

Thin Air

2019 • Volume 25



THIN AIR MAGAZINE



THIN AIR MAGAZINE STAFF

WELDON RYCKMAN
Editor-in-Chief

AMANDA MEEKS
Cover Art

LAWRENCE LENHART
Editorial Advisor

SOPHIE PALLISSARD
Layout + Page Design

MARGARITA CRUZ
Poetry

VALENTINE SARGENT
Copyeditor

ADDYSON SANTESE
NICK CARASSANESI
Fiction

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

JAMIE SHREWSBURY
Nonfiction

Thin Air Magazine is published
once yearly by Northern Arizona
University.

MARK ALVAREZ
Visual Art

All rights revert to the author
upon publication. The views
expressed in the writing herein
are solely those of
the authors.

EDITORIAL STAFF

Damian Brown
Courtney Brooks
Mike Buckius
Stella Elam
Clare Magneson
Fain Robert
Lauren Schroeter
Erika Schwartz
Elsbeth Teague
Trevor Warren

Copyright 2019 Thin Air Magazine thinairmagazine.org

CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE	7
THE FIRST STEP HOLLY DAY	8
THE CYCLE OF LIFE ROBIN GOW	9
UNCIVILIZATION LAURIE BLAUNER	12
THE LATE HOURS DANE HAMANN	17
LOST LUGGAGE ANA PUGATCH	19
IN TURVEY CEMETERY ZACHARIAH CLAYPOLE WHITE	21
CONTEMPLATING SHELLS: PLATE 12 FROM WILLIAM H. EMORY'S REPORT ON THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICAN BOUNDARY SURVEY(1848-1855) NELL SMITH	22
MT. CAMEL JUNCTION, UT DALLAS CROW	24
ARCHIVE THIN AIR MAGAZINE	25
NAILS JOE MILLS	26
VIOLENCE JOE MILLS	28

JUNGLE GYM EMILY VIEWEG	30
STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS TIMOTHY COOK	31
ON THE SHORE ERIN JAMIESON	33
ERIS ANDREW SUTHERLAND	36
A WOLF AT THE DOOR SHARON NICOLE COLE	38
WALKING THE SILT FIELD JOHN WALSER	39
OVERREACH JONATHAN GREENHAUSE	42
THE BUST SCOTT WILSON	43
PLANT NOBERT KOVACS	46
UNBLOOMING KATE BOND	47
RIVER BIRCH ELLERY BECK	48
LAST NIGHT, BEFORE I STICHD THIS CLOSED ELLERY BECK	49
LUCKY 13 SHARON NICOLE COLE	50
FOR THE YEW BUSH ON FIRE MARY MAROSTE	51

SLUG ALLIE MARIANO	53
REALIZATION: ALLEGORY ABOUT YOU AND ME FABIAN GONZÁLEZ GONZÁLEZ	60
WE DON'T NEED NO ED. ELIZABETH KING	61
PAPER PILLOWCASE BROOKE LARSON	62
WE DON'T NEED NO ED. ELIZABETH KING	66
I DON'T WRITE MANY NICE POEMS ABOUT HIM COURTNEY LEBLANC	67
CHARISMATIC MEGAFUNA DANIEL UNCAPHER	68
HOW TO GET RID OF AN ELDERLY DOG AND OTHER BAD ADVICE AIMEE LABRIE	70
THE FALLEN WANDERER SHARON NICOLE COLE	73
ALL FALL DOWN JAMES PENHA	74
LATE SPRING SNOW JESSICA YUAN	79
YOUR FRIEND TOBEY WARD	81
TWENTY WEEKS LAURA GADDIS	84

A NEW KIND OF PAIN DAVID LEGAULT	93
MEDICAL ARTEFACTS FROM THE TOWER OF BABEL ALEX KAZEMI	101
DISORDER SHARON NICOLE COLE	103
BUTTON SHARON NICOLE COLE	105
THE END HOLLY DAY	106
SURPRISE KATIE QUINNELLY	107
LE PETITE ELIZABETH KING	108
CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES	109

EDITOR'S NOTE

I'm very excited, and a little humbled, to present this year's issue of Thin Air Magazine. This is our 25th issue. When the journal began back in the winter of 1995, I'm not sure the editors imagined that here in 2019 they'd see it again, 25 volumes later, still in print in an era where that's becoming increasingly rare. Last fall, when I remarked to a crowd at a reading that the journal no longer featured a Winter Issue, Jesse Sensibar added that Flagstaff no longer featured a winter.

And yet, here we are, with the wettest winter in decades. The content in this issue is arbitrary and perhaps unbalanced, but coalesced into groups over time, ranging from meditations on object and place, to remembrances of childhood, to occupations of natural spaces and their frequent dissolution, to illness, body, and medicine. We did our best to organize and pair them, though you're free to pair and repair as you see fit. You might even tear out a piece or two, and move it elsewhere in the journal.

We are grateful to our generous benefactress Diana Gabaldon, our faculty advisor, Lawrence Lenhart, Nicole Walker, Holly Troy and NAU Printing Services, Dr. Steven Rosendale, and the literary community here in Flagstaff, including the Narrow Chimney Reading Series, Northern Arizona Book Festival, and Juniper House, who welcome us into their events here and there to showcase both upcoming and past journal features.

We hope you enjoy the work within, and maybe find a surprise or two.

THE FIRST STEP

HOLLY DAY

I take the piece of paper, put it
in my mouth, feel the word “love”
dissolve in my saliva, in my blood
and now I understand marriage.

The individual letters drift like
little stones
throughout my body, break up like
tiny meteors, turn to sand
sink to my feet and

keep me here.

THE LIFE CYCLE

ROBIN GOW

late in the night i
come apart amphibially,
a pile of frogs eggs,

each one heartbeat throbbing
in the sheets.

i want you to

put your hands in me.

a jar of apricot jam.

soft planets. the embryo eyes
flicking,

the world of commas.

all night the life cycle goes
& you watch as i become

a floor full of tadpoles,
thrashing & gill gasping,

put me in your mouth
to carry me to the bathroom,

all my bodies swimming

i taste like rain.

i would do the same for you.
don't swallow, not yet at least.

let the frogs go free though,
all over the house
& back to wet themselves
in the tub.

i just need to use my legs,

starting with just one limb
at a time, their growth like
pulling carrots from dirt,

don't watch me, this is personal

then again i watch you

getting dressed, the way

you roll up your socks
before pulling them on

don't you ever want to spend
the night like this?

it's only because i can't sleep

i promise

i want to say i'm not usually
like this but i am

i'm a wet merry-go-round body

& at some point all the fronts

break like jars of marbles

back into eggs.

the whole process takes about an
hour.

i'm sorry.

i'm sorry i really am this isn't
your job.

you pick me up & take me back to
bed,
piling the eggs up,

get some rest before
i get up again,

wrap your arms around them,

soft & warm &
quiet

go to sleep now
you whisper

& the first egg swells,
the tadpoles coming back,

spilling on the wood floor.

i go all night.

UNCIVILIZATION

LAURIE BLAUNER

I want to be lost in an internal wilderness because our planet has knees and elbows, a mind which resembles a teeming city, blood that recreates the noise of a relentless ocean, arterial veins, untamed hair, a vigilant skin through which we learn everything. I'm planning a trip to Iceland with friends where I would like the outdoor landscape to match what is happening inside me. When I'm outside myself, I watch my body adjust to bad habits, fretting over food, desolate decisions, my feeble attempts at friendship. I like the company of flames and ice. My heart beats a message in its cage of bone, saying cool down to nothing, yet be awed by everything outside of you. I lay my head on my husband's chest, listen to his heart emitting the sound a small animal makes when it is killed by another small animal just outside our window.

In Seattle I pour myself into things and people that don't last. We are a social species, needing to be shaken occasionally and reminded of transience. I believe it's the reason I'm afraid of tiny holes or tears in the thin membrane of my bedsheets, having caught a toe in one once as a child and, in my movements to extricate myself, ripped the sheet apart.

My husband and I recently visited his parents in Greensboro, North Carolina. In the airplane, flying above land that distantly resembled a green colored board game, I was fascinated by the clouds which were easily dispersed as we continued through them. I wanted to hopscotch from one to the other, if I could eliminate my too-human weight. Viewed from the sides or from within, they were airy sculptures made from wisps of air.

We too are ephemeral.

We are too accustomed to the earth's revolutions, day/night (time), hot/cold (temperature), predicting the future and the seasons. I expect my recently dead cat to be where he usually is, waiting for me by the ridiculous, wet bathtub or peering eerily

around a door. Because he isn't there, I'm now also anticipating his absence. Will another planet become our wilderness? Will another life form arise? The planets, including a few parts of our own, are untried and unknown. They are the new frontier, encompassing what is similar and familiar and their opposites, what is dissonant and frightening to us.

Planets in our solar system include:

- Mercury is slow, takes 88 days to orbit our sun, has a weak magnetic field, and no atmosphere.
- Venus is volcanic and spins slowly and is very hot.
- Mars orbits the sun in an eccentric circle, has two moons, and is cold, red, and dusty.
- Jupiter is large and massive and has rocks surrounded by a liquid hydrogen sea.
- Saturn is very hot and its rings are made of various ice particles resembling
a woman wearing a large, expensive hat.
(The Planets Today.com, "The planets of our solar system")

The Body's Dispute

Are our uncontrollable emotions transitory or do they linger in the body? Where do they go? I imagine our unwanted or unused feelings gathered into human shapes in a forest or another quiet, empty place to live. More and more accumulate and whole cities of them form, jostling to find some place with more space. We often don't enjoy our feelings and try to stuff them somewhere: shoulders, back, neck, stomach. Happiness and love are glorious if we can recognize them for what they are. Can I catch someone else's emotions, someone who is thrusting them on me or letting them loose between us? I have felt angry when someone is angry at me or joy around someone exuding joy. But I've learned that I'm not responsible for the emotions or actions of other people. This has taken me a long time to learn. In Scientific American, in an article by G. Lewandowski, Jr. called, "Is a Bad Mood Contagious?" he calls this reaction "emotional contagion" and there is a three step process: first, nonconscious copying achieved by adjusting your posture, facial expression, and movement to match the other

person; next, a feedback stage where a smile assumes contentment; lastly, synchronizing two individual's feelings and behaviors. Some animals, especially dogs, display emotional contagion.

