Featuring work by David McGlynn and an interview with Carl Phillips

Thin Air Magazine

Thin Air Magazine is published once yearly by Northern Arizona University. See website for submission guidelines.

Printed by NAU Printing Services
nau.edu/printing-services

Cover art "Driftwood #16. Camp Casey" by Bob Denst

ISBN # 978-1-4951-9477-1

thinairmagazine.org

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

Editorial Staff
2016

Letter From the Editor

Dear Readers,

We are so excited about this year's issue of *Thin Air Magazine*! We have stood on the shoulders of giants — last year's staff and those who came before — and learned so much along the way. Many thanks go to our readers and staff who volunteer so much time and energy to make this magazine beautiful; Nicole Walker, our faculty advisor for unending support and enthusiasm; to James Jay and Jesse Sensibar for literary support through the Narrow Chimney Reading Series, and financial support through many local fundraisers; to Diana Gabaldon, for your generous support to our magazine; to Karma Sushi, Martann's, and Chili's for the great fundraising opportunities; and finally, to the English Department, Graduate Student Government, and NAU Provost: your financial assistance guarantees that we have a magazine to print and the means to share this work with the writers and authors at the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) — and beyond!

On behalf of the 2016 editorial staff, thank you, and we hope you enjoy the magazine.

Laura Walker
Editor-In-Chief

Contents

Poetry

Fiction

Nonfiction

Visual Arts

David McGlynn

Featured Author

When David McGlynn was 26 years old, he got thrown out of the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. He maintains, to this day, that he did not do what casino security—three goons in all black flicking flashlights in his eyes—said he did, but he was outnumbered and caught off guard, and when the biggest of the goons grabbed him by the back of the shirt, he had no choice but the do as he was told. His feet barely touched the ground between the casino and parking lot. Thankfully, the goons let go once they were outside, and once David's friends caught up to him, they were ready leave anyway. I mean, who wants to hang around a joint like that? They took a taxi from the Hard Rock to the 4 Queens Casino, on Fremont Street, and gathered around a craps table. David hadn't played craps much before that weekend, but given the ordeal at the Hard Rock, he figured he'd give it a whirl. And that's when the magic happened. Everything he threw came up gold. He hit his numbers all night long, and staggered out of the casino as the sun was rising with more than $500 in his pocket. The wino across the table from him won more than $7,000. It was one of those nights that make you who you are.

Since then, he's tried to live up to the promise he glimpsed that fateful evening. He married, fathered two sons, secured long-term employment, published his work. Some of his stories and essays have appeared in magazines and literary journals, and he's seen two books into print. But whenever he's in the grocery store or the car wash or any place where coins tumble from a machine into a metal tray, he thinks of that night in Las Vegas, now many years ago, and wonders if he's still the same guy and, if not, whether he might one day be again.

The D Word

David McGlynn

The police cruiser slowed to a stop in front of our house, the lights flashing but the sirens quiet. I could see my neighbor, an old dude with stringy gray hair, sitting in the backseat. The officer shut off the lights and got out and opened the back door. When my neighbor stood up, I saw his chin was bleeding and he was holding his elbow. Another police vehicle pulled up, a mini-van this time, and from the back hatch the second officer removed my neighbor's mountain bike. The front wheel was so badly bent the officer had to stand the bike vertically on its back tire in order to roll it up the driveway.

My seven-year-old son, Hayden, was in the yard when the cops arrived. I went outside and stood with him. Together we watched the officer guide our neighbor to his front door. The old guy either had a hard time with the key or the door didn't want to give. When it finally opened, a gust of stale cigarette smoke wafted out, so pungent and powerful I could smell it across the street. It had been years since the house was aired.

The second officer leaned the bike against the garage, looked into the backyard, and then crossed the street to talk to us. He kept one hand on the radio receiver clipped to his collar, the other on his belt. He asked me if I knew the man they'd brought home.

"Sure," I said. "He's our neighbor." Truth was, though, I didn't know him well at all. We'd lived across from each other for eight years but had never had a conversation that extended beyond "good morning" or "how about this snow?" I knew from the other neighbors that he'd lived there for more than thirty years, along with an old woman who may have been his wife, and an even older guy who was, apparently, the house's owner and who'd died a year ago.

They'd been there for so long that no one knew the precise nature of the arrangement, nor did anyone know who owned the house now that the owner was gone. Neither the neighbor nor his wife drove a car; they biked everywhere, even in winter, mostly quick trips to the gas station from which they returned with a plastic sack slung around the handlebars filled with a little food, a pack of cigarettes, and beer. They didn't always come back with food but they always came back with beer.

"What happened?" I asked the officer.

"He wrecked his bike near the Walgreens," he said. "The store called an ambulance, but he refused medical treatment. He didn't want us to help him home, but we insisted. He seemed"—the officer looked down at Hayden, standing quietly, taking in his every word and gesture—"intoxicated. There's a huge pile of empties behind the house."

"They've always kept to themselves," I said.

The first officer came through the front door, closing it softly behind him, as if he'd put the old man to bed and didn't want to wake him. He crossed the street to join us. "Man," he said. "That place is in rough shape."

"Is he okay?" I asked.

"He'll live," the officer said. "His wife was passed out naked on the couch." He closed his eyes and shook his head. "Not pretty."

"Someone comes over to check on them every few days," I said. "Could be a social worker, but I'm honestly not sure. My wife's a social worker but she doesn't know the person who comes over." I looked at the house, the door shut and the curtains drawn, shut up and silent. "They're very private," I said.

The officers' radios squawked and they reached to silence them. "If anything else happens," the first officer said, turning toward his cruiser, "give us a call."

Hayden had remained quiet during the confab with the police, but back inside he was all questions. Had our neighbor been arrested? Why would he have to ride in the back if he hadn't been arrested?

What did 'intoxicated' mean? Was it a bad word like 'shit' and 'fuck'? I tried to give it to him straight, to explain what it means to be an alcoholic without devolving into euphemism or metaphor or baby talk. "They drink so much alcohol it makes them sick," I said. "They've done it for so long they can't stop." I paused to read his face for signs of confusion, but he was stone faced. "Too much alcohol is poison," I said.

Hayden pursed his lips. "You and Mom drink it." A statement, not a question.

Well, yes. My parents drank. Their parents drank. I can't conjure a single family memory that doesn't include booze: margaritas whirring in a blender, beer on the beach, wine with dinner, martinis in long-stemmed conical glasses. My grandmother served crème de menthe on St. Patrick's Day and Cape Cods garnished with lime on Christmas because the colors of the drinks matched the seasons. My mother and father, divorced now for almost thirty years, each keep a bottle of vodka nested among the ice cubes in the freezer, which they drink cold and plain, as do I. Like many American families—and almost all Irish—mine numbers among its ranks several uncles and cousins who, it was said, couldn't hold their liquor until it was later revealed they could hold too much. My wife's family roster contains a similar cast of characters, not in epidemic abundance, but nevertheless a persistent presence, like the crowd of sooty-faced pathetics filling in the backdrop of every Dickens tale. I've never been overly cautious with alcohol, but I've tried to remain mindful of its perils, and the fact that a certain dependency swirls through my genetic code, and my wife's, and so doubly through our sons'.

"Yes, Mom and Dad drink," I said. "But we try not to drink too much. We don't want to get sick."

Hayden thought about this for a moment. I wondered if he was remembering and hoped he was not. "Have you ever been . . ." he seemed embarrassed to say it. "Have you ever been the D-word?"

Katherine's best drunk story is one for the ages, a story we still

tell at parties. We'd gone to dinner at a friend's house—a friend who also happened to be the chair of my department at the college and so, technically speaking, my boss. It was June and warm, the sun close to the solstice, and our friend lived in our neighborhood so Katherine and I decided to ride our bikes. The food was good, but slow coming out of the oven. We drank wine while we waited, and with dinner, and carried a freshly opened bottle into the living room to enjoy with dessert. Katherine kept up with the conversation; she didn't slur a word or miss a step as we headed to the yard to collect our bikes. She hugged our host, thanked her for a lovely evening. We were three houses away when she let her bike drift close to mine and said in a voice so deadpan it's hard not to mock, "This is how it's going to go. We're going to ride by the junior high track. When we get to the long jump, I'm going to stop and puke my guts out. Got it?"

I couldn't tell whether or not she was serious. "You're drunk?" I asked.

"Ride straight and keep your mouth shut," she said.

The long jump had been chosen, I soon learned, because it was in the dead center of the field and was accessible by an asphalt path. Far from houses or the road, no one would see her there. Katherine pedaled heroically, game-faced and tight-lipped, and when we reached the sandy pit at the end of the jump, she very calmly used her foot to lower the kickstand before she staggered away into the dark. I heard her heaving in the shadows. "It's a good thing track season is over," she said, wiping her mouth. She looked back at the sand pit. "Damn."

By the time we made it home, she was fully sick. I had to hold onto her handlebars to keep her from toppling over. The kids were asleep by then and the next morning, when they found her lying in bed with her face covered, the lie was easy: she blamed the food.

My own low point is less comical because it happened while I was responsible for the boys. We'd gone to a backyard party while Katherine was out of town. It was a hot August afternoon, and the boys were playing with friends, moving between the house and the

trees, running up and down the driveway, and I had one more than I should have. And then I had another. And then I had one more, the car keys in my pocket the entire time. When it was time to go, I got the boys buckled into the backseat despite the fact that I could barely walk. I didn't have far to go, just nine blocks in the neighborhood, three turns and two stop signs between there and home. I'd driven that far before, home from the bar, though never with the kids in the car. Luckily a friend intervened and offered to drive us. I giggled in the passenger seat while he drove frowning. The boys sensed something wasn't right, Dad riding shotgun in his own car, but neither of them said a word.

The next morning, nauseous and repentant, I messaged my friend to apologize. That night he invited me to take a walk so we could talk in person. I went and apologized some more, but he wasn't yet over it. He said I'd been reckless and had come close to putting my sons in danger. I assured him I wasn't cavalier about my kids' safety; what happened was a mistake. The fact that I found myself standing beneath a streetlamp defending my commitment to responsible parenting, as though testifying before a judge, shamed me further still. We shook hands at the corner where I turned toward my house and he walked on toward his. I apologized one more time. He said he forgave me, though our friendship effectively ended there, on that corner. We haven't talked much since. To this day it remains one of my abiding regrets.

To the boys, however, I said nothing. I proffered no apology, offered no explanation. I hoped they were too young to understand or remember.

Our neighbor fell off his bike again. His wife collapsed inside the house and called 911. She wouldn't answer the door and the firemen thought they might have to break it down until the social worker showed up with a key. For several weeks, fire trucks and ambulances came howling down our street nearly every day. The pile of cans in the yard grew mountainous and spilled from the backyard to the

driveway, practically down to the street. The neighbor and his wife were taken away in ambulances and brought home in police cars and taxis, plastic hospital bracelets around their wrists. Their house was put up for sale. An eviction notice appeared on the door.

The boys watched this tragicomedy play out with a mixture of fascination and fear. For a while it consumed more attention than television. We'd be sitting down to watch a movie when we'd hear the sirens in the distance, hear them grow louder until the lights were flashing in our windows and paramedics were running toward the house. The boys began to anticipate the nightly arrival of the cops and the firemen. They wondered what time the firemen would arrive, whether they'd bring the ladder truck or the smaller rig, if Officer Peters would let them sit in the back of the squad car and play with his handcuffs, as he had the week before. The boys knew that any sarcasm about the plights of the poor and dispossessed would bring forth from their social worker mother a wrath not seen on Earth since God encouraged Noah to study up on shipbuilding. Instead, they teased each other.

"I put a-hol in your cereal," Hayden told his brother. "Good luck riding your bike today."

"It's not called a-hol," Galen said. "It's not a bad word."

"You're an a-hol," Hayden said.

"Boys," I said. "Enough."

"The thing I keep wondering about," Galen said, turning to me, "is if alcohol makes you sick, why drink it at all?"

"It's sort of like sugar," I said. "A little is okay. A treat. Too much and you'll puke."

"I know what that's about," Hayden said, patting his stomach. Two days before, he'd unearthed from the bottom of the basement chest freezer a Ziploc of hidden Halloween candy and had ended the night by vomiting all over his sheets. It struck me that his tendency to overdo it on sweets could one day translate to booze.

By Labor Day, the neighbors were gone and their house sat

empty. I couldn't imagine anyone buying the place, but an estate-sale company arrived early one Saturday morning and set up a tent and folding table in the front yard. They hammered signs into the grass. Minivans and pickup trucks filled the curbs on both sides of the street. Customers lined up on the walkway leading to the front door. The neighbors' bicycles were wheeled to the front yard and sold immediately, even the one with the bent wheel. I crossed the street with the boys and got in line. When the front door opened, everyone in the yard coughed and covered their noses, but they filed in anyway. At the threshold, a lady in a yellow t-shirt stopped me. "Children aren't allowed inside."

"They're with me," I said. "We live across the street."

She leaned in and lowered her voice. "There's porn inside. It's everywhere."

"Oh," I said. I told the boys to go back to our yard. "I'll be right out."

"Look out for a-hol!" Hayden called. "Don't get drunk in there."

"You are so stupid," Galen said to him.

I waited for them to make it across the street before going inside. I'd looked upon this house every day for the last eight years, literally thousands of times, but this was my first trip past the edge of the yard. I felt like a scuba diver plunging over the side of a boat. I held my nose to block the smell.

The interior was shabby and old, but less horrifying than I expected. No bloody carcasses or voodoo dolls hanging on the walls, no candle-lit pentagrams drawn on the floor. Just an old house with small rooms full of old people's knickknacks: porcelain figurines and rusted tools, wrinkled paperback books, shoes and clothes, dozens of VCRs and DVD players, one stacked on top of another, crate after crate of videos. One crate was filled entirely with animated children's movies. The promised porno was all from the '70s, featuring hairy models on the covers and titles like He & She, Misty Beethoven, and Nylon Party.

The videos didn't seem especially illicit; they seemed sad. It was

clear the neighbors had done little else over the last three decades besides get loaded, smoke cigarettes, and watch videos. It was a sad way to live, holed up inside this hot little house with the drapes pulled shut, too drunk to notice the life going on outside, neighbors moving in and having children, the seasons changing, a whole life spent this way only to have it end with a bunch of senior citizens grubbing through your stuff with their butts in the air, haggling and dithering over your coffee spoons. I could see my own house across the street through the living room windows, the boys on the lawn with their mom. The thought of my sons drinking themselves sick, their lives wrecked by a disease that has felled so many other good women and men, the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness—it was enough to make me sweat, to want to never drink again.

If only that would somehow guarantee that the boys would never have a problem with alcohol or drugs. If only adhering to an abstentious code would allow me to head off trouble before it arrived. In Wisconsin alcohol is a part of everyday life, a staple at every reception, function, and party. I was once invited to participate in a charity spelling bee to benefit the local literacy foundation, an organization made up of educators and school administrators. The spelling bee had a full bar, and contestants took their turns at the microphone while holding onto Seven & Sevens, Gin & Tonics, bottles of beer. Even when I lived in Utah, arguably the nation's most sober state, I knew plenty of alcoholics. There was nowhere to hide, and swearing a Puritan's oath would surely fail, if for no other reason that it would give the boys one more thing to reject. The harder truth was that the boys wouldn't know how they'd respond to alcohol until they tried it, until they confronted the decision for themselves. They'd probably have to barf a time or two before they got it. I prayed they wouldn't have the car keys in their pocket—or God help us, be behind the wheel—when they did.

I picked my way up to the attic, through the kitchen, and then down into the basement, as pungent with mildew and mold as the

upstairs was with stale smoke. I sifted through a toolbox and carried a pretty nice socket set to the man in the corner wearing a yellow staff t-shirt. "Do you know what happened to the people who lived here?" I asked him. "Do you know where they went?"

"I don't have the first clue. You know them?"

"I live across the street."

"Well, you'd know better than me. When we got here this morning, we saw that someone had come through the basement window. We think it was the former tenant, the way the boxes were rummaged through." He turned and pointed to the window in question, opaque with dirt and hardly larger than a shoebox. "Must be a skinny fella."

I shrugged. "I guess so."

"You didn't see him, did you? He stole several things."

"Wasn't it his stuff?" I asked. "Aren't they his?"

"Not anymore."

I held up the socket set. "How much you want for this?"

"Five dollars," he said.

"You take three?"

"Sure." He punched out a price tag on his label maker and affixed it to the case. I headed for the stairs. The sun was bright and clean when I came back up and the breeze that rushed into my lungs made me gasp. I rubbed by eyes and squinted.

"Dad!" the boys shouted from across the street. "Did you buy us something? What did you get from the drunk house?"

My wife bent to shush them. I felt slimy, standing in line to pay, an accomplice to a theft. I considered putting the socket set on the table and walking away. When my turn came, I paid the cashier. Crossing the street, I held up the socket set for the boys to see, hoping it would help them remember the people who'd lived in this house—people we hardly knew—and take caution.

Solo

Liara Tamani

For months I've been carrying around a picture in my mind of a girl in church singing a solo. She looks like me, but a different me, a better me. Her forehead is smaller, her hair is longer, and there's no gap between her two front teeth. She stands wearing a purple T-shirt, matching Converse, and holey jeans before pews and pews of shiny shoes, wide-brim hats, polyester, ruffles, cufflinks, and pleats.

She sings with her eyes closed. She sings with her whole soul, I can tell just by looking at her. Her song is a prayer and God hears her. She hears God too and understands Him without human help, without standing in a pulpit, without a cross around her neck, with no stockings and no dress.

Only song.

But I can't hear her song. It's like a secret between her and God. Even when I get still… so still… even stiller, still until my nostrils tremble, I only hear uneven sounds mixed up with pieces of prayer—a broken song. But I want to hear the whole song, know the song, know God for myself.

That's why tonight I'm trying out for a solo in Sunday's Fourth of July celebration service. I've been singing in the choir since I was five but never tried out for a solo. Never thought my voice was special enough to stand alone. It doesn't climb high like a soprano or swing low like a tenor. I'm just an ordinary alto.

But the girl in my mind is an alto too. I know because she doesn't look stuck-up like a soprano. And she definitely doesn't have a voice deep enough to be a tenor. That would be weird and she doesn't look weird.

