat her arm in the bucket, scraping off the honey with her other hand. Sometimes the bees would get stuck in the honey on her arm, their last moments spent wriggling desperately in the sticky trap. She didn't pay attention to them. She merely scraped them off of her arm, right into the bucket. When the bee woman wasn't looking, Edith tried to scoop them out with a stick, even though they were usually already dead. Their bodies, encapsulated in the glimmering, golden tar, looked like perfect fossils, the curvature of their wings remained untouched and immaculate. Wings, not fins, built for the air and not the sea, shining in their yellowy sweetness, but useless in their too-heavy weight and their death. Too bad, Edith thought. She looked up at the bee woman, who was staring back at her, arms elbow-deep in the bucket.

"They can't fly away," Edith said, and held up the dead creature in her palm. "They're stuck here." The bee woman nodded her head and, yes, she blinked. Edith could be sure of that.



## Mindfulness

Cammi e Finch

inhale

...

open your thighs wide  
like the pages of a book  
yawning their language  
into your head

drink in the stillness  
lift your spine taller  
and  
prepare for the backbend  
(you are stronger than  
you think you are)

envision the full moon  
washing the back  
of your head with its  
silken fingers, dripping  
its nectar down your  
vertebrae until your  
seat is warm in thought

align your sacrum  
to this intelligent  
edge of backlit  
realism (it's magical)

breathe deeply into  
the beauty of  
asymmetry and  
savor your perfect  
state of being  
vulnerable  
(because i do).

be aware of your breath: think —  
and then let it pull,  
like an unknitted cloud,  
away  
with your  
...  
exhale.



when I was consecrated

Alex Kime

insomnia was a wanton god knocking  
and thus the guest of honor the moment he walked in,  
hands running over everything. he declined my offer  
to hang his jacket but accepted the drink & the glass  
it came with, and even the pitcher too.  
already he said he loved me, and thus  
already he demanded my throat  
as an offering.

I say already. I mean  
five lifetimes. I mean he was vapor  
and thus everywhere around me, and now  
I'm singing colors into my hair at all hours  
until it is a crown, creation ritual  
barely satiating the divine hunger  
to destroy.

## Hydrophobia

Keighan Glynn

Venus  
was born from seafoam  
so I avoid the beach  
out of the fear  
that she will decide  
she wants a homecoming  
and will see me  
and greet me  
in her sea-salt embrace  
like the old friends  
that we are not  
and I will remember you  
and the misery  
    & the mishaps  
        & the maybes  
and maybe rabid dogs  
are right to fear water  
enlightened by madness  
they realize it's her mother  
and from it she will return  
a tsunami in her eyes  
a question  
frothing on her lips  
about a certain apple  
and thirsty dogs of war  
remember Troy  
all too well.

## Cutting Yourself Unlimited Slack

Molly Reitman

So you fucked up,  
lit the color copier on fire and didn't get invited to the  
office christmas party,  
so you sat down in a puddle of your own warm  
urine and let the heavy stink seep up your jeans,  
so you left home without your  
bandana-stick suitcase, without your  
"today's gonna be a great day" face,  
without the rings that keep your punch  
pointy,  
so you sliced open your thumb dicing up  
days on the calendar, re-calculating months into  
weeks and days into pitiful moments—  
so you let the band-aid on for too long and your  
flesh curdled underneath it into white soggy dough,  
into three week old chicken sitting on the floor of an  
unplugged mini fridge,  
so you drank a whole liter of Coke,  
savored the sting of each sticky bubble's attack on your enamel,  
let your liver get polished like a dirty penny,  
so you got worried about hoping and stopped,  
so you got worried about stopping and hoped,  
so you flipped all your oxygen for carbon dioxide,  
figured you wouldn't need it later—  
so you sat, unmoving, and let today enter each one of your  
molecules and sit its heavy ass on each one of your  
hardworking mitochondria,  
so you tried,  
so you really tried—  
who cares? We pick ourselves up and go to  
Denny's. We make it past the mailbox.  
Who cares?





