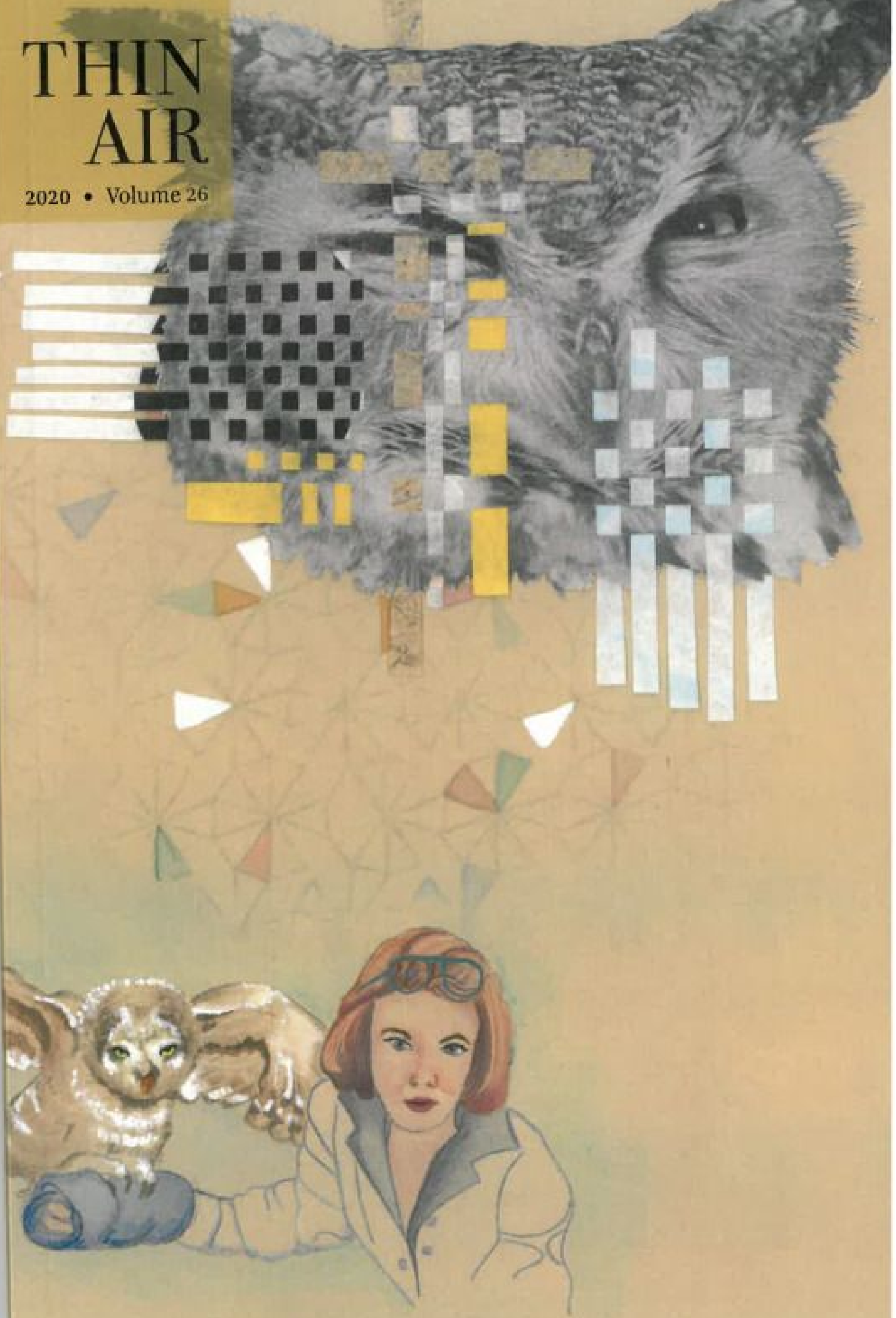


THIN AIR

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THIN AIR MAGAZINE



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EDITORS' NOTE

The 26th element in the periodic table is iron, which does not rust in dry climates like Flagstaff, Arizona. Iron is versatile, strong, and found in most everything we encounter—in the trains that traverse the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway along Historic Route 66, in the printing machines used to create the 26th volume of this magazine, and in the blood of our staff, readers, and contributors.

The written and visual work we received mirrored how we, as both writers and editors, felt as we neared the end of the decade. The pieces we select tend to surprise us. This year was no different. We are reminded of why we fell in love with reading in the first place, and we're proud to share that love with you in this volume. Find yourself repositioned in the new literary landscapes that these authors have created.

Thank you to our readers, contributors, tireless editorial staff, and the Fall 2019 Undergraduate Editing and Publishing course at Northern Arizona University (NAU). We admire, applaud, and commend our faculty advisor Lawrence Lenhart for the time and work he's dedicated to the continuation of this magazine. We also want to thank Andie Francis, Dr. Nicole Walker, Dr. Donelle Ruwe, and the NAU Department of English. This magazine would not be possible without the generosity of our benefactress Diana Gabaldon. We greatly appreciate Arden Paugh, Joe Moter, Amanda Meeks, and NAU Printing Services. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the larger Arizona literary community, including Curios, Carbon Copy, Sonora Review, and Hayden's Ferry Review. We are lucky to be a part of Flagstaff's active literary scene, alongside the Narrow Chimney Reading Series, Juniper House Readings, Northern Arizona Book Festival, and supportive local businesses such as Uptown Pubhouse and Bright Side Bookshop. We could not present the 26th volume of Thin Air Magazine without the efforts of editors since 1995.

Margarita Cruz & Clare Magneson
Editor-in-Chief & Managing Editor



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* EDITORS' CHOICE HONORARIUM





THE DAY THE TIPPING POINT ARRIVED

BY JAMES K. ZIMMERMAN

behind canopies
at the farmer's
market, a brick
wall, a Hopper
painting without
the street lamp

the color of old blood

a patchwork
of windows
limned in gray
paint, peeling

sills lined with
empty bottles
of Corona Light
and California
champagne

panes reflect
the canopies,
depict a rippling
watercolor
of fungal caps,
gaunt headwear
of death angels

over a stackpipe
atop the wall,
a mockingbird
blithely warbles
bubbles and froth

while a storm
waits in the wings
for a starring role
center stage





SUNRISE

BY ALAN ELYSHEVITZ

First, geology made a headland for a house,
 your house, occupancy of which seems flagrant
 adjacent to an indented sea whose waters,
 at least, are honest when gambling. The horizon
 is a foundry of color; its furnace whispers
 from the east. Despite a minute of saffron,
 the sea is not rice though it used to feed billions.
 You awaken to coffee from a little cup,
 to the sickening trauma of the first phone call
 and the last cloud shredded by glare. Seabirds
 with oily wings chastise your spread-eagle
 satellite dish. Bleached blond, the sun issues
 a subdural smack, like tv reporting that you,
 the birds, your house, the sea are all beyond repair.



CROW

BY BRIAN COHEN



KINGDOM OF GAUZE

BY D. R. JAMES

A frothed fog enshrouds the loud melodies
of these woods, the pileateds' sniggering,
the squawks and meows of crow and catbird.
Their row refracts through pluming detachment
from swing, lane, foothills, the world. Unperturbed,
bloused in this low-slung ceiling, by non-speed
I'm borne, desperate for nothing obscured
here—nor certifiable forgiveness,
nor angling prophecies, nor typhooning
bouquets of some charlatan's miseries.

OUTLINE FOR A SMALL FILM IN EIGHT SHOTS

BY JAMES MILLER

1.
Fade-in through fogged lens, damp dawn on gulf marsh:
bone-finger stumps, haze a miraculous shade of lavender.
No birds, only three modest ripples in the silky surface.
2.
A hour later, August heat burns out all color to a shrill brightness.
Off the path a branch has fallen waist-height, caught in a tangle
of undergrowth. A train of ants trails across its wide gift.
3.
A low shot from the knee: seashell-caught concrete, cracked
and mossed, entrance to what was once a driveway, or a corner turn.
4.
Noon's mounted clouds pass from right to left, behind gridwork
of steel claws and taut powerlines.
5.
Close to the bay-shore now. Camera pans to capture jumbles
of mortar and industrial tires, tide slapping on their rubber rims.
6.
Light failing on a field of cordgrass, and in the middle distance
a row of shaded oak and willows' crushed ink. Behind both,
seven chem plant towers blink red to naught, red to naught.





7.

Over a minute motionless, sound muted. We wait for the sun to sink below the bay, slowly obscuring the suspension bridge arcing across our midrange. Barges sit swollen in the stinking water. Grey streaks hover in the sky like trails of dead grass raked in a dry lawn—they catch drips from the last light, let them seep away.

8.

Fade-out on finger of geese headed east and out of frame.

GRAVITY

BY E. R. LUTKEN

after Dylan Thomas

My sixty-seventh; spilt years
Glitter like snowy froth at the river's rim
Weave in cat-tailed, cotton-mouthed
Sagging bands
Shed skins hidden
Pearl-silver ghosts drifting in wind-roiled duckweed
Backwaters sheltering restless aningas
Slick fish pierced
Myself watching
Mud oozing to ankles' brim

Glimpses at dreams' up-turned spring
Twice-told tadpoles swimming in my liquid mind
Flotsam, wink of dragonflies
Blue crawfish
Jetting backward
Rattle of cane poles in the bottom of flat boats
Paddlefish, gar, gaspergou lazing in sludge
Sheer magic
Red-eared turtles
Bright bream wriggling on the line

Deaf to the swarming summer
My starched coat veiling leaflets' whispered shivers
Sallow metal husks of breath
Threaded wire
Through the dark vein
Tick of measured wind, boxed in plastic bellows
Screens tracing garbled vitals, no floating sun



Or legends
 Of green gators
 Tails curled in the rogue river

At last, past pallid windows
 Sun below the levee, old October's ache
 Seeps across tangled bayous
 Tupelo
 Rust-red cypress
 Purple-yellow thickets, an aged bruise towed south
 Self-same pull that drags the rowdy river down
 Myself barefoot
 Rotting swamp
 Singing around me, awake



ASPEN

BY C.R. RESETARITS



GOODBYE

BY GRACE COVILL-GRENNAN

dear meadow
dew thistle
mown fallow
grass whistle

breathless
you held me
fallen nest
knotted tree

crooked limb
leave me
in lupine
petal body

for who
can tie
floating seeds
to a sigh?

PHANTOM FEELINGS

BY ASHLEY SGRO

I lost my pointer finger in a workplace accident. I stood at a conveyor belt in my orange vest and boots. I watched tumbling tubes of plastic straws. My color of the day was red. Somehow, a sheet of metal from an old machine fell and broke through bone.

“Watch out!” I heard a co-worker shout from a catwalk high above. Instead of pulling back my hand, I looked up to search for where he was. I saw his waving arms as warning traffic cops. I saw his plastic yellow hat. I felt a pressure on my hand as if an anvil had just dropped.

I awoke later in a bed that was small and not my own. The mattress was quite hard. The room was not well-lit. I turned to my right and saw a curtain as partition. I turned to my left and saw an open door. I tried to rise from bed, but a nurse came in and lightly pushed me down.

“Oh, no,” she said to me in a voice so honey-smooth. She patted the sweat away from my forehead with a damp white cotton cloth. “Not until a doctor sees you one last time.” I felt the trickle of water from the washcloth pressed against my skin. I wiped away the waterdrop. I waved her hand away.

The doctors left me with a nub where my pointer finger was.

“You’ll be alright,” one doctor told me as he held my hand in his, “but I’m sorry about this.” He grabbed my knuckles and shook my open palm. “Your finger was not able to be saved. This,” he said gently rubbing on my nub, “was the best that we could do.”

The location where my finger was looks like a sunken mound of dough.

“You’ll have no change in life,” one nurse told me before I left, and she was right. I still wake up in the morning. I still arrive to work on-time. I can eat food and drink beverages any way I like.

But late at night, I always wake. I lean my elbow on my mattress and elevate myself from bed. I hold my hand up to the moonlight





misting through Venetian blinds. I see no pointer finger, but it feels as if it's there. I still clench my hand into a fist. I still point to fallen scraps of food that line the tiled floor. My mind still tricks me into thinking I have five fingers on one hand instead of four.

Each morning I walk outside along my dusty road and see neighbors on their lawns. Some tend to floral gardens, some check for missing mail. I don't ignore them as I go. I smile. I raise a hand. I wave an *L* to say hello.

STUCK IN A CAR

BY ASHLEY SGRO

I'm stuck in a car on a mountainous hill. White hill. Snow-covered. Snow falling. Accumulation: fervent and furious. I've got my emergency lights flashing: yellow, yellow. Two rectangular slits of light among white. White snow pouring down as fast as I could slip down this hill. Make a path patched green. This cold's eating through my gloves—consuming me entirely. I've left the doors unlocked in case of rescue. I peek through my window—everything: white. The sky is stretched and rolled in white dough. The clouds have been ripped and crumbled and thrown down like damp paper shreds. My breath is like smoke. Cold cigar-mouth with no lighter. I see no lights that flash patriotic. I worry and grab hold of myself. I need fuel. Heat. I'm on *E*: empty. It's cold now colder. I can't feel my remains. There's nowhere to go. I shift in my seat—lift up, back down. I'm shaking the car. I feel something slipping. I'm becoming diagonal now rolling, turning, flipping, falling, falling to become stopped. Stiff. A new horizon made of myself. One starting with a head of full bristled hair. One ending with grey and rose-colored socks.





DRIVING UTAH

BY JON DAVIS

after Richard Hugo

Only a Mormon could dream this Eden.
Thirty miles from Price, the hills
Are worn as miners' wives who toil
On stoves scraped blue from the tired chafe

Of pot and skillet. Still the flat screen
Rages. The boys have grown
Into larger boys and faster,
Whose thunder crack and clatter

Cheers the men worn smooth by labor,
Like stones the river and centuries own.
Departure is the last remaining cash crop.
The tourists drop just long enough

To know that they can't stay.
Even the river slinks eastward here,
Quarrying bones from sandstone.
When the last cottonwood collapsed,

They carved a playhouse in the hollow
And capped it with a roof.
There's laughter there—
Until the church bells clang.

Eighty years and gone, the old men say.
No outlaws in the Outlaw Tavern,
No lovers crowd the Pillow Talk Motel.
When whimsy strikes they call a meeting.

The cliffs rise steep to wall out meth,
Those wiry, pale pierced girls, a world
Of trouble, freedoms no one needs.
Black Mesa gavels home the grim.





AFTER THE LATCH BREAKS ON THE BACK OF A WESTBOUND TRUCK

BY JENNIFER BATTISTI

The unbroken asphalt heats a disaster of plums.
Fists of blue sugar burst beneath tires off highway 40.
A flash of worry for the child's lunchbox, colorless the next day.

Two plums migrate from the road's shoulder, past the grooves
that keep us from drifting into the unnamed continent of sleep.
The others brace—a marooned bruise, a huddled
and gulpy mess of castaways, a glucose shock.