Now I'm sitting in the choir, waiting to audition, wearing an outfit just like hers. My friend Keisha is sitting to the right of me on the second pew; she's an alto too. To my left is George, the new boy, the only boy brave enough to own his high pitch and sit with the girls. The rest of the boys, half of whose voices are higher than mine, declare tenor on the third row. And, of course, sopranos sit on the first.

"Okay, everyone, settle down, please," says Ms. Mason, the youth choir director. "Quiet, please." She's sitting at the piano at the bottom of the steps in work clothes, dark pantyhose, and purple slippers.

"Quiet!" And she holds her pointer finger down on the piano's far left key until the low note swallows all sound in the sanctuary. She releases the key. "Now, show of hands for those trying out for the first song."

George raises his hand.

"George," Ms. Mason nods, her straight, stiff hair, flipped up at the ends, briefly leaving her shoulders.

He puts his hand down. Mona and Brandy, the pastor's twin daughters, who sing a special duet every holiday, who hog all the solos on ordinary Sundays, who have off-white skin and true brown eyes the same color as their long hair, and whom all the boys love, look back at George from the first pew and start exchanging whispers. Mona begins to raise her right hand—yes, please choose this song—but Brandy snatches it down. They exchange harder whispers.

"Anyone else?" asks Ms. Mason.

Mona whips her head away from Brandy, making the tip of her long braid swipe my knee, peeking through the hole in my jeans, and folds her arms in defeat. Keisha nudges me with her elbow, and I think about raising my hand so I won't have to face-off with the duo.

"You can beat him," Keisha whispers in my ear.

I know I can, but the chorus of the first song has "blood" in it, and I don't want my first solo to be about blood. Keisha may not understand this, so I whisper, "He's new. It would be his first solo too."

"So? Don't want to upset your boyfriend?"

I laugh, "You mean your boyfriend." Although I always toss George back when Keisha throws him my way, I secretly love his

thick lips and thick brows and sunken eyes, surrounded by lashes running wild.

"Congratulations, George. 'Nothing But the Blood' is yours," Ms. Mason says and jots down something in a notebook sitting on top of the piano. After a few moments she presses a white key with a bright note and writes something else, then a higher note and writes, and an even higher note and writes.

Behind me a boy hurls, "Way to go, Georgette," in a girl's voice.

George doesn't turn around, keeps his hands folded in his lap.

Then, in an even higher tone, "Yeah, awesome, Georgette."

And someone else, "Hey, Georgette, can't wait to see your pretty Easter dress."

Giggles upon giggles and I turn my head back, first this way, then that, and roll my eyes until they hurt.

"Quiet," Ms. Mason calls out without looking up from her notes.

"You did good," I whisper to George. But as soon as the words leave my mouth, I feel stupid. What am I talking about? He didn't even have to try out.

I feel something graze my knee and look down to see George's right hand land on my thigh. My insides grip in surprise, grip at his touch, at this feeling—pulsing and rising and pulsing and rising up from a low, untouched place. The heat, the sweatiness of his fingertips comes through the hole in my jeans, and then it's gone. I watch as his right hand floats back over my thigh, the space between our legs, his thigh, and to his left hand. Watch as if I can will his hand, his fingers to come back and touch me again.

Keisha nudges me, "Ooh, I saw that. Looks like somebody's got a boy—"

I dig my elbow into her ribs until she shuts up. I hope George didn't hear that.

"Show of hands for the second song," says Ms. Mason.

Mona's and Brandy's right hands shoot up at the same time, flashing the same hot-pink polish on their nails.

"Duet, right?" asks Ms. Mason.

"Yes," they say in unison, and after they lower their hands. Brandy glances back at George with an irritatingly sweet smile on her face.

I glance at George and catch his lips spreading. What are you doing? Don't smile at her.

"Anyone else?" asks Ms. Mason.

Keisha knocks her knee into mine.

I glance back at George. He's still smiling.

"Well, if there's no one..."

Keisha lifts up my arm and it flops back down. "Taja!" she whispers hard and lifts up my arm again until my wrist points toward Heaven. I take the weight of my arm and raise my hand.

"Are you and Keisha trying out for a duet? Or do you want a solo?" Ms. Mason asks.

Mona and Brandy are staring dead at me—their pair of eyes squeezing my throat, threatening to steal my voice. But I want my solo.

"Solo," I say but the sound is very small.

"Speak up, child."

"Solo," I say louder.

"Okay," she nods. "Let's hear you first."

"Yeah, let's hear you," says Brandy and smiles at George again.

George's smile is even wider than the last time. It's the same stupid grin all boys give to Mona and Brandy—nostrils flared, full row of upper teeth showing. It's like they all read the same handbook for looking as stupid as possible. I can't believe I let him touch my leg. I can't believe I thought he... I can't sing in front of him. I can't let him hear me talk to God. But maybe hearing my voice will make him love me, not her. Love. I look at his folded hands and wonder if that's what I felt when he touched me. Love. I search the creases in the skin of his folded fingers. I search myself. But all I find is fear, flapping its frantic wings inside me, all around me.

Keisha pats my leg and says, "You got this."

I snatch her words and press the triangular tips of my shoulder blades extra hard against the wooden pew as I stand up, trying to feel

something else, and scoot fast past Keisha and the altos, to the microphone stand at the end of the pew. Looking out at the sanctuary's rows and rows of empty pews, I imagine them packed, waiting to hear my solo, and I wish I could go sit back down. But I can't. Can I? No, so I stop looking at the pews and stare at the stained-glass windows on the sanctuary's right side, lit up from behind by the lights in the parking lot.

Behind me a boy coughs, "Flat booty," and the other boys laugh.

I want to grab a hymnbook from the rack on the back of the sopranos' pew and throw it at someone's head, but I keep my eyes focused on the stained glass.

"Quiet!" Ms. Mason shouts. "Go ahead, Taja. Just try singing the chorus."

Did I hear George laughing with the boys?

Ms. Mason clears her throat, and my eyes find a bright-blue pane to look into, deep, deeper.

"Come on, Taja," I hear Keisha say, and I try to imagine myself as the girl I've been carrying around in my mind, try to imagine myself hearing God. I close my eyes and see blue. I'm the girl on a pier over the ocean, long toes gripping planks, slowly letting go. She jumps but I'm not ready. Maybe she wasn't ready either because now she's sinking. I start singing.

He's all over me.

Now we are both sinking, and my voice is cracking under the weight of George's hand on my thigh...knowing God...George's smile at Brandy...hearing God...the hope of love. Where are you, God? Flat booty...flat booty...flat booty. Can't you hear me, God? Flat booty. Stop laughing at me. I try to swim back up.

He's keeping me alive.

But I can't swim. I can't find my voice, my limbs. Everything seems to be lost down here.

He's in my hands. He's in my feet.

I'm mouthing the words but I don't know if they're coming out. I can only hear silence. Not a sweet silence or holy silence, but a dazed,

boy-made silence I don't understand. Somehow boys and God are getting all tangled up, worst than the two thin chains that have been tossing and turning together all day in the back pocket of my holey jeans. But what do boys have to do with God?

"You can be seated, Taja."

The sanctuary is silent, like Ms. Mason has just held down the piano's lowest key. But the looks on everyone's faces tell me it's not the low key that has swallowed the sound in the sanctuary. Keisha tries to smile but she can't bring her slanted eyes to meet mine. I sit down and Mona and Brandy don't even turn around. George doesn't move his hands, still folded in his lap. I'm so embarrassed. Heat rises behind my eyes—no, that would only make me look worse—and I focus on playing with the strings hanging from the hole in my jeans.

Mona and Brandy sing a perfect duet. I don't know how they can be so nasty and still hear God so clearly.

Ms. Mason announces that George, Mona, and Brandy will sing at the celebration on Sunday, dismisses the choir, and asks to speak to me. I let everyone clear out of the sanctuary before I stand up and make my way to the bottom of the stairs.

"Have a seat," Ms. Mason says and pats the empty space beside her on the black, padded piano bench.

I sit down. I can't look at her, so I stare at the keys and fight the urge to press the white key, farthest to the right.

"I don't want you to get discouraged," she says

I need to hear a high note.

"Many people struggle the first time they sing in front of people."

The highest note.

"It takes a lot of guts to—"

I press the key and it sings. I hold it down until it fills me. "Thanks," I say as I get up and run out the left, side door of the sanctuary, away from my solo.

When I step outside into the courtyard, a bright light comes on and shines in my face. This is usually where everyone waits for their parents to get out of Bible study, but it's empty except for the hot, June

air buzzing with something wild...a song...no, a chant. I follow it away from the motion-sensored lights to the back of the sanctuary.

"Go, go, go," comes from a crowd of kids gathered around something I can't see. No motion-sensored lights back here, but the full moon shines bright on my little sister's bushy ponytail. She's standing with her friends who'd rather attend youth Bible study than sing in the choir. No, thank you. She's chanting, "Go, go, go," with everyone else. Even Keisha, who's standing behind my sister, is chanting. I make my way to the front of the crowd and see George facing Brandy, holding her hands, dangling the possibility of a kiss above everyone's hungry faces. "Go, go, go." George notices me—my heart drops a few inches in my chest—then he looks back at Brandy.

"Do it if you're gonna do it," Mona says.

Brandy reaches out her lips, and George meets her lips with his. They kiss and kiss, tongues tangling and untangling between mouths opening and closing. Hoots and hollers and my heart stings like someone is pinching and twisting it, hard, even harder. Hive-fives to George, a circle of squeals around Brandy, and tears rise up behind my nose and eyes. I run away before they can escape. Back in the bright light, I lie flat on my back in the grass, arms stretched out like Jesus. I do this so I can feel the overgrown blades against my skin—an itch I don't scratch. The only thing keeping the tears back. The harsh light in my face and the sweet itch digging into the back of my arms and neck numbs this night that has beaten me. But when I get too still, the light forgets I'm here. I move and it remembers. Move and it remembers. Move and it remembers until I'm tired of moving and lie still— forgotten, forgetting.

Into Faces

Richard Dinges, Jr

Sun sets. Yards empty.
Seasons change,
quickening pace.
Hard paths worn
through grass, soften
and vanish. Sounds evolve
from squeals of laughter
into rubber on concrete,
then silence. I look
into faces and see
less of the child
who once peered back.
I wonder who my
mother sees when she
looks into my eyes.

Muse

Anne Panning

It's not the sound of two pie
pans slammed together
at midnight, though you did that once,
in college, to impress a wrestler-
poet whose muscles you squeezed and called
"cataclysmic." Nor is it the old man waiting patiently
to cross the highway & fetch
his mail, though you pray for his safety

and yours. It's not the fetid subterranean mash
stewing in the garbage disposal, though sometimes
it comes close. Nor is it the miniature
snowman you made yesterday, your nose
to the ground, lentils for eyes, a bobby pin
grimace. It's not the vegetable
sundress your mother sewed, decades
ago, on the Singer —classic darts, pleated
zucchini, beets & onions swirling
rootless against you. And yet,

it could be. So much flotsam drifts freely: arcing
headlights across your bedroom walls, a stray
pistachio rolling under the couch, the way that
even a grim toothache may glow brilliantly
in the dark.

Lawn Chairs

Jessica Danger

My father was an avid sportsman. As a child, I often found myself the only girl on a hunting or fishing trip with my dad and brothers and gaggle of male cousins. Dad was always camping, fishing or shooting. Sometimes even just in his backyard: pigeons and crows and empty soup cans lined up in a row. He kept a gun cabinet front and center of his living room. It was a piece of furniture in our family, along the same lines of a sofa or a coffee table. The gun cabinet used to be in our childhood home, but when Mom and Dad got divorced Dad took the gun cabinet with him. It was a pretty shade of dark treated pine, with grey smoked glass in the front. The glass door slid open and closed, like the slider that lead to our old backyard, where we had a treehouse and a mangy mutt named Harvey. The glass allowed you to still see all of Dad's collection, without having access to it directly. I can only imagine what newcomers thought when they saw it or, if we ever had friends from school over, what their parents would think.

Dad used to polish and clean all of his guns. He had so many of them: shotguns, hand guns, pistols, knives, and old pearl handled things. Even had old grenades. He kept them clean, and functional. Both the large rectangular glass portion on the top locked as well as the squat, square storage portion underneath. Dad had the keys, kept safe, on his key ring.

I popped over to his house for a quick visit before work one Saturday. Dad had been drinking since that morning. He kept a handle of vodka beside his bed, within arm's reach so he could grab that first thing every day. He needed it even to open his eyelids, move a leg out of the bed. He would spike his coffee, then move straight to Budweiser for the better part of the day before going back to Vodka or Gin. It used to be that people came over to visit him, toting a six-

pack with them, maybe a little weed, but that had stopped years ago. No one came to visit him now unless they needed something or a place to stay. He always said yes because he loved the company.

My little brother James said hello to me, stopped to chat for a moment, then went across the street to visit with a few friends. Dad was already quite drunk. His words were slurred and he gave himself ample room when walking in the house. He sat down slowly. We sat outside smoking and talking, in green and yellow lawn chairs, the kind that pinched the fat of your thighs if you sat too close to the crease, bringing up a dark purple blood blister. He left them out in the sun every day, so the canvas braiding was dusty and sun-scorched. From where we sat on his burnt up lawn, we could see James in the back part of the driveway across the street visiting the neighbor boys. All three boys turned and looked our direction, laughing and drinking feverishly from their soda cans. One boy pretended to stumble, a slow looping of the legs before he hopped upright. When James and his friends turned back around, Dad's eyes had became two little slits in an angry sunburnt face.

"What the—?" My father pushed himself forward in his chair, squinting to see the boys across the street. "I don't like this." He took a long hard pull on his cigarette and his eyes stayed narrowed. He crossed his legs at the knee, his right foot tapping quickly. He grumbled in that deep throaty way he had, the way that always set me on high alert.

"What's your problem?" I snarled at him. I told him to knock it off. He stood up, teetering over in his lawn chair. He started to fall over to the right, bracing himself on the right armrest. The chair started to topple over, Dad's skinny little chicken legs wobbling with it. I jumped up, grabbed him by the shoulder, tried to set him straight again. "Dad!"

"Leave me alone god damn it." Swatting at me with his left hand, he growled again, looking at me with those eyes that never missed a shot tracking deer or quail. He walked in to the garage to get another beer. I followed him, opening another Diet Coke. I wiped the top of my can, trying to rid it of the lingering smell of the fluorescent orange Garlic Power Bait he also kept in the fridge.

"Dad can I take a pack of smokes to work with me?"

"That's all you guys come over here for! For my money and my sodas." He waved his hands at me, shooing me out of the garage.

"God dad! Come on. That's not what I came over for."

"Ahhh shut up." He lumbered across the garage, holding himself steady with his right hand on the workbench his grandfather had built fifty years earlier. "You don't know. You don't know anything." He turned around, heading back out to the front lawn.

We sat back down outside in the lawn chairs. Dad was still agitated, gripping the cold aluminum frame of the camping chair, and I was getting tired of it. James and his friends laughed again across the street.

"Look at them. Look at those god damn punk kids."

"What? Dad, that's James!"

"Take the damn cigarettes." He handed me the pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and silently smoked his own, hard and fast and aggressively while I finished my third diet coke.

He stubbed his cigarette out in the blue plastic ashtray beside his chair. He mumbled that he would be right back, that he would solve this once and for all. He would, by golly, he would. Dad wobbled up his rickety old porch. He held the guardrail on both steps, letting the old-fashioned wooden screen door slam behind him once he was safely inside the house.

Dad had been gone for a few minutes before I started to think I should check on him. It was a formula my brothers and I had developed as children that revolved around an equation something like A) how much and of what had Dad had to drink that day versus B) what time of the day was it compared to C) who was over or could see or hear us and then, finally, D) what time would Mom or any other adult be there. That day, one of the parts of that equation was off, and, alarmed by Dad's response earlier, I got up to go inside. I crushed my cigarette in his ashtray. Remembering how he had

burned up his last camping chair, which he kept inside the house, I used the last of my Diet Coke to make the ashtray a stinky wet mess. I crushed the Diet Coke can under my shoe, dropped it in the orange Home Depot bucket on the porch and opened the screen door. The spring made that familiar "EEEEEeeeeekkkkk" as I opened it. Once I cleared that pesky high point where the carpet met the front door, I looked up to find Dad aiming a loaded .44 Ruger at my face.

I put my hands up, palms out, in that way that everyone does in the movies but is actually the real thing to do. I stopped moving my feet and stood still, like Dad had taught me to do whenever there was a loaded gun nearby. I was seven or eight when Dad taught me to shoot. We were out in the Mojave Desert, camping along the Colorado River. The gravel so hot it would melt the bottom of my plastic flip-flops. A gaggle of uncles and cousins were going shooting, and I was dragged along. Guns then didn't really bother me. Dad had a shotgun rack in the back of his 1950 Chevy truck and an NRA sticker on every car we ever owned. He had shown me how to hold a gun with two hands, to level it off, and not allow the recoil to topple me. When he handed me a .22 that day at the river I cried, begging him please don't make me do it. He took the safety off, told me he knew I could do it, I was a smart girl. Then he backed away. I turned around, crying, arms locked at the elbows, begging him please to take it away from me. In my distress I had accidentally turned the gun on them. I cried until my father walked up, shook his head, took my hands, told me I could do it, and helped me pull that trigger. I cried the entire way through. To this day, just seeing a photograph of a gun of any kind, let alone a physical one, gives me hives.

"Dad." I tried to say it very slowly, very quietly.

"Dad. It's just me. Its Jessica." The gun was black, old fashioned looking, and very shiny.

"Get out of here. You're a spy! Just like the rest of them! Working for the family." His voice was low and garbled. His right eye squinted as he aimed.

"Dad. I don't work for the family. I'm just a waitress." I knew

enough to see that the .44 was loaded, and locked.

"Shut the fuck up!" He roared. "You can't fool me." The long ash from his lit cigarette fell.

Even though I knew that Dad was drunk, and clearly delusional, I didn't know how to proceed. And I remember, in that very nanosecond, thinking of my son Tomas. We had a little house, with a little yard, and we were a team. In movies, people tell you that their life flashed in front of them, and I used to be that person that called "bullshit!" But that day, in those few moments, all I thought about was Tomas and how, if anything happened to me, he would have no parents.