## Elliot Rodger's Retribution

Kaitlin Bonfiglio

is what he named it, like a tragic modern opera.  
He sang his part and enunciated every word like  
“*slut*” and “*slaughter*” and “*slay*” and earlier,  
that morning, he’d done his makeup. Brushed his hair.  
Washed his face. Prepared himself for the camera.  
All eyes on the killer – after the filming, he knew  
we would flock to him like never before. Yes,  
he thought, then they will see how beautiful I am.  
*(Father, he cried. Father.)*  
He handed her gold, and when she refused,  
he cracked, morphed, writhed, like a crushed insect.  
No face is more twisted than one tasting blood.  
He saw her split forehead before he’d even  
bought the gun. In fact, it was about the time  
he started having such exhilarating fantasies –  
women salivating over his genitals –  
women dead – that he opened up his laptop  
and saw there were others like him.  
*(Father. Daddy. Come play with me!)*  
Elliot Rodger watched the men on television,  
for whom pretty blonde women are prize,  
and pruned his feathers in preparation.  
No one told him that God is not human.  
Instead, they told him: You deserve it.

## Undone

Clare Higgins

I am compelled to report  
the peachy amber of her hips  
and their sway in the gilded spotlight.  
The way her abdomen curled to muscle there,  
the willowy give of her arms,  
the bitter taste to her prose.

I do not speak for falling in love.

I speak for falling for art’s sake,  
and there stood muse, onstage, firm and infirm  
cursing and killing—but the languish within  
brought her closer to edge. Stars  
danced for her, dolls craving her feminist  
vows, women wanting to love women,  
to leave and become, to pray to the Amazons.

A wife unsure of out-speaking might leave,  
make love to her husband  
and dream she is riding a centaur,  
man turned to beast before her eyes,  
world come all undone.

I speak for love’s practice  
of knowing the unknown,  
body speaking before conscience,  
casting lines into sea before we’ve learned to bait.  
For entangled legs and hands that kiss  
though no one has taught them.  
Somehow we learn what is fearsome.  
What steals our breath, what keeps us whole.

Somehow we are drawn, somehow we unravel.

## 14 Truths, 11 Lies

Molly Reitman

I burn my tongue on everything hot I can find,  
I've had biceps since I was five,  
I got your email but I won't let you know that  
I know that you know I haven't read it,  
I stay up til 6 a.m. every night,  
I burn down an Arby's once a month, just because,  
I itch all over but especially behind my knees,  
I cum loudly like an exorcism,  
I cut up my shirts in my childhood bedroom and  
use the old cloth for sweat bands,  
I run eighteen miles to work every morning and  
at work I write down earthquake tremors on a graph,  
I fucked over my high school GPA as a  
personal attack on Microsoft Excel,  
I love bleeding but it's so hard,  
I fantasize about lying in a hospital bed because  
I never have,  
I fill up my bathtub with Coca Cola on Mondays and  
Pepsi Cola on Fridays just to make sure my pores  
know the difference,  
I ate Youtube,

swallowed it all up,  
I threw rocks and ice chunks at your window in an  
attempt to tell you I loved you,  
thank god you weren't sleeping there that night,  
I set sixteen alarms every night and  
curse every one of them,  
I try heroin in a dream and I'm  
great at it,  
I try cunnilingus in a dream and I'm  
new at it,  
I try strangling the rooster but the landlord sees me  
and gives me a look so  
I put that on my to-do list for the weekend,  
I type and type and type but mostly I just  
look and look and click and look,  
I cut my hair twice a day but only where no one can see,  
I brush my teeth never, and once on holidays,  
I use my burnt-up tongue to pull old food from a  
hole in the back of my mouth,  
I regurgitate often, and,  
joyously.

## space is color is time

Freida Blostein

the freezer door, ajar, in harder  
light flaws my fathers features softer  
opener, and from it inhales ice cream  
he must be high, weed blurred up  
acoustic guitar – grateful  
dead, late on a Saturday, easy ears  
or early Sunday

my father lives on twelve mile.