Disobedience includes:

a moon crawling by, opening and closing stars
the dishonest woods throwing rocks in my path
loitering in the consciousness of a tree until its leaves fall
dogs chasing sunlight because it smells wrong
acting like an umbrella so I'll never be alone
rain making up stories so it can touch everyone
cats preferring the spot where a woman and a
man once kissed
my shadow not understanding me yet it keeps on trying
my conversations including more people in them that I
don't like
betraying you so you can absorb me into your body or
your mind

The Singing of Bones

I grew up in New York City, but when I was young, my family summered at a house in Westchester where I remember large trees, a variety of elegant butterflies, rabbits twitching near a stone fence, birds making the green leaves of bushes tremble. I remember my grandfather descending into a patch of poison ivy to retrieve a ball and returning unscathed. We stopped going to that house when the owner's son hung himself in the garage.

Some people that know me say that they are scared by my fiction books. "But you seem so nice," they say. I believe there's a bit of horror and unpredictability in everything. My husband can't read my books since he's sensitive to disturbing material. I don't understand how he survives in today's world.

The wilderness is one way of connecting to something bigger than ourselves, something majestic we break into pieces like ice or our voices. When I visit Golden Gardens beach, near where I live, I spoon bodies of water, oatmeal-colored sand, and the declarative sky inside me, and it calms me.

Levitations, Posthumously

We mean well, nursing a baby bird that drops from a cloud-filled tree, like my neighbor that feeds all the nearby stray animals. Nature displays her cruelty and loneliness in violent spurts. My neighbor doesn't know what to do about the young raccoon perched in her tree, scaring the other partakers off from her offered food and the baby bird dies terrified. Nature's difficult and unjust ways insure its continuance. But we, as a species, have withdrawn from its seemingly fickle and unfair bent, ignorant of what's necessary to sustain this world.

The world chooses. It complains. It tells us about fish, frogs, birds, ambitious streams, and the long-suffering trees in inscrutable increments. We look down occasionally, as if we had just dropped a cup that shattered into pebbles. Landscapes. We kick rocks from the edge of a cliff. America likes to tame the untamed, enjoying its chaos at the same time. The new west is currently trying to save its parks and open areas. Think Taming of the Shrew in old England. We like wind and cats, but not too much of them, and especially when they have unruly minds. Some days I want to put on wildness like a jacket, do something I don't usually do to excess: drinking, smoking, sex, running, yelling at people, but then I fold up that urge and tuck it back into a drawer, explaining to myself that it is the feeling I need to recognize, that its idea doesn't need to be expressed. We live behind glass, behind civilization.

Undependable Pastorals

I'm doing research for my winter trip to Iceland with my friends and I hope to find glaciers, waterfalls, volcanos, lakes, geysers, lava caves, Northern Lights. No tall trees. Seattle already contains trees, textured water, rain, a circuitry of forests, mountains, hills, beaches, ferries.

I imagine shaky scenes, rehearse old age pirouettes in my head, think about a parakeet reincarnated as a woman, how she adored sunlight, hit her head on a lackadaisical ceiling. I annihilate myself, becoming a romantic, a hunter, a child, an angel, leaving my body, uninhabited, my blood still flowing, bones knitting, breath murmuring in and out. My words become sharper knives.

Imagination is abundant, unlimited, an enhancement.

My wilderness has no windows or cupboards or mirrors. It doesn't sit, sleep, smile, knit, sew, watch television, move furniture. A wilderness dreams, likes abundant art for art's sake, suffers, transforms, enjoys a primordial silence, stitches light through metaphorical trees and embraces night through metaphorical grass, flowers through brightness and attachment, enhances past oblivions, growing whatever it can wherever it can, shrinking with time, and regret. It never knows what will happen. It considers other people's ideas, which are often larger and more predatory.

Bjorn's Icelandic Saga

Bjorn was brave as tree roots, a hunter in the dark, an heir to unnumbered winds. He depended on duty and light, wedded as he was to indolence and the inadvertent snow. He surveyed his beloved land, blood in his mouth. His cold, shifting knees creaked. He needed a wife. Olafur's daughter's eyes met his over a feast, then over a fire. The small of her back was strong, tall, inviting. Olafur had asked Bjorn to clear one of his fields, then to catch an intelligent fish, which was offered to Olafur's family. Then there was the hurtful sword fight with Egil, who also liked Olafur's daughter. After Egil's death, Olafur's daughter went blind. Bjorn married her although it became difficult for him to look at his sheep, horses, or land.



THE LATE HOURS

DANE HAMANN

When the late hours stick to this town like honey
what little comforts do we haul up from the wells

of urgency within us as a few old windowpanes
blaze like the refractory bricks in a hot furnace,

gobs of incandescent light falling again and again
onto the blue-gray street? Like a copper plate,

everything is eventually smothered with boneblack
ink. Even the aching orange horizon is brushed

with the inescapable tar of night. Listen,
you can hear the last gasps of gentleness

as the lip of land melts into the sky
which melts into the empty shapes

of unnamed tomorrows. Scars of late-night
neon morph weeds and grass into slender fish

around our ankles. Broken-bone trees reach
for our faces. Main street looms as if a gulf.

There may be nothing that fills us as much
like cold water as when our way home transforms

into an indecipherable puzzle, every angle
of everything dismantled by hidden hands.

But if we press ourselves into the intricacies
of the smallest shadows, we'll etch our path

through the darkness, a flurry of moonrises
with our every moment. We'll trace the constellations

of gravel spangling each other's backs and always
remember where to spark an unquenchable light.

LOST LUGGAGE

ANA PUGATCH

Five self-portraits
moth-eaten wool
hitch-a-ride crickets
ragged-edged coal

Crystallized cat piss
devilwood leaves
unopened gifts
black thoraxed thieves

Sickle, hammer
comic book red
sweet fly amber
doll tucked in bed

Krishna smiling
cork cut from tree
straw mats splitting
tin of sardines

Gold-ringed iris
note about plums
Saturn's bruises
chrysanthemum

Bright green birdwing
braved equinox
flew to Beijing
Mao in glass box

Airline's message
sorry, it's gone—
farewell wreckage
rose-fingered dawn

IN TURVEY CEMETERY

for douglas eric claypole white 1929-2000

ZACHARIAH CLAYPOLE WHITE

The stone
is too small

white marble
outlined in yew leaves
and lavender

my mother
and her mother
pull moss from the cracks
clean the inscription
listen to the village

then quit the grave
for gin and quiet conversation
by the elderflowers

this is how grief grows old
weeding the lawns
till it is time for tea
and there is nothing left to say

CONTEMPLATING SHELLS:
PLATE 12 FROM WILLIAM
H. EMORY'S REPORT ON
THE UNITED STATES AND
MEXICAN BOUNDARY
SURVEY (1848-1855)

NELL SMITH

What separates the layers in the oyster's shell?
Where is the distinguishable boundary, the clarifying road sign
or the high fence wound with barbed-wire,
the customs checkpoint
with officials in bullet-proof vests guarding both sides,
holding semi-automatics, saying
and where, exactly, are you headed?

Where are these boundaries in carbon?
In the ecology of past worlds,
oysters were lugging, slogging through the Cretaceous.

What if we shrank to the size of sand and walked the curves of
the shell,
waves of each layer rippling like estuarine mud, mirroring the ebb
and flow of tides.
What if we walked not the curvature, but traversed right across, no
switchbacks, straight
through a valley or ridge until we walked right off the edge of
our world.

Wasn't this supposed to be our world?

Within each layer is a delicate history of fractures.
Once, fluid salt eased within these crevices,
seeped into this space, caressing the jagged edges
until the boundary between before and after blurred.

Every boundary yearns for the return of salt.

MT. CARMEL JUNCTION, UT

DALLAS CROW





NAILS

JOE MILLS

Evan's friend Grayson yells, "Nailed it!" whenever he kicks the ball. It was funny at first, then puzzling. When he hits it hard, that makes sense, and, when he flubs it, that could be self-mocking, but every time? What's that? A tic? A compulsion? A lack of awareness the joke's no longer funny? Then Monica had started doing it, or rather thinking it. Hanging up after a conference call—*Nailed It!* Flipping an egg—*Nailed it!* She too couldn't seem to stop. She doesn't say it out loud—at least she hopes she doesn't—but she imagines saying it. To the barista. The Walmart cashier. The person coming out of the bathroom. At a restaurant, looking at her empty plate. *Nailed It!* Walking by a church and seeing a crucifix. *Nailed it!*

Before the game started, on the bleacher row below her, a woman arranged an emery board, cuticle pen, and bottles of polish, not even pretending to look at the field. It was obvious, but still Monica thought with glee, *Going to nail it!* She had never bothered much with her own hands. If LeeAnna had been interested, she might have done the mother-daughter manicure thing, but her daughter had never cared about make-up or wigs or anything where she had to sit for more than a couple minutes. LeeAnna only came to Evan's games so she could use the track. She wants to run varsity next year, so she's pushing herself instead of sleeping in.

Monica scans the park until she finds where LeeAnna is doing wind sprints, each one taking her farther away. The increasing distance makes Monica nervous—her daughter seems isolated out there, disconnected—and maybe that causes it. Or maybe it's the acetone smell still in the air from the nail polish remover, or the way two guys on the sidelines are making comments to one another and laughing, but she remembers one night in the dorm kitchen, washing dishes and overhearing a boy in the lounge

bragging about how he had “nailed her,” talking about Sheila in 4B, a girl she knew but wasn’t friends with. She hadn’t said anything. She had finished washing her plate and silverware and gone back to her room. For a moment, Monica sees LeeAnna stretched across the goal, an arm tied to each post, boys lined up to take penalty kicks. She closes her eyes and tries to regulate her breathing. At the cheers, she opens them. Evan has his hands in the air, high-fiving his teammates. He looks to the bleachers to make sure she has seen him score. She knows what she is supposed to do. Clap. Pump an arm in the air. *Nailed it!* she whispers, clenching her teeth.



VIOLENCE

JOE MILLS

Sandra has mistimed it. She hasn't meant to come back to the field until the game is over. She had thought that it was when those two kids had run out onto the field. Some parents had left the sideline as well, so she had made her way over, but then, after what clearly was a heated discussion among the adults, the game had resumed. She's not sure what happened, just that Brianna wasn't involved, which was the main thing, because if she had been involved, Sandra would have gotten involved, and that... wouldn't have been good.

Sandra had thought she knew what to expect with a kid. Her friends with children kept warning her how messy, smelly, loud, and tiring a baby was, and how this would upset someone with her pristine wardrobe and precise life. The first was true, the second wasn't. The stains, noises, and odors hadn't bothered her because she had known that's what having a baby meant. However, what had been difficult to deal with was the way Chad suddenly had become sentimental—almost crying at life insurance commercials—and the way she had become so easily upset. What she hadn't expected were the red rages. She had never been a violent person. She didn't get into fights or play shooter games. She never yelled. She was a nice drunk, one who got giggly before getting sleepy. That changed after Brianna was born. She knew the stereotype of the Mama Grizzly, but she hadn't been prepared for the reality, the surges of anger she felt when someone endangered her child or even was simply ill-mannered. If a server put a hot plate next to the high chair or a kid at daycare knocked Brianna over, Sandra's hands would snap into fists. It was comical, someone 5'3," manicured and tailored, being so volatile, or it would be, if people realized it. Sandra worked hard to make sure they didn't. Inwardly frothing, she would appear calm as she moved the plate or stepped between the children and picked up her daughter. On

the outside, she was June Cleaver, on the inside the Hulk.