We whizz by, glimpsing displacement in our peripheral.
Up ahead we'll stop for jerky and fuel, a scorpion fossilized
in a syrupy stick, we'll leave behind a storm of salt and wrappers.

The borders of their ash softened flesh beg and rupture under the sun.
You want to jet into traffic, scoop them all into your clean white palms.
But you don't know anything about saving plums—
how you'd hide them from the checkpoint ahead.

Only that once, when you were younger, someone lonely rumored
razor-fanged apples lurking amongst the candy in your pillowcase,
which became the season all the fruit
was made to rot.

EXCERPTS FROM *AN ESSENCE WITHOUT A NAME*

BY MIKE COLE

1

Expect it to be like wandering into a bar where Jackson Pollock
and Roberto Bolaño are collaborating loudly on an illustrated
guidebook to the logic of the absurd, and Marlon Brando is doing a
parody of himself as an Aztec liberator disguised as Father Junipero
Serra, and Judy Garland is lying across the piano singing Neruda's
“Ode to Salt” to the tune of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”



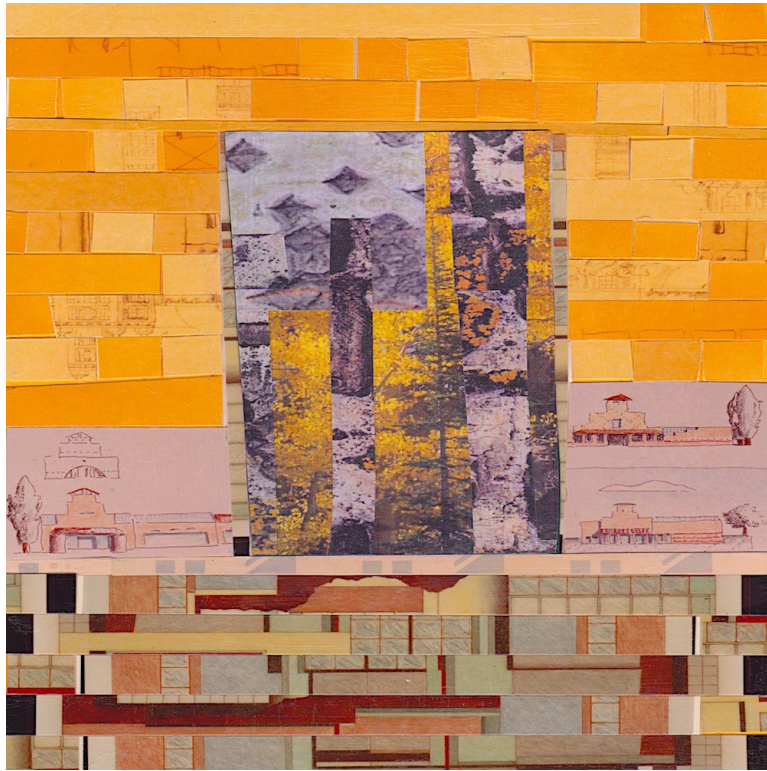


2

A first shred of dawn. A small brass bell struck once every heartbeat by a stone. Smoke from the distant fires. Water so cold it hurts your bare feet even more than the sharp stones. The juice of blackberries from vines with their roots in the slow flow of the stream. You stand and watch a drone, disguised as a dragon fly, measure your joy.

4

Sit down with Doubt at an outdoor table, say, of a café on a busy street in Barcelona or Maracaibo. Buy it a beer or a cup of coffee or a drink garnished with mint leaves in a tall glass that drips with the contradiction between ice and summer air. Let it hold forth for a while explaining as it does with polite firmness why you should be doing something else with your life. Then, when its glass or cup is nearly empty and it seems drained of all the reasons you can't possibly become what you already are, stand and excuse yourself quietly, politely, and leave it sitting there looking as alone and powerless as it is. Walk out and away and in a direction that will define itself as you go, and know that being on the way is more than arrival can ever be anyway.



NEW MEXICO

BY C.R. RESETARITS

HORSE / WILD

BY EMMA FAESI HUDELSON

The wild horse is dying. The American Mustang—namesake of muscle car, symbol of free, as in land-of-the—gets rounded up and removed every year by the thousands. Chased by helicopters into a pen, they're sold, sometimes for slaughter on foreign soil. The Mustang is the daughter of indigenous horses. Some with ancestral lines tracing back to prehistory, some crossed with others, like 15th century Barbs, the horses who ran from conquistador ships to Nevada badlands. The Bureau of Land Management calls them a nuisance, considers them strays, ferals. Scrappy street dog, not wolf.

All the wild horses are losing their wild. The Przewalski's Horse, another true-wild horse, is a shaggy, squat, dun-colored breed with a mane like a boot-brush and a black dorsal stripe. Herds of them stamp around native Mongolia today, but for years, they lived only in zoos. A breeding program turned twelve of these big-bellied beauts into a full herd without altering their wild-rooted genome. Their DNA is still pure, man-untouched. But they had to be nurtured. Captivity first. Then Cevennes National Park in France, a landscape that mimicked Mongolia but lacked the hungry lynx, the forty-below temps. Then in Mongolian pastures—fenced.

I don't ride the Przwalski's horse. I ride American Saddlebreds, descendant of Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds. The Horse America Made.™ Steed of Generals Grant and Lee. One of the breeds that can rack, a trained gait, rare, human-made. These horses are kept in fluffy-bedded box stalls. They exercise daily, snorting and sweating, ears perked, eyes bright. They nicker for pure alfalfa and molasses-sweet grain. They take vitamin E, Cosequin for their joints, probiotics for their guts, diatomaceous earth for their god-knows-what. Their coats are chestnut-

brown, their skin sensitive. When it's cold, we buckle them into insulated blankets. When hot, we bungee-tie fans to the stalls. They stand by them, eyes closed, manes blowing in the electric breeze.

The Mongolians don't call Przewalski's Horse Przewalski's Horse. They call her *takhi*, meaning spirit, meaning worthy-of-worship. Przewalski was Russian. An explorer. He hunted the breed that took his name. So did Hagenbeck, a German exotic animal fancier. He stole Przewalski foals, stuck them in zoos, killed the stallions who sired them. But Hagenbeck isn't full-on evil. He turned zoos into ecodomes, gave elephants habitats instead of cages.

A fenced-in habitat is still a cage. A soft bed in jail doesn't equal freedom. How am I okay with the rows of barred stalls I lock horses into each week? I'm not. Think about it too much: stomachache. But Friday, my day to work the barn, is the day I look forward to most. All week, I think horse. Horse. Horse. Horse. Horse. Horse.

If I keep writing, can I keep riding? If I keep riding, can I keep writing? Sometimes, bits and chains lodge in my brain. I tell myself I'll quit, but next Friday, I'll be back to cross-tie, cinch, and clip. After we ride, the horses will lower their heads, nuzzle my hair, soften their eyes. I'll kiss their rubbery muzzles, their whiskers stubby against my lips. It looks like love. It is. I love. The horses—do they? Can they love being ridden as much as I love sitting on their long backs?

If I meet a Przewalski's Horse, I'll say *takhi*. If I meet a mustang, I'll pray she stays free. Then I'll go to the horse show, bridle her Saddlebred cousin, and ride for a crowd. They'll cheer, whooping for horses moving in man-made gaits.

GEORGIE & SERGIO

BY DAVID BEEBE

Sergio arrived at First United Methodist before eight o'clock in the snow. He stood in line for a hot meal with some of the guys from 62nd Street and asked if they'd seen Georgie. They hadn't. The men sat at small lunch tables donated by a nearby elementary school, their knees touching the rock-hard gum stuck underneath, and spooned steamy chicken noodle soup with their elbows on the table and warmed their hands over the bowls like burning trash cans under the overpass. Sergio watched the front door. He went up to a woman serving soup and asked for a second helping and she smiled and said of course. When he finished he sat against the wall and waited. In came Lonnie from El Paso Avenue who once stole Sergio's shoes at knife-point several winters ago. They had since patched things up over the discovery of garbage bags from food trucks after last call throughout the city. Sometimes the food trucks set aside covered plates for Lonnie and Sergio, who then made sure there was enough for Georgie, which there always was. Lonnie hadn't seen Georgie either and Sergio began to worry.

"His mind wanders," Lonnie said, "and his feet like to follow."

"Never thought he'd miss a hot plate though."

Lonnie shrugged. "Could've grabbed one elsewhere."

They helped one another put on their coats and stepped into the cold, windy night. Sergio sunk his neck down to his shoulders and pulled the collars up on his coat. Lonnie breathed moist air onto his bare hands and rubbed them together. A digital clock in a storefront window read quarter to nine which meant the shelter would run out of beds soon. "It's going to be a cold one," Lonnie said but Sergio wasn't listening. He inched along the icy sidewalk with his head down, arms rigid, hands stuffed in his side pockets. Lonnie watched for a moment before heading in the other direction.

Sergio had the sidewalks to himself. He could've walked in the middle of the street if he wanted to. Just a few cars out.

Office building and high rise apartment windows were yellow and white and Sergio figured most were bunked in for the night. As he rounded corners to buildings the wind took his breath away for a second like jumping off the dock at his uncle's place in early spring, so cold the dogs wouldn't follow him in. Swarms of snowflakes fell in the glow of streetlights. Sergio thought they looked like Junebugs. On a night like this he wished they were. He passed a newspaper stand and a vendor named Pigeon handed him a stack of yesterday's paper. Sergio said thanks and wadded the paper into his deep coat pockets. "Be smart tonight," Pigeon said, pouring a cup of coffee and handing it to Sergio. "I got storage space if you need a roof tonight. Knock on the door and I'll give you a key, alright?" Sergio nodded and said thanks. "And you're sure you haven't seen Georgie?"

"What's that you got there?" Sergio sat against the concrete wall next to Georgie. His friend was quiet and stared at the paper in his hands and folded it and placed it inside his coat pocket. "Just an old picture," he said.

"Can I see it?"

"Not right now."

Sergio nodded and pulled his knees to his chest. "Well, I guess I can't tell you where I'm going tonight then."

"Where you going?"

"Since we're keeping secrets and all."

"Oh, come on."

Sergio smiled and took his ballcap off, revealing his bald head. "A guy that works at the drive-in gave me these after I washed his car for him. He didn't have any cash but said to come by during his shift and he'll get me in to whatever I want to watch. Popcorn and drinks included."

"You're going to the movies?"

"We're going to the movies."

"You've got two tickets?"

"I've got one and you've got one."

Georgie laughed. "What are we going to see?"

Sergio shrugged. "I have no idea."

They took the bus to the drive-in theater and the man at the ticket booth recognized Sergio and waved them over. "Starts in a few minutes. Here, take this to that girl at that register there and she'll get you set up with snacks and stuff. You guys will have to sit toward the back since, you know, no car, but there's speakers back there so you won't miss anything. Enjoy the movie!" Georgie and Sergio carried their buckets of popcorn and soft drinks in between cars and pick up trucks until they found a concrete picnic table near the back fence. They were offered candy bars but they discussed it and politely declined since neither could remember the last time they brushed their teeth, which left them embarrassed, but the girl winked and said, "Jeremy said free refills, he's the manager after all."

"I can't remember the last time a woman winked at me," Georgie said, sitting at the table.

"Almost forgot what that felt like," Sergio said.

"I can't remember the last time I was at the movies either."

The big parking lot lights dimmed and the coming attractions started on the giant screen at the front of the drive-in. A few cars honked back and forth and people laughed. Georgie too. He nudged Sergio who had his hand buried in popcorn and said, "Here." He handed him a crinkled photograph of a man and a woman, both very young, on their wedding day.

Georgie's usual hangouts turned up nothing. Jefferson Park was glossed over with ice, park benches with pillows of untouched snow. Madison Park was the same. The library across the street from the I-498 overpass was closed and the side alley empty. There was an old librarian that knew Georgie's father and let him stay in the basement on hot summer nights, but the librarian passed away toward the end of autumn. Georgie still liked to stop by to smell the books, said it helped clear his head. Sergio walked to the overpass and asked around. One of the guys, Leonard, said to check

back in an hour. The shelter tended to fill up before ten o'clock and everyone else would be turned away. Sergio stuffed his hands deep into his pockets and moved forward. He knew the newspaper ink was rubbing off on his skin. A police officer slowed next to him, rolled his window down, and said that it's too cold, the wind chill is supposed to get negative ten tonight, that he should head for the shelter. "By the time I get there, there won't be any beds left," Sergio said.

"Hop in," the officer said. "I'll take you."

"I'm looking for a friend."

"Maybe they're at the shelter. Ever think of that?"

"No, I didn't but he could be out looking for me too."

"Suit yourself."

Georgie and Sergio sit in the sun with cold bottles of water on a bench outside the dog park. A small group of Christian teenagers were handing them out with enthusiasm. The dogs ran and chased one another, picking up toys, shaking them madly. The two watched with joy.

"Ever have a dog?" Georgie asks.

Sergio shakes his head. "My uncle did."

"My parents brought one home when I was eleven or twelve years old, around the time we moved to Rhode Island. This little two-story about a five-minute walk from the shore. I told you about it. The house where my brother Brian became paralyzed. He named the dog Bandit. Grandma would call Brian that when she was alive and for the life of me, I can't remember why. One of the few words she knew in English. But the dog. When she died no one else called my brother Bandit so he passed it on after Dad found that dog wandering around some parking lot, begging for food. I think my brother meant to honor her in his own way by giving it that name though we all knew she never liked dogs. She'd been bitten as a child a few times by strays in the old country, or so she said. But Bandit the dog was a good dog for the most part. He fetched well and didn't bark a whole lot. Sometimes at birds. Finches and sparrows liked to dive in just over

his head and he'd jump and try to catch them, but they were too fast for him. They enjoyed pestering him and I think he did too. When Dad built a fence to the yard Bandit started digging himself out and I'd have to fill the holes back in. Dad usually found him down the street wandering around or going through a neighbor's trash can. Once we found him at the beach lying in the sun after a fisherman fed him a bunch of oysters. Ever heard of that? Who would give a dog oysters? Some nights after he ran away, we'd hear him barking somewhere in the neighborhood. I always liked hearing that. Then one day he left and that was that. I cried myself to sleep every night for a week. Well, another week or two goes by and one night my brother goes to the window of our bedroom and gets all excited. He says 'Look! There's Bandit!' and I hop out of bed and run to the window but when I get there, he says 'Aw shucks, you just missed him, he was there under the tree.' He did this several times. I caught on eventually but always played along. He was looking out for me, I figured. Couldn't fault him for that."