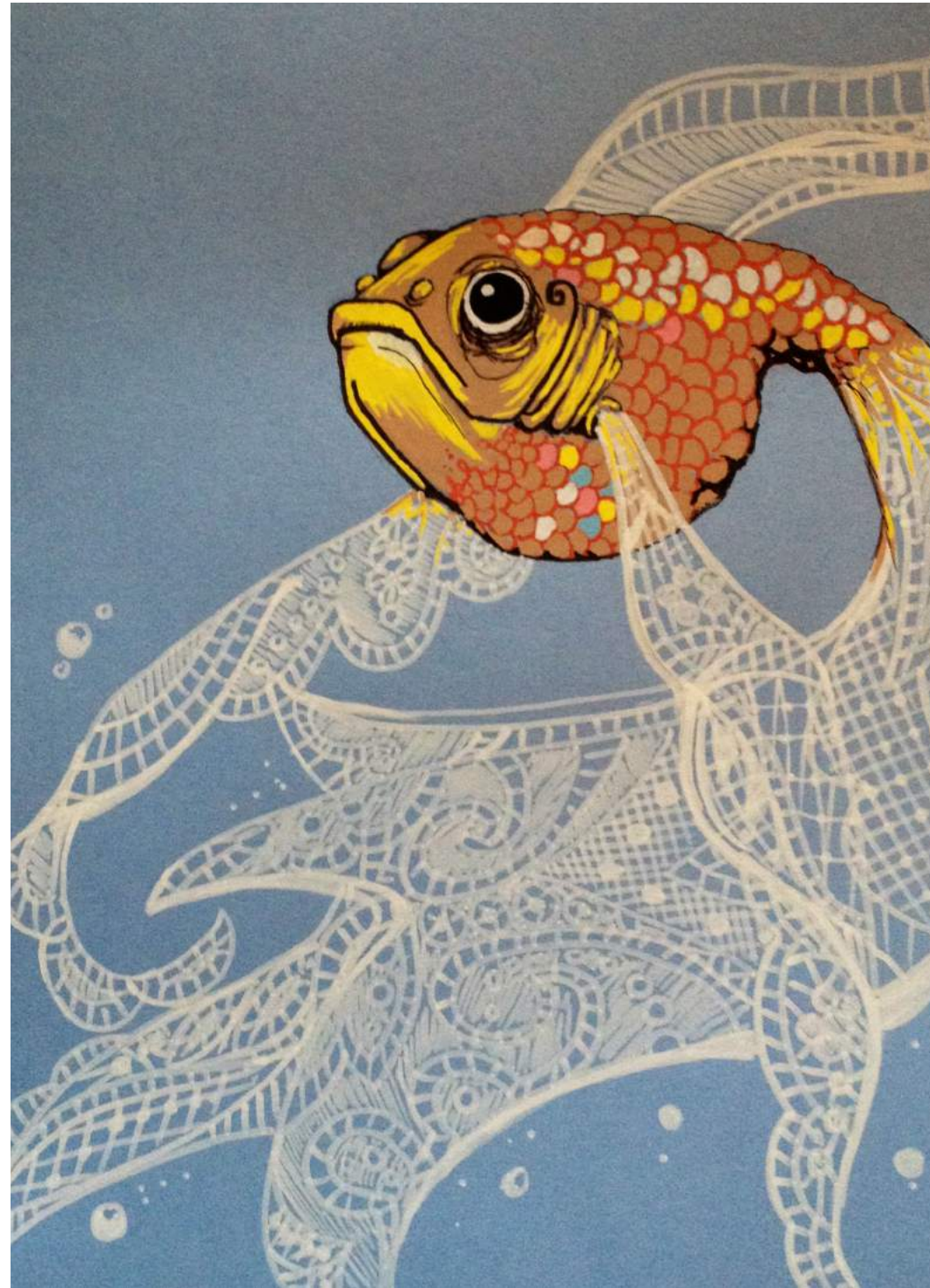
so

if we down a street named woodward.  
few miles that stretch farther  
my father, his father, were we black  
and 8 miled, mild cigars late on a Saturday,  
early Sunday few miles –  
many years in prison different,