Sandra had strategies for minimizing possible eruptions. At games, she went for walks, read in the car, or did her nails on a row of bleachers with her back to the field. She took herself away to make sure she didn't see how Brianna was treated. She had to. Last year, her daughter's team had gotten crushed every week. By teams that ran up the score. By teams that laughed at them. It was so bad at one point the coach had stopped the game and pulled the players off the field. Some parents were mad, but it was merciful. The kids were punch drunk, shell shocked, stumbling around the field with glazed eyes. For Sandra, the coach had done this just in time. She had been close to running onto the field and smacking one of those snotty, snot-filled, little fucking snots. Every time they ran along the sidelines, she had wanted to trip them or clothesline them. Her nails had made indentations in her palms that had remained for hours. She had vowed that would be the last time Brianna would be on a team like that. This year she been in regular contact with the league organizer to ensure Brianna was on a good team.

Sandra had expected to be annoyed as parent—her friends seemed constantly irritated—she hadn't expected to be so angry. It would be best if Brianna didn't even play soccer, or any sport, because at some point Sandra was liable to do a Woody Hayes, the Ohio State football coach her grandfather had idolized who had run onto the field and punched an opposing player. Most people couldn't believe or understand it. She does. It isn't about losing, but about love. It is the frustration when those you care about are getting humiliated.

Sandra climbs the bleachers, carefully not looking at the field. Sometimes you love your kid so much you can't watch what they do. Sometimes you love your kid so much you want to punch someone.



JUNGLE GYM

EMILY VIEWEG

I feel like I'm failing –
galloping down a metal slide,
thighs burning from the sticking –
you remember that feeling.
it is 98 degrees in St. Louis
in August and you're just trying
to play at recess
when The Gorilla dares you to climb
the high slide reserved for 6th graders.
you're the chicken, so they'd never believe
that at home, in your back yard,
you fly through the air, eyes closed, wind
flapping your pigtails across your face.
you surprise them all
and hoist yourself, without handles,
to the apex
and hobble back to class
wearing your slideburn
with pride.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

ANDREW SUTHERLAND

In the bunk above me my big brother
chattering about the girl he's macking to
& about rhinestoning up his Starter

cap, the Indians one with the gumpy cheese
& tag attached like the earring he got
done over by the Howard stop. In the room

next door on their bunks doing homework
or reading graphic novels my other
big brothers. Downstairs watching

Johnny Carson our parents till our mom
dips in to say Say your prayers
& he & I say Your prayers. I can't

shut him out so I listen till there're spaces,
weed-infested gravel lots in his rambling ...
the name I'm gonna use for hitting up

dumpsters & washroom walls the cigarettes
we sneak from my homeboy's mom the game
tomorrow night against St. Hillary's

how I'm gonna give their point guard
the business Mariana's laughter &
curly hair the Bart Simpson t-shirt

I have to have the kid with leukemia
I never met he was hospitalized
by the time I transferred into the school

the only time I ever saw him was
in a coffin ... I pray every morning
with my classmates before saying the Pledge

of Allegiance, every Sunday with
the congregation at Mass, every night with
my family before dinner, never alone, so

I was a little confused & uncomfortable
kneeling before the funeral in our bedroom
holding a plastic glow-in-the-dark rosary ...

I trace back my thinking, linking each thought
till I can't remember what started me on
this path, I expand out into the night

like running full speed across Ashland
Avenue or the boulders that separate Albion &
North Shore Beaches to all the people out there

with their thoughts & feelings & fears & hopes
over & over & over rewinding or pausing or stopping
or fastforwarding the tapes. & it is all too much for me.

ON THE SHORE

ERIN JAMIESON

This is not a space for dreams but gaps in reality—the seams of yellow sailboats as they glide across frothy lakes with shores where sisters, ranging from eight to nearly thirteen years old—dangle their feet and sip lemonade.

They are thinking, of course, of futures not brighter but more expansive: canopy- striped towels on bone white sand. A peck on the forehead from freshly falling rain. Beauty beyond this moment. The three older girls are classically pretty, with delicate features, but the youngest looks nothing like them, with a too-wide nose, unruly brown hair, and heavy eyebrows.

Some dream only this and others dream of exploring coral reefs or becoming a doctor to cure the mysterious thing that has transformed their grandfather. All of them are on the same shore, drinking the same lemonade, feeling the same hot sun lick the skin on their backs. All of them filled with longing that they've been told needs to be suppressed, if they are ever to grow up.

The oldest sister excuses herself: her back is burnt so badly it's started to peel. Two others follow, complaining of the heat, eager to eat peanut butter & marshmallow or pickle & cheese sandwiches back in the house.

But the youngest sister stays, shaded under her grandmother's sunhat, watching the boats come and go, staying past noon, past afternoon when fishermen dock their boats and the sun slips, crimson orange, like a milky dream. Her grandfather is in the house, but she wishes he here out here too. Ever since he started forgetting things, he has been told more and more to stay away from the docks.

She longs. She longs in a way she has been taught not to long; she longs to sink her feet into that lake, to feel the power of her own legs.

She worries some one will notice how long she has been missing. Someone to come and tell her to come back inside, to get away from the lake, to do things a sensible girl should. But she does not want to play with her dolls. She does not want to be confined in her house. She has never been nearly as good as her sisters at pretending to be satisfied with such a small life. A dream, perhaps, to be something more, but it is her dream, and in that moment, it feels as alive as she is.

She dips her muddy toes in the cool lake, feeling more alive than she has felt for some time, more alive even than the day her father acknowledged her with a smile and a hug, or the last day her grandfather still seemed to recognize her.

She glances over at her other two sisters, so carefully minding themselves, occasionally skipping a rock but doing little else. Her sisters, who have also taught her to dream, but not to dream too deeply.

She stands. She wonders if anyone is watching. A cool breeze hits her cheek. She feels as if this must be a dream, because suddenly she does not feel so afraid. She is not so afraid of the very thing she has been taught to fear.

She starts to jog. And then—because there is no one to stop her—she sprints down the dock. Maybe someone is yelling at her to stop. Or maybe it is just the wind, or the instructions she knows by heart:

1. Don't run. Ladies don't run.
2. Don't stay out by yourself. You never know who might be watching
3. The world is a dangerous place for beautiful girls like you.

But in the moment she is airborne, she realizes she has never wanted to be beautiful. Not in the way her sisters are, with their clear skin and wide eyes and thick hair. She wants this, a moment of uncertainty, a space in time, however brief, where no one can claim her.

When she surfaces, her lungs ache. There's someone trying to reach her in the water, a hand outstretched, maybe even a lifeboat,

thinking, perhaps, that she is in need of saving. Though she's never learned to swim, her legs are more powerful than they look, and she is able to make her way back to the dock before anyone does it for her.

There's someone waiting for her. At first, she assumes it's her father—he only talks to her when it is to discipline her.

But no, it's her grandfather, with his checkered red shirt she and her sisters bought for him a year before he started forgetting things. He looks at her, and, slowly, a smile twitches on the corners of his thin lips.

She can't say for certain—he doesn't say her name—but in the moment when his hand reaches out to her—she feels he knows her, has known her all along.

Her parents are not far behind him, but those moments before are the ones that matter most.



ERIS

ANDREW SUTHERLAND

You sat in my lap, trying out a toothless bite on my index finger.
With my other hand,
I flicked through the pages of a book about shapeshifting.

As follows:

a plush toy python, a rubber pterodactyl, the tear ducts
of a drunk's emotion; a much-cuddled octopus named
Colin and the squid I'd purchased in New Zealand as his
rival (though I can only recall the name given to Colin);

paint smeared on walls, pairs of oversized sunglasses
and possible tantrums at Dogswamp shopping centre;
books on the occult borrowed and visits long-delayed,
changes recognised and tracked by way of Instagram,

the uncertain shape in the crib on the monitor, the peace
and the unrest of listening for the sound of sleeping;
a much-tormented plastic girl-doll, the jealousies and
generosities discovered in becoming an older sibling;

a Tree of Life painting left unfinished, an impression
of a family at a baby shower, and the gold-dipped ram
now sitting atop my dresser ... everyone that will never
be known; the inevitability of damage, the expectation,

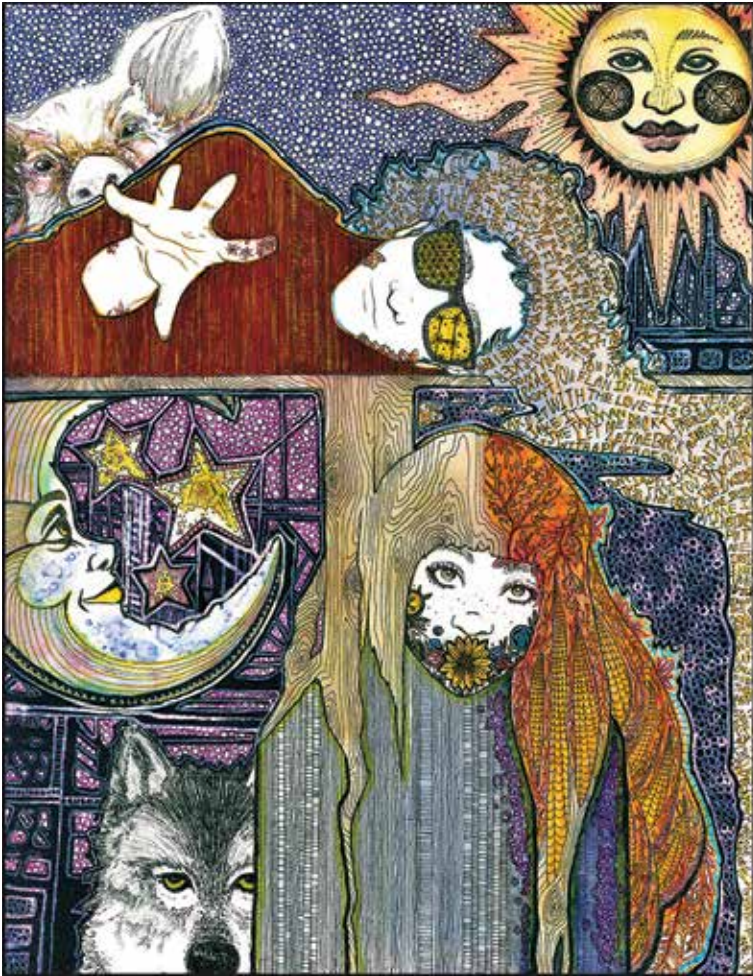
egos, hopes placed and misplaced, my deep limitations,
inflated sense of collective responsibility, an ideal only,
a Greek chthonic deity, Roman counterpart Discordia;
a burst of soap bubbles, and somebody else's future,

(which is constantly arriving, and yet may never arrive)

in which the shifting space from one shape to the next
is a multitude of microscopic acts of repair; from chaos.