"Dad. Please." I tried to take a step forward. He adjusted his knee where his elbow rested, his finger as steady as that of a very drunk man in the middle of a Saturday afternoon could be. "Its just me. It's Jess. And you're right. I only came over for Diet Cokes and cigarettes. You were right. It's just me. It's just me."

I have no idea how long I stayed there, although it felt like a lifetime. I have a distinct memory of trying not to shake or pee my pants. Scattered open ammunition boxes lay on the floor around Dad's feet. His right foot was planted so firmly into the carpet that I could see the millimeter difference between the 1980 carpet and the dusty periwinkle suede of his tattered dusty blue sketchers. This was the same positioning he had drilled into my head. On every family vacation. On every camping trip.

I heard the screen door bang shut. James charged past me straight towards Dad, bumping my left shoulder. He pushed the .44 straight down, straight into the floor, the muzzle nestling into that same filthy brown carpet, his hand going into the small vulnerable part of Dad's neck, forcing him down.

"No." He said. And just like that, he took the .44 away from Dad.

I took the four or five steps to James and Dad, pushing the open boxes of ammunition away with my foot. He had spilled two of the boxes and I had a time finding my footing on the carpet. James, after putting the safety on, was holding the gun away from him and Dad. I

didn't want it in my hands.

After we got everything all cleaned up and put away, James took the gun cabinet keys away from Dad. He also took the truck keys that night. He put our dazed and apologetic father to bed in the middle of the afternoon and went back across the street. I took another diet coke, my pack of cigarettes, and went to work. Later, my brothers would try to take all the guns from his house, but Dad stormed around the house accusing them of theft, blackmail, spying, lying, cheating, tunneling them to my mother. So, Dad hid all his keys.

When Dad died, we found out that he had sold that .44 to an uncle on my mom's side. It was a habit of Dad's: sell everything for anything to anyone. James went out and bought back that .44. He still has it. Locked up.

Where They Went

Kaela Martin

The oubliette: a place to leave
the porcelain dolls my mother collected,
their faces cold and serene, ghosts
amongst the cavern. Here we laid
a clamshell locket held together
with lake-worn membranes, stringy and dry.
What happened to that boy, nameless now,
who kissed me like it would be February forever.
The wind biting our cheeks in reprove,
but colder still when snow chains snapped
frosted puddles, leaving the parking lot
with shattered ice.
This must be where my words went,
the stutter I never surpassed. Cracked shards
of voice cut like they can't remember
thin air or bluegrass radios,
the static of mountain roads.
Tossed in with a book never returned,
left on a picnic table, found by snow.
So many receipts with ink bled through, gone now,
along with poems trampled underfoot,
carelessly thrown in the backseat. Your name
scrawled across two inch paper, smeared
like a secret told to a stranger, meaningless
without remembered smiles and cold hands.
Indistinct in the dark, indifferent,
a crypt for things no longer understood.

Among Collard Greens, 1930

John I. Scott

Genealogy: Bessie Blanche Jenkins

Among the collard greens, while yanking weeds,
she sometimes hikes her feedsack skirt to pee,

her legs a wishbone pressed into the dirt
until it nearly snaps. Inside the house,

her Victrola X's "Laughing Record" crackles
beside the horsehair couch. Grandchildren, stuffed

with applebutter stack cake breakfasts, watch
through kitchen windows, betting the day she'll tip

at last; aware from small, similar failures
how unlasting such balance always is.

Intention in Three Movements

Jacqueline Kolosov

I.

We have at last found the stable, secreted beyond a mews, on a cobbled street lined with diminutive butter yellow houses, their windows bordered by flower boxes filled with geraniums and forget-me-nots. It's like we've backpedalled into the last century, and it makes me deliriously happy—oh so light-headed—to think that just five minutes ago we were standing on the deafening corner outside Hyde Park, taxi cabs and compact cars rushing past in the direction of Buckingham Palace. "Are you sure this is the right corner?" your father asked, his question swallowed by noise. "Yes," I said with more confidence than I felt.

It's the manure that proves I've steered us correctly. Dozens of grassy green-brown lumps harden on the pavement in the July sun, lumps like the proverbial breadcrumbs that should have enabled Hansel and Gretel to find their way.

Not that we are in any danger. We are on an adventure. The proof: our arrival at the stable where a milky-skinned, blonde guide named Rose fits you with boots and a velvet helmet, then brings forth your horse, a compact paint gelding with a white-gold mane.
You are five-and-a-half, and in less than two months you will start kindergarten. "Can't you come with me?" you ask once you're saddled. Your mouth is fretful. I shake my head. "This is your ride," I say, "the one you've talked and talked about all week, but Daddy and I will walk close behind, okay?" You consider for a moment, your upturned nose freckled from days out of doors. "Come now," Rose says, and squeezes your hand. "You're a big girl."

"Okay, Sophie?" I say.

You nod. "Okay."

I was eight weeks pregnant on that July afternoon, the slightest curve in my belly betraying the wish become real I'd been cherishing for more than two years like the frankincense and myrrh the Wise Men brought to the manger. Oh for the promise, the chance of another child. And what lengths we went to in order to conceive that child, costly medical interventions I will not go into here, for they—the sickening memory of them—are not the point. Not anymore.

What mattered then, standing on that cobbled street, was that as I released your hand and your horse walked off, closely following Rose who held the rope—what was your horse's name? why can't I remember?—I felt more blessed than I had ever been. I'd become again a vessel into which had been poured promise, possibility, time. "Be it done unto me," Mary is said to have told the angel when he appeared to her. And although this was hardly the annunciation, I knew each pregnancy to be a miracle, the only miracle we have left.

Your father and I follow you for the first twenty minutes of your hour-long ride through Hyde Park and then Kensington Gardens, my favorite place in London, for its subtle wildness—all those dreamy, deeply-boughed trees and feathery, swaying grasses—

At first you look back, once, twice, but soon you find your rhythm and your confidence, and focus straight ahead. And for this golden space of time, your happiness—your joy—is my own. I hold your father's hand. We are tired from this week in London, deliciously tired and replete, having eaten too many scones with clotted cream and jam, having wandered through countless gardens, traversing one neighborhood after the next. As your small shape diminishes even further into the canopied path, your father and I turn to each other, kiss, and lie down in the soft, high grass. Your father will tell me afterwards that he felt closer to me then than he had in a long time. I lay my hands on my belly, imagine the child becoming there.

Becoming. All is promise. Hope. "Be it done unto me..."

II.

Nearly a year has passed, and you are now six-and-a-half. In three days, I will fetch you home from your last day of kindergarten. I will take hold of your hand, listen to you chatter about summer, freedom, days upon days of play.

But today I am far away from you, physically at least. How far? Three hundred miles away in the small house in the foothills of Santa Fe, the house I claim for a few days each year. Yesterday I drove out to the stable here, a drive that took me well outside of town so that I crossed cattle guards and breathed in the too-rich, too-pungent smells of cow manure.

"Are you Emily?" I asked, stepping inside the barn, as a slightly built woman with dark, graying hair approached me, her eyes also gray. I have been taking riding lessons for six months now, having resolved to follow in the path I began with you last September, two months after our return from London.

"You'll ride Nesbit," she said, bringing forth a very large paint horse, far bigger than any of the other horses I ride at the barn at home. "You need a horse at least this big," she told me. "Look at the length of your thigh."

I did not question this. I had come to learn.

"You've got it real bad, I see," Emily said when I told her that I spend four to five days at the barn at home, or partial days, riding, of course, but grooming the horses, too, bathing them, in particular the lesson horses and the ponies. "Yes," she laughed. "You're in serious trouble, the only cure—one of your own."

What I did not tell her is that it's the communion with horses I seek, and I do not use the word 'communion' lightly. Since the miscarriage, and the death of the dear friend that followed—your godmother and my first West Texas friend—the horses alone have been able to pull me up out of my grief, returning me to the present moment, to being present, myself again, or perhaps more than myself.

Isn't there a myth, from the Bedouins perhaps, of a horse that rescued a girl from the desert's equivalent of the underworld, a place of no light?

(Daughter, I cannot explain any of this to you yet, though you have seen my tears—"The baby died. Why did the baby die, Mama?"—and so I am simply grateful you understand my need of the horses. "Do I go to the barn too much?" I asked you recently. "No," you said. "You're happy there.")

There was no communion with the paint horse Nesbit yesterday, nor should there have been. Communion is no slight thing. The horse did not know me. Why should he regard me with anything but patience, even sizing me up in the arena where initially he refused to listen to my aids?

After brushing down Nesbit and cleaning up his poop, I stroked his face. "Thank you," I said.

Emily smiled. "I wish I had more time with you. I could really help you. You have the strength, the fundamentals. You just don't believe in yourself yet."

I nodded. "I'm getting there."

III.

The baby dies one month after your ride through Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park. It's the end of the first trimester, a landmark, a threshold, and I arrive at Dr. Phillips' office for the twelve-week ultrasound. "I am going to miss you, Jacqueline," she says, as I place my feet into the stirrups on the examination table. "You're graduating today. You've decided to go back to your OB/GYN, yes?"

"Yes," I say, reminded of the journey that has led me here…

"I cannot find the heartbeat, Jacqueline," Dr. Phillips whispers a few minutes later, the ultrasound wand deep inside me, her gaze trained on the screen.

I hear what she's saying, but the words—what can they mean? I cannot understand, though I hear my doctor crying. My gaze is fixed on the little being on the ultrasound screen, the minute hands

curled into fists, the fishlike tail nearly gone now, and in its place the beginnings of legs. My child has a beautifully formed head, eyes. I have carried this image inside me for so long, across an ocean, across years.

"I'm sorry," she says, seizing hold of my hand. "I'm so very sorry."

Nearly six months later, Julia, the woman who will teach me to ride, introduces me to Tommy, a twenty-seven-year-old Arabian gelding with soft, round eyes, a light build, and a rich bay coat and reddish-black mane and tail. I groom him lovingly, talking to him as I work, massaging his neck, his forelegs, his hocks. It is with Tommy that I learn how to trot, to post and eventually how to canter. More fundamentally, it is with Tommy that I learn how to breathe, how to synchronize my breath with his; with Tommy, I remember how to breathe consciously, deliberately, and I try to ally my breath and movements with his. After each lesson, I walk him in long, luxurious loops around the arena and stroke his neck. He licks my arm, nibbles the skin, whinnies.

By late March, I am reading everything I can about horses. "The alphabet of connecting with horses is composed of life energy, or chi," says horse trainer Allan Hamilton. "Understanding horses is about feeling that connective energy, the chi, flowing between our horse and us."

When that life energy courses through us, I understand the power of energetic will, what horse people call "intention" or the process of focusing our energy by focusing on an objective, a destination. It might be moving the horse towards the bright portal of the barn door that opens onto the paddocks. It might be navigating a maze of obstacles while maintaining a posting trot. It might be "cowboying it through" when I'm on the verge of tears.

Yes, it's crazy, I'll admit, to ask you—as I have asked you too many times these last few months—what you'd rather have: a horse or a sibling. Who asks a six-year-old child that? But I have asked you, as

if you understood the stakes involved. Some days you'd say, "a horse," but more often than not, you'd fix your blue eyes on me—eyes blue as my own—and say, "a sister."

Has the lost child's soul taken flight? At twelve weeks, does a growing being have a soul? And if so, how much could it possibly weigh?

I no longer ask these questions, having released them to the fierce yet fundamental winds out here, winds that carry in bits and pieces of elsewhere, memories, too, perhaps, and certainly grief.

Singing Machine

Dana Fang

For a small fee—the tip
of your pinky finger, a string
of cowrie shells, maybe the jade
on your wrist—I will play the same stories
you slept to at seven, blessed with your baba's
sheepish love.

Now you desire
reprieve from the same red beasts and
their aluminum voices. The site
of memory, a secret world.

I will love you when you are drunk
and bent. I will keep you when sickness
claims the basket of your childhood.
Your baba's brown
face, quietly disappointed.
You will come to me to play
patient. Induce the body to forgive
the neglect of the mind.

Bundle yourself in song
like a sapling for first snow,
knowing the world
will not bless you with warmth
for months if you even live
to remember it.

Ode to Enough

Carolyn Stice

With your still mouth you call
for the dead to rise,
laughing again in your arms.
Look at you. His wife is wailing
over the coffin, and all you
can think about is his body.
You are more than a girl
pushed sideways by longing
across the maddening gulf,
between want and have,
or the space on the line of your neck
where kisses slept and thrushes
called softly to one another at dusk.
You are a silver net.
You are light playing over water
shimmer of wave against wave.
You draw the outline of his shape
with your mind's eye and hold it
in a hollow place, against your ribs
where music moves only at midnight,
and daytime leeches out of blood
to spill onto the shadows you leave behind.
Be still. Let every last
slow, bold, quick sensation
roll down the heels of memory
and fix itself on your skin.
You are the wetness of tongue against lips
the sharp exhale as they part.

Laundry List

Angela Doll Carlson

The idea won't wait. You will think it might, but it won't. You will step from the long shower where the idea happened and unfolded and danced in your brain. You will step from the shower, still dripping and the idea will fade a little. You will dry your arms, your legs, run the towel over your hair, dab your face and then your ears to catch the one last lingering stream that runs to your shoulder with some urgency. With time and that terry cloth towel you will find yourself dry once again, standing there full nude and reflected in the mirror. You catch sight of that body. You believe it somehow resembles the body you knew in high school, college, mid life. The idea is drying too, fading from view or running down the drain. The water brought it here. The water takes it home.

BUY FISH STICKS.
It's almost Lent.

To save time you sort the laundry on the floor in the bathroom. While sorting the laundry on the floor in the bathroom you'll notice the accumulation of lint on the bath rug and in the corners of the tile where the floor meets the wall. You'll notice the dust on the hinges of the door, gathered there like freckles. You'll wonder how on earth the dust finds its way there, hung like that, and how often you'll have to notice it before you finally grab the towel you just used to dry your body and wipe away the dust. You won't follow through this time. There are no more clean towels in the closet. You'll need this towel again tomorrow. Towels are washed tomorrow when you have time to complete the process. Towels left in the washer too long turn to stink, but sneaky so. Towels left too long in the washer gather themselves

some hidden mildew that disappears when they dry, reactivated with water in the worst of times, like just after a shower while the idea is drying, the smell punctuating an otherwise profitable moment. The stink transfers to the skin though you don't remember it until later when while in a sweaty hush it returns to you while driving the car, or standing in line at the grocery store, it comes back again, a wave of mildew hovering just below your nostrils. "It's me," you'll think in line at the store, sniffing your collar, sniffing your cuff. "Maybe it's him," you hope as you notice the poorly dressed man in front of you. You notice his collar. You notice his cuff. You forget about it soon enough, in the time it takes to travel from the check out to the car. Towels are washed tomorrow. Leave the dusty hinges where they are.

WASH WINDOWS, VACUUM FLOORS.
House blessing tomorrow.

By eleven in the morning you remember food. Your stomach reminds you in the worst way, nausea rather than pain. By eleven the laundry is in, boys' jeans and tee shirts, that small blanket your youngest still carries to bed every night. It has its own stink. It smells of his history, his wonder, his late night travels through the house, dragged along the dirty floor after a cold sweat nightmare. He likes the way it smells. He says it is a comfort. Every night you gain a whiff of that stench made of too few showers and more rolling in the dust under the bed. This house is dusty, too dusty. What was that idea? It was a good one. It was there in the shower. It had something to do with the dust that hung on the door near the hinges, perhaps not. By then the idea was drying or running down the drain. It dried fast, and quiet—not like paint drying; not like that, but maybe a little. Paint dries loud and long, the smell lingering for days in the clothes and skin, more like mildew, towels left too long in the washer.

What is it about this idea and why did it go? It was a good idea. It ought to have lasted longer than this. The nausea washes over you; you might wonder a moment about whether or not you are ill. Is it the flu? What about a bit of toast, some tea? You are not hungry. You are past hungry. It's almost lunch.

PAY TAXES.
BUY BREAD.
School begins.

Get it down. Get it all down, like a mind dump on the page. Write it down and don't stop for ten minutes, eight minutes, five minutes or until the buzzer sounds the end of the cycle. Your friend has a new washer and dryer. It is shiny white and aluminum, modern and digital. It dries in half the time. Your friend's drying cycle ends with a perky tune, a three or four tone song that signals her, alerts her, it's time to fold. Your signal is the buzzer, like the one at a high school basketball game when a basket is made. Here is your basket but she's winning, up by two. Two-zip. The buzzer sounds and you hesitate because maybe there are a few more words hiding there under the edges of the keyboard, under the glass of water at your elbow, under the carpet at your feet and you notice the lint. How long has it been since this was vacuumed? You cannot even remember, and who cares? No one complains. You bought this rug for its pattern. "It hides things," you had said. And you know it's true now, but not exactly. You see the lint. It takes away the last words you had hidden underneath. It squirrels them away in its pattern, deep in the pile of the fibers. All you see now are the small specks of dirt and dust. Dust, even here, even now. Don't look under the bed where the carpet ends. You do not want to know the colony of skin cells, last year's muddy boot leftovers, leaves the wind blew in through open windows. It is a mass of things stored up and waiting. It's better to leave it undisturbed, like asbestos lying in wait. You wander from the rug to the space under the bed but do not look, you know it is there; you do not need confirmation. Write it down, write it down before the idea dissolves, before it dries and joins the collection of things you might have written down, before it runs down the drain, before it becomes words on a list of things to get, to buy, to clean, before it becomes voices asking for help dressing, stomachs aching for more than toast and tea. Write it down because the idea won't wait. You will think it might. You will hope it will.

But it won't.

Four Hours

Linda Dennison

Six line cooks sauté sauerbraten six nights a week, but it's only him she notices.

Four months of lifestyle-Spanish in Chicago, a study of the language and the lips from whence it came — in this, it's all contained.

Sixteen glances sneaked beneath heat lamps before they take her lunch break in the back alley, where everyone smokes.

Three words she catches in the too-fast phrases of his heart language: la cartel, mi hija, cinco anos, but she doesn't know the Spanish to ask after this word for prison or this little girl, so she let's him breeze by it, da igual.

One slip of thermal receipt paper with his poor penmanship scratching black number lines creases inside her apron pocket.