Sergio caught the bus headed uptown. The driver let him on without paying although Sergio had enough for the ride. "No one's out tonight anyway," the driver said. "I'd rather you be inside here than walking in the damn cold." Sergio got off the bus at Highland Park. The driver poured a cup of coffee from a tin thermos into a white plastic cup and handed it to Sergio as he thanked him for the ride. He didn't like coffee, even though people were always giving it to him, but it would keep him warm, at least for a little while. He vaguely remembered the upscale neighborhood surrounding the park, Pacific Heights. His father used to deliver milk to these houses when Sergio was a boy and on occasion, he'd accompany his father as he went door to door, leaving small crates of sweating jars of milk on welcome mats. He walked the sidewalk as snow crunched under his boots. He let out a "Georgie!" but felt embarrassed in doing so. He sipped the cup of coffee which was quickly losing its steam and admitted it tasted alright and wondered what brand it was. Steps to condominiums were salted



and Sergio heard the scrape of shovels, but he didn't see anyone. He liked the way sound traveled with snow on the ground. It was like being in the woods at his Uncle's place and he wished for anything to be there now, skipping stones across the placid lake in twilight, the ripples widening forever and forever. He imagined being there with Georgie but as boys building tree forts and fishing and Georgie's brother is there and he's not paralyzed and he's running with Bandit who leaps and catches sparrows in his mouth softly but lets them go without hurting them. In this cold-stricken daydream Sergio's parents are there too, his mother with dinner on the table calling the boys in and his father poking at embers in the fireplace as he often did before building it back up again. He wanted to cry but his feet were cold and damp and growing numb, so he kept moving up the block of staccato and brick buildings, Christmas trees aglow in the windows. Just ahead he saw the bus stop bench he'd found Georgie once before, during a "season of melancholia", as Georgie put it, not long after the night at the movies, and Sergio knew the score when Georgie, still as the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, came into view. Sergio wanted to cry out. He wanted to tear at his clothes and fall to the ground and beg for a miracle. He wanted to run and embrace Georgie and hold on until life returned. But he just stood there. He looked up into the sky and let the snow touch his face before melting onto his skin. He then dusted the bench next to Georgie and sat down. He couldn't feel his toes. He took a glove off and put his hand in front of Georgie's mouth, then grabbed his wrist for a moment before putting his arms around his friend and sobbed. "I'm sorry I couldn't find you," he said, "I'm so sorry." He leaned in and whispered in George's ear: "*Please, Saint Anthony, would you come around? Someone is lost and cannot be found.*" In Georgie's hands was the folded photograph from so many years ago. Sergio saw movement in the window across the street and a woman he thought he knew stepped outside in her bathrobe, white as her mother's wedding dress.

Sergio stands in the sun and waves at cars passing on the freeway. He waves till someone honks and he smiles. Georgie lies on his back looking up at the clouds. There's a taco truck in a parking lot below. "Smells good," Georgie says.

"I've got a couple bucks if you want something now," Sergio says.

"Nah," Georgie says, "you go ahead and keep it. I can wait."

"We've still got awhile till they close."

"I'm okay. Go ahead if you want."

"I can wait," Sergio says.

"We'll eat like kings," Georgie says, his eyes closed. "In due time."

The sun falls between skyscrapers miles away. Glass sparkles and shines in the late afternoon. Sergio sits next to Georgie and opens a warm beer. Foam spills over his hands and he wipes it with his shirt.

"We've got it made, don't we, Georgie?"

Georgie nods. "That we do."

"Free as birds?"

"Free as birds."





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SARDINES

BY AMANDA NICOLE CORBIN

The most haunting part of an active shooter drill is the voice. The familiar, sometimes-naggy bristle of your supervisor's voice over the intercom, often reminding you of a pep rally or schedule change, now deflates from the same classroom speaker where you find yourself with twenty-two trembling bodies. You do as you are trained. Remove a magnet from the frame. Pull the door shut. Close the blinds. Pretend these things could stop a bullet. Bunker down under a table. Pretend you are a fish.

You think of a fish because of the way you and your students huddle beneath a wooden table in midday darkness. When you were a kid staying at a nocturnal camp, you and the other campers played a game called sardines. One person hides and slowly the group grows in mass until there's one person left searching for the rest. The point was to stay silent and unmoving, breaths cramped together to go undiscovered.

Now all you have under the tables are the whispers of eyes and movement of hands to give your students faith. Beside your knee, a girl new to the school chokes back whimpers. Later, you'll wish you knew then it was merely a downed powerline on a nearby road. Your hand meets her shaking shoulder and you mouth it will be okay. There's no phone usage but you still text your mom you love her.

As you wait for the gunshots or the announcement it's safe, you scan the room. The kids are preteens, in their first year of middle school, desperately seeking their place in the world. Currently, that place is in a cloud of scared silence. Each of you are surrounded by school books and posters and folders. It all just looks like paper. Eventually, your lights are back on and you are at the front of the classroom, standing. The words you read are automated and you scrap the vocabulary quiz you had planned. You laugh with your students about the day and remind them of their homework at

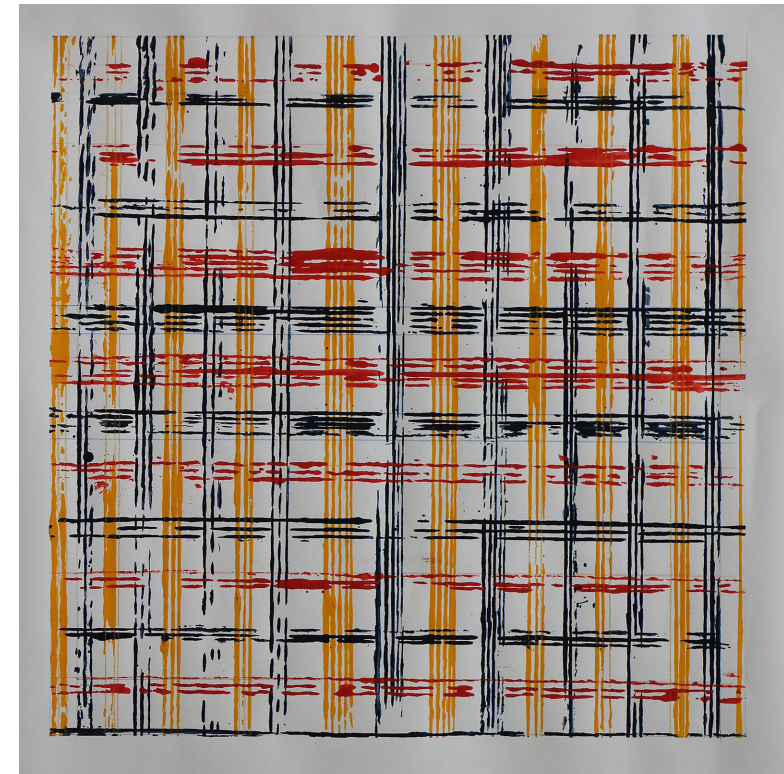




the end. You check your phone to remind your mother that you, the teacher, are fine.

You remember being ten; a *tourist attack* hit your new city and you couldn't go out for recess. You hid under the lunch table as a joke, wondering what harm tourists could possibly do, laughing all the way home until you finally asked your mother if you could go to a neighbor's house to do math homework. She stood at the television with a tissue held to her face. You wondered why her sobs were so heavy if Dad wasn't in those towers.

He didn't make it home until late, but at least his name escaped the national news.



PLAIDDRAWING 8

BY JEAN WOLFF



THIS IS NOT AN AVOCADO

BY LAURA VALENZA

The Avocado is coming to visit. He's actually a lawyer, not a fruit, but the words for avocado and lawyer in French are both *avocat*—or *avocate* for a chick because, you know, god forbid we all just be people. Or fruits. Whatever. I understand avocado becoming *avocat* and I understand advocate becoming *avocat*, but I don't understand how avocado and advocate became so similar in the first place. Apparently, it was all a colonial misunderstanding and something to do with testicles. This guy is nobody's advocate. He might as well be an avocado.

He comes in, his face an ancient and roiling sea of wrinkles, a pipe perpetually between puckered lips. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. Is one of the greatest masterpieces of modern art a dick joke? A pipe, pipe in French, is also the same word for blow job. *C'est une phallus*. That's right, I just made *phallus* feminine. Or did Magritte do that? The Avocado has a phallic umbrella hooked over one arm, his threatening implement for keeping me in check. I must adhere to the Avocado's rules. Especially if I need him to bend the law on my behalf. He and his umbrella remind me of Magritte's painting of Golconda, corporate men raining from the sky—a mockery of the wealth I could have had. And now that he has come, he has rained upon my life, he is, upon closer inspection, Magritte's Son of Man, but instead of an apple face, this dick has an avocado face. I want to peel back his toughened skin, disembowel the seed, and consume the fruit. Is there a face behind the fruit or under the flowing wrinkles?

Rain, wrinkles, men—the deluge sinks me under the sea of law. If I had as many arms as an octopus, and its brains too, I would have been a better art thief, and wouldn't have needed an advocate.

CHEWBACCA

BY CRYSTAL GANDRUD

Lena was a clown. I was a fat ballerina.

Against my will, I wore two pairs of woolly tights, a red sweater crammed under a leotard and silver moon boots. More *Bibendum* than *Swan Lake*.

How can you be a ballerina in moon boots? I reasoned.

You just can and you will, Mom insisted. Think of yourself as a ballerina on the moon.

There's no gravity on the moon. How can I be a ballerina without jumping and twirling?

Boots or you don't go.

I strategized to sneak out with ballet slippers and hide the offending items near the house but we were on the other side of town before I noticed my sweaty feet. Unsure if I would use this information, I made a note that I had been correct in assessing the footwear unnecessary. She hadn't been doing well after the raucous phone call in the middle of the night, so I had lately loosened up on the war.

Well, stuff his lungs back in, then, she screamed into the phone hung on the kitchen wall.

It was a bullet from long ago.

A shining foreigner who entered his chest in the Korean War.

An unwanted guest rattling around in the viscera for thirty years.

Then, on a September evening, it did him in.

The shattered organs flew out of his body.

He died.

She took to her bed.

I imagined doctors stuffing his pulsating lungs and heart, deformed with black stitches like the ones I had earlier that summer after flying over the handlebars of my bike, back into his scarred body. I was dying to see him at the funeral. I think I had expected him to be naked because it had not occurred to me that





anyone would put clothes on a dead body. Only his head, drier and prettier than ever in life, was offered for scrutiny. The web of capillaries, his most distinctive feature, erased and replaced with a healthy glow.

He wasn't her father anyway so I didn't see the big deal. She was being dramatic, as usual.

To test the gravity of the situation, I stomped into her room and announced, I've just spilled red juice all over the floor and am not going to clean it up. It is your own damn fault for not tightening the lid.

She looked at me and breathed noisily through her nose. Then her eyes slowly rolled to the drawn curtains like I was just part of the wall.

That was why I went easy on her over the boots.

I would look back on our evening as the definitive height of my Halloween career. We were *on*. How could anyone collect that much candy? I was inexhaustible, invincible – going to every house. Not shy. Right up to the door with the other children. Lena at my side. She diverted their attention. No one made teasing comments about my costume or frizzy hair. It was like being with a movie star when they opened the door.

Lena, they would shout, so good to see you.

A person of stature; someone to respect; me, ignored.

Hey, she would say, just like the Fonz.

Raucous laughter, back slapping, piles of Tootsie Rolls, taffy, 1,000 dollar grand bars dumped into our pillowcases.

Lena had put up a fuss about wriggling out of her black t-shirt with the glittery silver thumb for the clown outfit. It was not her idea. She wanted to dye her soft blonde hair black and wear the usual for Halloween. Her mother, my grandmother, vetoed that idea as more involved than she really wanted to get about the whole thing. She, too, felt subdued after the dramatic, if relieving, death of her husband. It wasn't an entirely bitter conclusion. Now she could read Madame Blavatsky in peace.

By that strange switchback of time that sometimes happens in

families, Lena was my aunt but only three years older. My mom was the first, a bastard, and then some time passed before the line-up of chewers and future smoker-drinkers unfurled. The only reason I had any standing at all was because Lena had taken me in. When I was born, she was about to die, pronounced to have but three years of life in her. A birth, mine, and a death that didn't happen, Lena's. The two events were unrelated, I think.

She came out on a chilly spring morning. My grandmother, incongruously named the glamorous Veronica, woke with a rising phlegm filling her lungs and, being much experienced in birthing matters, knew things were not entirely fine.

Later, Lady Slim dangling from her lips so thin she need not have bothered with the red line she drew there, she told me that she knew, knew, things weren't fine. She assured me that I was going to know things, too.

Undeniable Fact about Veronica: she knew things.

She rolled onto her side, bones poking into the mattress, springs poking into her bones. She looked out the half-opened window past the last house on the edge of town and watched the fog twisting in through the window. The white polyester lace curtains waved in the early morning brisk.

Her skinny frame hardly noticed the others but this one made her bloat and sweat like chicken skin just out of the freezer. The others were inconsequential, she indifferent. She had barely looked up from her occultish investigations. But how she hated this one.

She never admitted that. I just knew it was so.

The fact is that Veronica was too old. Already there were seven. One.

A significant pause while she collected herself and resolved not to be the local whore.

Then a marriage and boom boom boom boom boom boom.

Her body indifferent to family planning or interventions from the other side.

Then a ten-year dearth of door prizes.



Now this.

Her husband, the town lawyer, was smaller, rounder. He had seemed a catch when she caught him but now he was mostly pulled here and there by the tributary streams of his blood into the larger alcoholic river. Wisps of hair lay like wet weeds on his skull. Not returning home was a four to five nights a week practice. Save Saturdays and Sundays, after consulting hours he retired to the American Eagle, offering legal advice, standing drinks to farmers and postal workers and manual laborers until he couldn't walk home and had to spend the night in his storefront office down the street.

I have to go to the hospital, she said to no one.

She spoke with him when he wasn't there, never concerning anything interesting. We need milk, she would say, or, Jean wants a ride to school tomorrow.

She pulled on her dressing gown and laceless tennis shoes and waddled to the kitchen. The eldest still at home served grilled cheese to the rest of them before school.

I'll go to the hospital now. Call daddy at the office.

Okay.

But you can give him a few hours.

Veronica took her handbag full of tissues and tarot decks and crumpled dollar bills from its place on the counter. To the heads bowed over greasy breakfast she said, Do not spill your milk. I'll be back later.

In that moment, I knew she wondered if she would return. The birth was uneventful. Those kind often are. Just slip right out, the little dears. A blonde, blue-eyed girl with pink cheeks. God's angels. Everything you could possibly want. After the event, Veronica's relief that nothing had gone amiss lasted hours until she was visited by the head doctor and the news was broken. She could not tell if she cared or not. She could not figure if it mattered.

Lena was Chewbacca. I was Princess Leia.

They wouldn't let her join Indian Princesses because Chewbacca wasn't an Indian name. Lena said to forget it and

started wailing.

When mom came to retrieve us from our first meeting, which we were ejected from because Lena's blubbing superseded attention to all other activities, she had sarcastically inquired of the ratty ringleader with long hair, Do you know Sioux? Isn't one name in English much like any other? What does it matter whether she is Sky Dancer or Chewbacca? None of them is really Indian anyway.

That's not the point, the ringleader whined. Lena can't choose a name from popular culture. The whole point is to learn about another, more sacred culture.

She ran her nail-bitten claw across her dry lips.

Twigs and dust, I thought.

You could just let her do what she wants, you know.

We do not bend the rules for anyone.