A WOLF AT THE DOOR

SHARON NICOLE COLE



WALKING THE SLIT FIELD

JOHN WALSER

Snapping turtle shell: badger hole:
potato drill public footpath:

surface tension: tiller dig: the stones of spuds
hard as little fists:
the soft dirt shift shallow crust crazing.

Three men and a woman on a tractor back
blade ride toward the end of another row:
the scratched dust tailfeathers that dusk glint
against the swan's wings of a high grey sky:

into the woods, onto a sidehill moss sponge path
I leaf rustle rock stumble stepslide:

a stonewall where the last deer through
left a thorn and hide fur scrape:
a tussle of surfaces:

down to the in the wet season
this would be a creek.

The fall air shootcracks:

small animals more rifle report concerned
by the hunt than by my tread
brush scuffle around me:

I'm swallowed by deep tangle drying flowers:
stamen, pollen, pistil:

by the ash facets in the grove trees:
the lashes, the splinters, the switches.

Be careful of wells, the groundskeeper
at the manor house had said
our very first day:

We don't know where all of them are –
the ground may not be ground.

Minarets of maples and oaks almost changing:
the fall bark stone steeple lichen stained
like St Mary's and St. Peter's:
autumn's totems:

I am almost home:

a day of walking
turnstiles and city streets:
sheep shit fields: the grazing grounds:

the embroidery of ploughshares and chopped stalks:
haybales like the broad backs
of hunch shouldered giants:

a cemetery collapsed in lumps and winks
and shrub snarl:

my backpack not filled
with bread and cheese:
wine and need:
the markets closed early.

Almost home:
the countryside is wind scattered sheets
bits of awkwardly cut cloth:

I don't mind my mud shoes:
the suck of each step
the smear of my tracks:

I don't mind the sky's building bluegrey porridge:
the priestbirds that blackheaded scream in the trees:
the false night of branches:
the cooling air.

Almost home:
walking into my own mist breath:
I even don't mind the tower bells signaling:
weight and age hard hang forged:
that I'm a mile late for the last serving
of roast and carrots:
potatoes and gravy:
Sunday pudding.

THE BUST

SCOTT WILSON

Wearing Tyvek jumpsuits to protect us from agricultural chemicals while gathering samples of orange tree leaves and blossoms is like being inside of another still-living human, under their skin—hot, moist, foul. The loose flesh over our own can't grip an orange blossom well enough to work quickly to keep from overheating. We take a lot of breaks and drink a lot of Gatorade that flows right back out. This dehydrating and rehydrating takes a lot of time, picking at zippers and finding a private spot in this flat land of orange groves and dirt roads. I like to hide behind the diseased piles of tree corpses, built by field workers at the end of the hedgerows. After whatever vestige of green life evaporates out of the piles to the Great Orange Tree in the sky, a worker will go down the road with an acetylene torch and lighter fluid to carbonize the remains. In the distance we see rising black smoke from the neighbors.

Thunderheads float in and out of the area in fronts, making clear binaries of the day: sunshine, storm, sunshine, storm, sunshine, storm. At the first few thunks of rain we drop our sampling equipment and jog to the trucks. I squeeze into the new Mercedes SUV of the pest control advisor, the chemical company's representative. His SUV's floor mats are brochures. He doesn't mind if I step all over them, he says, he has plenty more in the back. We drink San Pellegrino from a cooler built into the seat and eat organic beef jerky, chatting. His weather radio issues a warning, this will be a bad one. We see a single white bolt flash from one end of the horizon to the other, dipping in and out of the clouds and sending off little side-strikes.

"The longest lightning bolt ever recorded struck around here," says the company man.

"How long was it?"

“I think it was a few hundred miles, start to finish. I have no idea how they measure that. Anyway, lesson is that if you hear thunder, then you’re in the strike range and you need to get to shelter immediately.”

“That’s what they said whenever I took the mound in little league.”

He laughs a little too hard at that. Even wrapped in Tyvek he can tell I have the shoulders of a book reader.

Some minutes later, looking for more conversation fuel, I grab a brochure off the floor about methods for controlling citrus greening and flip through the pages. It says that orange yields for Florida are at a fifty-year low. That a little Asian bug is infecting trees with a lethal bacteria. That other countries have seen the death of their citrus industry. That Florida trees are highly susceptible, being genetically similar to all the other orange trees of the world. The neighbors’ black smoke columns turn white in the moisture, and bend with the wind.

“The only solution we got right now is to spray, and spray often.”

The rep’s dad was an orange farmer, and his brother and sisters took over the farm in the ’70s, while he got his degree, then masters, then Ph.D. in some form of bio-chemistry that has too many syllables for me to remember.

“When I was a kid, my dad never sprayed.”

“Did you get a lot of blight then?”

“Mmm, no. Not really. Not for us. We lost some of the crop, every season – about the same as most growers do now, really. Growers without greening, that is.”

“So why spray at all?”

“It’s too late to quit. You spray once and that’s it. You can’t stop.”

What he means is that after chemicals have sterilized the acreage, crop killers—locusts and aphids and other pestilence—can regroup quickly, and ravage a plantation, ruining a whole season. The economy takes a while to grow spiders and birds and assassin bugs to even things out.

I think, but don't say, that if farmers use way more pesticide now than they did before the greening epidemic, then it's a good time to be a chemical salesman. I think harder and realize that as long as there are orange trees, it's always a good time to be a chemical salesman.

"You know the big advantage of insecticides (he uses the brand names) is that they keep the pollinators away. Growers actually don't want bees because they make the oranges seedy."

Orange trees self-pollinate when left alone, ensuring higher quality fruit. Tree breeders keep tight controls over who pollinates their plants to keep lineages pure, like the great monarchies of Europe, because it takes years, sometimes decades, to create an orange variety that has the right color, flavor, shelf life, and size for the global consumer. Yet all the edible varieties covering millions of Florida acres come from a single root species.

"There's a tree that's immune to greening, a grower found it on his land a few miles south of here." The white smoke from the neighbors is gone. I see rainbows on the horizon, at the edge of the thunderhead. "I tell ya, that guy's gonna make a fortune."

I once heard about an old lady who swallowed a fly. I don't know why, but she did. She bought a spider and sent that down after it, then she bought a bird to go after the spider, then a cat to go after the bird, and on up the food chain. Her neighbor heard about the old lady and figured he'd like to take care of his fly problem too, so he bought some animals and sent them down the hatch. It was a bit of a craze, and the pet shop owner had his best quarter of all time. New people moved into town, took up the practice. Finally, a town without flies! There were pet shops on every corner. A real boom time.



PLANT

NORBERT KOVACS

When the wind shakes the bush, I notice the blood-red bud on one of its bare branches. It is sized like a piece of gravel, its shape a tiny arrowhead. The sight of it stirs the very life in me. I break the bud off the bush and bring it to the hard patch of dirt beside my back door. I press the bud into the stiff earth, so that it lies covered. Let's see what it might do in this ground, I think, filling with curiosity. I do not water the spot and it does not rain, but soon the earth where I put the bud changes. It darkens as if soaked. The ground softens and fresh cracks snake over it like rivers. A lime-green shoot emerges, wavy and slender as the long cracks that have formed on the ground's face. However, this shoot appears more than the cracks in the dirt. It has its own body, supple and pliant. It rises from the ground even while drawing nutriment from there. The stem of the shoot curves one way and curves another on its upward earth. As the plant grows over the next, many days, these bends find no rest: in its great energy, the plant sends forth leaves, open and wide. I watch these green leaves become eyes and I know each of them looks on a world rippling just like the plant on which they grow. The grass around them swishes and flows with the wind. The birds dip and rise, as waves do, when they fly across my green meadow. The buck deer leap in arcs along the edges of the nearby wood, their calls rolling through the long night. As the plant becomes part of these environs, my friend and I tend the plot of land by its roots. We grow and age as we work, turn our hands, darken and yellow in mood and temper. We stoop and straighten in the perpetual flow of body and mind.



UNBLOOMING

KATE BOND

A woman can break
on her own in being delicate
and opening as the morning
glory does, all at once
and in the rise. How heavy it is
to lift these petals at night,
it can weaken the hours.
I used to think I couldn't
be the glory, so strong as to open
in full right there in the beginning—
When I put my petals
where your hands have been,
I know what keeps me alive
keeps me alone is a toast to
our differences.

RIVER BIRCH

ELLERY BECK

My own personal current,
find your way around my skin, enter
with a pace unaware of your

dams. Witness the cascades, the
effervescence of copper. I'll still

let you draw me back, wrap
around and stay. My roots are
not as sturdy, but can't
let go. My branches will snap, but still
you're welcome to erode.

LAST NIGHT, BEFORE I STITCHED THIS CLOSE

ELLERY BECK

I've let myself swim
in the buckwheat honey of
your promises and hard-field

gazes. Your fingertips gentle, a
grazing against the small
of my back sending

a stem-bending breeze through. Be
soft and let me go
when your arms sag and release.

I'll float away down
the lick of molasses wind
gracing my thighs, I'll close

my lips to you for the last time.

LUCKY 13

SHARON NICOLE COLE



FOR THE YEW BUSH ON FIRE

MARY MAROSTE

This morning,
my living room smells like blue linen,
& the leftover wine on the table sours slowly –

I think of my uncle –

burn hole in the ceiling, drunk underwater,

stealing my parent's Journey CD that summer he visited
& tried showing
he finally changed this time by buying his bank account
worth of fireworks
& putting out the yew bush when it ignited.

Tommy's love is an expensive mistake –
my father spreads grass seeds on the patch of lawn
suffocated by his RV,

my mother counts her pewter tea cups,

& on the phone, 12 years later,
she tells me her molars
are grinding themselves to silt & my father

stopped recycling his Miller Lite cans.

Out my window Orion's red shoulder flickers,
my mason jar firefly goes out in the twigs –

I think of
pistachio light dripping through Utah's aspen trees,
my uncle, Aspidochelone,
drinking again,
& how we let him.

SLUG

ALLIE MARIANO

The third slug this week squishes under your bare foot. The texture is disconcerting, cold and sticky like jelly.