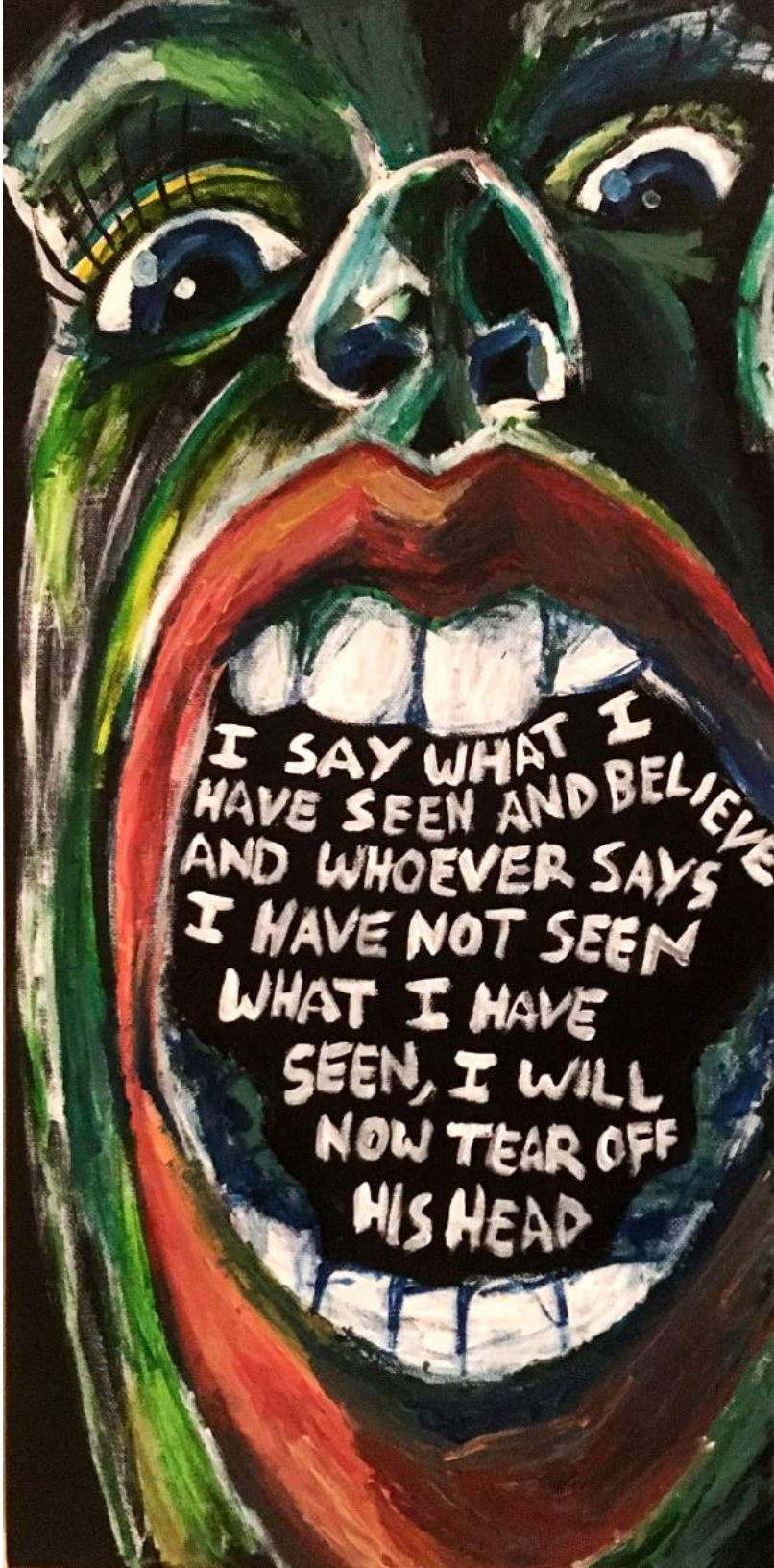
my father lives on 12

but, just so, drive these few miles  
with me, know I speed, heavy quick  
but never stopped, know I speed  
he speed, they speed, young men  
in wolves clothing, or just black sheep, or just  
black, so I speed – they stop, the  
light flashing, in harder light flaws  
each features opener, and the weed  
they have means something different

because my father lives on twelve mile,  
& the physics of law says  
space is color is time  
in prison.