Acting as informant, I said, She made chocolate tofu cheesecake for snack.

Mom looked at me, trying to decide whether that was relevant information. Come on, girls, you are better than Indian Princesses.

She grabbed Lena's puffy hand and stomped to the car. This left me and Indian Queen Twig Dust assessing each other like generals. The next week was my last week because we strung together tiny blue beads and I got them under my fingernails and the other little girls were strangers who all knew each other because they went to school. We had chocolate flavored tea with our tofu cake and I threw up when I got home.

Mom asked, Are you sure you want to be a member of a little girl cult?

I guess not, I said.

It was easier to play Star Wars in the back yard with Lena. Sometimes, other cousins or neighbor kids would fill in for the lesser characters like Luke Skywalker and Hans Solo. The younger ones would play R2D2 and C3PO or, when we had run out of more sophisticated plots, The Enemy. The Enemy involved running screaming from the littlest every time we snuck up on them and they turned to look at us. Being looked at equated attack. We ran



until sweat trickled down my back in a tickly trail. When we tired of that, we sat on the back step washing ourselves in melting popsicle.

The sky darkened to the shade of a deep ocean and the first stars appeared for their nightly performance. Lena and I threw ourselves onto the damp grass of the hill at the end of the yard and stared up into the night.

So much, she said.

I knew that the hole in her heart meant that she was not to live past the age of three. Ten more years was a flaunting extravagance.

Do you think there's anything up there? I asked.

What do you mean?

Like aliens.

Yeah. Planets with other little girls.

Do you think they play Star Wars?

Is there Star Wars there?

Maybe.

Lena was the Man of Action. I was the Broken Girl.

We had never played this one before and it only happened once, upstairs in her room with grease stain daisies wallpaper. She rarely slept in there, preferring to don her sleeping bag and shuffle until Nod found her. Sometimes I would come upon her in the hall or even the back mudroom. All her siblings had grown so she had full range of the house. Now that her father was on the other side, nothing and no one kept her out of wherever she chose to go.

Lena was, as usual, ruminating on thick yellow phlegm like it was chewing gum. I had decided it was the one thing I could not take.

Stop it, I said. It's disgusting.

I proffered a tissue so she could get rid of the substance.

She ignored me. Her hair fell into her pale eyes. She looked a way I had not seen her look before. She pulled at her clothes, breathing noisily, and got down onto the floor. It took me a minute to understand that she was twisting her legs out of her black jeans.

What are you doing?

Her hand shuffled between her legs and she dragged down her pink flowered pants. I grabbed her wrists, forcing them over her head.

You stop that.

She started thrashing her head and legs so I rolled onto her, using all my weight to flatten her.

Do you know you are being a pig?

She whimpered but otherwise said nothing as she violently corkscrewed her entire body under me.

Her gyrations were loosening my hold so I pulled back my head and knocked my skull into hers. She went still. In the pause, my head throbbed like it did when I waited for mom to pick me up after school, hoping she would arrive before the gangs of girls came round to have a bit of fun.

Knowing it was forbidden to say so, I whispered, Has anyone ever told you that you are retarded?

She shoved me off and retreated to the beanbag in the corner.

I remained on the floor, staring at the exposed rafters, wondering where the black wires up there went when they disappeared into the wood.

The room was utterly still except for Lena's breathing.

In a quiet, adult voice, not her usual tone-deaf shout, she said, Maybe you're the one who is retarded.

Unlike other times when I cried, she did not comfort me. She watched me sob, struggling to breathe through the snot, for what seemed forever. Time is longer in the realm of tears. Then she stood up and walked with dignity to the door, where she paused and said, Don't be so dramatic. The world doesn't revolve around you, you know.

Just before that Halloween, we were wolfishly dancing with Roman candles in the garden when Lena suddenly dropped hers and fell to the ground, moaning.

I want him back, she said.

Who do you want back?

My dad, stupid.





Then she curled up like a pill bug and screamed, refusing to listen.

I lightly slapped at her face and said, Lena, listen to me. He isn't coming back. He's dead.

I don't care, I don't care.

Well, that's not reasonable. You know he can't come back.

Veronica rallied round to explain it to her but I knew it was no good. She wouldn't understand.

From her cocoon, she repeated, It hurts, it hurts.

I sensed a bit of a performance to it—maybe she needed attention.

The other game was called Teeth and involved being horses. Mine, Flash, was black and could sometimes run so fast she would sail off the ground for seconds at a time. I made this happen by jumping off low branches or from one rise in the earth to another. But Lena's horse, Teeth, was a robot. She ran even faster than flesh and blood horses. She had blue eyes and could swim. Also, she spoke Spanish. I was a little jealous of Teeth. Why hadn't I thought of any of that?

The night of the Halloween triumph I dreamt that we were involved in a perfect game of Star Wars. I swung over the great chasm on ropes but Chewbacca floated around like a hirsute angel. The space below saddened and scared us and I began to cry in the cold air.

Chewbacca Lena smiled and said, I love you, retarded girl. She offered me a green candy. Then we flew around in the void, free.

Sweetie-love-perfection?

Mom sat by me on the bed and interrupted the game. I opened my eyes.

Precious angel, I have just terrible news. It's so very, very sad.

I patted her hand and waited for her to be able to say it, thinking of the bulging pillowcase of lucre under my dresser. Tears came out of her from everywhere.

Darling, Lena died of a broken heart last night.

Oh, I said.

Are you sad?

Yes.

Is there anything I can do for you, my love?

No, nothing.

I wanted her to go away so I could go back to dream Chewbacca Lena.

This I knew with certainty: the hole had grown so large it consumed her.

Lena was the Dead Girl. I was the Retarded One, the endless game now and forever. Her body, my second in as many months, had fine hair styled like an old woman's.

Hey, retarded girl, she said, Help me make this black.

Your pretty hair? No way.

Then read the instructions and tell me how.

No.

Why?

Because I love you and Veronica will kill me and you if I do.

Do it!

No, Lena.

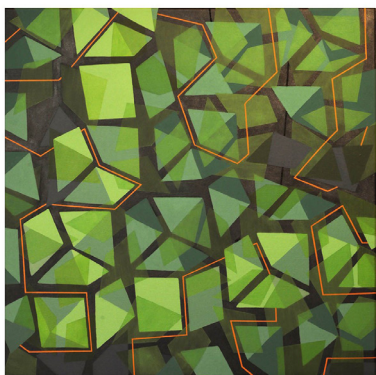
Why?

I just told you why.

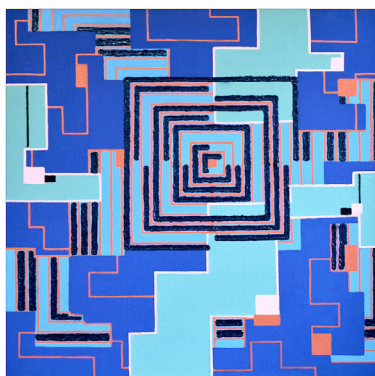
You'll be sorry when I'm dead.

Probably.

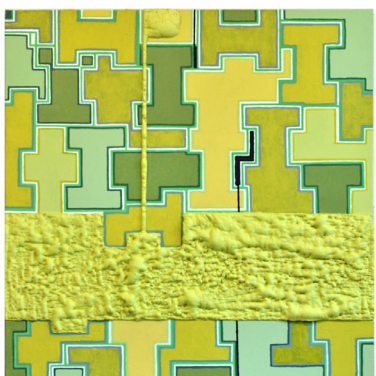




ARSENIC



HYDROGEN



SULPHUR

BY ROBERT DIMATTEO

B A B E

BY ANDREW JASON JACONO

September

First name: Nunzio. Last name: Romano.

“Middle name’s Nico,” he declares, clasping his stubby fingers around my hand. “Yes, my parents are assholes.” He scowls. “My twin’s named Anthony. He got the longer end of the stick.”

We’re at the end of our dorm’s first-floor hall. Freshman orientation cleanliness shines on the dark blue couches and spotless windows overlooking the muddy baseball field outside. In the air is the vague nip of lavender and the sweat-laden stench of anxious first impressions.

“Bobby,” I reply, half-smirking. I recline into the couch and rest a hand on my temple. “Everybody just call you Nico?”

“Yep. Nunzio sounds like the name of the protagonist from a shitty Italian rom-com.”

I snicker. “I don’t-a think Nunzio is a bad-a name-a,” I gripe in an obnoxious accent, thrusting a pinched hand back and forth in stereotypical fashion. “Fuck it. That’s what I’ll call you.”

He grimaces and gnaws on his lower lip. Then his expression softens, and he rubs his palms together as if plotting out a scheme. “Do whatever you want. My logic is bend, don’t break.” He points to the ceiling. “Miss you, Tupac.”

October

The best way to describe Nico? A real-world manifestation of a promising cartoon sketch. He barely scrapes past five-foot-six, though he argues he’s five-foot-seven. He has a long, wide nose and nostrils shaped like fat raisins. His eyes are dark brown and thin and scan everything with a hint of anxiety, as if he’s always prepared to deliver a snappy comeback. He blasts thumping, profane rap music while writing essays, sometimes ethereal soul tunes.

He's also a passionate comedian.

"Have you ever accidentally jerked off to a picture of your own mother?" he shouts to the room, empty except for me and him, reciting his most recent standup bit I agreed to sit for. He scans the area as if there's some sort of negative response, nods gently, and slips his hands into his pockets. "So I'm the only one?"

Out of shrewd politeness, I chuckle and flash an ephemeral smile, unable to wholly mute the cringe crawling over my face.

As we're walking to the dining hall one day to grab lunch, he spots a woman skirting across the dewy green ahead. Ogling her bust, he announces, "God, she's got a great set of personalities."

The woman's head cocks to the side as if she's heard. My face goes pale. "Mind being a little louder?" I groan, though this is far from the first time he's said something so lewd in public.

He pops his collar. "Who needs a filter when you've got style?" He stops in place and squints in thought. "Damn, I should write that one down." He pulls out his shattered Samsung phone and taps his fingers over the shards of the keypad. "Women love funny men, Bobby," he says with an almost didactic bite, not looking up as he starts to walk. "Trust good ol' Nico on that one."

Even though he's irreverent, I still find him endearing. He's like my closest Long Island friends: aggressive, both sexually and socially, always willing to sacrifice face to say something cringe-worthy and uproarious. If he isn't describing how he'd bed a woman drifting around his periphery, by way of example, he's regurgitating a half-facetious comment about how unattractive some of the people on our dorm hall are, sometimes while they're eating with us. As a result, I've become convinced he can't comport himself around the typical, ultra-liberal student at my college.

I usually want to say something in response to his comments, but I never do. I think it's because I'm worried he'll dub me a pussy like my friends back home did.

After lunch today, we head back to my room while my roommates are out. As I strum my newly-purchased acoustic

guitar with the self-consciousness of a musical novice, we argue about the average human penis size.

"It's gotta be at least six inches," he says.

I shatter the chord shape to bury my face in my hand. "We've been talking about this for ten fucking minutes. Does it matter?"

For a few long moments, a whistling wind sputters through the half-open window beside my bed. I play another few chords to drown out the sound, and for some reason, an image of Claire, the beautiful girl down the hall, slips into my mind: a snapshot of her red, wavy hair fluttering in the chilly Connecticut wind, freckles dotting her nose and cheeks. I remember the moment, a few weeks ago, when she told me and a group of friends about the time she had rough sex with her ex-boyfriend in a janitor's closet, and drum my foot against the ground.

"You know, I feel like everybody here's really ... experienced," I mumble. "And I'm not."

I half-expect Nico to unleash a grating, seal-like cackle and brag about how many women he's screwed, but instead, he purses his lips, scratches his eczema-reddened forearm, and admits, "Well, I'm a virgin."

I look at him quizzically. None of the four or five women he'd dated in high school had ever slept with him? "Really?" I ask.

He eyes his bouncing leg. "It's fucking embarrassing. I mean, it should've happened. I've had plenty of opportunities, but ... it just didn't gel."

"No, I know what you mean," I respond, almost chuckling. "I feel exactly the same."

A downcast smirk falls over him. "Well, I'm glad you understand. Most people don't."

I nod. It's maybe the first time I haven't considered giving him grief for being honest.

November

I stare into the foggy bathroom mirror, frowning at an irritated pimple under my eye that I squeezed in the shower a few minutes ago. I sigh, my cosmetologist mother's voice bouncing with a



vengeance in my head, then focus on my sopping hair. I part a few strands to the right, pat them down until my widow's peak disappears, and give myself a quick nod of approval.

As I grab the razor sitting neatly on the sink, the door to the bathroom creaks. Nico steps in, sporting a wrinkled blue tee-shirt, emblazoned with the slogan "Life is Good," that he's been reusing for the past few days.

He walks up to the adjacent sink and flips it on. "How's it goin', babe?"

The razor almost nicks my lip. "I'm sorry?"

"Doin' well, babe?"

I suppose I feel fine, if not a bit confused. I don't think he's ever described himself as, or revealed himself to be gay, but I start to sift through some memories I've made with him, scrutinizing a few recent heart-to-hearts and overt sexual jabs as possible corroboration for the sudden speculation. *You're the only one who understands me here, he whispers in my skull. I don't know what college would be like without you.*

I catch his eyes in the mirror. He winks. My cheeks feel hot and I look away.

"Come on, you're like the girlfriend I never had," he says nonchalantly, running his hands through the whitish stream under the faucet. "Plus, you've got a better body than anyone I've dated."

I say nothing in response, but he chokes on an attention-seeking snort, and I turn to him. He's clutching the sink, cackling so violently I can hear him wheeze. A broken laugh escapes my lips, and within three or four seconds, I'm clucking like a choking hen.

I don't know why, but I reciprocate. *For the thrill of the joke*, as he'd say. "All right, babe," I sigh, throwing my hands up. "Is this the part where we make passionate love?"

He rolls his eyes and flaps his sopping hands in the air. "God. Buy me dinner first."

While I'm playing guitar with fumbling technique atop my

bed, staring in careful concentration at the purple night dangling outside the window, the door handle jigs. I turn. Nico steps in and clears his throat.

"Hey, babe," he says. "How we doing?"

I set the guitar on my lap. "Not bad, babe." I look at his face. His eyes are wide, bloodshot, almost shaken. "You okay?"

He nods. "Well, I've got a funny story."

"My favorite."

He sits on one of the burrito-stained chairs in the middle of the room and pats his belt buckle. "I just did my stand-up routine."

I can feel my face droop. "Oh, cool," I mutter. He'd mentioned it while he was reciting one-liners last weekend, but I'd forgotten to go. "Sorry I couldn't make it. I was ..." I glance at the instrument straddling my thighs. "Doing work."

His shakes his head. "It's all good," he says. "Probably for the best."

I bite my lip. "What do you mean?"

His expression flickers like a flashlight low on battery. "Well, the Holocaust went better." He notices my sigh. "Hey, I can say that because I'm half-Jewish."

I disregard the joke. "What happened?"

"Nothing, really." He gives a shrug. "I said something about Mickey Mouse's sex life. Crippling anxiety. My brother's suicide attempt."