It is morning, nearly nine, which means hurrying with the coffee pot and scanning the kitchen for something appropriate to eat. No leftovers; when was the last time you cooked? The slight throb of a headache demands water. You pour a glass and look in the fridge, which sweeps you up.

Lately you will find yourself in a different room staring at a book or wiping at dust, not remembering how you left the kitchen. Or you will be brushing your teeth, thinking about how you need to pee. The motions aren't right, and you realize you are leaning over the toilet, still brushing. Sometimes you forget to feed the cat and find her batting at another slug, and part of you even misses criticism that could motivate action.

In spite of the slugs' consistency, their autonomy is miraculous. They move. They leave a trail.

The slugs are something you deserve.

This is what you do: clean the slug off the floor and the slime off your foot. You make coffee, but wait to drink it because you desperately, more than anything, do not want to burn your tongue. If the only minor misfortune before nine a.m. is a slug underfoot, then today can be a success. A burnt tongue suggests what you imagine salt would feel like to a slug. Though they are a pestilence, you will not subject them to slow pain.

Dressed, you do not look at your phone, though you heard the vibration of a message. There are too many possibilities and not enough caffeine to risk it. You pour dry food for the gray cat. She is hiding again. You pour your coffee into a different cup, stand at the front door. Leave for work.

Last night or early this morning, you waited outside a bar for

your friend, Mo, to get going and leave. A man you hardly knew ran up to you, rushed you into a waltz. Drunk, it seemed natural. The embrace with an arm extended, the slow rotation of your two bodies felt exactly right. You felt him stiffen against you and somehow that was exactly right too.

He muttered without looking you in the eye. Your hands stuck together in the humidity, and it occurred to you that he was the first to touch you since you left Samuel.

Are you okay? you asked. Isn't it always someone else's problems?

Of course I'm not. I don't even know you. His breath was laced with cigarettes and pungent beer. It smelled like a punch in the gut, and his words hurt more. You took in his blond curly hair, the gap in his teeth. Try to remember how you met him. It was outside, and there was the scent of rain.

You know me.

He let go, and Mo finally appeared and scooped you away and you allowed it.

Mo dropped you off at your house. Through the front door, heels in hand, and squish. A slug, it seeped through your hose. You thought of tiny, latticed imprints on its slimy flesh. You imagined it survived to be a very attractive slug with its tiny design. You scooped it up with a newspaper and tossed it out the front door onto the grass. The cat sat upright on your bed, eyes glowing in the dark, scolding.

The more time you spend away from home, forgetting things, the more the cat avoids you. When you are home, she seems to prefer the back porch. She stretches in the sunlight, twists and inches along on her side. She bats at passing flies, does not glance when you stick your head out to check on her. Really, she seems content with or without you.

Work is at the little pea-green house on the corner. All of the houses in this neighborhood host businesses: a boutique, a salon, a wedding photographer. Like all of the houses, the massage therapy studio is raised a foot or two above the ground. Under the house it is constantly damp, the perfect habitat. Cement steps lead to the

front door. Inside, the soft light of the waiting room soothes. Joan is already there. She nods when you walk in.

Morning, you say. You think to tell her about the slugs, but to what end?

She looks at appointments on the computer. She is twenty years older and sturdy, a square frame with large breasts hidden in brown scrubs. She owns the building, which means it is cheaper for you to rent this space.

The back room is chillier than it should be. You adjust the thermostat and begin the oil diffuser. The folded sheets on the shelf smell of bleach, which could be your favorite smell. Samuel never came here for a massage, though he had his thoughts about the job. The vanilla honey scent begins to permeate. In this room, you set the terms.

Before the first client, you check your phone. The message is from Samuel.

I am getting better, please meet me. I have so much to tell you.

You stare at the message for a while, hit delete.

Once he showed up in tears, he had gone to his mother's for dinner. She had been drunk and then he hit a squirrel on the way to your house. He kept talking about the squirrel, like its death was the worst thing he had caused. You held him, massaged each of his hands as if the right pressure point would end his sadness.

That feels like home, he said.

You slid your hands up his arms and down his sides, and he kissed you. Your bodies slid into each other. His sadness was yours.

At home, the slugs keep coming. They creep on one foot into the kitchen every night and marinate in their slime and the dirt on your floor. When you force yourself out of bed to the tune of that cat's hungry meows, inches from your face, you always forget. You tiptoe through your home alone because the cat always changes his mind about breakfast. So you measure coffee into the maker and take one step to the side and *squish*.

Mom calls most nights and tells you to put a dish of beer by the front door.

They will drink it, she says.

They will drink? This fact is alarming. You sit heavily on the couch. This fact suggests slug mouths and slug drunkenness, and all sorts of minutiae of slug life that exists aside from their apparent desire for suicide by human foot in your dirty kitchen.

Whatever; they'll absorb the beer until they die.

They might have mouths. Would salt or beer be crueler? She moves on to your brother and his job, which is the same; his girlfriend, who is the same; your father whose new hobby is bird watching.

Met anyone nice?

Not trying. The cat makes a rare attempt at camaraderie, and you massage her neck until she purrs.

She takes on a new tactic: *You live in that city with no real connection to anything. Everyone drinks too much. All of those waiters you spend time with.*

At least she doesn't mention Samuel. The cat leaps from the couch, so you stand.

They're nice people, I met them through Mo. Your mother loves Morgan.

Well if they're his friends, they're probably all gay. That city...

Don't worry. I'll see you next month. The call ends, and you realize you are lying on the kitchen floor. You turn your head to the side and you can see under the refrigerator. There is something brown, shriveled and dry, pushed up against the vent.

In the little room, the lights are dim, and each client lies face down covered with a thin sheet. What is soothing for them is also soothing for you: the soft light and the air that is a few degrees above room temperature. The music is gentle: it rises and falls in minor crescendo, accompanied by water crashing into rocks. Hands oiled, you begin on one shoulder, kneading like your cat, pressing into the knotted tissue, smoothing out the lactic acid. Contact, even this contact, is comforting. There were only ever two corporeal bruises: the wrist where he held on so tight you thought it would squash and, later, the left eye. You wore an eye patch and

claimed that you had Lasik. Now your hands are strong and solid, you reject the word slimy as it floats into your mind. Try not to think of your hands as one slug-like muscle.

He said, *They're all assholes. They will all cheat. I'm protecting you. If you hadn't met me...* This, too, you reject. Move to the client's neck, wonder if you weren't massaging deep enough when you were lost in your daydream. Most of your clients are middle-aged women. They rarely tell you if it's not enough, only if it hurts.

You work down this woman's flaccid body and look around the room. Something is draped out of the wastebasket. It has the sheen of a used condom, and you try to make sense of its presence.

You recall a night, early in your relationship: the two of you tumbled into your house. His hands in your hair, mouth on your neck, as you undid his belt. Then a sudden accusation in his smoky beer breath. You had touched the bartender's arm, you had shaken his friend's hand too long. You were ready to work your strong hands over anyone. This was three years ago. You cried.

Oh okay, cry like a little girl.

The next morning, he held you and kissed you, eyes to feet.

I trust you. I'm sorry. Vague stories about an ex, about his parents.

Once, you were in his bedroom. He had shut his dog out of the room. After, you lay curled around him, your hands never stopped moving. His muscles were slack. He got up to go to the bathroom and stepped in dog piss. He screamed, *No, you fucker! Bad!* Shoved Red's face in the piss. You sat up and wrapped the sheet around you.

He came back. You could see the tautness of every muscle and reached to touch him. He glared at you and turned away.

This afternoon's client is an athlete, tall and tan. He smiles when you leave him to undress and cover with the sheet. Back in the room, he lies face down on the table. You begin again with the shoulders.

Deeper! Deeper! The client yells at the floor through his face

hole. It surprises you. Normally, you would remind him about polite and appropriate communication. If met with resistance, you would show him the door. But today is a challenge, so you put all of your weight into the heels of your hands and work down from the spine to the small of his back.

Watch the individual muscles ripple and yield at your touch. For a moment you expect the horrible, for this man to suddenly roll over and lay confident spread eagle on the table, penis erect. You think about stepping on slugs, about control. Press into his skin in circular motions away from the spine. The horrible fantasy makes you work harder, but you can't keep the scenario from playing out: he would watch for your reaction, gaze down at himself, then let it go and fade to a semi-erect nudibranch. None of this happens of course. So far, you've only had one exhibitionist.

He keeps shouting and you continue, inspired. Each palm rams the lower trapezius, the latissimus dorsi, the internal and external oblique. Your hands are fists.

You are punching him.

Stop. Stop! He rolls on his side. The sheet keeps him covered.

Blood rushes to your face and you remember where you are. His confusion is handsome in the dim light.

Sorry. Try to remember the line about appropriate communication. *I – I'll let you get dressed.* Shut the door behind you. Feel the mucous in the back of your throat. It's as close as you ever come to tears now.

Joan peers into your eyes in the dim light of the hallway.

What is it?

You choke back the sting of salt water.

What did he say?

No, you tell her, nothing.

Samuel? The name is salt in a wound.

The client tips you all the same but doesn't reschedule. Joan makes tea and sits you on the waiting room couch. She doesn't speak, but she keeps one hand on your shoulder. The solidity is a

substrate; your shoulder clings to her hand.

Tell me.

Slugs. In my house, every morning.

We can kill those.

You sip the tea, something earthy and dark. I feel bad.

You didn't ask for them.

You want to tell her you did ask for them, but now this seems foolish. The realization startles you more than it should.

At home you find a little dish and pour beer into it. The cat leaps on the counter to sniff, seems disgusted and sits to watch you. Open the door and place it by the gap in the threshold. Take a break and try to cry.



REALIZATION: ALLEGORY ABOUT YOU AND ME

FABIÁN GONZÁLEZ GONZÁLEZ

Your hair spells out a name and it is not my name.	In a mist, I think, you'd love me.	Come watch the rain with me, purple-pink disaster.	Earthly brown eyes come touch this bruised, rugged discourse.
I am not the white moon. I mirror the dark side.	The rain hangs from the wind in hopeless tragedy.	Earthly brown eyes come sing a child's song in my ear.	Amazing when I first realized every single word mattered.
You and I have become imperative voices.		If the moon were out, you'd also feel romantic.	
Amazing: every single word matters.	Birds fly above the clouds as you've flown above me.	Would you love me in a purple-pink sudden mist?	Let us speak of pacing, the end of this soft line.

WE DON'T NEED NO ED.

ELIZABETH KING



PAPER PILLOWCASE

BROOKE LARSON

TWO presences, YOU and OTHER WOMAN. One CHAIR. All naked.