Maeve Pascoe



## Yellow Light Fighter

Kaitlin Bonfiglio

orange peel chewer,  
cookie dough consumer,  
nightmare slayer: you  
will not be ambushed  
by laugh track laughter,  
last-page-readers,  
fingernail clippers.  
push on, Yellow Light  
Fighter, on through  
the intersection glazed  
with grass and glass  
shards. you eye-roller,  
Coke drinker, multiple lover,  
radio warrior, your battle  
against the sunlight  
is relentless. slow not.  
brake not: at night,  
the lights flash gold  
for their queen, the  
weightlifter, knot maker,  
pencil crusher.  
carry on, Yellow Light  
Fighter. the road  
will echo your laugh.

Quoted from *The Haight-Ashbury Diggers*, 1969  
Kara Mullison

Excerpt from: Deranged Radical Feminist  
Brutally Attacks Well-Wisher

Winner of the 2016 Roy W. Cowper Fellowship

Skyler Tarnas

Interrogation Room One was small, square, and gloomy. A dim lightbulb hung despondently from the ceiling above the sole wooden table, flickering at random intervals. It wasn't one of the officer's favorite rooms, but it tended to be effective. Only for serious cases, usually. And apparently this woman, sitting confidently on one side of the table, was a serious case.

"State your name, please."

"Jennifer Page."

"Do you know why you're here, Miss Page?"

Jennifer's mouth twisted unpleasantly. She was six feet tall and athletic, her wiry black hair pulled into a disconcertingly tight ponytail. Her stiff, aggressive features (not unattractive to the officer, but certainly not attractive enough to sway his sympathies) were accentuated by her posture; she sat in the hard-backed chair as though she was the one giving the interview. "Because I beat somebody up?" she offered.

"'Assault' is the preferred term, Miss Page."

"All right, then; because I assaulted somebody. Is he okay?"

"Do you care?"

"Sure," said Jennifer. "I'd rather not have killed anybody."

"This is serious, Miss Page." The officer leaned forward across the table. "I'm not sure you realize how serious it is."

"Sure. What more can I tell you?"

"You can walk me through the day, Miss Page. Explain. I'm here to help."

"Sure. I love people who are here to help."

~~~~~

The officer watched with crinkled nose as Bradley Valentine scratched at his bandages. The room in the hospital was bright white and clinically clean, a stark contrast to the mess of a man lying under freshly changed sheets. The officer took note of the bruises, the purpled face, and the limbs tugged in separate directions by elevated casts. All this damage by one woman.

"Do I really have to answer questions right now?"

"It's just a formality, Mr. Valentine." The officer took a seat by the bed. "We want you to walk us through the day, if you feel up to it."

"I guess." Bradley Valentine was blonde with wide blue eyes, which made him look even younger than his twenty-four years. The officer's sympathy swelled, much like Mr. Valentine's right eye. "I just want it clear that I didn't do anything wrong," Bradley continued. "I'm a nice guy. I don't get it at all."

"I don't doubt you."

"I think she must be crazy," he said. "That's the only explanation I can think of."

~~~~~

"Name, please?"

"Steel. Henry Steel."

"Cooperate, Mr. Steel, and this will go easily. We don't want to cause any more undue stress."

"It's a little late for that." Henry Steel was a thick man with a sheen of sweat over his balding head. His bushy mustache was ungroomed and contained more food than could usually be found in facial hair. In Interrogation Room Two, only slightly better lit than Jennifer's, he would have looked more at home as a suspect than a witness.

"I'll probably get fired for this, you know. Doesn't look good on me. As if it was my fault."

"If you're blameless, you're blameless. We just need a

witness's account."