Five conversations with the rearview mirror before the call.

Eleven digits she dials, his out-of-area line rings in stutters.

One hang-up before the second ring.

Two rings grip her fingers for fashion: a symbol of marriage, she knows, in a culture of symbols, she learns.

One ring, hers, that he keeps so he can keep her.

Four months, she'd played the game, screening his calls one night, dancing til two the next.

Twelve days, she took a break, flew for a good cause to San Diego, drove Highway 5 to Tijuana, built an orphanage three Jeep Wrangler hours from his mama's house.

Twelve days, every one, she imagined life with him could be all beaches and burnt shoulders, without the bullshit.

Ninety-four feet splashed in the salty Pacific, while her hand wanted for his, shoulders and shins burnt like hers in the Baja sol.

Four graffiti artists carved the letters of love in the wet sand, a-m-o-r, what was he doing hundreds of miles away if not with her?

Four girls played carelessly near the white-capped waves, innocent and light skinned like him. Was there a little girl like him, big blue eyes like him?

Six requests back home, Baila conmigo?

Five answers, flimsy and whispered, I can't.

Seven steps to his front door where they wait, flashing blue light washing over her creamy arms, his chapped lips forming broken English words he knows she wants to hear.

Seven minutes to change to a borrowed dress in the back of the gray truck to meet dress code.

Five fingers curl around her uncovered ass cheek, gone before she can swat them away.

Four glances back to the car at the curb, beneath the tracks. A streetlight flashes black while she waits in line for a wristband.

Three offers, via phone, for a safe ride home from this neighborhood known for nighttime crime. She declines.

Twenty-five dollars off for dirty blonde hair and bright blue eyes, Ladies Night.

Nine bartenders, bottles in hand, beg for singles while she sips water from a straw.

Nine Coronas, before long, lime in the neck and gone.

Two extra sips she pilfers from his bottle, trying to quench a thirst not for drink.

Seven, no nine times his hand slides down her arm, across her chest, coming away salty and warm with sweat.

One single English phrase in a sea of shouted Spanish. She can't keep up.

Zero inches of slinky salsa dress fabric between his hand and her leg, twice.

Twelve spots on her shoulder, moist evidence of his lips asking permission, her declines drown in mixed pieces of language.

Nine years, academic Spanish in school, with honors. A waste.

One defiant tear drops when he grabs her shoulders, clacking her ribs into one another.

Six certain doubts about staying until last call, quiet in obedience to his hand firmly around her waist.

Three seconds she closes her eyes in the stall, just like she learned in a counseling course, the flushing water putting pictures of the Pacific in her head. If they could only go together to Baja, she imagines.

Two stories he'd always forget he'd already told her, about his familia on this fishing trip, he tells again while they wait.

Two incongruent cultures, make for a messy union, she's learning.

Two moments where their hands close together while waiting for the gray truck to pull up, solos amigos.

Twenty-one miles from home in this grid of city streets, trains deafening overhead. Just friends.

One drunk driver in the gray truck. She can get her stuff and stand on the curb or climb in. Tick, tock.

Three seconds, she locks eyes with him, sin palabras, waits for him to say the only thing, the right thing. But, he climbs in.

One call is all it takes, two-thirty in the morning, to summon a safe ride home, after being sent to bed hours ago with her refusal.

Two times he calls to her on the curb, from the passenger window with long vowels, stretching her name into paragraphs. She can't move to him. She nearly does.

Five footwork patterns, new salsa moves she'll take home, feet all chkchk across wooden panels in heeled slingbacks, dress corners flirting with air pockets.

Fifty-four minutes of every hour, for weeks she misses his half-English words, his lisp, the way he can never pronounce teeth.

Three nights on other dance floors without his bravado, his sure feet to lead her, hers are lost.

Four hours, into the morning, she stays wide-awake replaying these four hours in her head. These four months.

Alms

Christian Downes

28 Buddhas ruminate in the empty pavilion
pregnant with shuffling and the scent of brass
Peony and wind

Elders haw at their reflections
in each dull gold belly
their eyes, warm with temple smoke culminate
in my robed brother's blessing–his prayer hand
a murmuring candle guided toward my chest

the rising current of his words
May he know how to nourish the seeds of joy in himself every day

Prayer rises into the incandescent green
a single shrike bobbing at the end of the branch

alms and blessings ascend from flowers and fruit rinds
small Koi swimming lily hearts

eyes of the mange-ridden cat inquire
of mine as I, painting this memory

watercolors humming in the parchment
like silken summer wind in the blood grass

Soothsayer of Desert

Müesser Yeniay

I heard the voice
of existence

(I had a dream which is hidden in
a grain of sand)

my soul
was immigrating
to a shadow of a palm tree

the voice that I wrote on crooked bones of camels,
on stems of date palms

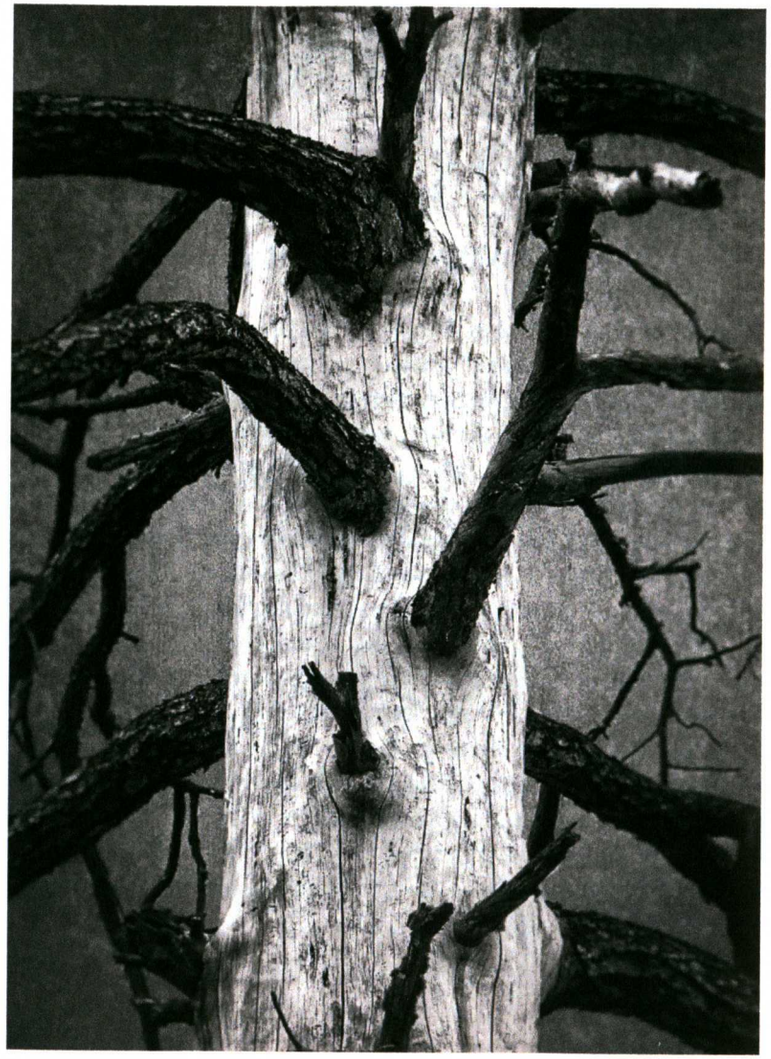
rose on air in oasis
Oh God! said Mohammed:

he told and I wrote

A Parrot Named Darwin

Nicole Provencher-Natale

I planned to teach him to sing. I planned to teach him to hop from finger to finger and coo back at me when I smiled. He was with me that terrible year. Between the finding out about a mistress and the knowing and the deciding what to do. What to do. Darwin learned to sob, long deep cries that he repeated over and over until I threw a patchwork blanket around his cage and locked him in the bathroom, pushing his stand against the window furthest away from my wall. Sometimes when he cried I could hear my mother, her wails echoing from the bathroom tiles. I strained for the click, click, click of a lighter that never came. There was nothing to do by the time I found the feathers pulled like tufts of hair from a brush and spread in a semicircle around his cage. Darwin sobbing as he yanked them from his body, his skin bleeding. Darwin in my hands as I coaxed him from finger to finger singing, the only feathers left the ones at the back of his neck too close for his beak. And Darwin when I found him. Flat on the bottom of the cage like a boot print, mimicking a sobbing faint enough to miss. Darwin naked against the newsprint and crying, his feet not even in the air.



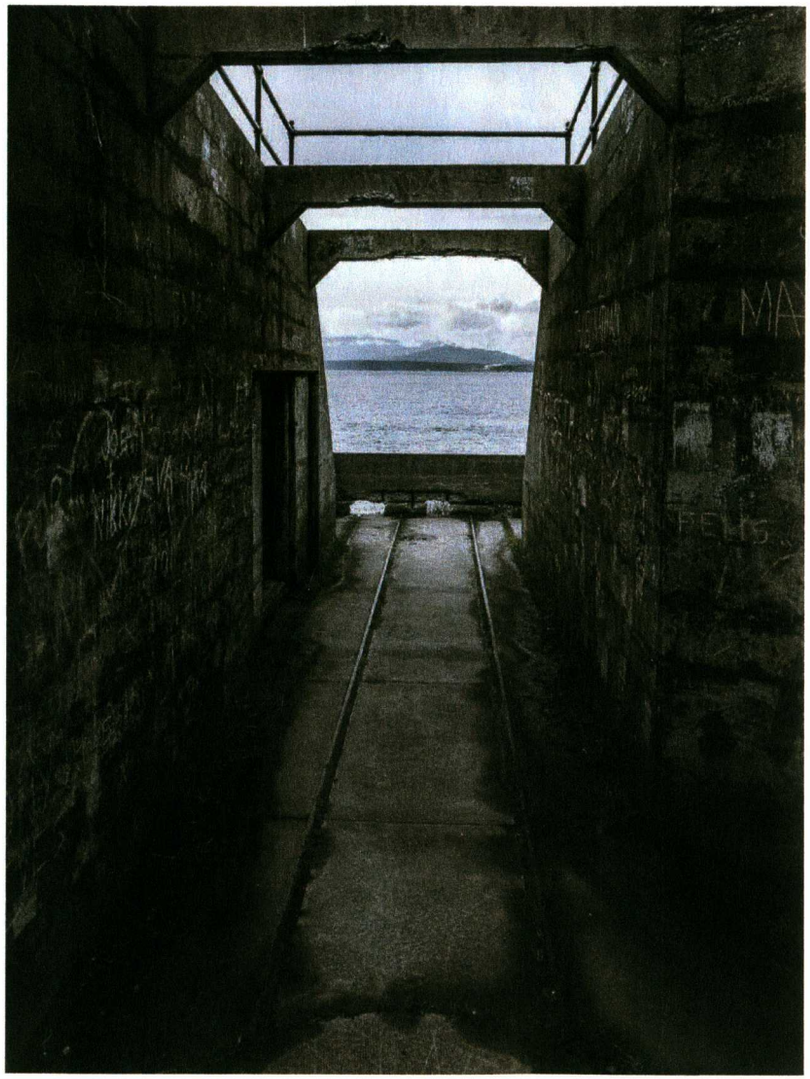
Ponderosa Snag, White Horse Lake

Bob Denst

Descending Cloud Forest, 2015

OIL ON CANVAS

Matthew Schwab



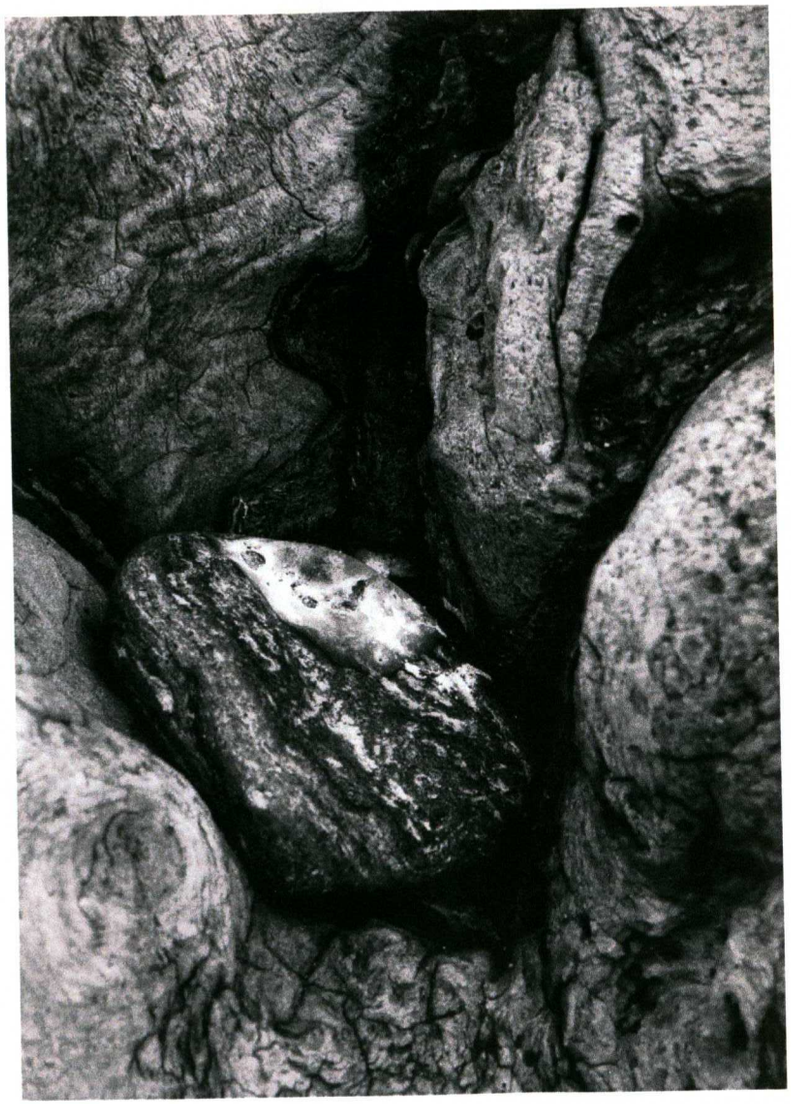
Looking Towards Port Townsend

Bob Denst

Standing with Burnt Trees

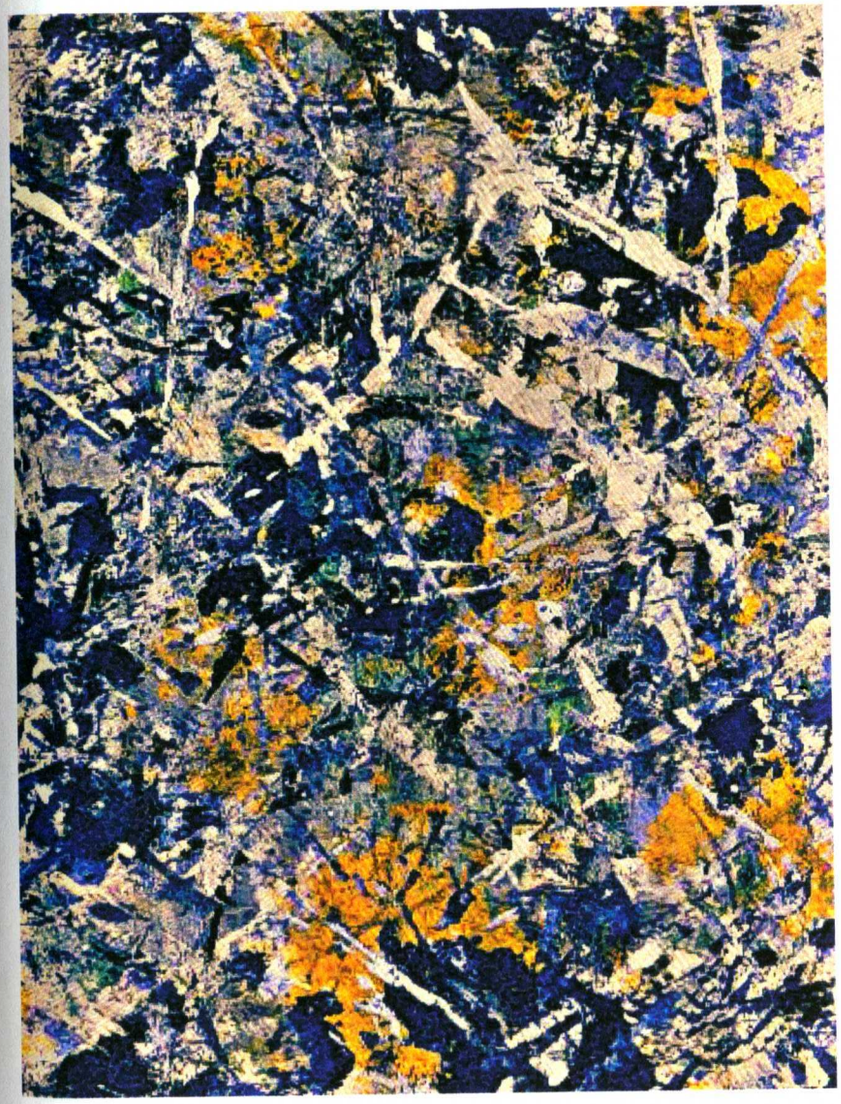
Part of *Red Dress Series*, slef-portraits of the photrapher

Daisy Yokely



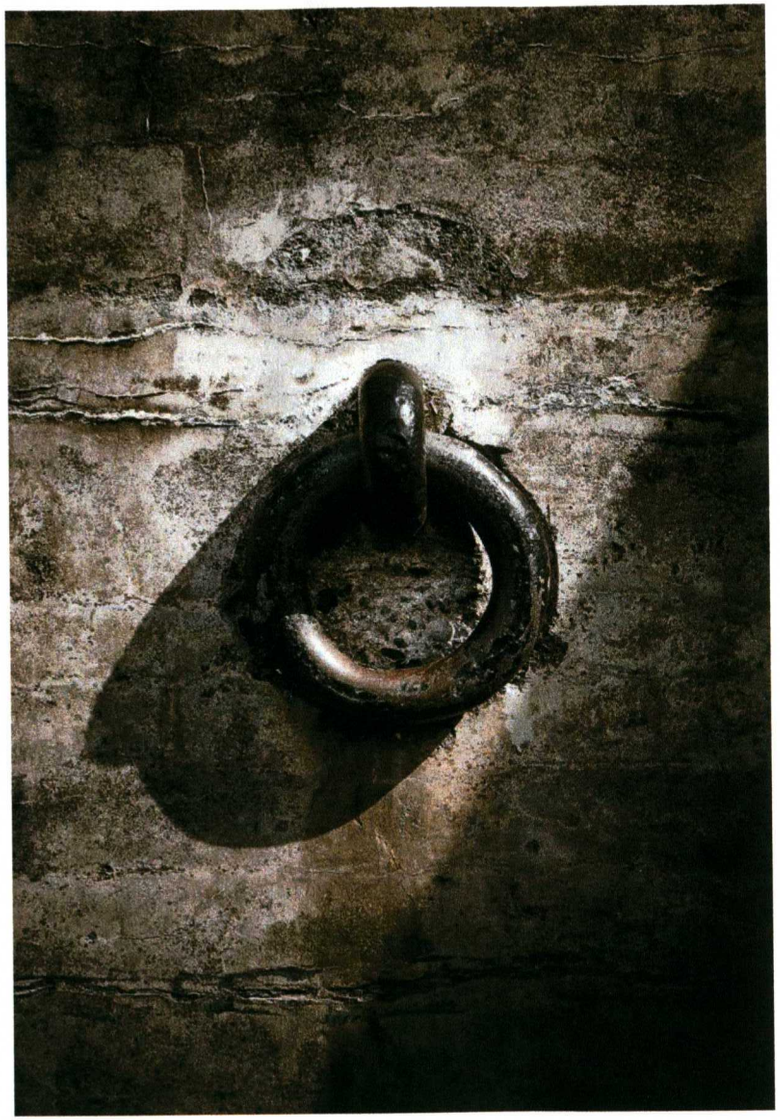
Wood and Stone #3
Whidbey Island

Bob Denst



Untitled
Acrylic on paper

Anna Prundaru



Anchor Ring, Ft. Casey

Bob Denst

Women Carrying Firewood Across the Payatza River, 2015

oil on canvas

Matthew Schwab

The Moth

Bentley Snow

"One's sympathies, of course, were all on the side of life."
—Virginia Woolf, "The Death of the Moth"

A brown moth perched near the showerhead as I entered the stall, a good enough reason, I felt, to try a different shower, until I realized the rest of them stood in plain view of the hostel's kitchen window. I wasn't keen on showing myself half nude, so I returned to my first choice and tried to pretend the moth wasn't there, so I could feel I wasn't being seen.