"So only light-hearted stuff?" I sigh.

He scratches his hand. "I got a little more political near the end, and, uh ... well, they decided to ban me from the premises for a year."

My head jerks back. He was snubbed for a saucy standup routine? I'm not fond of a good deal of his humor, at least in a public setting, but that sort of response seems unwarranted. "Are you serious?" I gripe. "Fuck, dude, I'm so sorry."

He waves off the apology. "Nah, babe, don't worry. Most people here don't like good jokes. I'll try to find somewhere to perform in town or something."

He shakes his head as if he knows performing elsewhere





wouldn't be a viable option, and for an aching moment, I want to find out what exactly he said so I can comfort him and tell him that everything will be all right regardless of his mistake, but before I can say anything, he steps to the door. "See ya tomorrow, babe," he murmurs.

I meet his eyes for a moment. They look duller, glossier than usual. "All right, babe. Don't let this get you down."

He looks toward the hallway outside. "I won't." He leaves. The door slams. I wince. Something tells me he won't perform again, at least not anytime soon.

January

Winter recess comes and goes like the momentary spark of a butane lighter. I spend a few days engaging in fierce wrestling bouts with turkey drumsticks, Italian sausage stuffing, and sweet potato casseroles. During my ample downtime, I learn new techniques on guitar and record a few simplistic melodies of my own.

I haven't thought much about Nico despite the fact that he'd been one of the most stubborn focuses of my thoughts during first semester. The last time I spoke to him, he told me he was going to Montreal with a group of friends to guzzle vodka and fuck ginger hookers.

"A noble cause," I'd said.

"Another gem of a chapter for the memoir," he'd replied. "I'll call it: Nico Romano and the Wondrous Voyage to Titsland." With an eager look on his face, he'd pulled out his phone to type the zinger out, but dropped it back into his pocket just before a frown darkened his expression.

I assume he's faded into the background static of my thoughts because of physical and social distance over the last few weeks, but on the drive back to school, he materializes in my head with the subtlety of a supernova. Some of these scattered memories are of specific things he's said, or egregious jokes he's told, but they're mostly of his facial expressions—his sharp, toothy grin whenever he glides over a story that makes someone writhe in their seat, the deep furrow that digs into his brow whenever someone poses

him a pointed question, the way his eyes slip toward the ground whenever I mention one of his family members.

While my head is occupied for most of its duration, the drive proves uneventful. After I park in the empty lot behind my dorm, I close my eyes, listen to the rumble of the car's engine, and try to clear my head. I don't succeed, but I switch off the ignition anyway, grab my belongings from the back, and step toward the entrance with an unsteady smile on my face.

When I enter my room, Nico is planted in front of the little television sitting on the desk next to the window, stuffing dollops of hummus into his mouth, watching a profane cartoon with one of my roommates, shaggy-haired Jack.

"Hey," Jack moans, eyes glued to the screen.

"Babe!" Nico yells. He hops over and claps my back. I catch a gracious whiff of his scent: skunky ashes and cheap cologne. He nods at me with swollen pink eyes. "How was your break?"

"Not bad, babe," I reply, dropping my backpack and cased guitar on my bed. I glance at the greenish stains painted on one of the sleeves of Nico's usual "Life is Good" shirt. "What's up?"

He looks around as if he's forgotten where he is, then meets my eyes. "Just hanging out."

"Nice. How was Montreal?"

"It was . . ." His eyes drift to the side. "I didn't end up going, actually."

"Oh." I wonder why not, but I decide not to pry, especially since Jack is nearby. "So you stayed home, then?"

"Yep."

"And how was that?"

His lips thin. I scold myself for asking. The last time I did, he went on a long-winded diatribe against the government, claiming they don't recognize Lyme disease, which his sister suffers from. This time, however, he appears more reserved, even though I can tell it's a guise. "Fine," he says, squeezing a finger in his palm. "Anthony's been having some trouble with his meds, but he's back at Colby. That semester off really helped."

I nod. "And how are you?"





“Me?” he retorts, taking a moment to straighten his back and puff out his chest like a frightened blowfish. “Livin’ the dream! I’ve been *riggity-wrecked* for the past week. And by God’s good grace, Jack’s got enough weed to singe an entire semester.”

Saliva hits the back of my throat, tasteless and heavy. *I’m only going to smoke when there’s a full moon*, he’d told me months ago. I wasn’t aware full moons happen so frequently.

He flashes a lethargic, chickpea-yellow smile and gestures at the dish of hummus in Jack’s hands. “We’ll talk later, babe. You hungry? I’m starving.”

April

In the cramped but brightly-lit study lounge at the end of the hall, I mark the unsolvable statistics equation in my textbook with a dull pencil, wondering why I decided to take the class. As if by *Deus Ex Machina*, Nico cracks open the door and waves.

“Hey, babe,” he grumbles.

“Hey,” I reply, folding the page and setting the book and pencil on the table in the center of the room. I gesture at his unkempt, oily hair. “You just wake up or something?”

“Yeah,” he laughs. “I think it’s a new record.”

I check my watch. “It’s 2:30,” I reply, squinting, though I’m not surprised. He’s been waking up later and later by the week. “Everything all right?”

He puts his hands on his waist. “Yeah. I’m just feeling a little ...” he trails off. Thinks for a moment. “Under the weather.” He turns his head, looks around, sniffs. “Wanna get fucked up tonight? Like, destroyed?”

He should know that I’d never choose that option, but I entertain him anyway. “I dunno. Got a lot of work. What’s bothering you?”

“You’d have to give me an hour for that.”

“Mind condensing?”

“Uh ...” He bites his lip. “Work, mostly.”

I’m almost offended by how drab his response is, since he’s usually more creative. “Well, did you do any?” I press.

“Nah.” He throws up a dismissive hand. “I’m just gonna do it

tomorrow. Jack and I gotta smoke tonight. Then I gotta go out after, or something. Calm the nerves.”

“Well, you can try to do some now,” I suggest. “You can kill time. And if you get it all done, you won’t—”

“It’s fine.” He chuckles nervously. “I just don’t wanna do or feel anything right now.”

I can’t find anything more inspiring or conciliatory to say other than a hesitant, “Okay, babe.”

His jaw tightens, loosens, tightens again. I don’t know what that means. “Listen, I’m gonna get my degree from here and die in a DUI when I’m 28. Gotta live while I can, right?”

I gape. My tongue feels heavy. I notice my heart is thumping like a racehorse’s hooves against a dirt track. “I guess.”

We sit in silence for a while. He stares at the window behind me. Then he clears his throat and turns the doorknob. “Later, babe,” he breathes, and walks out. The door slams.

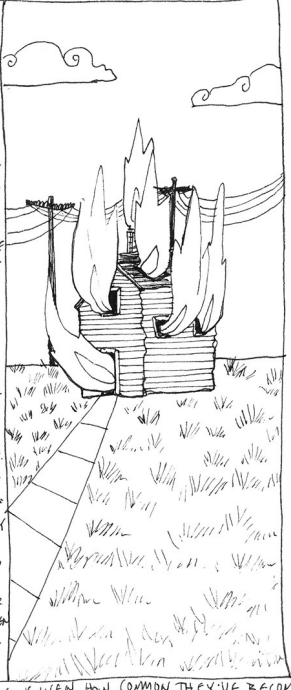
Now, there is only the fan humming in the corner like a discordant choir. In my head is a stinging wave of heat. I repeat his comment to myself a few times before it fades on its own.

I lift the textbook from the table, unfold the crease in the corner of the page, and scan the paper. The wide black blocks of text glare back. In the slim white spaces on the sides, I can almost see him shaking his head, laughing and sobbing at the same time.





I'VE NOTICED A TREND AMONGST MY OLD BOY FRIENDS. AFTER WATCHING THE EPISODE OF "BREAKING BAD" WHERE WALTER WHITE TRAPS A MAN IN A BASEMENT WITH A MIKE LOCK, ONE SAID, "THAT'S WHERE I'LL KEEP YOU. YOU'LL BE MY BASEMENT WIFE." ANOTHER WHILE WATCHING "DEFIANCE" CALLED ME HIS FOREST WIFE AFTER THE SCENE WHERE JAMIE BELL MARRIES A GIRL IN THEIR ISOLATED ENCAMPMENT. SAM PROMISES TO PAIR UP WITH ME IF WE'VE GOT TO RIDE OUT THE APOCALYPSE. THERE ARE LOADS OF REASONS WHY THESE RELATIONSHIPS DIDN'T WORK OUT, MORE NUANCED THAN EACH MAN NOT WANTING ME. IT SEEMS THOUGH THAT TO THEM, I POSSESSED NO SMALL PART OF MR. ROCHESTER'S MAD ATTIC WIFE. I'M A WOMAN TO LOVE IF TIMES ARE DESPERATE. IF I CAN BE CONTAINED, OR IF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT CEASES TO EXIST. ONE MAN WHO WOULD BRAG ABOUT MY INTELLIGENCE TO OTHER MEN AT BARS, TOLD ME THAT A LOT OF WHAT I SAID MADE NO SENSE. "YOU BELIEVE POEMS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD." YES AND NO BUT HE NEVER ASKED ME TO ELABORATE. I'M NOT ANGRY. WHEN THEY SAID THESE THINGS, I WOULD BREATHE A SIGH OF RELIEF. "IF YOU THINK THAT, ONE DAY I WILL BE FREE OF YOU." I'M TEACHING LOGICAL FALLACIES AND AN EASY ONE WOULD BE THIS SLIPPERY SLOPE. "THESE MEN DID NOT CHOOSE ME SO I AM CRAZY AND UNLOVEABLE." I WANT TO FOCUS ON THEIR LOGICAL FALLACY. "SHE'S IN LOVE WITH HER WORK AND WILL EVENTUALLY LEAVE." OR "LISTEN TO HER. SHE'S CRAZY." THIS ALL EQUATES TO CATAclySMIC THINKING, A FEAR-BASED FLAVOR OF THIS FALLACY. MAYBE LOVE IS JUST COORDINATING



DAY 295

CATAclySMIS GIVEN HOW COMMON THEY'VE BECOME. I NEED A MAN THAT I CAN'T SCARE.

LIKE A HOUSE ON FIRE

BY MEG REYNOLDS

I CAN'T LOOK

BY SOPHIE BRAXTON

There are fights inside me sometimes. Against probability, the weaker entity always wins. I remember arriving two hours early to see you and still feeling relieved at the fact that you weren't there. Crying is stupid and Love is stupid because neither has any root in reason. Not that I can perceive. I am the cashier who said she was hungry, and shook her head affably when the customer spread his arms and scoffed, *In a grocery store?*

There are fights outside of me too. They like putting their fingers in each other's faces and making like they're about to bite. The saddest fistfight ever happened at our own store. Bodies passed through solid things. You were not there and I was not there, but we know about it from hearsay. Even now, a year later, people describe it, punching the air. Why do things like that become legend? Why not the time I worked 4 dairy pallets in 3 hours? You don't even know about that, because you were already gone. Nobody knows. The people who took your spot, the people who are supposed to praise me, they were not paying attention. All they do is look at each other. If they provoked me, I would fight them, but that hasn't happened yet and I think they are scared. When I look at them, they keep on walking, too ashamed to fall under the sunlight of my stare.

Conflict is necessary and kind of like dancing. I remember the school counselor tackling a girl to the ground and holding her there, in the cloudy dirt. If they had their clothes off, it would look like they were having sex. That's what I was thinking. *Don't watch anything on TV that you don't think I'd want you to watch*, my mom told me, but what if the thing is happening at school outside my window? Can I watch?



I know that everything has flaws because when I used to ride my scooter, not even the streets that had just been paved were completely smooth. If I knew a perfect person, I don't even know if I'd like them. I don't know what they would be like. When my sister saw you, she said that you look too normal to be beautiful, but I don't agree. I don't know if my mom would want me to look at you, because of the way you make me feel. I wish you were somebody I could go to the library and get a book about, so that I could do some research before deciding what I want.

All I know is what other people tell me and what I have seen, which isn't very much. It's not enough. This feeling reminds me of when I want to make collages, but I don't have any magazines. And if I had a picture of you, I would never cut it up.

My pupils may be dilated. I hope everybody knows that it's not because I'm on drugs. I did a drug test once before, I had to put something in my mouth. It tasted like a glass of water left out on the counter for weeks—that's the opposite of what you would taste like if you were a drug test.

When somebody asks me what race I am, or where I got my shoes, I tell them I don't know. Now I'll say the same thing when they ask me if I've ever been in love. But if they ask whether I've been in a fight—then, I will nod my head.

POSTPHOBIA

BY KATIE KING

You would retrieve the mail for me and drop it in a bag I held open in the parking lot. Certified mail containing news of syphilis (later proved false) and an informal restraining order complete with exclamation points - so different from the typewritten letters from gamma sent with newspaper clippings that I would long for as a child. Her handwriting as if it somehow fumbled out of her pen on its own, but still so straight you could put a ruler under it, like the ruler they put under my cursive at Christian school. I failed penmanship and often spent recess indoors, battling with a cushion-grip pencil. I wanted to sign my name with a J and my teacher told me I couldn't because it started with a K. *Well, it's my name* I thought. My name and my mail.





BIG FISH

BY LOUIS STAEBLE

SMALL TALK

BY CRISTINA FLORES

The question floats to the surface of our conversation, kicked loose from a crevice, despite my care to walk over words and step around sentences: “Are you planning on having any children?”

Yes, I tell you. That ever since I was a little girl, I fantasized about having six. Now, at my age, I guess I'd settle for three. But I always wanted a daughter - named Scheherazade. Even though my mother thought it was absolutely ridiculous. Think about how people will misspell it, mispronounce it. But she knew I had my mind set. And so I tell you about the box in the attic filled with all the things she collected - toys, pictures, and a child's dining set - depicting scenes from One Thousand and One Nights. And then there are the things she made when she realized she would die by the end of a year - halloween treat bags, onesies, booties, blankets. So then I tell you about when Kevin and I first met and I told him Scherazade was a non-negotiable. He smiled and asked if we could call her Sadie for short. And so I tell you about the ovulation kits and pregnancy tests. About those two suspiciously late and painful and bloody periods. And I tell you about days I can't drag myself out of bed, about the therapists and the antidepressants. And then I tell you about the adoption and foster care seminars, the doctor's visits, the tests, the lists of procedures - not covered by insurance. And then I tell you about the anxiety, about how I have no idea how we can pay for it all much less what comes after - diapers, day care, college - on two teacher salaries. So I then tell you about the day I took Kevin by the hand and said I give up. Let's live our lives. And then I tell you about the moments when I am lost in the garden of forking paths, when I can't find my way out of the what ifs. When I think this actually might be the greatest thing that has ever happened to me, and I wonder when I can tell you all this and believe it.

I simply shrug and say, “We never gave it much thought.”



BLACKBERRIES

BY GAYLORD BREWER

My father, into his eighties, surprised me with a half-full gallon bag of blackberries he'd picked at a secret location. As I recall, he lacked the resolve to can them as jelly or preserves, instead saving the entire stash as a gift for his youngest son. He had gone picking out of tradition and, I suppose, as an assertion of personal agency. What the hell.