"Whatever. I'm a nice guy, I wanna be helpful." Steel's hunched posture and folded arms said otherwise. "But you should be talking to that kid Randall."

~~~~~

"Randall."

"Randall what?"

"Randall Trotsky."

"Age?"

"Twenty-one."

"Age?"

"Nineteen."

Randall Trotsky was not prepossessing to the officer. The kid was squat and slightly greasy, with beady, nervous eyes above a bulbous nose and a gray beanie over black, slick hair. His jeans and sweatshirt were factory-torn. One of those young people, the officer thought uncharitably, who spent too much money trying to look like they didn't have any.

"This isn't about the alcohol you had with you- though we *will* have to confiscate that."

"Yeah, yeah," muttered Randall Trotsky. He slid petulantly down in the stiff chair of Interrogation Room Three.

"You saw the assault."

"I saw the lady go berserk, yeah. But I didn't do anything."

"You didn't provoke her?"

"Hey, listen, I'm a nice guy. I'll tell you what happened. She went totally fucking nuts. I'm surprised the TV lady didn't tell you."

~~~~~

"Bennett. Shirley Bennett. I'm eager to help, officer. Doubtless you've heard of me?" She offered a manicured hand across the dingy table of Interrogation Room Four.

"Can't say I have."

"You *must* have seen my books in stores! And I'm sure you've seen me on television. You must culturally educate yourself, officer!"

"If it's all the same to you, Mrs. Bennett, I'd like to get your statement and move on. We have a lot of witnesses to go through."

"My dear officer!" Shirley Bennett was blonde and heavily made up- definitely out of place in the cobwebby space. The officer guessed she was a good ten years older than she looked. Her accentuated lips had a habit of puckering in outrage. "I am a *published author!* And a pundit! My opinion is invaluable, and I should hope you would know that! I will send you one of my books, you must have at least seen the advertisements- '*Feminism? More Like Lesbianism, Am I Right, Ladies?*' I'm aiming for the Pulitzer."

~~~~~

"There was construction outside my building," said Jennifer Page tonelessly, twisting one long strand of hair around her finger. "That's why I woke up so early. They're doing renovations on a restaurant, but for some goddamn reason they always start the drilling at 5:30 in the morning. I tried to complain, but the manager just laughed. The workers are the *worst*."

~~~~~

"I don't control when we start the drilling," said Henry Steel. "I just follow orders. What is this, a civil suit? I can't help it the little lady got upset about our schedule."

~~~~~

"You have to understand, it's been going on for weeks," said Jennifer. "And I keep calling, and nothing. Even on the weekends, when I'm supposed to be sleeping! I mean, it was 5:30; I wasn't exactly thinking straight- I took the elevator down and went right up to guy in charge and *begged* him to stop."

~~~~~

"Coming up to me in her pajamas, I knew she was crazy," said Henry Steel. "Screaming about her work schedule and how she needed to sleep a few more hours- What about *my* work schedule? Totally inconsiderate."

"What did you say to her?"

"I was polite but firm. I told her she had to get out of our

way.”

~~~~~

“He *hooted* at me,” said Jennifer, a flush creeping into her cheeks. “All of the workers did. That’s when I realized I was still in my pajamas, and I ran back inside. I mean, they always yell at me on my way to work, the typical stuff, telling me to smile and less pleasant things.”

“What’s so bad about asking you to smile?”

Jennifer stare became suddenly withering. The officer nearly recoiled, but caught himself.

“If you don’t mind, officer,” Jennifer said coldly, “I’m not going to answer that question. I went back up to my room and covered my head with a pillow for an hour before I had to get ready for work.”

“And where do you work?”

“Mullen Advertising. It’s a few blocks from my apartment. I’ve worked my way up from a secretarial position to art director.”

“And you live in the same building as Bradley Valentine, your co-worker?”

“I guess I do. Did? Whatever.”

“You were acquainted with him?”

“I guess,” said Jennifer. “He’s another art director. We, like, we knew each other. I didn’t dislike him or anything. I thought he was kind of dumb, but that’s all.”

~~~~~

“I woke up to construction,” said Bradley Valentine, his blue eyes widening even further. “Terrible. And it was the third morning in a row. I mean, I’m usually an early riser, but it was ridiculous. I took the elevator down to talk to the foreman.”

“And what did he say?”