~

OTHER WOMAN sits in CHAIR. OTHER WOMAN has dark dark bright bright so long RED HAIR. We're talking long long. So long, its strands have been woven into a DREAM-catcher. Yes, the dark bright so long strands form the web of a gigantic DREAM-catcher balanced atop head of OTHER WOMAN. HOLY shit. YOU stares wide-eyed. The scalp of OTHER WOMAN is pulled tight tight with hairy DREAM-catching. YOU longs to say, a DREAM, like HAIR, carries dead weight somewhat cosmically. NO ONE has spoken.

~

YOU cuts OTHER WOMAN's HAIR. OTHER WOMAN's dark dark bright bright so long RED HAIR. YOU cuts it with gigantic SILVER shears. One strand at a time. Each woven strand, once cut, is unwoven slowly, randomly, gracefully, limply, differently and indifferently, by GRAVITY. All this, all somewhere between amputating and unbinding, is cut from the gigantic DREAM-catcher, balanced atop head of OTHER WOMAN.

As YOU cuts away the RED HAIR-woven DREAM-catcher with gigantic SILVER shears, YOU weeps. YOU weeps deep. YOU radiates big fat salty spheres. OTHER WOMAN sits still in CHAIR. OTHER WOMAN wears no expression.

WHOSE HAIR is a DREAM-catcher's anyway?

~

YOU wipes EYES. YOU gathers cut RED HAIR and glues it to legs of OTHER WOMAN. OTHER WOMAN, NOW very hairy-legged, vacates CHAIR and lies down on back. EYES open. Yes, OTHER WOMAN EYES are open and staring up up.

~

OTHER WOMAN waxes her NOW very hairy legs. YOU is NOW lying on back beside OTHER WOMAN. With each ripped strip, it's YOU who shouts in pain. YOU yells, YOU writhes, YOU makes cussy sounds but no cuss words.

~

OTHER WOMAN's legs are NOW hairless. A moat of WHITE strips weeded with dark dark bright bright so long RED HAIR surrounds OTHER WOMAN. YOU strips the strips of their ripped HAIR. YOU bunches RED HAIR in OTHER WOMAN's armpits. YOU lies down again next to NOW very hairy-arpitted OTHER WOMAN.

NOW OTHER WOMAN fiercely tickles her NOW hairy armpits. Only YOU laughs uncontrollably. Spastically. Excruciatingly. With each tickle of OTHER WOMAN's hairy armpits, YOU bunches up in howling heaving hee-hee knots.

~

OTHER WOMAN gets up. OTHER WOMAN tucks tickled armpit HAIR BETWEEN her legs. Yes, OTHER WOMAN puts on snatch HAIR, a wild mangled magpie nest of it. RED HAIR there, OTHER WOMAN faces YOU. YOU meets OTHER WOMAN's stance, and THE TWO hug EACH OTHER, holding HAIR BETWEEN them. Long long hold.

~

When THE TWO come apart, there is no HAIR but a MACAW. A MACAW flies out from parted snatches. The MACAW hits the theatre RAFTERS. The MACAW bursts into RED, YELLOW, GREEN feathers, spraying OTHER WOMAN and YOU. Holy SHIT.

~

YOU and OTHER WOMAN are not naïve. THE TWO suspected something LIKE this might happen. YOU and OTHER WOMAN, BETWEEN scenes, have stitched TOGETHER these TWO PAGES, using a bone needle and a stray strand of dark dark bright bright so long RED HAIR, into a PAPER PILLOWCASE.

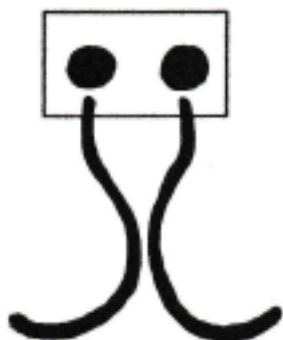
~

YOU and OTHER WOMAN slowly, very slowly, gather the scattered RED, YELLOW, GREEN feathers. THE TWO stuff them inside PAPER PILLOWCASE. THE TWO lie down. One PAPER PILLOW—RED, YELLOW, GREEN feather-stuffed—BETWEEN THE TWO. More HAIR somewhere. But HERE and NOW, YOU and OTHER WOMAN share a single stuffed PAPER PILLOW. Each body curled up on its side. Curved bums almost touching. For in lying down TOGETHER, THE TWO FACE away from EACH OTHER.

Cue or cut hairy RED, YELLOW, GREEN DREAMS.

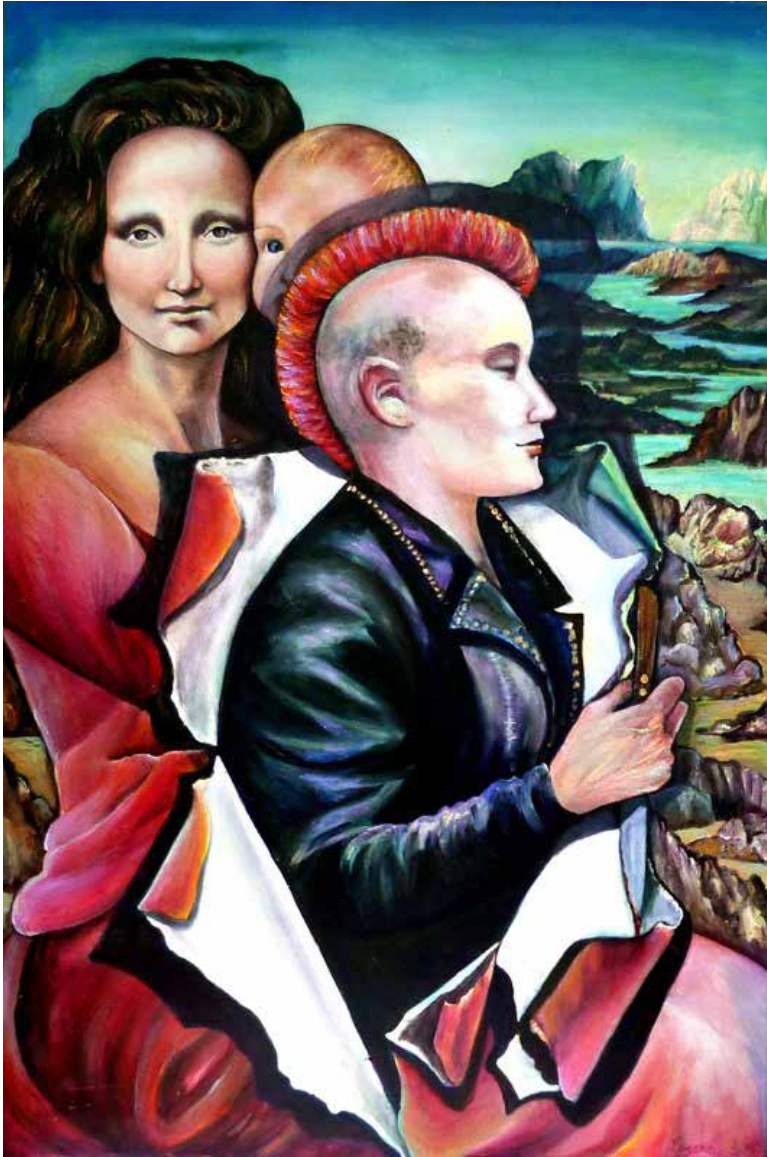
~

THE AUDIENCE observes from the theatre RAFTERS. THEY ALL are very high up. The priciest seats enjoyed a brush with MACAW as it exploded. Looking down NOW, THE AUDIENCE sees a WHITE rectangle, and grown from it, LIKE a taproot or a tumor, a naked UPSIDE-DOWN QUESTION MARK and its MIRROR IMAGE. No sign of a CHAIR.



WE DON'T NEED NO ED. I

ELIZABETH KING



I DON'T WRITE MANY NICE POEMS ABOUT HIM

COURTNEY LEBLANC

I remember mornings we drove
to the beach, windows rolled down,
my long hair a cape flying
wild. We always stopped
at the bodega near the house, always
ordered the same thing – four coffees
with milk and sugar (they were small)
and a loaf of French bread. We sipped
coffee while driving, tore off chunks
of the warm bread. By the time we reached
the beach, half the bread was gone, one cup
of coffee held in our hands. We kicked
off our shoes, dug our toes into the still cool
sand and ate the rest of our breakfast
as the sun rose. The rest of the day spent
in the warm sun; salt water curling my hair
and leaving a thin crust on my skin. I wrap my hands
around my warm mug, my kitchen hundreds
of miles from the island we called home. I can almost
feel the breeze on my skin. I don't think
of the rest – how jealousy tore at us, how his control
broke me little by little. I just drink my coffee and vow
to go to the bakery down the street and buy a loaf
of still warm bread.

CHARISMATIC MEGAFUNA

DANIEL UNCAPHER

When I tell Carolyn that I think hitting me is spousal abuse, she rolls her eyes and says: “I can count on one hand the number of times I’ve hit you, you just cry whenever I do.” It makes sense when she says it.

I like to try to classify clouds and she likes to try and recognize animals in them, but I’m the one with the active imagination and she’s the one who knows how to scientifically classify clouds. It’s a permanently ill-adjusted arrangement, but the sky is beautiful to both of us anyway.

The sky is so beautiful sometimes that I think it must be on fire, that a bomb must quite literally have gone off over downtown LA. Sometimes a jet appears overhead when we’re at the beach, which is the worst beach in California, and it gets so loud that no one, not even the dogs, can believe it, and everyone quiets down and turns to look and we all, each one of us, thinks in our uncertainty: and is this it, then? Is there about to be a flash, a wave of heat, and then nothing?

It’s a deep thought and I’m proud of it. I have to say I’ve been thinking incredibly hard lately. I’ve been thinking about many things, like homelessness, or vegan zoos. I am not a vegan. I ate a pulled pork sandwich the other day. I have about 8 good reasons on the table not to eat pork: pigs are as smart as dogs and stupid people, pork isn’t very healthful, the carbon footprint is huge, and I don’t even like pork that much anyway. Times 2, because Carolyn’s vegan, so that makes 8. The environmental cost alone is too steep to keep eating meat even if animal rights or personal health doesn’t get to you, like it gets to me. I mean I don’t even like meat—I just like cheeseburgers, fried chicken, and the occasional pulled pork sandwich. Maybe I think pigs are people, sure. But what does that mean for other animals?

I discovered three new animals the other day; it was the busiest

animal day in recent memory. I discovered the Damascus goat, whose babies look like angels and whose adult males look like demons. I discovered a snake with a tail that mimics the shape and movement of a giant spider, which displeases me greatly. I discovered that there are 10-foot-long bioluminescent tubes of hermaphroditic clones that live deep underwater called giant pyrosomes and have been migrating north in search of colder temperatures; should they all die from the heat their corpses will eat up so much oxygen they'd turn the Pacific into a giant deadzone, which would be catastrophic.