When I turned on the electric light, though, of course it drowned out the dim glow suffused throughout the bathroom, and the moth began to flutter around the attractive, stubby cylinder that glowed like sunset under soap scum. I'm not sure why I was uncomfortable to begin with—it was just a moth—but hey, this was something sentient I was naked with, and I didn't want that. I heard a story about a guy who was skinny-dipping alone in the wild until a deer came by and started watching him. It made him nervous. I can't blame him. How much do those things—animals, insects, whathaveyou—understand?

Unfortunately, that chalky, degradable texture that moths have is almost as bad as being naked with one, so it took me awhile to remove the guy (let's just say guy so I feel less uncomfortable) without contact. Pulling back the shower curtain, I fanned my hands to wave him out, then whisked the curtain back in place, before he came back in over the top, about a second later. What can he say, he loves him some light. After a few more attempts, I got him to be still and outside of the shower—all but one hair-thin forearm which crooked over the top of the curtain, much like Vince Carter hanging on the rim by his elbow in that awesome NBA dunk contest. One antenna

poked into view too, subtle but significant: "Your privacy hangs on a whim," it seemed to say, "—mine." I could see his triangular smudge on the curtain's translucent (or transobscurescent) white, which was close enough to the light to keep him pacified, for now.

While fanning him out of the shower, I had seen an open window from which he must have entered the bathroom, perhaps while the sun still shone into it. The opening in the window was small—only the top few inches of glass had swung in and open a few inches—such that, looking around at the hallway and spacious sink area with all of its fluorescent lights, I was sure the moth would never realize freedom lay in the last place that he thought it did—the darkness.

Images of bees trapped inside by windows, and flies, buzzing desperately against glass, went through my mind: a terrible thing, to see the world before you yet to be kept back from it, and to not know how or why. The moth would not escape: the gap he had to pass through was such a narrow part of his world, and besides, there was light right here. There was no way he would let me guide him out, no way he would understand my words nor gestures, but if he had landed on my hand, I could and would have set him free, not that I wanted to touch him. So I didn't try to convince him. I've tried to set bugs free before, but usually killed them accidentally. The way I so easily killed once seemed like power to me, but now I saw that I was weak. I turned out the light and left.

The Forecast

M. C. Rush

Things happen not for one reason but for many,
none of which struggle and scheme on your behalf.

Inadequate to the handicap,
purpose reposes so small alongside accident.

We must blaspheme against certainty
or against truth,

press ourselves full-length, naked,
against a cold window running with rain,

hoping our naked hopes, believing our naked beliefs,
fearing our naked fears and loving our naked loves.

Entropy is forecast to win, of course,
but we will bet on the longshots, won't we?

Not all extravagance leads to dissolution;
not all care conserves.

When stubbornness can no longer transcend weakness—
this is the point of no concern.

Your brain will conform to someone's expectations,
imagine limits that we will call "you."

How often is what appears to be resilience

actually complacency?

It is true.
It is also untrue.

In a just world, you would only die
when you ran out of things you wanted to do.

A Blueprint of Dispossession

Jonathan Greenhause

The wallpaper hung from the ceiling
but kept its distance from the walls, as it was mildly allergic to them.

The floor, too, was divorced from the uneven floorboards,
& the roof's tiles were affixed

several inches above the conical roof.
The entire house situated itself slightly outside its address,

receiving its correspondences in the mailbox slightly to its left,
& the basement took care to be

noticeably aboveground
for fear it might grow unkemptly subterranean.

The gas connections in the kitchen refused to carry gas,
the pipes were rust-averse & hydrophobic,

& invited guests were kindly requested
to depart before arriving. Even the home's long-term inhabitants

weren't part of the lease, claiming their residency in a no-man's-land
between past & present,

& the property's true owners
were compulsive liars who regretted their compulsion to lie.

Geometry

Elena Tomorowitz

Hung like winter's entry into spring,
my goose gown draped me, my hair
trapezed and sulked. I wished for all
these feathers to make weightlessness.

A moon entered through blinds,
made claw marks on this bed
[shadowing the ugly places]
where I combed my hair and waited.

Struck matches in the dark,
I looked for reflections in panes.
Only the pigeons, only petals hide scabs.
All forms of communication irrevocable.

I pen letters to my future self
on graph paper,
organize my life
into squares.

[I am two-fourths hibernation,
two-fourths bird eating worm,
one percent collapsed roof] –

something, like being locked inside.
Whether criminal, whether animal.

"I Wish I Knew How to Quit You," Says the Moon

James Croal Jackson

We know it is us
who wish to quit the moon.

We close our eyes our jaggedness
could drive the sun away but never
in the way our metaphors could.

Still we write the moonlight
into the sand and growl
at the tide

and again
when the tide returns.

We cry from the shape
our lives took to intersect–

an hourglass
filled with sugar,
or a snail. Or a million
hourglasses, a million snails,

a million glimmering shells

in a measured slowness.

You were talking about the sunrise–
but I never wanted to look.

Waiting for the Boom

Marlene Olin

Due to bad luck and worse genes, my family history was paved with potholes. Dad had his first heart attack when he was thirty-eight. An uncle was killed by a drunk driver. Three grandparents died young. To wrest control of our fates, my parents set rules. God gave us ten commandments. My siblings and I had hundreds.

Don't touch that lamp! Don't touch that sofa! Don't touch anything!

Like most over-protected children, the three of us had no common sense. Steven, seven years older, looked forward to the hurricane season the way some kids counted the days until Christmas. On sunny days he stayed indoors watching TV or doing homework. But as soon as dark clouds appeared on the horizon, my brother's face lit up.

He'd put on a yellow slicker, grab an umbrella, and drag an aluminum folding chair onto the lawn. Then he would sit and wait for the rain to pour, scouring the Miami sky for lightning. He would count the seconds that passed between the flash and the boom and calculate just how close the lightning was. With one eye he'd scan the universe while the other watched the front door.

Some people can only handle the push and pull of life's surprises in small doses. Steven loved the thrill of electricity in the air. He loved the way his scalp tingled, the way the hair on his arms stood straight up. But he always remained within a few yards of shelter, close to our mother's grasp. He wouldn't leave home until he was twenty-three.

Ellen, eighteen months younger than my brother, was suffering

through adolescence. Her hair was as frizzy as a scouring pad. Her mouth was a cage of braces. While Jackie Kennedy graced magazine covers with her classic taste and boyish figure, Ellen was unpleasantly plump.

But the biggest burden in my sister's life was me. There was an invisible barricade in our bedroom that I was forbidden to cross. When she spoke, she snarled. If she saw me in the hallway, she'd turn and head the other way. My brother was her partner in loneliness, her best friend, her only friend. Together they were Saturday night fixtures on the family room couch.

I prided myself on being different, the sort of kid who never colored inside the lines. There was nothing I liked better than to slip past the front door when my parents weren't looking. An inch was light. Two inches was blue sky. Three inches and I'd see the hibiscus hedge in front of our house. I still can remember the instant relief felt when one elbow then two slid through the crack, the doorknob behind me.

If she caught me, if a claw grabbed my arm, my mother never simply said goodbye. Each time I went outside to play triggered a ritual. Rubbing her palms nervously on her housecoat, trying to brush off invisible smudges only she could see; she'd look down and mumble. Don't get wet. Don't get dirty. Don't go in the street. It was the verbal equivalent of rubbing a rabbit's foot. Mom's catechism of woe.

Every moment of our lives was punctuated by do's and don'ts. The kids we could play with. The houses we could visit. But the more my parents hovered, the more I wanted to take risks. And there was no place better to take those risks than when I went horseback riding.

Every Saturday my best friend Allison's mom dropped us off at a ranch in Davie along with the Zimmerman twins. We only had money for an hour's ride, and no one ever bothered to ask what we did the rest of the time. My parents assumed I was at a pony ring, perched on an aging Shetland, cinched in with a leather belt. In truth the ranch was more dangerous than my parents could have ever

imagined.

The owner was a grizzled man of about seventy who had a bowlegged walk and about half of his teeth. When he'd show us how to groom the horses, he would stand a little too close. Sometimes he'd brush up against us. He joked about how riding a horse was like making love to a woman. We were only ten years old, but we knew never to leave each other's side when this guy was around.

Harder to pass up was a ride in his rusty old truck. Since we were afraid to sit next to him in the cab, Allison and I would stand on the running boards and the Zimmerman twins would sit on the hood with their legs wrapped around the headlights. Then the cowboy would careen through the pasture, his left arm out the window waving his hat in the air, laughing when one of us fell off. The ground was full of ruts and tree roots. Allison and I would bounce up and if we were lucky, our feet made contact with the running board on the way down. But half the time we were bucked clean off and chased the truck to catch up. Looking back, I'm surprised no one got killed.

My parents' rulebook was often nonsensical, based more on superstition than fact. Bicycling was a particular obsession. I was only allowed to ride my bike on the sidewalk. Even when I was in junior high, I had to walk my bike across the street.

One day a bunch of kids decided to bike to Uleta Park, around a fifteen-minute ride from my house. I obediently stopped on every corner while the others pedaled ahead. Soon my friends were out of sight. I was so unaccustomed to venturing off familiar turf that I got lost. Panic-stricken, I ran from block to block with my hands on the handlebars, trying to catch a glint of a fender, the back of a shirt.

An hour later, when I finally found the playground, tears of outrage streamed down my cheeks. When I made it home I took a deep breath and announced to my mother I was never walking my bike again.

A bigger hurdle was the invisible perimeter my parents had drawn around the neighborhood. A mile from our house in all directions marked my boundaries. Under no circumstances was I

allowed to go beyond them.

Deep within the heart of forbidden territory was my favorite hangout. Dixies, a five and dime store, not only had great comic books but the best penny candy selection in town. Wax lips, Smarties, cinnamon toothpicks. If I was lucky Mom would hand me some change and let me browse there while she shopped for groceries two doors down.

Allison could go to Dixies any time she wanted. Because both of her parents worked, she was basically unsupervised and free to bike wherever she pleased. I was jealous beyond imagination. Every day I watched the back of her shirt shrink smaller and smaller as she made her way along the asphalt. I was tired of watching the backs of shirts. We kept our dog Max on a chain in the front yard. I felt that chain around my neck, too.

A plan emerged. I saved nickels and quarters in a metal Band-Aid box that I hid from my sister. It took me a few months but eventually the change added up to over two dollars.

I didn't exactly lie to my mother. But when I told her one morning that I was going to Allison's house, I knew I was breaking the rules. An hour later we crossed Sixth Avenue. We flew on our bikes and never looked back.

When the two of us reached the five and dime, I proudly took out my cash and carefully made my selections. I had never experienced such a thrill before. I felt confident, assured, grown-up. I glimpsed into my future and saw someone who was self-reliant and capable of making her own decisions, right or wrong. One day there would be no older brothers or sisters to boss me around or parents to watch my every step.

Allison and I greedily stuffed some candy in our mouths and left the store with bags in our hands. We almost made it to the bikes when we saw them. There was my mother, brother, and sister leaving the bakery with a look of shock on their faces. Mom moved in a flash, mouthing words I couldn't hear, her arms gesturing like windmills. She dumped my bike into the truck of her car, corralled me into the

back seat, and drove home.

Steven fiddled with the radio while my sister sat next to me. Cracking her gum, Ellen gazed out the window. The sun threw shards of light. "You're in deep shit now, moron." Then just in case I didn't get the message the first time, she lowered her chin, looked down at me and reloaded. "Really deep shit." I turned around for one last glimpse of my friend as we left the parking lot. Allison was pedaling at a clip, her hair flying in the wind, her handlebar basket overflowing with bounty.

A few years later, Allison's family moved to upstate New York. Washington Irving country. Since phone calls were too expensive, we communicated by writing. There was one letter I read and reread until it disintegrated in my hands.

Guess what? wrote Allison. My parents bought me a horse! My very own horse!

Again I pictured the back of Allison's shirt receding. But this time I envisioned pasturelands, forests of evergreens, apple orchards on rolling hills.

I'm learning to jump. It's so fun. Bosco's a palomino and he's only eight years old and his withers are the color of the sun. I wish you could see him. He's so cool. He's really really cool.

Meanwhile my life looped day after day. School. Homework. Sleep. School. Homework. Sleep. Sometimes it took weeks to write Allison back because I had absolutely nothing to say.

Then one day we got the phone call. At first I thought I heard static. The voice on the other line was crackling. There were jumps and starts between words.

"It's Mr. Schaefer, Marl, there's been an accident."

Allison's parents never called. It took me a few seconds to register who he was, where he was. When my synapses finally clicked, I backpedaled. Fear stuck in my throat. "What? I can't hear you? What did you say?"

"Allison... the horse jumped...she hit her head...she never woke up..."

Suddenly a lifetime of admonitions congealed into one hard lump. All the do's and don'ts, all the stop signs and yield signs, flashed in front of me. My parents' fears were validated. The world was a smaller place.

In the distance, the television blared in the family room. My mother was washing dishes in the kitchen. The air-conditioning hummed. In a few minutes I expected my father's car to pull up along the pavement. I glanced out the window and searched the sky for lightning. I could swear I heard the boom.

Birds of Metal

Daniel Blokh

"We're reaching an altitude of 15,000 feet, folks," the voice above us chimed. Michael and Ella sat behind us, staring out the window and gasping in awe. "We're so high up, Daddy!" Michael yelled.

"Yes, we are," I said, smiling. I felt obligated to watch the view, but after the first few minutes of the ride, I lost interest. It felt like the same landscape repeating over and over again, no end in sight until the eventual end of our ride.

Instead of marveling at the view, I turned to April, who was watching the children with a lost look on her face. This was not unusual; for the past few months, or perhaps years, she had looked like this. She was more an eye than a person, more asleep than alive, watching the children's play as though it were a dream.

"You alright, darling?" I said to her. She nodded. She had become quieter in these past two weeks, something I theorized I could fix with this trip. But no such luck had come yet. Some foolish hope still hung around me, an expectation to hear some fascination at the trees and dark rivers veining out under us. But she remained silent, only watching, watching. It was all she ever did.

It saddened me to see her like this, and I still had no idea as to why she was becoming like this. She had children to love, a husband to love her, a home. What else could she want? Or, rather, what used to exist for her that suddenly went missing?

I looked away from her. Around us, people were talking about everything from sports to cartoons. Two men sat in front of us lost in a deep debate about a football game, while next to them sat two women, one young and one old, discussing some celebrity. It was all boring to me, but I tuned into to the conversations for lack of anything better to do.

Eventually, a stewardess walked past, taking orders for food. I got a martini, which she brought in a small plastic cup. She was quite pretty, but when I looked at her, I thought instantly of Ella and Michael behind us and of April. I thought of the woman who I married, who had barely looked at me in the past month, who had watched our children run and play for hours on end, who would look for hours at anything except for me, who I had found in a frenzied fit of tears one day in the kitchen over a cracked bowl, who I loved. When the stewardess came back to take my cup, I did not ask for more, and I did not look at her. Instead, I looked out the window. The earth seemed like a toy underneath us, a board I could wipe with one hand, if only I could reach out of the window. I watched its passing greys and greens and blues and listened to the quiet chatter of the plane.

But it seemed to me that amidst the noise, the laughter of the children, the debate of the two men in front of us, the crying of a baby somewhere near the front, the snoring of the old man behind us, I could hear a strange noise resounding under us. It was a quiet, metallic murmur somewhere in the depths of the plane, an undertone to the ongoing conversations. It sounded only once and quickly disappeared, but it was unlike anything I had heard before, and I felt a little worry stirring in my heart. I looked over at April.

"Did you hear that, darling?"

She didn't answer, but I could see in the way she perked up and looked quickly around her that she had caught the noise as well. Her eyes darted back and forth across the airplane.