Improbable as it seems, I'd guess that was five years ago. I got up this morning thinking guiltily of an icy zip-lock somewhere in the back of the freezer. That's a bad habit of mine, holding onto things too long, until they're ruined. These days, dad can barely navigate their modest house, get to the grocer and back without incident, and those are the last blackberries he will ever pick. No crime in a bit of sentimentality but certainly a misdemeanor to waste a batch of sweet wild berries.

But as I dug through the overloaded shelves, they weren't to be found. I searched again, a bit frantically. No. I stood there, freezer door open, tendrils of cold on my face, a late-summer day already boiling outside. Perplexed, frustrated, resolve stolen. I looked a third time. At some point I'd felt similarly to this morning and made a cobbler or cooked down and strained a sauce for grilling. Maybe an ice cream. That's my theory, and a good thing, I suppose.

I share my father's nostalgia for berry picking. Sweat burning the eyes, shirt clinging, a barbaric August sun, every step into weeds potential snake pit awakened, chigger welts to be tallied later as wounds of honor across chest, stomach, and groin, torn hands and forearms streaked in blood, each plump, dark fruit revealed, taken, and added to the pail. Good country fun. The couple of small patches I discovered when I moved to Tennessee have long-since been uprooted for subdivisions. I wouldn't know where to look.

As I said, there will be no more blackberries from my father. And the last bag's gone.

CONVERSATIONS I DIDN'T HAVE WITH MY MOTHER

BY SARAH ROBBINS

I.
can a woman preach / why cant women preach / why doesnt god want women to preach / what is wrong with women / why can women only preach to other women / can women teach men if theyre children / why can women preach if its called teaching / can a woman preach if god tells her to / can a woman preach if no men want to / can a woman preach when all the men are bad at it / can a woman preach if all the men are dead

II.
what kinds of birth control are there / does an IUD hurt / can an IUD hurt me / wont a birth control patch fall off / what brand pill do i need / will the pill make me break out / will the pill make me sad / will the pill make me hungry / side of effects of the pill/ what will the pill do to my body / how much does the pill cost / do i need a prescription for birth control / do i need insurance to buy birth control / can my dad see my prescription if im on his insurance / how does planned parenthood work / is it legal to give birth control to a friend

III.
what is sex / what defines sex / what counts as sex / does the bible say i cant have sex before marriage / why dont i want to have sex with my boyfriend / what does the bible say about touching / define sex / define rape / define sexual assault / define molestation / can molestation only happen to children / does it count if its your boyfriend / is it okay to keep dating him / how to erase search history





THE QUIETUDE

BY REBECCA ENDRES

The doctors prescribed chemo
for arthritis, not cancer;

it still felt like a death sentence.

My mother, bones under a quilt,
my father, gaunt with the thought

of an empty bedroom.

Our windows ceased to work,
filtering out most colors

so the living room seemed dim.

Eventually with a yawn, our home
settled to sleep, careless of us

insomniacs trapped in our kitchen chairs,

beading corn and peas into rosaries
though we'd never been religious.

I loved my father more than I knew I could,

but now I fear that it was only pity
for the way he flossed his teeth

without even the television for company.

HARRY HOUDINI'S GREAT ESCAPE

BY VITO COLE

“Secrets aren’t for strangers, they’re for the ones you love You can sit
on a bus and tell a stranger everything They’re just empty words.”

-Ken Smith “Harry Houdini”

In St. Louis the service is incredibly slow. I am in the hotel lounge
waiting for my brother and my nephew, who are taking their time
making sure their expensive phones are charged to the max and
the expensive shoes they are wearing match their expensive belts
and their expensive socks. I am wearing a pair of cheap glasses
with a giant scratch across the cheap left lens. My hair is clean but
messy. My cheap phone is half-charged and contains no apps that
will allow me to communicate with anyone or anything unless I
dial their damn number, which I don’t. I am just waiting for my
Budweiser in the lounge of our over-priced, under-staffed hotel.

This is my second time in St. Louis, I don’t remember much
about the first time, other than I was a mess. Alcohol, drugs and
bad women had caused a meltdown in my life and my last trip
to St. Louis was my personal vacation/detox. No words had to be
spoken about it, I needed a break and I took it. Every year my
brother, nephew and I meet up in a fine, American city to attend
the NCAA Division I Wrestling National Championships. Two of
the last three have been in St. Louis. We don’t do touristy things
in the host city. We watch wrestling. For three days we watch 340
wrestlers compete in 640 matches across ten weight classes to
reach the 80 All-American spots on the championship podium.
From 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, we talk wrestling, we eat wrestling,
and we live wrestling.

Heavy conversations are left at hometown airports. We don’t
deal with emotions and silly things, we are men, and it’s a wrestling
tournament. I see my brother, maybe, once a year besides our





yearly wrestling excursion, so this is our chance to catch up and share our funny stories about golf and our new favorite meats. There's no time for insecurities. I see my nephew even less. He is the oldest of all my nephews and nieces, so it's probably easy to see why he is my favorite. He's not super skinny like me, but he has skinny sensibilities and I love that. His hair is longer than mine and his beard lacks the seasoning mine has accrued over the years. He likes to rib me and tell me that if I gained a bit of weight, people would think I was his dad. I smile to myself when he tells me these things. He turned 21 right before Christmas. I tease him with the fun things he gets to look forward to when he gets to be my age. "Be on the lookout for ear hair," I tell him. And "Don't be alarmed when you find yourself turning up the volume and enjoying am radio." And of course, "Relax when you're on the toilet making 'boom boom', push too hard and you get hemorrhoids."

The super slow server finally brings me my Budweiser. My brother and nephew have still not arrived, and I find myself imagining the life of the server outside of this over-priced lounge. I wonder about his home life. Is he married? Does he have children? Does he only serve alcohol, or does he go home and consume it too? Or is he so sick of drunks that when he gets home, he pulls the shades, locks the door, unplugs the phone, and lies with his eyes closed, on his single bed, sipping from an un-iced glass of lukewarm tap water? I wonder how many lies he has to tell to get through a day? I think to myself, the bartender is the stranger on the bus one could conceivably tell his secrets to. I wouldn't tell him my secrets, but maybe my nephew would tell him his secrets. But he didn't. He told me.

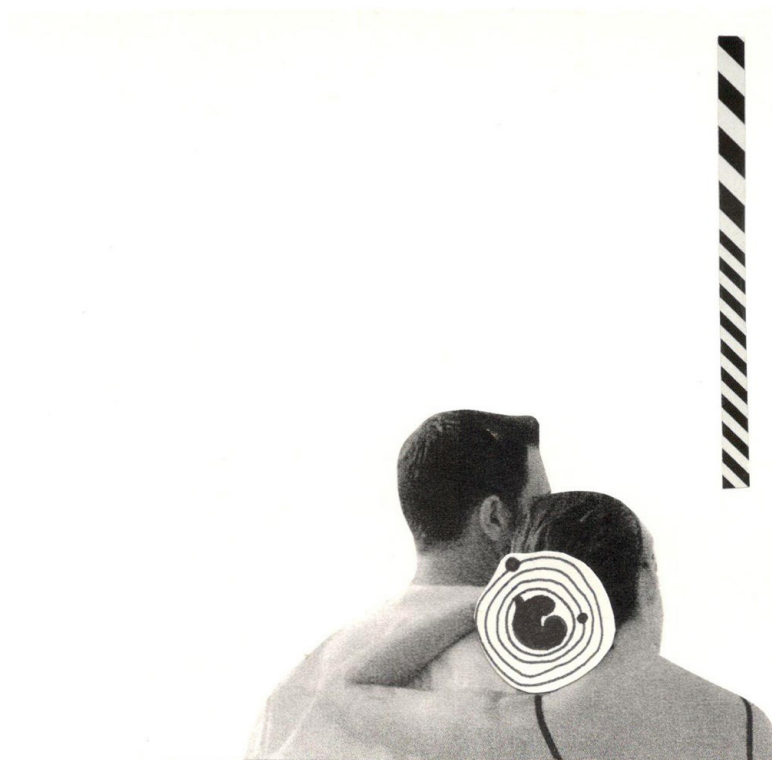
In May, my nephew's best friend called him up and asked if he could hang at his pad while my nephew was at work. While my nephew was working, the best friend put a needle in his own arm and treated himself to a lethal dose of heroin. When I was 20, my best friend shoved a couple eight balls up his nose and went joy riding in his truck, leading to a spectacular car wreck with his own vehicle rolling over him three separate times as he was being thrown from it. His heart stopped beating eight times before it

finally threw in the towel. These are secrets. Not that I was ever scared of anyone knowing the pain I was in, I just didn't want to talk about it. I shoved all that pain up my nose, or I sprinkled it on some weed rolled it up and inhaled it. My nephew told me the story over a beer, with the prerequisite "please don't tell anyone" tag. and now I feel there is not enough beer in the world. Use the server, that is what they are there for.

I wonder and I worry. I wonder and I worry. My nephew is a lot like me. I was hoping he was smarter and wouldn't have to deal with all the ugliness of substance and mental inconsistency. The two go hand in hand, bouncing carelessly through the cracks and crevices of personal experience. I tell my nephew that he's too young for this, I tell him that as I put my arm around him. His eyes are wet, no tears are dropping, but there is a hesitancy in his voice, almost a crack, not more than a whisper. I realize at this moment; how sad I am for him. How much I love him. How much I love my family. How much I love my life. How scared I am. How important these things are. How much I will miss these things.

Secrets aren't for strangers they're for the ones you love.





COLLECTON OF MEMORIES #3

BY ANA JOVANOVSKA

THE GAP IN THE CIRCLE

BY CASSONDRA WINDWALKER

The rearview mirror came off in my hand as I reached up to adjust it. Soaring canyon walls continued to fly by, the low-slung bucket of bolts that was my son's Fiero hugging the curving road. Fierce desert sun glinted off the blacktop and bounced away from the angled windshield.

The weight in my palm terrified me. More than anything, I wanted to reattach it, regain the vista behind me. I wanted to glance up and see where I'd been still hanging in the mirror. I could almost sense my son sitting beside me, feel his hand pulling my arm down, his voice imploring me to set the mirror down. To drive blind to the road behind me and set my gaze firmly on the road ahead.

Seven months earlier, he'd been driving a different car down a dark road. He'd reached up to adjust the mirror, and since every car he drove was a work-in-progress (mostly work and not much progress,) that mirror had fallen off in his hand, too. He'd struggled to reattach it, and by the time he'd looked back at the road, it was too late. Another mother and her son lay dead in a field, and he was trapped in a tangle of steel and glass beside them.

People are wrong to think that ghosts wait for darkness to appear. They have nothing to fear from the sun. As I set my son's affairs in order, disposed of his carefully hoarded belongings as if they were trash, these three trailed me everywhere – she, him, and the boy my son used to be, before a mirror came off in his hand. In that moment, with the weight of a catalyst in my grasp and a New Mexico highway screaming away beneath the tires, the path seemed very clear.

A life for a life, right? Mine for hers. And what perfect symmetry. Why else, how else, would I be here, sitting in his place, facing his choice that he could never, never make again? More than anything I wanted to put that mirror back. I wanted to look into the past





and watch it overtake me. I wanted to take his place, take her place, and imagine that that would close this loop, complete this circle, silence this pain.

Slowly, painfully, I set the mirror in the empty seat beside me. Force of habit did draw my eyes back to that empty space, again and again, as I navigated the winding road, but all I could see was the sky breaking out before me, endless blue. The gap in the circle is too vast to be closed by death. Only life can link one broken hour to another. As I reached the floor of the canyon, shaking, crying, and pulled the car over, I imagined I felt that other mother lean against my seat, wrap her arms around my shoulders. “You did good,” she whispered. “You did good.”

the end

FOR THE GIRL WHO WORRIED AT 6 FOR NOT HAVING A ROPE LADDER TO ESCAPE FIRE FROM GROUND FLOOR

BY ELIZA SWAN

The magnitude 7.6 Chi-Chi earthquake and subsequent large aftershocks...stunned all who live and work on the...island of Taiwan.
— Risk Management Strategy, 1:47 a.m. September 21, 1999

the first time you startle in the day
in the middle of an earthquake, grimace a laugh—
finally, what they prepare you for in school.

swirling concrete-block foundation shakes you
awake, you want to go back to nightmare. at least
there, you could scream yourself up.

every park morning, see more pathside sculpture
blocks scatter on grass. charismatic chikung teacher
the only one still laughing. buy a cartoon sleeping bag:

you can't read, but you know what it is. sleep on the quad
up the hill with other english teachers. tented village of foreigner
fragility. the ground is better than your host dad's finger

tapping you awake on your nose. your kids don't notice you
over prepare for every moment lesson. you refuse to finish
the old man and the sea. reminds you of grandpa. you need him alive.

say goodbye to your students. pack up stickers, socks,
presented pencils. leave behind clothes that do not fit
the expanse of your skin.



find your way to manhattan. happy-hour sidewalk rumble pulls
you under

table. duck & cover until you hear the subway thrum car-by-car
from under air-vent grate. when you go home to california,
ground tremors under dinner table. say:
it's just the train. it's just the train.

EDGEWOOD ROAD

BY BARBARA DANIELS

My foot stuck out from under the coverlet.
Insects lived on the ceiling in gauzy nests.
That dog—always too much of the dog

and too many rooms, bathrooms, crawl spaces.
Burdocks snagged me with hooked burs.
I refused to hang shirts facing the same

direction. No, I can't, I told my husband.
You wash them. We had thorns,
loud skaters rolling past, bells rung

by Presbyterians. Oh, I was laughable,
those red socks with brown pants and
vines reaching through windows and walls.

Systems filled and ran over, spread dirty
water onto the floor. A woman offered
a handful of paint chips, all as white

as milk and cream. Yes, I had choices,
every cup white, every curtain thick
and white, every plate the same size.

Don't think the calla lilies escaped me,
their horrid noses, those yellow
protuberances. I had to push them

down the disposal. Behind the house
sunlight stroked red. I was hidden
by closed blinds. No one gardened.



No one mowed. The carpet was soundless,
the slumped couch, the empty oven. Even
the freezer rarely clicked. Blue shadows

bloomed under my breasts and in
the folds of my body. It was too much,
those twisted trees, that ill-tempered dog.

LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES

BY MICKI BLENKUSH

Then, potatoes harvested on a day
the wind blew colder. Sacks held
sweep of rain, mismatched gloves,
tentative stab of pitchfork
through clods of black mud.
My cousin from the city swatted bugs
and complained of grime
when we had to pick the beans.
Her land was concrete and crumbled stairs.
She led me up skyscraper elevators.
On roller skates to 7-Eleven
over cracks that tripped, causing cars to wait
as we stumbled in the street. I returned
by Greyhound to pass wet logs
through basement windows. Stacked
in a corner waiting to be burned.
Barn clothes to be washed. Frogs perched
along the edge of the cistern, waiting to be found.
Each time she visited a chance
for me to show once more sunken streams
the other side of barbed wire. Or again
toppled headstones in the two-person cemetery
a half-mile from our farm.
She gathered grains from our fields to exhibit
at her school. She claimed to have reached
from an airplane to capture a bit of cloud.
Twenty years later, we pass a year without speaking.
Digging then, we were vivid as a painting.
Wheelbarrow pushed uphill.
Pumpkins twisted from their vines.
My dirt-smearred coat as foreground
against a fathom of sky.