In the ocean they look pretty impressive, but if you take one out of the water they look just like thick, ribbed condoms, which frankly kind of turns me on. Carolyn hates condoms. As a germophobe, I can't say I mind them at all.



HOW TO GET RID OF AN ELDERLY DOG AND OTHER BAD ADVICE

AIMEE LABRIE

First, don't get a dog or attach yourself to any sentient creature whose life you have to manage. If your dog is old and sick, his eyes filming over, take him to a nearby forest. His ears will perk up, like they used to do, alert to the chattering squirrels in the treetops. Wear rain boots as you walk him deeper into the woods. Find a gentle stream and set down his favorite toy, a blue monster that quacks like a duck. Say, Good boy! Then turn and run as fast as you can. Because of his eye problems and his crooked hips, it will be hard for him to follow, though his nose is ten times better than yours, so be sure to spritz yourself with Dog Off to confuse him. Jump in your car. Do not look back. If you do, you might be tempted to pull over. Remember, you are not equipped to see this through to the end.

Avoid that person you love or could love. Instead, read about love in books, where the endings make sense. It can happen that you love someone and that person doesn't love you back. Doesn't that suck? Or you could love a man or a woman, and this man or woman could love you back, but not for your entire life. He teaches yoga and is surrounded by nimble young women who can hold downward dog and plank for way longer than you. Remember when you tried plank that last time, your arms trembled, and you folded over on the mat in under seven seconds? Yes, the yoga teacher may love you now, but he will certainly fall for that woman in the back of class with the long braid. Her name is Mogwina and she reads Thich Nhat Hanh and understands tantric sex. She's able to have multiple orgasms just from penetration. And you? Well.

If your elderly mother asks you to move in because she's afraid of falling down the basement stairs, get online immediately to find a caretaker at careformoms.com. Look, there's Marta who loves crossword puzzles and making toast. Or Lucinda, who will listen to your mom's long (and inaccurate) stories about life with your stepdad, who is ten years dead and good riddance. For an extra \$24.99, you can even do a background check. Or not, they look reputable. Marta wears a summery dress she made herself and Lucinda holds what might be a stuffed animal or possibly a real, live kitten. You don't even have to talk to them on the phone. Email them her address and pin a note to your mom's shirt that reads, *Please help me log in to Netflix*. Your mother—she's better off in someone else's hands.

If you make a mistake and have children, one of them will inevitably come to you sobbing because she heard from Carrie Potonik that Santa is made up, and the parents do all of it, even eating the cookies. Carrie Potonik has evidence. Her dad has a crooked front tooth, and what a coincidence, so does Santa. Your daughter is nine years old, really too old to believe in Santa. You remember being that age, and how this pretend world was slipping away—a world where unicorns might possibly be real, and fairies existed somewhere far away like Ireland. You thought your dolls had feelings too, and so rotated your attention accordingly to avoid hurt feelings. You remember all of that believing and if you could, you would stop your daughter from discovering that none of it is real. Including the tooth fairy. Including the Easter Bunny. Including God. If you could give your daughter permanent brain damage to keep her innocent, you would do it. But you can't, not without getting arrested.

Here is the real problem: you will lose everything.

Here is the real advice:

When you get home tonight, if you are stupid enough to own a dog, take his head in your hands. Look him in his milky eyes, the ones that follow you everywhere, interested in whatever you're doing. Putting on your shoes? Wherever you're going, he'd like to go too.

Hold his head in your hands. Say to him, You were a good dog. Say this to him every day to remind him and yourself. You were a good dog. You were a good dog. You were a good dog.



THE FALLEN WANDERER

SHARON NICOLE COLE



ALL FALL DOWN

JAMES PENHA

Linda closed her old HP laptop and bore with her right hand a treacherous tunnel through the mountain of unopened QVC boxes on the kitchen table in order to see her husband better. Dennis sat where she had situated him after the memorial service.

Her plan had been to scatter his ashes in the Kensico Reservoir where Dennis used to take his Sun Dolphin row boat to fish, but Linda's son-in-law David, a state trooper, told her it was illegal to dump anything in a reservoir.

Linda did not react well to the warning. "It's not trash, you know; it's your fucking father-in-law!"

Jennifer intervened to calm relations between her mother and her husband. "Mom, David doesn't want you to get into any trouble."

"Dump!" Linda repeated. "Dump! Like garbage?"

"C'mon, Linda," David said, "I didn't mean anything. You know how much I liked David. I mean ... I used to go fishing with him in Kensico. Let Jenn and me help you—" David took a breath. "—scatter Dennis's ashes somewhere appropriate. But I can't abet anything illegal."

"Abet? Wow! Suddenly a thesaurus word ... like scatter! No, of course not, no abetting." Linda turned to her daughter. "So what would you suggest?"

Jennifer thought. Ever since the first of his two cancers—lung then throat—six years earlier, her father, forced to retire from the pharmacy, had lost interest not only in fishing but in almost everything else except his den's big-screen TV before which he would smoke cigarettes in his recliner until he and the rat terrier curled in his lap both fell asleep. "How about Belmont?" Jennifer excitedly said.

"Perfect!" David said. "He loved playing the ponies."

"And you and he used to go to the big race every June, right Mom?" Jennifer added.

“Well, yeah.”

“We can do this,” David said. “I’ll work it out with the Nassau County boys, and we can d—scatter Dennis in the paddock near the statue of Secretariat.”

“What do you say, Mom?”

“Yeah, it’s a nice idea. He’d like it. He loved Big Red.”

But whenever Jennifer called to ask if they should pick her up for the drive down to Belmont, Linda put them off. “No,” she said every time, “I’m not ready.” Once, when David phoned, she added with a well-rehearsed smirk in her voice, “No need for you to go abetting at the track today.”

Most recently, Jennifer told David, her mother had said that she didn’t think she could live without Dennis. “That scared me. I thought she was threatening to kill herself. But then she said she thought she’d get an urn.”

“Yeah, right,” David said. “I’m sure they have an Urn Day on QVC.”

But for now, in the square box the crematorium had delivered into Linda’s hands, Dennis’s ashes remained on his chair at the kitchen table. The box prevented Jasper, the rat terrier, from climbing onto the table via the chair. And it—Dennis—kept Linda company.

“How could you do this to me, Dennis?” she whispered every morning as she poured, out of habit, two cups of coffee. “Leave me alone like this?”

The death certificate reported the cause of death as pneumonia. But the more Linda sorted out Dennis’s affairs—a life insurance policy about which she had known nothing; limit-verging credit-card statements stapled to a letter from Dennis’s financial adviser (her husband had a financial adviser?) assuring him that should he die, New York law required his bills to be forgiven; envelopes containing documents or mementoes carefully addressed to certain friends and relatives—the more she understood that Dennis had planned for his death . . . or, more accurately, he had planned to die.

His endless smoking and his refusal to eat anything except the Ensure Linda forced on him had prompted Jennifer not infrequently to tell her mother that Dennis was committing suicide, but very, very slowly. Linda hadn't wanted to hear it. But now she came to believe it.

At the memorial service, Jennifer said to her mother, "I was right, you know. Dad did a Willie Loman, but much more cleverly."

"Smart-ass!" Linda said to the box on the opposite chair. "I don't want to be alone!"

There was no response, of course. But Dennis had always been taciturn anyway—more so since the radiation on his throat gave him a voice as rough as sandpaper. It was Linda who always kept conversations going, usually in reaction to the Facebook comments scrolling on her laptop or, face-to-screen, with Fox News or, of course, the QVC presenters babbling from the little flat TV hanging above the kitchen table. Fully engaged in her monologues, she often failed to notice, until Jasper leaped on the table wagging parcels to the floor, that Dennis had left the kitchen for the den and his recliner.

Jasper missed Dennis. And he missed Abby, the toy poodle who had died of old age just two weeks before Dennis's passing. Her ashes were in a box on the dining room table. Abby's death had hit Dennis hard; he loved his dogs, and they loved him.

Linda got up and made her way to the dining room. The big package on the table contained the MacBook Pro she had ordered from QVC but never opened. It was too late now to return it. Atop the parcel was the gaily-decorated box labeled "Abby" from the veterinary crematorium. Linda undid the cardboard tab from its slot. Inside, Linda smiled to see a shapely Chinese-red ceramic receptacle with a screw-on top. She wondered if Dennis too was already in an urn. She hadn't thought to ask. David had taken care of all those arrangements. Carefully lifting Abby's vase and nestling it against her chest, she returned to the kitchen table on which she made room for the little urn and set it down.

The corrugated cardboard box containing Dennis was carefully and neatly sealed with fabric tape. His name was inscribed in a

handsome label on the top. Linda grabbed a steak knife from a drawer and carefully cut around the upper edge of the box until she could flip open its top. Inside was another box. She removed it from its container, put it on her chair, and applied the same procedure with the knife. An odd metallic smell emanated from the box, but Linda saw at first only several layers of cotton balls. After transferring them to the now-empty outer box, Linda saw clearly that Dennis inhabited no urn, but only a thick zip-lock plastic bag like those used for the dehydrated dog food Jasper loved. She unzipped the bag. Dennis didn't look as appetizing as the dog food, Linda thought. His remains were as rough as his voice had been and as gray as his complexion during those final days in the hospital.

She undid Abby's urn. The dog looked no different from her master, so similar that Linda decided to pour the canine ashes into the plastic bag containing the rest of her husband. Although Linda hadn't made bread in years, she dug into the bag of ashes up to her forearms and kneaded the mixture until Abby and Dennis were inseparable.

"Inseparable," she said aloud. "Inseparable."

Linda lifted her arms toward the top of the bag and, as carefully as she could, wiped them free of the ashes so that they sprinkled back atop the pile in the plastic. She lifted the bag from its box and lugged it to the bathroom off the master bedroom where, after plugging its drain with a rubber stopper, she emptied all the ashes into the bathtub and set aside the plastic bag. She knelt at the side of the tub and stretched her hands to draw swirls and curlicues in the grit, moving eventually to impress the small hills of Dennis-Abby with her handprints.

"Inseparable," she said aloud. "Inseparable."

Linda stood and removed her clothes. Naked, she entered the tub. Her feet remembered the rough sand of Zach's Bay Beach on Long Island where Dennis and she used to picnic when Jennifer was a tot. She sat, stretched out her legs, and lay her head back. Linda was comforted. She scooped handfuls of ash and rubbed them on her breasts and between her legs. She hadn't felt anything there in

months. “In years,” she laughed out loud. She remained that way for hours, relaxed enough to catnap until Jasper appeared outside the tub and barked for attention. The dog was hungry. Linda rose. None too careful now about ashes dropping to the tiled floor, Linda opened the medicine chest and found the opiates prescribed for Dennis just in case. She shook four into her hand and offered them to Jasper. The dog swallowed them before bothering to taste or think about them. Linda poured the remaining capsules into her own mouth and returned to the tub where she opened the tap and bent to drink to swallow the medicine. After playing with the handles to moderate the temperature and the flow of the water, Linda again lay down in the tub, rolling over and over and over in the mud until, dizzied, she fell asleep.