"It's alright, honey, don't worry—"

I was cut off by a sudden mechanical chirp, a faltering in the monotone grumble of the engine. April instantly grabbed her chair's armrests, her blue eyes wide open. Behind us, the children let out an excited shout.

"Daddy, we're going for a ride!" Ella said, leaning in toward me.

"Yes we are, Ella," I said, smiling at her. "We're going on a fun ride. Just like a roller coaster. Make sure you buckle up, honey."

Ella returned to her seat, giggling. I turned back to April.

"Honey, I'm sure this is nothing," I said. "It's probably just a bird, something like that." "No," she said, and suddenly, it seemed she had woken from the look she had before.

"Listen." I paused trying to listen to the aircraft. Around us, people were starting to talk among themselves, frantically. But I could make out the quiet mumbling of the engine under them, faltering slowly but consistently as we soared through the sky.

I looked back at April, and the calmness in her eyes frightened me. A smile spread across her face, the first in a long time, and she opened her mouth.

"This is just what we've been waiting for," she said. And I knew she was right.

Just then, the plane jerked again. I heard the children giggle behind us. Above us, the intercom came on.

"Don't be afraid, everyone," the pilot said, his voice attempting firmness but shaking. "There may be a fuselage failure, but it shouldn't be unfixable..."

The plane took a quick dip downwards, straightened up, and then dipped once again. There were shouts of panic now, rippling out through the plane. Across from us, a woman comforted a trembling old lady next to her; to the left, a man sat, crossing himself. The sound of croaking metal resonated under us, and each shiver of the airplane seemed to make it louder. It reminded me a bit of a carnival ride.

Over us, the pilot yelled into the intercom muffled by a babbling stream of people saying "my god" and "forgive me." He never said the words everyone was waiting for, but there was no need to. I noticed the children looking around them, listening to the pilot's shouts.

"Don't pay attention, children," I said, but I could see that they were still listening. So I said, "Don't be afraid. We're going to have so much fun. Look! The Earth's getting closer in the window. Why don't you wave?"

The children considered this for a few seconds before seeming to resolve in agreement with what I had said. They turned to the window, waving, and soon they returned to their previous ecstasy, yelling and laughing amidst the sounds of screaming and crumbling metal around us. They giggled, played patty cake, hugged each other.

After a while, the pilot fell silent, and there was nothing but an occasional whimper coming from above us. The sounds around us didn't die down, though. I clenched my hand into a tiny fist and closed my eyes. I imagined what the cities below us must think, seeing this grey bird blushing red in the sky, the shadow of a falling Icarus. I felt a hand on mine.

I opened my eyes to see it was April, her fingers interlocked with mine. Her eyes were rimmed with red, but she was smiling. I leaned in, and as we kissed, I played with her fingers in mine. When she pulled away, we intertwined our fingers.

"This will be a great adventure," she mouthed. I felt two other hands wrapping with ours, and looked back to see the children, their eyes full of warmth and excitement, so much that I couldn't believe they had come from us. We felt each other's hands, each other's skin, each other's lightness. How, I wondered, could this airplane be going down?

There was nothing to say to each other, nothing to listen to. My only regret was that I could not hear all of us breathe; the people's cries came from all sides of us, masking all other sound, even the faltering snarls of our engines. Nothing was audible, and there wasn't much to do but turn and smile at April as the plane sloped down and down and down.

She was smiling too, looking ahead at some fixated point at the front of the plane, a few tears travelling down her face as we went faster, faster, faster. I looked into her eyes, trying to capture the image of her at that moment. Her eyes were large and wide, almost frighteningly so, and I felt the need to take a sudden deep breath, as though they were drowning me. I did not kiss her or even bring my hand to her face. No, I did not want to disturb her. I only stared into the blue of those eyes, staring ahead as the plane was slowly wrapped in fire, as though it were burning into the ocean.

The Hole Game

Kate Imbach

Our puppy was dying. He half-chewed his dog bones because we stood nearby, encouraging him, scratching his ears. He knew chewing made us happy. We knew that if he could chew he wasn't dead yet. He could never quite get up the energy to mangle bones the way healthy dogs do. Once we stopped cheering him on, once we went off to make dinner or answer emails, he would nose the bones into dusty corners and turn away to sleep and whimper. We started buying the most extravagantly flavored treats, ham and peanut butter, but new flavors didn't entice him. He left them sniffed and unharmed.

We kept him alive for a little bit. We knew he needed to die but we liked him living, even fifty percent a ghost. Maybe we were selfish for not putting him to sleep right away. Maybe he was selfish for dying in the first place. In that short period when we were ignoring this impending death, James and I went to dinner at the restaurant where we had our first date. He ordered cheap red wine. He got heartburn. I complained about the things that I like to complain about. I can't remember what, or I'd rather not say. My complaints are dear to me. As I remembered everything that I had come to hate about him he reached for my hand across the table. The red-wine-white-tablecloth time machine clicked on and we flew backwards in a blur. I forgot everything I hated about him. I leaned my cheek in my hand and he touched my face, like we were right back at the beginning, except that we weren't. This time we had a half-dead dog waiting for us at home.

"It's time to put him down," James said when we went home and found the puppy wheezing on the living room carpet.

I sighed. James huffed. Our marital resentment had its own respiratory system.

"I will take care of it," James said.

"I will always take care of you," James said, at another time, under a different set of circumstances.

Being with James was like visiting someone in prison. Maybe he did hire guards to live in our home with us, with guns and billy clubs at the ready on their hips. I would never have noticed. I would never have been reprimanded. I was obedient to the prison protocol, when I could touch and speak and when I couldn't. I only filed shivs out of toothbrushes in my mind.

The next morning I stood at the bedroom window holding a bunched up edge of a lace curtain between my teeth. I couldn't move. Maybe the prison guards had their hands on my shoulders, keeping me in place. Maybe I knew the rules so well that I didn't even bother to fight anymore.

I watched James walk to the backyard. The puppy followed. He watched James dig a hole. It was sunny and pretty. There was a nice breeze. The puppy struggled to paw at the falling dirt as it fell in clumps from the shovel to the ground.

The digging didn't take long. It had rained and the puppy was small. He wagged his tail and whined. James didn't reach down and scratch his belly. He didn't speak in soft tones. He didn't lie down and hold him in his arms the way people do on the cold floors of vet offices right before deadly injections. He said nothing to the puppy because he had nothing to say. He never did.

James snapped and pointed. The puppy jumped into the hole, ready to play. He was having one of his good days. The last days are always good days.

They looked at each other.

I could read the puppy's mind because he wore his thoughts on the outside, on tail and tongue. He sniffed the air, grass and bugs. He sniffed greens and browns. He waited. He whined. He thumped his tail once against the dirt. He wondered if he was doing the right thing. He wondered what would happen next. Ball? Treat? He thumped his tail once more.

I could read James's mind, too. He thought nothing.

He pulled his gun out of his waistband and shot the puppy precisely between the eyes.

I squeezed mine shut a second too late, puppy blood lashed to the inside of my eyelids. I screamed and the lace curtain fell out of my mouth, heavy with spit and tears. In a house where proof of life was found in the strength of the jaw, in the damage teeth could do to a chicken-flavored dog bone, I was dead too.

James filled the hole, the grave, with dirt. He went into the kitchen. The only things he touched inside the house were soap, the faucet, water, and a dishtowel.

It was over. There were bones all over the house.

Pantoum for a Lost Christmas Syllable

Noel Torres

I woke to gifts 'neath a tree bathed in light.
It was our first Christmas after you died.
Mom cried quietly on her pillow, tears
falling from the weight of your absence, (Dad).

It was our first Christmas after you died.
All I could think was, "Where is my Daddy?"
Mom fell from the weight of your absence.
Christmas carols rang loud through the halls, (Dad).

All I could think was, "Where is my Daddy?"
as I tore open presents from Santa.
The halls were bathed in Christmas caroled loss
three year olds should never understand, (Dad).

I tore open presents from Santa and
Mom hugged me tighter than I've ever felt.
A three year old should never understand
what it feels like to lose a parent, (Dad).

Mom hugged me tighter than I'll ever feel.
Pain-filled tears thumped drummer boy beats on me.
What does it feel like to lose a parent?
An empty chair. A noteless song. Me, (Dad.)

The Last Word

Lauro Palomba

what to wear to my cremation
how to dress for soul salvation

my wedding suit no doubt too tight
the flames will loosen then ignite

a clothing heirloom none will wail
I can take, default its sale

the old and comfy things I wore
right after me, they're out the door

something sporty to say goodbye
'he ran not fast, he jumped not high'

what of a hat, a jaunty tilt
'over the top, the weave will wilt'

a fashion scarf, this final trip
'don't be absurd, he wasn't hip'

a coloured shirt, pale or bright
'he didn't mean it, keep it white'

a friend's last gift, warming pants
'check his pockets, on the chance'

accessory belt if made of leather
'another waist will show it better'

to conclude, shoes and socks
'if seldom used, leave in the box'

what's the point, our wants get trumped
our dearest wishes quickly dumped

a rude awakening if I sneaked back
true blue promises fallen slack

toasty and soft is how I came
for symmetry, go just the same

too much is made of seeming shrewd
skip the heartburn, opt for nude

Never on Tuesdays

Deri Ross Pryor

Note to self: In the future, never schedule a job on a Tuesday. Tuesdays are double coupon and senior days at Food-O-Rama. Nana never misses a Tuesday, even if she doesn't need a thing.

"I can always use more cat food, Tommy," she likes to say, often clutching a sheaf of mostly expired coupons in her tiny, wrinkled hands, and forgetting as usual that I go by Thomas now. I've yet to see a single clerk deny her a coupon. She once used ten of them on five cans of Fancy Feast. They were two years old and for a completely different brand. Nana gets what Nana wants.

Anyway, the job. I almost always schedule my jobs for the weekends. Nights preferably. Attention is diverted to drunk drivers and other nocturnal activities. The prostitutes down on Federal Highway help me out in more ways than one. Plus, it just seems fitting. Death in the wee hours of a Friday night has a certain glamour to it. In the garish light of pre-dawn Tuesday morning, it just seems cheap.

But my client insisted. It was the only time to get to him, she said. Payment would be wired once I texted a picture of the deceased target. Since she was doing the paying, I was doing the listening. Even after I had realized how inconvenient the timing was, I still figured I'd have plenty of time to get the job done and take Nana shopping. That was my first mistake in the whole debacle. It certainly wasn't my last.

The job was at one of those posh A1A houses halfway between Delray and Palm Beach, the pink terra cotta and plaster affairs with the gated driveways and roof-top terraces overlooking the water. Well, more specifically, it was at the beach area across from the house.

"Make it look like a drowning," the unnamed woman had said. Her voice was cold and methodic. "He never misses his morning

swim. He drinks heavily. It will make sense."

I liked the job even better after that. No clean up.

It all went wrong. I mean, I got the guy dead, no problem. A drowning is easy. But there were complications.

First, he was a big fucker. Well over three hundred pounds, easy. If you ever had to wrestle a big, hairy, old guy in a speedo in the cold Atlantic in the early sunrise, you'd understand my issue here. You wouldn't think a guy who took to swimming every morning like clock-work would be that big. I guess he did more floating than actual paddling.

Second, he had company, which I was not told to anticipate. I was just about to snap a picture of him before pushing him out to sea, when I heard a high-pitched whine from the hedge of sea grapes shielding the beach from the road.

"Benny! Benny!"

And here came this skinny little blonde nothing in a flimsy robe, looking like jail bait, her hair a wild, just-fucked-all-night mess. The details may have been vague, but the whys were suddenly quite clear. She came right for us.

"Hey, have you seen a guy?" She stopped right in front of me where I stood knee deep in water. Her eyes were raccooned with cheap mascara, and blurred from whatever partying her and Benny had gotten into last night, but she looked me up and down. "Hey, you're dressed funny."

I looked down at myself. I prided myself on always looking the professional. However, I had conceded to shedding my jacket and tie, shoes and socks, and rolling up my dress pants, which had still, unfortunately, gotten wet. I sighed. This was my favorite suit.

Then she saw Benny floating face down behind me like a bloated, pale fish. So I had to do her too. By this time, the sun was peeking over the horizon, traffic was picking up, and my car would be easily spotted parked oddly on the side of the road. I could see early beach-walkers gathering in the distance, a gaggle of old ladies in tennis shoes and visors who stomp up and down the beach faithfully every

morning, the little balls of their ankle socks bobbing wildly. Nana tried to join a group like that after Grandpa died, but she said all they did was gossip and talk about great-grandchildren, which was just too much of a sore spot for her. She emphasized this by dabbing at non-existent tears. If Julia hadn't run off, maybe I could have helped in that last matter.

I didn't have time to wait for both bodies to get carried out in the tide, so I started dragging. The woman was no problem, but her end was a bit bloody — a quick blade to the skull base is effective but never one hundred percent clean — so I had to take some time kicking sand around after stowing her in my trunk. Benny, well, he about killed me. By the time I fished him back out of the surf, the group of walkers were almost to us. Thinking quickly, I got under one of his arms and managed to balance him on his feet.

"Oh my God, is he OK?" One of the women stopped in her tracks.

"Oh, yeah, yeah, he's good." I said, trying not to grunt under his crushing weight. "Just overdid it."

The women continued to stand there, staring.

"Can we call for help? Do you need an ambulance?" another woman asked.

At that moment, I felt stupid. Yeah, I could have just played the startled passerby, pretending to do CPR, melting into the crowd after EMTs got there. Instead I was standing there like a complete rookie, worried about not letting Nana down.

"No, no," I laughed. "Just gonna give him a second to catch his breath."

They didn't move. Benny's head flopped onto my shoulder.

"Oh," a different woman said, "how sweet. He knows you will take care of him. What a cute couple you are."

I came very close to dropping Benny at that point. I gritted my teeth and gripped one side of Benny's pointless speedo.

"Well, I gotta get him inside so I can get to work."

The women moved on, proclaiming things about true love and devotion. I waited until I was alone again, and with a lot of grunting

and cursing, managed to drag Benny all the way to the road. I'm not a small guy – the job keeps me fit – but he about killed me. When the road was clear, I popped the trunk and plunked Benny on top of barely legal blonde. I peeled off my gloves and stood a moment to catch my breath. Thank God the Lexus has a big trunk. The most I had ever hauled was four, but I think it could hold a lot more. It's why I picked this model. That and the satellite radio. I like my tunes. Nothing like a little Adele to unwind after a stressful job.

By the time I got redressed properly and the car turned around, Nana was calling. I punched the accept button on the car console.

"Nana, hi."

"Where are you, Tommy?" Nana's voice boomed over the car's speakers. "You know what day it is."

I glanced at the clock. It was almost eight. Nana liked to get there at eight on the button. No exceptions.

"Nana, I don't like Tommy anymore. It's Thomas."

"How long, Tommy? I've got a lot of coupons today."

"I'm on my way. I'm running a little late." I was at least an hour from Boca. "Fifteen minutes. Tops."

I hung up and flipped the heater on high to dry out my clothes. I glanced in the rearview mirror and froze. I should have known. A few cars back I saw the rusted-out orange Kia.

Kevin. My third complication.

Kevin is a kid, an up-and-comer. He's stupid as hell, but somehow always catches wind of a mark and tries to jump the job. He's unprofessional and conspicuous. He's come close to botching things up for me more than a time or two.

I groaned. In my hurry, I forgot about snapping the picture. Since Kevin knew about the job, I knew that I wasn't the only hire and the money was up for grabs. First come, first served. I needed to send that text and get them gone. Normally, I liked having my marks completely disposed of before confirmation, making sure there were absolutely no ties to me or my clients. Professional courtesy. It didn't look like I'd have that luxury this time.

I accelerated the Lexus, easily passing cars until he was out of view, then left the A1A and hit I-95.

By the time I pulled up in front of Nana's, she was standing on the sidewalk, twisting the handles on her handbag into a knot. Nana was five-foot even, if you count her cloud of blue-white hair. She had on her retiree uniform of bright capris, coordinating button up shirt, and sensible sandals. She got in and slapped at my shoulder with her arthritic hands.

"It's almost nine, Tommy. I can't believe you would do this to me."

"Sorry, Nana." What else could I say? I loved my Nana. She was all I ever had. I didn't like to disappoint her.

"What is wrong with you? Why is it so hot in here?"

I struggled for an answer she wouldn't see through. "I, uh, I woke up late. I forgot some things and ran back through the yard. Sprinklers got me. I was trying to dry out my pants."

"You don't have sprinklers. Or a yard. You live in a condo."

"Neighbors' sprinklers."

She gasped. "Thomas! You ran through someone else's yard? I raised you better than that." She punched my shoulder again.

I said nothing and sped off, hoping to make up some time. As I waited at a light, I heard the pathetic coughing of a car on its last legs. Sure enough, coming at me in cross traffic was a rusted orange Kia.

"Fuck!" I muttered.

"Tommy! Language!"

The light changed, forcing Kevin to stop. He grinned as I passed. I went a few more lights and turned into a Starbucks.

"This isn't right. Where are we?" Nana sat up and peered over her glasses.

"I need coffee," I told her as I pulled around the back of the building to the drive-through.

"I could have given you a cup of coffee."

Nana buys Food-O-Rama brand coffee, which costs about two dollars a can and tastes like feet. I got a latte and sat a good ten minutes behind the Starbucks sipping it while Nana fussed.

When I felt sure I had lost Kevin, I continued on to the store. I tried to figure out a way to snap those pictures without Nana seeing, and then dump those bodies, quick. The sloppiness of the whole thing made me nauseated.

"Hey, Nana, how long is your list?"

She pulled out a piece of notebook paper and a wad of coupons. "Let's see, I need milk and eggs and bread and fruit...do you like peaches? I have a coupon for peaches. And cat food and paper towels..."

OK, so long enough to take them somewhere, I thought. "Hey, so, I really have an important errand to run. For work. I may drop you off and come back for you. That OK? Nana?"

Nana had turned her head to her window. It wasn't OK. I sighed. I pulled into the parking lot of the store and headed for the side of the store. There was a tall hedge of bushes lining the barrier to the street. I parked behind some dumpsters.

Nana looked around. "Tommy, this is not where we park!"

"I thought maybe this would give us a little more shade. It's gonna be hot today." At her dubious look, I added, "Trust me."