PINEAPPLE SOURS

BY KORBIN JONES

I hope it always ends this way: My body made gummy at the hands of a man's mouth in the bath tub, feet rising into air.

Soft fruits fermenting in the fridge from lack of hunger & of memory.

Some pleco boys keep me in their company, freshwater sucker fish, whose fins peel away & erect themselves when they're taken from the tank, their sharp angles & still bodies tangled in the mesh net's mouth.

I had one just like them when I was twelve. He grew fat from algae and forgotten meals, lasted longer than the others but could not outswim the well water that no chemicals could tame.

His body had gone limp in the hexagonal glass, limp like mine when the water starts to pour out onto the vinyl floors & another lover knocks.

THE MAN WHO OWNS THIS NAME

BY KORBIN JONES

after Georges Gilles de la Tourette

a man born nearly two centuries ago. a man who studied uteruses that wandered through cavities. a man shot in the head for alleging himself against a woman's mind, called it *mesmerism*. a man who was encouraged to break our bodies down into classifications:

ECHOLALIA, or

COPROLALIA, or

a mind that doesn't align with the body that carries it. a man who extracted our nervous systems, sliced tiny demons from our neurons, which had been planted by ancestral offenses, by generations of IMMORALITY THAT REMAINS UNNAMED. a man who would later be set aside due to increasing

NEUROSIS, or

NEUROSYPHILLIS, or

another word for neurological irony. a man who studied under *the father of neurology*. a man whose unaffected name owns my syndrome, whose family name means *small towers*, small towers like the electrodes that doctors sink into our brains these days to stop the TIC-TIC-TIC-TIC-TIC.





PROOF SHEET: AUTHOR'S PHOTO

BY JON DAVIS

1.

In this one taken in near darkness
you are trying to hide, trying to say *not me*,
trying to disappear, trying to project
the chiaroscuro of unknowability.

2.

In this one, head tilted, seeming affable,
chin tucked, seeming pert, seeming
agreeable, a chum or coffee date, an unseemly
seemliness, a delighted choir of seeming.

3.

Austere in this one. A professor of facticity.
A beholder of the bitterest, the most
ineluctable horrors: A wounded child, one arm
in shreds, wandering the smoke-blackened city.

4.

Happy for no reason in this one, shot
on the steps of the courthouse. In slightly
oppositional flannel while the suits circulate,
dragged by their unruly briefcases everywhere.

5.

Here, "striding purposefully." Instructed to.
The furrows thumbed from your brow.
In the tradition of Whitman—elegiac, robust,
lanky as your long-lined poems.

6.

Here you are leaned against an oak—
the ragged bark, a lilt of sunlight—holding
a sheaf of poems, inadequate crenellations
against the enshrined despoilers and plunderers.

7.

Now huddled with a mug in the wood-paneled bar.
Backed against the wall. We can almost feel
the poem assembling itself inside you—a list
of everything you oppose and are quietly becoming.





TWO FAMILIAR

BY LOUIS STAEBLE

DISCONTINUATION SYNDROME OF AN ONION

BY LISA DESROCHERS-SHORT

Allium spp.

With the permission of a licensed psychiatrist, titrate off of Prozac because it doesn't work for you. 80 mg, 60, 40 for now. Feels like the flu. Extreme distant derivative of onion, antihistamine to help with the swell. Wake up with DMT still coursing from pineal gland to hypothalamus. Pulse, pulse, pulse of the wheat beige walls. Sparks of rainbow in a field of vision. Pay attention to the domed, fluorescent purple flower clusters, and royal pink, look through the petals like stained glass. The other colors are muted. Perception from inside neuron wildfires. Activate NMDA sodium receptors. So numb for so long. The problem of not having a decent orgasm in 3 years. Parted clouds, sun breakthrough. Findings have been inconsistent. Salt. Thoughts are exploding sea salts in mind snot.

Trying to sit up is a nightmare-wobble underwater. Take that 40 mg of Prozac with 300 of both Wellbutrin and Neurontin. Take Neurontin 3 times a day to boost GABA production. Sick. Headsick but not as. Sick as before. Coffee drip-IV poking veins to keep awake. Weaning, dreaming in daylight. The full weight of a nodding head ready to sink to the ground and crack the spine in half on the way down. Splat! Concrete sidewalk. Mixed gray matter of fact jelly fist jam clenched and ready to roast the skull with electricity. Sting the eyes with defense mechanisms. Blunt reaction time with dopamine, smokamine, ketamine, chives, garlic, cannabinoids, bananabanoids, chocolate that a ferret stole, foxes, chalk, and hot dogs thrown at an eyeless Shih Tzu as he does tricks. Jump! Paw! Speak! Speak! Speak!





SSRI withdrawal is a stupid kind of hell. Brain zaps make the scalp itch and send irritating shivers down stone-filled shoulders. Maybe it's a fever, febrile seizure? Tears stream down the face as if cutting. Painful but not particularly emotional. Push-ups and sit-ups and sipping coffee, sleep. Rage, rage and throw some bottles at streetlights. Hear them CRASH and run away. Trip and punch a wooden fence. Maybe try kickboxing? Definitely get CBD oil, breathe, and take a shower. Walk to 7eleven to freeze hair into icicles for the sake of sour candy watermelons and chips. The sound of sticky sugar smacking in the cavity filled molars near the ear. Deafen. Annoy. Overwhelm. CRUNCH. Sour cream and onion. Stuck at 40 for now and 300 and 900 and too much DMT. Polypharmacy. Why can't 40 be a multiple of 3? (13.3x3) Can it ever be whole? There are 3 bulblets! You awaken in the dream of reality, awaiting clarity, while staring down the infinite black hole of a decimal point.

NIMBLE PARACHUTES

BY MELANIE FAITH

Green Thumb

We joke about who has the worst green thumb. "Six weeks, and the leaves got mottled with brown stuff." "A month, and I killed the succulent that the guy at the greenhouse said was idiot-proof." "I overwatered, and half the seeds never even sprouted." "She gifted me a cactus, and I just handed it straight over to a friend. Took no chances." We leave lunch promising to get matching Plant Killer t-shirts; whoever gets asked first about their band treats the other next time.

nimble parachute—
the assassin bug
lands

Parachutes

The reception has moved inside a heated tent after rain. Already dark at six o'clock. We leave jackets and wraps on the bones of chair backs, holding our shapes by calligraphied paper placards. Parachutes filled with light rise like fairies above the stone patio. We know inherently what to do: to run to the bright, to look up and laugh at fire parasols twirling away from open grasps. The venue has two and sometimes three employees in bright vests keeping watch for errant flames landing on lawn grass. We guests gaze up and point. The young girls in bare feet shiver, arms bare, their strappy, spike-heeled shoes parked under round tables in the tent. I shake my head when a twenty-something I've just met, a Zippo in-hand, motions me to join in. On the spot, I've decided





I'm here for observation. A writer's life, this living life twice, and yet sometimes I ask: Shouldn't I more often take part? The breeze a brrr along my braceleted arms I keep hugged around myself, peering up. The warmth of each quick spark as the shoot stirs and launches. Each lantern a moving planet: a Jupiter, Neptune, Pluto out of orbit.

red maple leafs
first fallen—
the rake rests

Gift

The plastic case sticks slightly when opened. The mix-cd gives off a rainbow sheen when tilted in spring sunlight.

That first year, I tutored fifteen students. Just four or five years younger than me, contemporaries. Three afternoons and evenings a week, I reviewed with them: Brit Lit, ESL English, AP World History, Elementary French, SAT Prep.

Next to the *Maxell* slogan: *Technology for the next generation*, his English written with a slight uphill slant, printed in black Sharpie: *Thank you forever! Always remember me. 2000 June.* I recall his wire-frame glasses, his open smile, his name— starting... with a J?

library spire
bent scholars scurry--
pink super moon

Brought from the back of storage, with a little puff of dust at my breath, the mix-cd then slides into the player. K-pop boy-groups do-wop Korean beats. '90s R & B: Boyz II Men's "End of the Road," K-Ci & JoJo's "All My Life."

Headphones clamped over my ears, I recline against a pillow.

Taking time to stare at the ceiling, temporarily the youth I once was.

call of the magpie
long forgotten
traveler

Pop Art

A hallway of sculptures after the room of watercolors—flowers, landscapes, an Italian restaurant plate-glass storefront in the sideways driving rain. Some sculptures in taffy twists of speckled copper or sleek steel, others with rainbow crumbles of glass beads, most of them taller than any of us.

Out two double doors, in a corridor between Wings A and B, a water sculpture with a pendulum of drips down a sloped ramp, a tin frog, too, that we stand beside for a few moments. One of us calls him Kermit, but we know he's not. That's part of the fun of it, of being here.

In the children's wing that's momentarily empty, there are Styrofoam shapes and a tumble mat. The girls rack rectangles on squares on triangles, scampering around for the circles before karate-chopping their momentary constructions. We page through old issues of *Art Forum* on two orange Naugahyde benches with the slope and shape of a fifties Chevy backseat. We bounce back and forth ideas for lunch. Pizza, Chinese, something with chicken, stuffed sandwiches on chewy bread. The girls laugh and toggle for the next shape, stopping to bop each other with the Styrofoam bricks.

Before we gather up the girls, we get the girls to stack the blocks for others. Before we leave and lunch, we steer them to one last exhibit. In the left-hand corner by the door is an art installation with a Pop Art painting— a backdrop with a frame to take pictures. The painting is an oversize print of a Roy Lichtenstein ka-boom,





composed of blue, red, white, and yellow zigzags and jagged lines.

We take turns, letting the girls go first, laughing as we crawl into the oak frame box and make sound-effect-worthy faces.

“We are in the painting,” one of the girls giggles. The kapow! bubble radiates behind our torsos. My necklace, too, slightly askew: a dime-sized silver medallion on a silver chain. The smile in my eyes genuine. I upload it as my instructor profile photo.

squalls
after work stepping into
a shook snow-globe

Rosie

I know you, her eyes say. There is only one sidewalk that curves into the building, and she is on it as I approach.

I glance at her, and then glance away across the grass and parking lot from which I’ve come, and then glance back. She’s still there.

Should we greet each other? There are complicated matters of timing and introductions, pleasantries for two who share the neighborhood.

An SUV slows to a stop at the sign, left-right-left, and past. By the library, a kid on a blue scooter calls into the sunlight.

A few paces ahead, the middle-aged couple I see sometimes walking after dinner. They do not hold hands, but they walk close as if discussing matters far more intimate than dishwashers and contractors. She has a haircut like Bettie from the Archie comics; his legs are almost as tall as my entire body, his gray-white hair cropped close. They never say hello; somehow, they’re always a few paces ahead of me or I’m sitting on a bench enjoying the pages of a paperback but faintly register their presence, their loop of the macadam. I am a ghost to them or else I am self-contained,

with no easy in, but Rosie doesn’t see it that way.

She stops in the middle of the pocked concrete and faces me.

I’ve often wanted to walk up to her, to create an exchange, but wasn’t sure how to broach introductions. Now’s my chance. I bend down, the bag at my side heavy with notebooks, books, electronics that thump into my thigh.

“She’s friendly!” the white-haired guy calls out.

I knew that, I want to call out, but instead I smile, my hand meets the soft white fur of Rosie’s expressive face, down her back dappled with auburn patterns, one of which resembles South America. She’s a hunting canine with a pointer’s springy body, but in this neighborhood she only seeks people and the occasional housecat darting from apartment to apartment through a parking lot.

Bettie continues beside the white-haired guy, two archipelagos stepping in tandem as Rosie’s tail flutters from side to side, *thank you, thank you, thank you for knowing me*.

“You’re a welcoming sort, aren’t you? Very cute.” I chirp. Her warm brown eyes are glassy globes that intuit strange minglings of loneliness and eternal hope, that seem to have known me elsewhere, for centuries, for centuries more: *We’ll meet again. We’ll meet again*.

I rub my palm along the fine bones of her face and down her back twice, then again.

We traversed a field of blue bonnets once. There was that time in the farmer’s carriage when you and your friends took me for a ride through the snow. Don’t forget your crinoline getting stuck in the door, and I yipped for the parson to turn to help you.

Bettie whistles; the white-haired guy turns back to call. Rosie takes off at a tear, pivoting a hundred yards across the green, sniffing the base of a flowering apple, and then dashes back to the couple, a spring in her trot. She doesn’t turn back; she doesn’t need to.

I know you, I think, my palm recalling the proud curve of Rosie’s back, the fur of her face before she darted away into a future ever-unfolding.





yellow sparrow
puddle wash—
who cleanses who

Intermission

He stays during intermission. We stand from fold-over plush seats as if to stretch, leaning towards each other. There are no awkward pauses; nobody's trying too hard. Conversation came with unusual ease. About the actors. Our own short-lived, failed forays into acting. Our holiday flights. Neighbors shuffle around us; we hardly notice. Like a braid, we are strands of the same stuff, commenting, asking, nodding in syncopated pattern. We move to the side once when asked to let 12D and 12E shuffle past. The waft of popcorn from 12E's hands launches us into childhood anecdotes of movie nights. He opens the program, his fingers nimble and lithe on the paper, and points out the fifth name down. "He was in my class last year. Nice kid." I nod, smiling, about to speak. Too soon, house lights dim, neighbors drop like dominoes into unfolded seats. We darken into forced silence.

gray pebbles
river water
rushes over

IN _____ TOWN

BY AMANDA LEAHY

The First Thing You Learn

The water here is bad. It leaves its white scale everywhere — in the drinking glasses and the bellies of pots, between radiator gills, within the veins of houseplants, inside your hair. It leaves you thirstier for having drunk it. You come to drink only other things instead, or nothing at all. You soon get used to it.

The Second and Third Things You Learn

The bigger problem, though, is the mirrors. There isn't a single accurate mirror in this town, and each and every one of them will show you yourself different. You learn to choose. And you learn to be prepared for what happens when, one bright and blue morning, you find that your mirror has suddenly disappeared.

Weather

Every day begins with weather. It is always winter first. Then, it is early spring for some portion of the day. Then it is winter again. It is like this all year long; it is only the ratio of these portions to each other that changes, and this is how we know what season we're in. It makes it so everyone is always becoming bigger and smaller, covering and shedding and re-covering themselves all day long. It makes it so that within one day there are always many days, and sometimes many years, too.

It rains approximately one and one half days per week. When it rains, everyone stays indoors and watches it rain through the glass.

On Tuesdays

I go to piccolo night at the library from 5:30 - 7:00 PM.