“He told me very politely that he couldn’t stop just because I said so. I wasn’t too happy about that, so I went back inside and phoned my dad- he’s a lawyer- and then he phoned them, and presto, the noise stopped!” Bradley seemed like he wanted to clap childishly, but the casts prevented him. He and the officer both grimaced.





## Every Hour, On the Hour

Tracy Scherdt

At night it melts then slides  
Down my walls  
Leaving a trail of history  
That maps itself out like  
A New York subway guide or  
The scar on my side from falling  
Backward into fifth grade

Fast asleep, its tongue still clicks  
Every hour, on the hour  
In a primal search

(As if we hadn't already  
Designed space helmets  
That keep Einstein's theories  
From munching on the better bits  
Of our minds)

We both prepare in the nighttime  
For the morning dew to fill up  
The jugs we left on the porch  
So that we may drink together  
And toast our companionship

But on the backside of  
A forethought, neither can forget  
The knife in the cupboard  
Wrapped in black velvet  
And boxed with a lock  
That loosens its grip daily

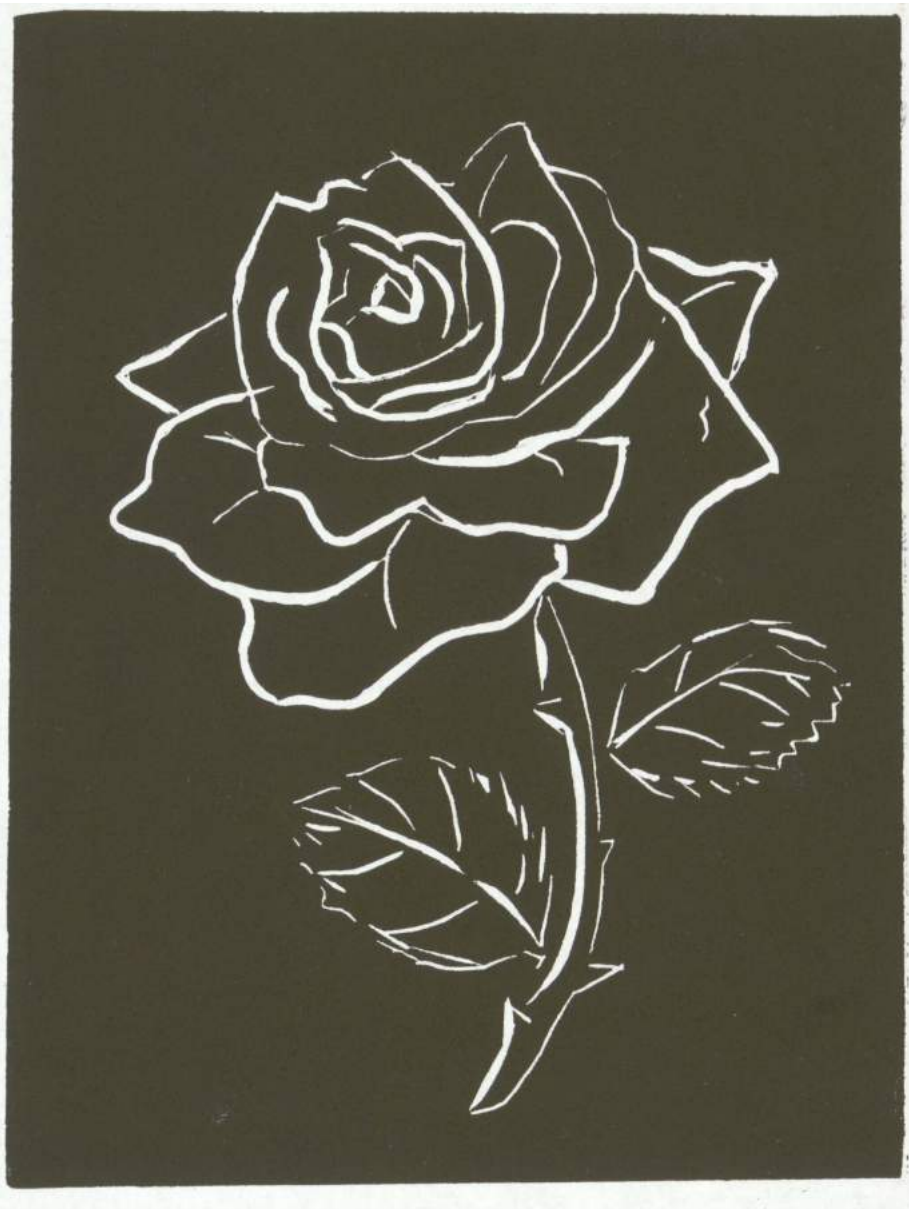
We drink the morning dew  
Warm in our ceramic mugs  
Knowingly rocking in concert  
As time plots to kill me