Nana just sniffed and got out of the car. I had another option. I'd get Nana inside, come out, snap the picture, and worry about the bodies later. I didn't like it. I'd have to be sure I didn't get identifying features of my car in the shot, but it was my best bet. I went in with Nana to get her all settled with her shopping, made up an excuse of needing the restroom, and left her by the canned goods. As I turned out of the aisle, I heard a familiar voice.

"Let me help you with that, ma'am."

Kevin. I spun on my heel and hurried back to see him plucking canned peaches off the top shelf and putting them in Nana's cart.

"What a nice young man you are!" she said. "I wish my grandson was as thoughtful."

"Hey, Nana." I snatched peaches out of Kevin's hand and glared at him over Nana's head. "Didn't have to go after all."

Kevin smirked. He was shorter than me by several inches, pale,

his face dotted with freckles and pimples, giving him the look of mottled fruit, and he had a shock of red hair that was never combed. He was in torn jeans and faded chucks. His t-shirt had a nasty slogan from a local restaurant implying he was good at sex.

I stepped between him and Nana. "Thanks, man. I got this." I made my hand into the shape of a gun and pushed him in the chest with the barrel.

Kevin didn't move.

"Look, you little –" I was losing patience.

"Language, Tommy!" Nana looked up from a can of pineapple.

Kevin laughed and held up his hands.

"No prob. I'll be around." He gave me a yellow grin. Jesus, surely he made enough for dental care.

He slid down the aisle and out of sight. I rubbed my temples. May in Florida meant the heat was enough to make those bodies a problem after only a couple of hours. I needed to hustle Nana along but wasn't going to leave her alone with Kevin around. She dragged and fussed down every aisle, comparing her list to coupons to prices. No matter how many times I've told her she didn't need to worry about money anymore, that I could cover her expenses, she would hear nothing of it.

When we finally made it to the check out, Kevin was leaning on the customer service counter trying to flirt with the disinterested girl behind it. Nana followed my gaze.

"Such a nice young man, isn't he? Handsome fellow. Looks like he found himself a girl. Wish you would. You need to forget about Julia."

"Nana, we've been through this. It's not Julia. It's work."

"Oh, because being an accountant is so demanding. Pff." She turned away from me and began laying her coupons out on the conveyer belt. By the time we were done, Kevin was gone.

As we walked out to the car, Nana said, "Open the trunk, Tommy."

I stopped dead. "Uh, no. It's full. We'll put this all in the back seat."

"Full of what? Your trunk is huge. It will spoil in the back seat. The sun will get to it. Open the trunk."

"Can't."

"Tommy…"

"Nana…"

We stood next to the Lexus, locked in a stare down. Suddenly, she reached out and snatched the keys out of my hand and hit the trunk button.

"No!" I made a grab to slam the trunk lid closed, then stopped. It was empty.

"What. The. Fuck." I bent down to look all the way to the back. The bodies were gone.

"Language, Tommy!" Nana carefully put a bag in the trunk. "And help me with this. Be useful."

Stunned, I grabbed a bag, then looked in the trunk again. Just then Kevin and his coughing Kia pulled up. He grinned at me.

"Y'all have a nice day."

I had a moment of complete shock. I realized then that Kevin had been casing me for a while. And was confident enough to stay around to throw it all in my face. I leaned down close to his window.

"Kevin," I hissed.

"Ah, ah," he whispered back. "Don't be a sore loser."

"You little fuck."

"Language, Tommy!" He mocked my Nana's voice. He threw his head back and laughed. Just then there was a loud thumping from his car. His smile melted. The thumping came again, this time shaking the whole car. Suddenly, his rusted trunk lid exploded open and a very red, very angry Benny fell out of the trunk, sputtering and cursing.

Nana gasped and Kevin flew out of the car.

"What the hell!" He gaped at Benny, then swiveled his eyes to mine.

Benny spun around, confused. He saw me, must have recognized me, but Kevin was between us, and in his rage Benny grabbed him by

the throat and lifted him off the ground. Kevin screamed, a little girl scream of pure terror. I reached into my suit, to my side holster, then stopped. I couldn't do this here, not in front of Nana.

"Help him, Tommy! Don't just stand there." Nana reared back with her purse and began hitting Benny.

"Nana, get back," I yelled.

As loath as I was to touch Benny and his soft girth again, I lunged and wrapped my arms around his waist, now wet with sweat, and tried to shake Kevin free. Kevin dangled like a grotesque piñata and gurgled. Despite our semi-hidden location, a crowd gathered and someone began going on about a dead lady in the trunk.

"You killed Sheila!" Benny growled.

"It wasn't," Kevin said between gasps, "me!"

I slammed Benny into the Kia, but he wasn't letting go.

"Freeze!" another voice yelled. I turned. Cops, guns drawn.

I backed away. Benny continued to cry about Sheila and shake Kevin, who was rapidly taking on the hue of a blueberry pie. There were more shouts. A shot rang out. I dove over Nana, pushing her to the ground. A bright red dot appeared on Benny's forehead, and his eyes rolled back as he slid down the Kia to the ground. Kevin, finally released, rolled away, semi-conscious, gasping for air. Nana rushed to his side.

"Oh, you poor boy, are you OK?"

I rolled to my feet. "Get away from him, Nana."

"You be nice, Tommy." She patted Kevin on the back.

The cop stepped to the trunk and looked at Sheila. I edged up behind him. She was a tangled mess.

"Damn," the cop muttered. "We got an anonymous call of a car over here with blood in the trunk. Didn't mention a body."

Kevin. In his attempt to take me down, he was about to take the whole rap. I pulled out my phone. I snapped a picture of big, fat, now most certainly dead Benny, leaning unceremoniously against Kevin's car. For good measure, I took one of poor wrong time, wrong place Shelia. Nana was fussing at the cops about helping Kevin. I texted the

pictures and added a brief explanation.

Girl was extra hit on site. Disregard previous texts from different hire. Tried to jump the job and in police custody now.

I pocketed the phone. It was a long shot, but with Kevin arrested, the client wouldn't want her money tied to him. I stepped to the nearest cop.

"This guy," I gestured at Kevin. "I don't know, man, he was acting strange in the store. Like, stalking my grandmother. I shudder to think that she could have been next."

Kevin's eyes went wide, then he began fast talking, which quickly escalated into a screaming fit, until he was tasered back into semi-consciousness and plopped into the back seat of a police cruiser. The last I saw of him, his face was pressed against the side window covered in drool.

I went back to my car before I was asked for a statement. Nana was sitting in the car. As I got in, she scowled at me.

"What now?" I asked her.

"Well, this all took too long." She waved her hands in aggravation. "My food is spoiled. I was going to make you a nice peach cobbler but the ice cream is melted." She folded her arms at me as if I was the greatest disappointment in the world.

"Nana, this was hardly my fault. That 'nice young man' tried to murder two people.'

"Well, he did help me with the peaches."

I sighed. Just then my phone dinged. My bank. A wire deposit had been made. One-and-a-half times the original price. I couldn't help a satisfied chuckle.

"It's okay, Nana. I'll go out for more ice cream."

"I don't have any more coupons." She turned her face to the side window.

"This one's on me. No arguments."

She turned and patted my cheek. "You're such a good boy, Tommy."

I veered the car away from the crowd. "I try, Nana."

Silver Dollar Moon

Kris Hall

I really do honestly wish
my cab driver would accept my tacos
of appreciation
After all, they went to the trouble
waiting in the drive-thru
with the meter off
and I couldn't possibly finish
this entire order myself

Perhaps the gesture alone
defines the measure of our success
from Point A to Point B;
the prismatic explosion of lights in
Capitol Hill to the epicene
darkness in Greenwood;
we discuss the measure of our success
half-naked
glazed in honey,
objects have a fluid weight of warm
honey

They curl close to me like goose feather
brought to flicker & flame and offer
credit to my being worlds away,
skimming lakes
    at a planetary distance

where affections are screamed into
a jar then cast,
then orbits,
then burns up in the atmosphere
to finally reach them at a less menial
hour;
acknowledgement as compensation
& tokens are mere tokens

THE WARLOCK OF TIMES SQUARE

Eric Kingsbury

seventh avenue and forty seventh street—

father duffy presides over the square,
that grim bald crowleyesque soldier priest,
like some corporate demon in combat boots
glaring hard at crowds and billboards alike
his iron trinity of christ, commerce, conflict—

and no one howls response, no chest-rending laments,
no wild-haired prophets, no mad revolutionaries
amok gesticulating inspired ideology translated
in any language to mean liberty, fraternity, charity,
hell, no one has spoken lenin's or lennon's name,
not here, not for nearly forty years, and —

washington glares down from an insurance ad
while crowds mill about taking photos of photos
in the glowing red el-ee-dee coca-cola light on
streets cool blue, nypd, nyu, nyse, news corp
somnolent blue, tranquilizer blue, and all
is calm here, orderly, nothing to get excited about
except shopping samsung, macys, american eagle,
aeropostale, and tkts to wicked, phantom, annie —

and all the while, father duffy telepathic chants
his silent spellcraft, all day, every day and night:
shush, children, sleep, sleep children, shush.

Bloomers - 1859

Jo Giordano

Sibyl said, "Wearing Bloomers, I'm a little girl again, free even to ride a bicycle. It's liberating; I can go to work in them. Men will know my cause by the clothes I wear. I'm a suffragette."

Elizabeth said, "Fashion fads are created by men. They control our clothes as they control our lives; another tool to keep us in line. Our vanity plays into their hands and does us in."

Sibyl said, "Ridiculous. You're just jealous of my figure."

The Prose Poem and Common Household Appliances

Dallas Crow

The prose poem had a healthy respect—admiration even—for common household appliances: the microwave and refrigerator of course, but it was the sturdy washer and dryer—all haunch and torque—that left him speechless. Mesmerized by latitude and longitude, he fantasized about a career as a cartographer. Of football players, he most looked up to offensive linemen. Lace, filigree, and other fancy things were for sonnets and other delicate flowers. All he needed was an open field with space enough to turn around in three times before he slept.

Shopping Hazards

Stephen R. Roberts

In this dream I'm arguing
over two dollars and fifty cents
at the grocery store.
The We-Care clerk is not
in agreement with my version
of a damaged gallon of milk.

Liquid drips onto the counter
as she counters my story
with one of her own -
that the container was
irreversibly damaged
during the shoot-out
in the parking lot,
moments ago, just before
I reentered the store with the jug.

There's an odd reflection in her eyes
as I demand to speak to the manager.
She hesitates in the perilous lace
of her dream, then pulls a lever,
pushes a button, flips a switch
or some nefarious act of aggression,
tripping the trapdoor
I haven't noticed beneath my feet.

Sliding down a moist ramp
into a grey cellar, I find it populated

with other disgruntled customers.
One holds up two moldy oranges.
A second dangles a delicate sack
of slimy deli meat, going green.

It's lock-up for dedicated complainers.
Those who dare to question.
Those who now will be served stale bread,
and hard donuts from the bakery, along with
beige water from a back room faucet,
as time gurgles like a strangling amphibian
in the super market basement's dungeon dark.

The Zoo and Botanical Garden

Ceridwen Hall

Cincinnati, Ohio

I am told this is where, years ago, my mother met my sisters. Perhaps our father introduced her in the parking lot or in a car on the way here, but this is the first place they all went together. Today we begin with the elephants, which are near the entrance to remind us how large and strange our thoughts. It's always a shock, the first animal, especially for a child, then one gets used to looking, used to seeing things contained. Soon my sisters' children want to be held up near the glass and then set down again. The lemurs, meanwhile, ignore us and climb to where their food is kept. The zoo has changed a great deal over the past thirty-some years. There are grey wolves now and fewer peacocks roaming the trails. During my childhood, there was only a little red train that took you on a loop around the pond. But my sisters remembered a carousel, which has since been restored. We lift the children onto lions and hummingbirds and stand beside them. It's dizzy-making to watch all the painted animals move up and down. Then we go to see the manatees, the sleeping gorilla. We read aloud to one another surprising facts that we will forget in a day or so. A giraffe's heart weighs twenty-five pounds; the snapping turtle is the oldest animal on display, older than any of us. It's getting hot, so the tiger stays submerged in his pool and blinks regally at visitors. Then there's a kind of domino effect in which all the children begin to fuss. We collect water bottles and umbrellas, make our way out.

Autumn of the Heart

Sean Prentiss

Autumn hearts cannot sleep with all
the geese singing of home as they fly

above the cold bones of this house.
Their calls empty as wind and gone

as quickly toward whatever next home.
But with this house fused to cement

and blacktop that pools the water, soon
our geese, not knowing better, mistake

this gathered water for their next stop.
I too am rooted in all the wrong ways,

and left bleating for home.

Big Bear

Ryan Gallagher

"Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplify, simplify."
-Henry David Thoreau

Small talk across the field, milk thistle and daises
breath on my feet, kiss us on our skin.
Clusters of reeds line the river bank,
rocking to the pace of the water.
The river greens as the sun raises over the mountain.
A western wind sweeps the water towards me,
causing Lonnie to eat her hair when she laughed.
She pierces a limp worm with her fish hook,
then casts the line into the river with grace.

Hard salami and provolone sandwiches wrapped in tin foil
keep us busy as the line drifts off in the wind.
Lonnie asks me if I believe in dreams, the ones that are surreal.
I tell her I haven't dreamed since my divorce.
She begins to speak, but decides to sigh and checks the line.
The floater does a slow jig in the water
like a child would do at a wedding.
Lonnie yanks at the line, but there was nothing.

Empty-handed, we stoke up a fire by our cabin.
The smoke tendrils grasp the tree tops in the night,
the light from the fire bleeds onto the trees.
Lonnie pokes at the fire with her s'mores stick.
She plays with her hair, curling it onto her finger, then says,

"This reminds of me when I went camping with my dad.
He would rent a cabin and take me up to Big Bear Lake,
-before the frost would kill the grass or before
the snow would fall onto a deer's back-
and it would be just the two of us."

"At night, we would roast store brand hot dogs on a stick
over the fire and he would tell me scary camp stories.
They would scare the shit outta me,
but then we would look to the sky,
listen to crackle of the fire,
taste the crisp, burning pine
and we would look in between the stars."

Scary, Silly, Dead

Jonathan Louis Duckworth

In a land with an unpronounceable name,
a farmer rises from bed to till a field
teeming underneath its topsoil
with unexploded ordinance
from wars supposedly settled.
For now the bombs and shells are content
to leach their metals into soil,
to leak their lead into the groundwater,
to plump the turnip bulbs with mercury,
and swell the strawberries with shavings
of the most delicious chromium and tungsten.
But that piddling, slow-death shitshow
won't hold them over forever.
Chromosome damage isn't as satisfying
as flensing fascia and flesh from faces.
They await the day the plowshare
kisses their shell, delivering them up
to a rapturous gasp of air and shine.

Mirage Is Not a Warm Soda

Sarah Van Praag Leonard

The winding highway descends through
pine forests sky island to desert
sleepy towns deserted storefronts.

Now a cowboy slowly walks boots, straw hat
An olive skinned woman shuffles parasol held high
trailing her a nondescript dog.

The animal is thin needs brushing a bath
I stop enter a Mini Mart He pauses watches me
wary eyes.

Across more uninhabited miles heat waves shimmer
parched land blue horizon
barren country unremitting sunshine.

Radiant Sun my only companion
I sip a warm soda head for the border
Only a few more hours.

Pylimo Gatvė, Vilnius

J.C. Todd

Slot canyon streets, ringed by chain link,
barbwire, walls of quarried rock and grit
cracked by shell casings, shrapnel, pocked
with flecks of blood, flesh, most of it human,
blasted in the fighting and the fleeing
and the fencing in, the weekly or daily
culling, the ferreting through sewers where
weapons were smuggled in, babies and youths
smuggled out. In the midst of this history
imprinted in stone, along a street that bordered
Ghetto 2, the chestnuts fan their boughs
and bloom, the leaves brown and droop, the nuts
fall and no one stoops now to gather them
as the women did then, slack shouldered and starved
to the pith of their bones, returning under
guard from the fields or factories, passing
through the gate into the ghetto each night,
burning with the question, did Shulamith
or Menke make it through the day. They risked
the boot, the rifle butt, the bullet
to scoop up a few russet shells. Horse chestnuts,
sweet flowers, bitter meat the tongue curls against
to spit out. An act of will to chew and swallow,
to say to yourself, Eat, it's food. To stay
alive to work one more day for the Germans.
To want to outlive the war, yet know
you can't outlive your sorrow or your death.

Sleep Tight

Liam Callanan

When I sleepily opened the door to my office one Friday afternoon and found the police inside, I decided it was finally time to call the doctor. I often joked that I'd thought being chair of an English department would involve a lot of discussions about books. It didn't.

The police were installing a surveillance camera. They gave me a "hello again" nod, and got back to work.

I explained to the doctor that I was exhausted, that I was having trouble sleeping, that after 4 p.m. I felt like I was sleepwalking, and by 7:30, if I lay down to read our toddler a bedtime story, I was in danger of falling asleep myself. And in worse danger of waking up at 10 p.m. and never falling asleep again.

"Your job is stressful?" she asked, though she knew I was an academic and I knew she thought that couldn't be stressful: flexible hours, a job for life. Good healthcare.

"Let's try a sleep study," she said. Because my good healthcare would pay. Maybe the problem was that I wasn't really sleeping when I was sleeping, never submerging into REM sleep as real rest and recovery required.

The sleep study took place in a tiny office building across from a movie theater, in a vascular disorders clinic that moonlighted as a sleep clinic. I had never been in a doctor's office waiting room at such a late hour before. I sat next to a pile of People magazines and anti-embolism hosiery brochures.

The technician came out. A young man, short, grave, in scrubs. We passed a series of exam rooms and then, behind a white door identical to the ones we'd just passed, a catalog bedroom appeared: the walls honey-white, the sheets a rich brown, Craftsman-style bed

and dresser. There were twin, wine-red lamps and a leather chair. Heaps of pillows. And almost below hearing sounded a steady, pulseless surf.