Construction

They're always doing some form of construction. It's all hours of the day and night, with the exception of thirty minutes for lunch daily at 12:30 PM. Continuous. They aren't considerate about it, either. Even during lunch, all you hear is their talking, mostly about the weather: *Nice to have some sun after that fog this morning O sure don't I know it Might rain tomorrow Is that so? Yep.* The same conversation, over and over. What exactly they are constructing we don't really know.

Sharing

We get a lot of visitors, especially during those times of year when it is more agreeable to be here. They come on the weekends in big red and black and yellow machines. When they step out into the light with their cameras, they pause, suspended. They squint hard at us through the glass.

Environmentalism

Last week they passed an ordinance that makes it illegal to not compost.

This week the yards are littered with food scraps, bones, chickens, egg cartons, old clothing, umbrellas.

Circumference

Everyone is a native somewhere, but not everyone is a native here. In order to circumvent confusion, the latter are highly encouraged to purchase bumper stickers and/or lawn signs which make their nativity abundantly clear.

On Sundays

I go to Cultural Diversity night at the library from 5:30 - 7:00 PM.

Children & Dogs

Dogs outnumber the children here by a lot. Unlike the dogs, the children are mostly silent, and so we often forget about them. It is always delightful to stumble onto a group of them keeping themselves so entertained: teaching each other to walk, or collecting rocks and things upon a crumbling sidewalk.

Cats

No one has ever seen one during the day. At night, though, their high songs compete with wind in the telephone wires to become music for the town's many insomniacs. It is rumored that they like to gather outside the yellow windows of the laundromat and silently watch Rosa, who only does her laundry at midnight.

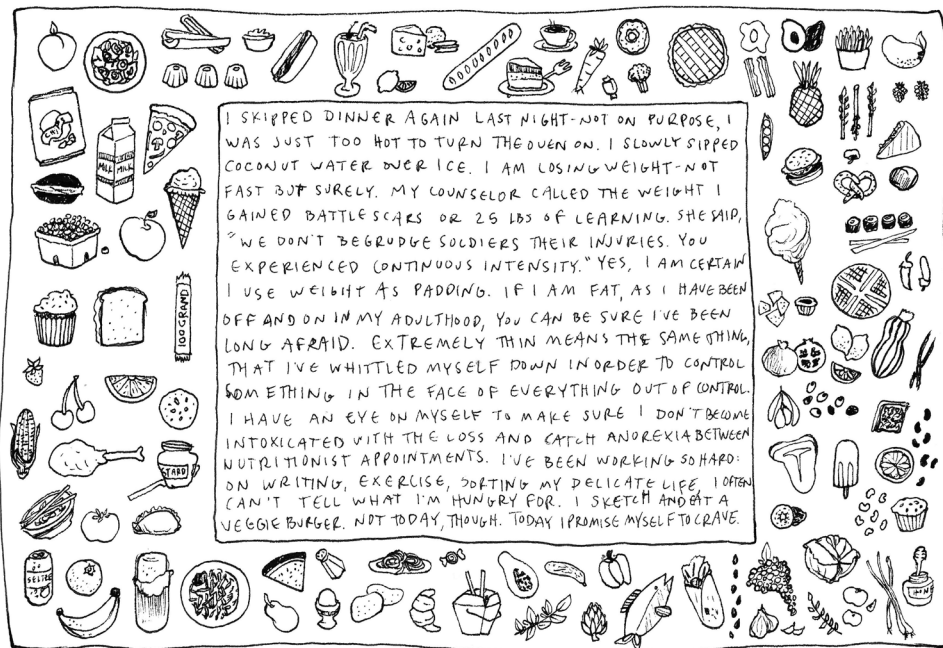
Love

On Mondays between 3:30 and 4:00 PM I watch the street sweeper pass back and forth, back and forth. I count his passes dutifully. There are always at least thirteen.

Incidents

Sometimes, there are incidents. Not very frequently, but it should be noted that they do occur. When they happen, they are usually dealt with promptly, efficiently.





DAY 253

CRAVE

BY MEG REYNOLDS

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

JENNIFER BATTISTI calls Las Vegas home. She is a Teaching Artist for the Alzheimer's Poetry Project in Clark County. In 2018 she was voted best local poet or writer by the readers of the *Desert Companion*. Her chapbook, *Echo Bay* was released in 2018 (Tolsun Books).

DAVID BEEBE was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His work has appeared in *This Land Press*, *New Plains Review*, *The 3288 Review*, *Tulsa Voice*, *Art Focus Oklahoma*, and *Sugar House Review*. He currently writes poetry and fiction in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he also helps run a small printing company.

MICKI BLENKUSH lives in St. Cloud, MN. She was selected as a 2017-2018 Loft Literary Center's Mentor Series fellow in poetry and was a 2015 recipient of a Central MN Arts Board Emerging Artist Grant. Her writing has recently appeared in: *Cagibi*, *Typishly*, and *Crab Creek Review*. Mickiblenkush.com.

SOPHIE BRAXTON is 18 years old and lives in Atlanta, Georgia where she writes and makes visual art and works at a grocery store.

GAYLORD BREWER'S most recent books are the cookbook-memoir *The Poet's Guide to Food, Drink, & Desire* (Stephen F. Austin, 2015) and a tenth collection of poetry, *The Feral Condition* (Negative Capability, 2018). His next book of poems is *Worship the Pig* (Red Hen, 2020).

BRIAN COHEN collaborates on artists' books and broadsides. His books include *What Animals Teach Us*, with poems by Chard deNiord (Bridge Press 1995) and *The Bird Book*, with poems by Holiday Eames (Bridge Press 2005). He also created the cover for deNiord's book, *In My Unknowing* (University of Pittsburgh Press 2019).

MIKE COLE was born in Fresno, California (1948) and graduated from Fresno State College in 1971. Over a sporadic 45-year publication history, his poems have appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Midland Review*, *Blast Furnace*, and other magazines, as well as several anthologies. He lives in the Sierra Nevada Foothills near Yosemite National Park.

VITO COLE is an English Writing Major at Wayne State College in Nebraska. He is inspired daily by the simple, midwestern sensibilities of small town Nebraska, and most importantly his beautiful artist wife, Sharon, and his adorable three year old daughter, Stevie.

AMANDA NICOLE CORBIN is a writer and teacher in Columbus, Ohio, who got her Master's Degree from Salt Lake City, Utah. She is starting to like fruit and allergic to her cat. She has had her short prose published in journals such as the *Notre Dame Review*, *Adelaide*, and *Thrice Fiction*.

GRACE COVILL-GRENNAN is a carpenter and writer living in Eastern Oregon. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rockford Review*, *Genre: Urban Arts*, *Little Stone Journal*, *Timshel Magazine*, *The Impossible Task*, *Permafrost Magazine*, and others. She is the author of *Blockhead* (Another New Calligraphy Press, 2019).

BARBARA DANIELS' book *Rose Fever* was published by WordTech Press. *Talk to the Lioness* is forthcoming from Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press. Daniels' poetry has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Mid-American Review*, and other journals. She received three fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

JON DAVIS is the author of five chapbooks and six full-length poetry collections, the most recent being *An Amiable Reception for the Acrobat* (Grid Books, 2019). He has received a Lannan Literary Award, the Peter I.B. Lavan Prize from the Academy of American

Poets. He taught for 23 years at the Institute of American Indian Arts before founding, in 2013, the IAIA low residency MFA in Creative Writing, which he directed until his retirement in 2018.

LISA DESROCHERS-SHORT is a poet from rural Maine. She is the MFA Poetry Thesis Fellow for 2019-2020 at George Mason University and the Assistant Nonfiction editor for *So to Speak*. Lisa won an Alan Cheuse International Travel Grant for research in Montréal, Quebec. Her work has appeared in *Permafrost*, *Breakwater Review*, and others.

ROBERT DIMATTEO is an artist, writer and teacher. He has recently relocated to the Bay Area from the East coast. He did his undergraduate study at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY and received his Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale University in New Haven, CT. He has exhibited widely throughout the United States and has his work in a number of museums and private collections.

ALAN ELYSHEVITZ is the author of a story collection and three poetry chapbooks. His poems have appeared in *River Styx*, *Nimrod International Journal*, and *Water ~ Stone Review*. Winner of the North American Review James Hearst Poetry Prize, he is also a two-time recipient of a fellowship in fiction writing from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

REBECCA ENDRES was born on Long Island and currently lives in Brooklyn. She is the recipient of the 2018 New School MFA Chapbook Contest for Poetry. When she is not writing or reading articles online, she enjoys walking along the East River and looking for friendly neighborhood cats.

MELANIE FAITH is a professor, prose writer, poet, tutor, and photographer. Her latest book, *Photography for Writers*, was published in November 2019, the same month she took the NaNoWriMo Challenge. She enjoys spending time with her darling

nieces. <https://www.melaniefaith.com/blog/>, @writer_faith.

CRISTINA FLORES received an M.A. in English from the University of Vermont. Her work has appeared in *Hippocampus*. She currently resides in Portsmouth, Virginia, where she teaches writing, literature, and philosophy.

CRYSTAL GANDRUD'S recent works include "Inviting Space" in *INKQ* and "Yeatsian: We the Numberless Dreamers" in *The Encyclopedia Project*. Her 'installation-novels' include "Numberless Dreams," Hamilton Gallery, Ireland and "Fair Shouldered One," l'Université de Sorbonne, Paris. She is also the creator of the online installation "Dream of the Drawing for Everything" and is co-founder and acquiring editor for Lionheart Press. She is often on the move but currently writes in London, UK.

EMMA FAESI HUDELSON is a teaching fellow and PhD candidate in literary nonfiction at the University of Cincinnati. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *BUST*, *the Chattahoochee Review*, *the Nasiona*, *the Rumpus*, among others. Her essays have been finalists in the 2017 International Literary Awards and Creative Nonfiction's Spring 2018 Contest.

ANDREW JASON JACONO is a writer, musician, and mountaineer who has been telling stories ever since he could talk. His work has previously appeared in or is forthcoming in a number of literary journals, including *Cleaver Magazine*, *Green Briar Review*, and *Litbreak Magazine*, among others. www.andrewjacono.com.

D. R. JAMES has taught college writing, literature, and peace-making for 36 years and lives outside Saugatuck, Michigan. His latest poetry collections are *If god were gentle* (Dos Madres) and *Surreal Expulsion* (Poetry Box), and a new chapbook, *Flip Requiem*, will be released in Spring 2020 (Dos Madres).



KORBIN JONES is pursuing his MFA in Poetry at the University of Kansas. In 2019, his translation of Pablo Luque Pinilla's poetry collection *SFO: Pictures and Poetry about San Francisco* was published by Tolsun Books, while his debut collection of original poetry, *songs for the long night*, was published by QueerMojo. In 2020, his debut chapbook, *MOONSICK*, was published by Finishing Line Press.

ANA JOVANOVSKA received her MA in Printmaking from the Faculty of Fine Arts – University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje, Macedonia (2016). Upon receiving a scholarship she attended École supérieure d'arts & médias de Caen/Cherbourg in France (2013-2014). Ana has 10 independent and more than 150 group exhibitions.

KATIE KING does her best writing at golden hour in front of the window wearing nothing but a bra and earrings as the Canada geese fly past. Her writing has been fashionably published by *Tiny Spoon*, *Nude Bruce* and more. Follow her writing on Facebook at Katie King, American Sayer.

AMANDA LEAHY is from Lowell, Massachusetts. She is currently pursuing an MFA at Vermont College of Fine Arts and lives in Montpelier, Vermont. Her work has appeared in *DreamPop Journal*, *MoonPark Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, and elsewhere.

E. R. LUTKEN worked as a physician for many years, the majority of that time on the Navajo Nation. After that, she taught 7-12th grade science and math in rural Colorado for a few more years. Now she spends her time writing, and fishing in the swamps of Louisiana and in the mountains of New Mexico.

JAMES MILLER is from Houston, Texas. Recent poems have appeared in *Cold Mountain Review*, *The Maine Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Gravel*, *Main Street Rag*, *Verdad* and *Juked*. Upcoming publications

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C. R. RESETARITS is a writer and visual artist. Her writing has recently been published in *Southern Humanities Review* and *Native Voices: Indigenous American Poetry, Craft and Conversations* (Tupelo Press). Her collages have appeared in *New Southern Fugitive*, *Midway*, *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, *Gasher*, *Sonder Review*, *Pretty Owl Poetry*, *Empty Mirror*, and *Nashville Review* and will be featured as cover art for the next *Florida Review* and *Falling Star* issues.

MEG REYNOLDS is a poet, artist, and teacher living in Burlington, VT. Her work has appeared in *The Missing Slate*, *Mid-American Review*, *Fugue*, *Sixth Finch*, *The Offing*, *Inverted Syntax*, and the anthology *Monster Verse: Poems Human and Inhuman* as well as *The Book of Donuts* and *With You: Withdrawn Poems of the #MeToo Movement*. She was recently selected as *Fearsome Critter's* Top Hybrid Works Contributor.

SARAH ROBBINS is an English major at Missouri Southern State University, a pink-hair-dye connoisseur, and a firm believer in giving a damn.

ASHLEY SCRO has always been infatuated with words and writing. As an avid reader and eternal writer, she dedicates her free time to composing poetry and fiction. Ashley currently lives in New Jersey. Visit her at ashleysgro.com.

LOUIS STAEBLE lives in Bowling Green, Ohio. His photographs have appeared in publications such as "Agave," "Blinders Journal," and "Elsewhere Magazine." His work has been shown in The Black Swamp Arts Festival 2016, 2017 and 2018 as part of the Wood County Invitational.

ELIZA SWAN lives in Houston, TX, where she has read her





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LAURA VALENZA'S fiction has appeared in *Lady/Liberty/Lit* and *Visual Verse*. Her nonfiction has appeared in the Reno visual arts magazine *Double Scoop*. She graduated from New York University and is now working toward her MFA in fiction at the University of Nevada, Reno where she is also finishing her novel. Instagram: @the_rain_in_jane, Twitter: @rain_in_jane.

CASSONDRA WINDWALKER earned a BA of Letters from the University of Oklahoma. She pursued careers in bookselling and law enforcement before resigning her post to write full time, presently from the southern Alaskan coast. Her short-form work has appeared in numerous literary journals, and her long-form work is available on Amazon and in bookstores.

JEAN WOLFF studied fine arts at the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit and at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, receiving a BFA in studio arts before graduating from Hunter College, CUNY in New York, with an MFA in painting and printmaking. She's since had group and solo exhibits in various galleries in New York City and internationally, published works in 45 issues of 34 magazines, and is part of the Westbeth artistic community in Manhattan.

JAMES K. ZIMMERMAN is an award-winning writer and frequent Pushcart Prize nominee. His work appears in *Pleiades*, *Chautauqua*, *American Life in Poetry*, *Nimrod*, *Reed*, *Vallum*, and *Tipton Poetry Journal*, among others. He is the author of *Little Miracles* (Passager, 2015) and *Family Cookout* (Comstock, 2016), winner of the 2015 Jessie Bryce Niles Prize.