Miranda Hency

June is sitting on the cement in the  
Big Boy parking lot laughing with friends,  
gravel imprints on legs  
June is scratching bruised  
mosquito bites, speckled across skin  
June is slowly stumbling into  
disinterest  
June is licking black swamp  
raspberry ice cream  
and enjoying time alone  
June is being afraid of  
those big black bugs of the  
same name  
and aliens  
June is unhappy with feeble relationships  
and being unable to  
speak up  
June is touching pimples on greasy skin,  
leaving scabs browned over  
June is burning candles  
made for the winter time  
because it has the effect of that  
calm January stillness

June is not listening to the right music  
June is taking any kind of attention  
from boys and building it  
into self-esteem  
June is feeling uncomfortable  
and anxiety-ridden  
and wondering how therapy works  
June is singing too loudly  
along with the blasting car CD,  
leaving the speakers pulsing  
to the bass line of The Front Bottoms  
June is tripping over sandals  
that don't fit  
June is leaving everybody wondering



Rose  
AnneMarie Torresen

## When I Hear the Train I Think of You

Written in the style of "Sometimes the Way It Rains Reminds Me of You" by Colleen McElroy

Katie Irani

Around the same time each night I hear the stale bellow of the Amtrak retracing its steps back to rotting wood benches at the station each night passing the old caboose in the playground where we kissed you held my hand as I balanced on the tracks, my breath like mint chocolate chip that year was the Indian summer and I felt our warmth would never end

After a while we knew when the sound would come. Again and again I'd hear that that awful sound is nothing but a nuisance but with that ugly, blurry belt into dusk I knew you'd pick up the phone or be at my doorstep ready to begin again

Now I hear that sound and I think of you  
the days when that sound meant  
you were thinking of me too and my chocolate breath and my sweaty hands  
maybe you still think of me with the sound of the train  
there is comfort  
in the hollow sound that reminds me of  
the way you used to look at me with soft eyes and a soft mouth

## What We Return To In Memoriam

Tracy Scherdt

We stand by the places we stood before,  
With the idea that we'll grow to see  
The view differently,  
That our toes will be warmer here  
That we'll be changed for having left and come back.

"Come back to the table,"  
Crumbs still settling  
Into the heartlines of the wood grain, next  
To my father's hands, worn from a life of  
Construction, deconstruction,  
Nervous and twisting;  
Mother's are his counterpart—  
They dance with anxiousness,  
You twist while she twirls.  
I remember love like that.

That a dinner of chicken pot pie and green beans,  
A place of memory and fear,  
Can be left untouched by my brother, who  
Later reveled in the power of earthy stringy beings  
And of turning his back to me:  
Our own silent dance, learned.  
This moment is what I have of family,  
Before the sadness my father passed around,  
Like dinner rolls, warm and undercooked.

Maybe this was the worst of it.  
I can't remember those days clearly now,  
But you smiled and I shared mine with you, too.  
You finish the green on my plate  
And descend again.

Again to the place you keep coming back to.  
Your whole life, under your own shadow,  
And you swear you can't leave,  
And that here is what you are:

So what of there?  
Of the places you've felt anger,  
Of the skyscrapers rising in my mind,  
Of the people we've let leave  
When we'd rather they'd stay,  
Though  
Our lips never parted to plead.

There sounds like a good Here, Dad,  
I hope you can enjoy the view.

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Hoeb  
I love you and  
I might marry  
you. JFC

HELLO  
my name is

DAD



Your cholesterol will never see him coming.