The police were installing the surveillance camera in my office temporarily, and not, they explained, to see anything inside, but something outside—the parking lot directly below had recently been plagued by graffiti. But seeing the police was trigger enough. It was April, which not only chairs of English departments find the cruelest month. With graduation approaching, it is a challenging season. In April 2007, a 23-year old student at Virginia Tech killed 32 and wounded 17. I had been encouraged to take "Active Shooter Training" on our campus, where a stern officer told us to remember the "OUT Rule." I waited for the acronym, but it wasn't one. "Get out, keep out, take out," he said: your first obligation is to escape, your second to secure shelter, and your last is to attack. I thought about the lesson one morning later on. The police had suggested deploying "protective surveillance" while an instructor met a student in the library to discuss the story he'd written about shooting up a classroom. The policeman and I sat nearby to watch how the meeting went. The officer was young, in plainclothes, and looked like a student—jeans, t-shirt. When he twisted to check the exits, his t-shirt pulled taut, and I saw that he, unlike me, was wearing body armor.

I asked the technician if there was a microphone to monitor snoring. Yes, he said. And then, once I had changed into sleep clothes, he began to attach wires to my skin with help of thick, clear conductive paste. Dozens of wires. One clipped to my finger, others glued into my hair, along my jaw, beside my eyes, on my shins and chest. He would measure, he said, eye movements, heart rate and rhythm, blood pressure, the amount of oxygen in my blood. Even what was going on in my brain.

The police found the graffiti artist, a student. The student who'd written about shooting up his classroom said he was just trying to write something exciting.

The sleep tech arranged me carefully on the mattress. He said

I shouldn't worry about moving, which I soon understood meant I couldn't move. The wires lay heavy and cool all across me, Gulliver-style. He pointed to what looked like a high-tech hairdryer in the ceiling, its barrel pointed directly at me. The infrared camera. "Don't worry," he said. "I'll be watching."

Dear Radioactive Fox

Shannon Quinn

Mice in fish-skin coats march on the night in protest
but tourists still take pictures
as you drink.
They do not hear
every heart in the harbor
sync
to a slow thunder-
grief's time signature
for the bioluminescent paw prints
of a rose colored soot-rolled beauty
&the geiger beeps of her cement trees.

Follow the shorebirds, sweetness
the anatomy of the sea bruises
so hurt your way home to me.
Claim your crown of first lilacs and early violets
water boatmen and brine flies
will swim behind you
carrying your train.

A Gesture of Love:

An Interview with Carl Phillips

I was honored when Professor Carl Phillips, Department of English at Washington University in St. Louis, agreed to an interview. He is a prolific author whose most recent collection Reconnaissance (2015) continues to establish him as a leading poetic voice. When asked what advice he would give to someone new to writing, Prof. Phillips succinctly responded, "Read as widely and as deeply as possible."

Laine Derr: What do you fear? Is it — speaking of promiscuity/art — "to become cliché"?
Carl Phillips: All artists should fear becoming cliché, certainly. And I suppose I fear I won't find my way to the next poem. But the things worth really being afraid of lie far from my private fears — I think it's more worth taking seriously the fear that unarmed black people will continue getting killed by the police, that terrorism will never not be a reality, the list goes on…
LD: In your collection Riding Westward, I was struck with your poem "Shall Want for Nothing." In the opening stanza, you write of a "they" being misguided by concepts of pleasure, exactness for art, and the self. Is working through confusion a fundamental part of your writing process and poetry?
CP: Yes, working through confusion, wrestling with the unanswerable, is pretty much entirely what brings me to write a poem.
LD: Does Reconnaissance continue an ongoing discussion (through your body of work) of contradictory expression, creating a "space for surprise," and the role of art and sexual restlessness?
CP: Yes, I think so. Though I don't think I've talked much about art in my work, more about the body and restlessness. I never really thought about the relationship of that restlessness to art, until thinking about my prose book, The Art of Daring.
LD: In The Art of Daring, you conclude: "If I've been restless, then as a compass can be, and still be true." Is the concept of being restless yet true (also found at the end of "Shield") an important theme for you, for your writing?
CP: Yes, it is crucial for writing, and for living fully — which is to say, imaginatively.
LD: How is poetry "both a form and an act of love"?
CP: It's a desire to make sense of something, in a way that will resonate with others – that seems to me a way of giving a gift, a gesture of love, to have helped others see the world anew and maybe more usefully. The writing of the poem is the act, the poem itself is the form.
LD: What is your editing process for a poem? For instance, the movement of ideas and parts of lines between versions "Each Like a Branch Thrown Slant Across" (published in Washington Square) and "Shield"?
CP: That's hard to get into without really really getting into it. I favor associative leaping between ideas, I like the idea of seemingly disparate shards being brought meaningfully together. And that's what guides me in constructing the poem. In editing, I read aloud a lot, get a sense of where rhythms do and don't work. Form matters, of course, but it's hard to say how I get there…
LD: What was your inspiration for the poem "From a Land Called Near-Is-Far" and its concluding lines: "that smell, or fearfulness, or just fear by itself — tenderer/ hands than ours, soundlessly, as they at last unyoke us."?
CP: It's hard to point to a particular inspiration — I suppose the idea of relationships, their wounding properties, and the idea that maybe things just happen because they happen, no special reason. It's meant to look a bit like an excerpted paragraph, but lineated, and somehow shadowed by the sonnet's form…
LD: How does the title piece for your collection Reconnaissance shadow the poems to follow?
CP: That title poem introduces the idea of exploration, and raises the question of how best to proceed – how to navigate possibly dangerous terrain. I like to think the book as a whole is the enactment of that navigating.

Contributors

Daniel Blokh is a 14-year-old creative writer living in Birmingham, Alabama. His work has been recognized by the Foyle Young Poetry competition, the Scholastic Art and Writing awards, Cicada Magazine, and more.

Liam Callanan is the author of the novels The Cloud Atlas and All Saints, and most recently, the story collection Listen. He's taught in the creative writing program of the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee and the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers, and is on the web at liamcallanan.com.

Angela Doll Carlson is a poet, essayist and fiction writer whose work has appeared most recently in publications both online and offline, such as Burnside Writer's Collective, St. Katherine Review, Rock & Sling, Image Journal's Good Letters blog, Ruminate Magazine, and the Art House America Blog. Her memoir, Nearly Orthodox: On Being a Modern Woman in an Ancient Tradition (Ancient Faith Publishers) was released July 2014. Her latest book, Garden in the East: The Spiritual Life of the Body is due out from Ancient Faith Publishers in 2016. Angela currently lives in Chicago, IL, with her husband, David, and her four outrageously spirited yet remarkably likable children.

Dallas Crow has had poetry, fiction, and nonfiction in a number of publications, including English Journal, The Flyfish Journal, Great River Review, and Poet Lore. His poetry chapbook, Small, Imperfect Paradise, was published by Parallel Press in 2013. He teaches English at Breck School in Golden Valley, Minnesota.

Jessica Danger lives in Southern California with her family. She holds a BA and MA in English, and an MFA from Bennington College in Vermont. Her worvk has been published in Crux Literary

Journal, Wild Quarterly, and Gold Man Review. She will forever defend the Oxford comma.

Linda Dennison is an essayist. A former high school teacher, Linda's work has appeared in journals such as frostwriting and the Newer York, and stage productions by The Plagiarists and Do Not Submit. She lives with her husband in Chicago, where together, they run The Play Cafe (theplaycafechicago.com) and host salons in their living room.

Bob Denst retired from the Tucson Fire Dept. after 28 years and is currently taking photographs and pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing through Seattle Pacific University.

Richard Dinges, Jr. has an MA in Literary Studies from University of Iowa and manages business systems at an insurance company. Nebo, Straylight, Thick With Conviction, The Same, and Miller's Pond most recently accepted his poems for their publications.

Christian Downes is an MFA candidate for Poetry at Seattle Pacific University (3/2016). He received Allegheny College's 2013 Poetry Prize, and a Reynolds Award from Nota Bene (2011). His poetry explores theological themes and archetypes through eros and ecological perspectives.

Jonathan Louis Duckworth is an MFA student at Florida International University, where he serves as a reader and copy-editor for the Gulf Stream Magazine. His fiction and poetry appears in or is forthcoming in Literary Orphans, Fourteen Hills, Lunch Ticket, decomP, Cha, The Penny Dreadful, Off the Coast, Gravel, and elsewhere.

Dana Fang is currently a senior at Oberlin College, studying Creative Writing and English Literature. Previous work has been featured in Susquehanna Review, Plum Creek Review, Wilder Voice and The Voices Project.

Ryan Gallagher is an Arizonan but a southern Californian at heart. When it's not summer, Ryan hikes in different parts of Arizona. His work has appeared in Glass Mountain Magazine. Ryan is earning his bachelor in creative writing at Arizona State University.

Joe Giordano was born in Brooklyn. He and his wife, Jane, have lived in Greece, Brazil, Belgium and Netherlands. They now live in Texas with their little shih tzu, Sophia. His stories have appeared in more than seventy magazines including Bartleby Snopes, The Monarch Review, decomP, and The Summerset Review. His novel, Birds of Passage, was published by Harvard Square Editions in October 2015. You can find him on the web at http://joe-giordano.com/

Jonathan Greenhause was a finalist for the 2015 Aesthetica Creative Writing Award and was highly commended for Southword Journal's 2016 Gregory O'Donoghue Poetry Prize. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in FOLIO, Green Mountains Review, Mantis, and RHINO, among others. This is his third time appearing in Thin Air.

Ceridwen Hall holds an MFA from the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), where she now teaches composition and serves as an editorial assistant at The Ninth Letter. Her work appears or is forthcoming in Denver Quarterly, Poet Lore, Confrontation, Salt Hill, and elsewhere.

Kris Hall is a writer and event coordinator for Ogopogo and Da'daedal from Seattle, WA. Author of the chapbooks Dillinger on the Beach (Horse Less Press) and Notes for Xenos Vesparum (Shotgun Wedding). His work has been featured or is set to appear in Juked, Dreginald, Fog Machine, Drunk in a Midnight Choir, The Monarch Review, Pismire, and The EEEL.

Kate Imbach is a writer living in San Francisco, California. She has a Master's in Public Administration, which is only one letter away from an MFA. Kate's work has been published in Passages North and Word

Riot, among others. Read her work on kateimbach.com and follow her on Twitter @kate8.

James Croal Jackson's poetry has appeared in The Bitter Oleander, Rust+Moth, Glassworks, and other publications. He grew up in Akron, Ohio, spent a few years in Los Angeles, traveled the country in his Ford Fiesta, and now lives in Columbus, Ohio. Find more at jimjakk.com.

Eric Kingsbury studied creative writing at Illinois State University and is an avid traveler, artist, writer and professional creative. His poetry has appeared in several publications over the years, with work published most recently in Canyon Voices Literary Magazine. Eric currently lives and works in Phoenix, Arizona.

Jacqueline Kolosov's work in this issue is part of "Motherhood, and the Places Between," which won the 2015 Mary Roberts Rhinehart Prize selected by W. Ralph Eubanks, and is forthcoming from Stillhouse Press in September 2016. Her essays have appeared in The Sewanee Review, Terrain.org, Bellevue Literary Review, and Shenandoah. She is also a fiction writer and poet. Her latest collection of poems is Memory of Blue (Salmon, 2014), and she has a new YA novel entitled Paris, Modigliani & Me (Luminis, 2015). She lives with her family and a menagerie of animals, including a Spanish mare, in West Texas. Find her at www.jacquelinekolosovreads.com.

Sarah van Praag Leonard summers in Flagstaff, AZ and winters in Carefree, AZ. She is a retired fitness professional: U.S. Air Force Fitness Officer, College Teacher of Dance, Health Ed., P.E., Fitness facilitator for private industry. Sarah has written poetry for ten years. Her poetry has appeared in numerous literary magazines. "Mirage" is her paean to the Southwest.

Kaela Martin is an undergraduate student at Stephen F. Austin State University studying creative writing. She has had a lifelong love

of words and will be finishing a poetry collection as her thesis this year. "Where They Went" is her first major publication.

DAVID MCGLYNN married, fathered two sons, secured long-term employment, published his work. Some of his stories and essays have appeared in magazines and literary journals, and he's seen two books into print.

MARLENE OLIN was born in Brooklyn, raised in Miami, and educated at the University of Michigan. Her short stories have been featured or are forthcoming in publications such as The Massachusetts Review, upstreet Magazine, Steam Ticket, Crack the Spine, Poetica, The Water Stone Review, The Broken Plate and The Saturday Evening Post online. A contributing editor at Arcadia magazine, she recently completed her first novel.

LARUO PALONBA has taught English as a Second Language and done stints as a freelance journalist and speechwriter.

ANNE PANNING has published a novel, Butter, as well as a short story collection, Super America, which won The Flannery O'Connor Award and was a New York Times Editor's Choice. She has also published short work in places such as Bellingham Review, Prairie Schooner, New Letters, The Florida Review, Passages North, Black Warrior Review, The Greensboro Review, Alaska Quarterly Review, Kalliope, Quarterly West, The Kenyon Review, The Laurel Review, Five Points, River Teeth, Cimarron Review, West Branch and Brevity (4x). Four of her essays have received notable citations in The Best American Essays series. She teaches creative writing at SUNY-Brockport.

SEAN PRENTISS is the author of the memoir, Finding Abbey: a Search for Edward Abbey and His Hidden Desert Grave, which won the 2015 National Outdoor Book Award for History/Biography. Prentiss is also the co-editor of The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre: Explorations in Creative Nonfiction, a creative nonfiction craft anthology. He

lives on a small lake in northern Vermont and serves as an assistant professor at Norwich University.

NICOLE PROVENCHER-NATALE is a poet and English teacher. She holds an MFA from The University of Arkansas, Monticello. She is an editor for Gravel Magazine. Nicole's recent work appears in Eleven Eleven, The San Pedro Review, Nimrod, and The San Antonio Express News. Visit her at www.nicoleprovenchernatale.com.

ANA PRUNDARU lives in a forest-side home near a zoo in Switzerland and will probably never get used to being awakened by lions' roars. Her work appears in Calyx, Luna Luna, Elephant Journal, Gingerbread House and 'Bye Bye Bukowski' - an anthology by Hyacinth Girl Press.

DERI ROSS PRYOR is a writer of fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. She is currently working on her MFA in Creative Writing at Eastern Kentucky University. She has won several college-level writing contests and has been published in Eastern Kentucky University's Aurora Journal, Pluck! Journal of Affrilachian Arts and Culture, Kudzu Literary Magazine, and Still: The Journal. To pay the bills, she works as a freelance writer and editor. Deri lives in Richmond, Kentucky with her posse of rescue dogs and one inadvertent cat.

SHANNON QUINN's first collection of poetry, Questions for Wolf, was published by Thistledown Press in the fall of 2015. Her work has appeared in literary journals in North America and the UK. She currently lives in Toronto, Canada.

STEPHEN R. ROBERTS lives on eight acres of Hoosier soil, pretending it to be wilderness. He spends more time now with grandchildren, trees, and poetry, not necessarily in that order. It is the love of these things, along with lariats and other fine examples of rope that keeps him tying up words, unknotting poems. He has been published in Briar Cliff Review, Borderlands, Willow Springs, Blue Stem, Water-Stone,Yalobusha Review, and other literary publications. His two most recent of five chapbooks are Rhubarb Desoto and Small Fire

Speaking In the Rain. A full length collection, Almost Music From Between Places, is available at Amazon from Chatter House Press.

M. C. Rush lived for many years in Arizona and Nevada and currently resides in upstate New York. He has work forthcoming in Two Thirds North and has most recently published poems in The Tulane Review, Broad River Review, and Whiskey Island.

Matthew Schwab is a digital colorist, painter, and a photographer, who travels for work and pleasure. His choice and treatment of subject and color in his fine art work is a recording of his personal emotion and philosophy at the time; a memoir-esque reflection. More work can be seen at www.mattschwab.com.

John I. Scott was raised in Pikeville, Kentucky, and recently received his MFA in poetry from the University of Arkansas. He held a Fulbright College Teaching Fellowship and now lives and works in Austin, Texas. His work has previously appeared in The Louisville Review, New Madrid, and The Wolf Review, and is forthcoming in Measure and Southern Humanities Review.

Bentley Snow is unfamiliar with the art of pithy, 50 word bios, but he looks forward to reading those of the writers published in Thin Air Magazine and learning from their excellence. If he knew how to bow in print, he would do so unto you, reader: Namaste.

Carolyn Stice received her PhD in Poetry from the University of Tennessee Knoxville and currently lives in Fairbanks, Alaska where she teaches writing and literature at the university. Her work has appeared in a variety of journals including Cutthroat, Stirrings, and The Alaska Quarterly Review.

Liara Tamani is a Houston native and earned her MFA from Vermont College and BA from Duke University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Apalachee Review, Blackbird, Ducts, Fourteen Hills, Gigantic Sequins, The Griffin, Knee-Jerk, Mythium Literary

Journal, and Storyscape Journal.

J. C. Todd is a 2016 Alliance of Artists Residencies Fellow at Ucross, finalist for the 2015 PSA Robert H. Winner Memorial Award, and a 2014 Pew Fellow in the Arts. Books include FUBAR (Lucia Press, 2016), What Space This Body (Wind Publications, 2008) and a poem in the anthology The Doll Collection (Terrapin Press, 2016).

Elena Tomorowitz earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Cleveland State University and PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from The University of Southern Mississippi's Center for Writers. She has work appearing in Guernica, The Collagist, Hayden's Ferry Review, ILK, Fugue, and The Moth - for which she won second place in the 2014 Ballymaloe International Poetry Prize. Currently she works as a technical writer, freelance editor, and managing director of the nonprofit, Big Tree Arts. She lives in the mountains of Boise, Idaho.

Noel Torres is a writer from the Bronx, NY and primarily a fiction writer but tends to fall in love with poets, so he writes poetry sometimes. He recently earned his MFA from Adelphi University. This is his first publication.

Müesser Yeniay was born in İzmir, 1984; graduated from Ege University, English Language and Literature. She got her M.A from Bilkent University on Turkish Literature. She has three poetry books and several translation books and a criticism book. Her poems were published in Hungary, USA and Vietnam. Müesser is the editor of the literature magazine Şiirden (of Poetry).

Daisy Yokley is a lover of mountains and dogs and donuts and photography. She also loves running around in the forest, taking weird pictures of herself in a red dress. You can find her at www.worldofdaisy.com.

ISBN 978-1-4951-9477-1
US$5.00
50500>
9 781495 194771