LATE SPRING SNOW

JESSICA YUAN

After the blizzard there was no one
at the zoo except small muddy dots
hollowed out by a warm body

tucked away. And pairs of eyes,
averted, in the thick and far
of someone else's winter.

Two feet of powder had fallen
in almost april, wet with its aftertaste
by afternoon, when the university

confines me to the psych ward against my will
and I sit in the emergency room my arms red
with the half moons of fingernails

below the fluorescent glare
of an overworked night shift. The giraffes
were in their emergency room,

hiding in the rafters of it. The gibbon
was in his emergency room, the bison
in theirs. They kept me so alive

I stayed bug-eyed open each night.
The snakes were intubated with
heat lamps. The ibex stared straight ahead

in their white counterfeit savannah
breathing gray clouds above
the scrim-screen placard

declaring their endangerment.
I was amazed. I was not let outdoors
those seven days, though the world melted

brown and damp in that time. I took
inventory of what drained from me,
a sturdy roof at the back of the stage

to hide and cry to sleep in the hay.
There were two camels in one shed
and they took turns. There were elephants

pacing in their winter pavilion,
burnt yellow by the low voltage hum
of their wrinkled swinging.

I thought if I spoke sensibly I could
go home. I would give myself
headaches by the hospital window,

piecing together the ice-crusted meadow
from pixel of cross hatched
suicide screen. I never left

the second floor, hovering above
whichever habitat I moved into.
An animal cannot go extinct,

only the species. If necessary
a body is enough to live on like that.
A body is the smallest emergency room.

YOUR FRIEND

TOBEY WARD

On Facebook, you find out your friend has cancer. She's only thirty, one year younger than you are. You don't comment or message, text or call. You close the computer. You might not have noticed her post yet. You might be too busy. She lives far away, and you haven't seen each other in a long time.

You go out to dinner with your boyfriend. You almost tell him—once you were close to someone, and now she's sick—but there's nothing else to say. You go home and have sex and fall asleep.

The next day, she's made a website. It has a cutesy alliterative name. But she can call her cancer site whatever she likes. On the About Me page, she describes her prognosis. It sounds good, you think. Or not too bad. Or, it doesn't sound like she will die. Or, it sounds like she believes she won't die.

There's a smiling, healthy-looking photo, but maybe it's months old. The first post praises her husband: her best friend, her support system, her strongest ally. She was always smug about him, like she'd gotten the last good man. You close the computer. You might not be much of a Facebook user. You might be on vacation.

You text your boyfriend to come over. When he forgets the wine, you pick a fight. He doesn't understand your needs, never prioritizes you. He's inconsistent, irresponsible, flaky. You fall asleep thinking hurtful thoughts at his back.

A few weeks into the cancer site, your friend shaves off her hair. In the photo, her bald face is huge, like a baby's. You remember her hair in middle school: the messy bun on top of her head, bangs that hid her eyes. How badly you wanted to be her then.

You cancel dinner with your boyfriend and compose a long journal entry about love and hope. You make promises, commitments, deals with God, the universe, or whomever. You plan to read it to her someday, when she's better, when you're

friends again.

On the cancer site, her tumor isn't shrinking. She needs a double mastectomy. But she posts a sexy photo on Instagram with full makeup and lots of cleavage. #Cancerselfie she tags it.

You give yourself a breast exam in your boyfriend's claustrophobic shower. You've never noticed their texture before: ridges and pockets beneath the skin. When you get out, you ask your boyfriend to feel them. Is this normal? And this? He touches you seriously but smiling, and you wonder if he is a man who can withstand illness, worry, bad luck. Yes, he says, totally normal. You love me, you say, right?

On the Internet, she's raising money for breast implants and nipple tattoos. You give fifty dollars anonymously. Then you give a hundred more. She raises fifty thousand dollars in twenty-four hours.

You can't help it, you think about her breasts. Once you stood side by side in front of a mirror and examined each other. Yours were nearly flat but came to little points. Hers were wide-set and round with large pale nipples.

On your year anniversary, your boyfriend remembers the wine and brings a box of chocolates too, your favorites. You wonder what you would do if he were the sick one. Would you love him enough for hospital beds and visiting hours? Would you love him if he became shrunken and bony, if he lost his beard? If death climbed from your computer with its cold digital paws?

In the morning, you check the site, and she's in remission. You're relieved, deeply relieved, of course. You begin the message you've put off all this time: *I was very sorry to hear... I can't believe it's taken me this long... My thoughts and prayers...* But instead of pressing send, you scroll through pictures of your friend and her husband, starting with their wedding and working forward, through all the many years when she was barely on the periphery of your life. In the most recent photo, they're at a cancer benefit gala. Her hair has grown out, and the pixie cut suits her. Her new breasts look amazing in a fitted pink dress. He turns toward her,

his arms gathering her in, but she looks directly at the camera, lips open, laughing. Or maybe she's saying: I found it, the one thing you always wanted.



TWENTY WEEKS

LAURA GADDIS

“I can try to break your water and see if we can progress things.” Matter-of-fact words resonated from Dr. Gordon. The mop of curls on the top of her head bounced as she straightened her neck. Her eyes peered from beneath a rogue, twisted lock. Bed sheets sagged out of the way, save for one strategically placed. It provided what little privacy I was allowed—a privacy that mostly shielded me from myself.

My determined body clung to a pregnancy not meant to last. I had been lying back in the hospital bed and could not see what Dr. Gordon had been reaching for when she spoke. Nurse Ashley’s eyes creased at each outer corner in confirmation of the nurturing smile behind her mask. Averting my gaze from Ashley, my eyes wandered, finally focusing on the flurry of actions around me. Metal on metal echoed. The sound gave rise to maniacal ideas of what Dr. Gordon was about to do. My view was obscured as the doctor’s eyes once again descended into the trenches. Her forest of curls shook with each push, prod, and poke. My head laid back on the sliding pillow as my body pressed into the mattress. I allowed the movement to take over, hoping the awkward ordeal would soon end.

Minutes elapsed.

The silence in the room was cut only by the soft grunts Dr. Gordon muttered as she diligently worked. Abruptly, she stopped.

This was the very juncture where we had been just two hours ago. The amniotic sac had become dislocated and immovable a day after the start of my labor. It was at that time, as my body finally attempted to dislodge what was no longer viable, that my comfort had plummeted. I had imagined this was how someone felt when caught in an earthquake. The ground shaking beneath her, making it impossible to keep her balance. I imagined when

the pieces of her home—pictures on the wall, bookshelves, dishes from the kitchen cabinets—began falling and burying her alive, blocking every possible exit, that she, too, would feel suffocated. I imagined that just as the earthquake survivor would fight despite the torrential hopelessness, that she would also realize that there was nowhere to run. That the only exit would lead to more devastation.

Now, back in the delivery room, I prayed this time would be it. That it—this pregnancy, this devastation, the terms ‘abnormalities’ and ‘nonviable’—would end. The continued effort of being the patient was exhausting. My helplessness drifted across the bed as I laid there, useless. The hours between the first attempt at jump-starting labor and now brought me little rest and even less comfort. My cheeks blushed, as red as candied apples. Fatigue saturated my body. Each muscle that was once taut now fought to stay strong. Constant trembles that had recurrently shook my legs throughout my hospital stay felt more and more volatile. The sharp twinges persisted across my lower back. I was, after all, on day three of bed rest on a stiff mattress. Labor pains only intensified the strain already parked in my muscles. Writhing around as much as I had dared, the persistent agony had taken little notice of my modest attempt at relief.

Unlike a small child taking a candy bribe or a dog heeding a command to sit for a bone, an amniotic sac that had yet to be fully stretched was not one to be easily persuaded. It held firm, doing the job it was made to do. It protected my child from outside harm. From the germs, bacteria, and sharp objects that could penetrate its shield and prove fatal to the baby. Apparently the one within my gut had not gotten the memo that roles have changed. I would no longer be able to mother my child, Dr. Gordon would no longer be placing a crying newborn into a joyful mother’s arms, and the rubbery sac no longer served to protect.

I was embarrassed for both the view Dr. Gordon had and the stubbornness my body displayed. I wondered just how flushed my face had become. I hoped no one had noticed.

The unforeseen snapping of Dr. Gordon’s gloves was followed

by a disturbingly heavy sigh. Her head shook. The back-and-forth motions were slow as they stewed in her disappointment. Was she embarrassed at her own ineptitude? After all, here was a doctor—who by profession was supposed to save lives—but could not even coax an already dying one to let go.

Or was she disappointed that my case pressed on? My situation did not afford her the option of a quick condolence. It did not allow her to move on to the mother next door whose ultrasound I could hear whooshing through the paper-thin wall. I pressed my lips together. It stifled the tears that threatened to reappear. The muscles in my cheeks squeezed out a grimace.

Oxygen that had been sucked into my lungs now begged to be released. The molecules had transformed. Carbon dioxide pushed against all sides looking for an escape. I had forgotten to breathe. The break in action gave me a moment to let go the air that had over-saturated my body. Dr. Gordon barely took a moment to rest. She dove back in. She likely wanted, or needed, this to be over just as I did. The moment when my desire for her to give up outweighed my desire to progress this labor, a sinister “pop” exploded into the air. Dr. Gordon’s scrubs were instantly wet.

I gasped.

Dr. Gordon won her altercation with the stubborn balloon protecting our baby. What felt like a dam breaking was likely more of a water balloon finding its fate at the thorned tip of a rose bush. Amniotic fluid dripped down to my knees, falling off my skin and onto the bed sheet before reaching my shins. With this task finally completed, my earthquake felt like it was nearing an end. Naive to the birthing process—to a pregnancy that quits prematurely—I had yet to experience the aftershocks. Finally reaching the point where my daughter could proceed to her fate, every person in the room still had a job to do.

“Laura?” Ashley stepped through the throng of unrecognizable faces. As she approached my bedside, a worried look inscribed across the exposed top half of her face.

“Do you need anything for pain yet? We can give you something stronger through the IV.”

Two days after I had been admitted, Ashley was finally authorized to offer pain medicine more robust than the typical over-the-counter insult. The pills the nurses had dispensed to me every four hours were the same white tablets that sat in our bathroom cabinet at home. Nothing about being at a hospital made them special. They could not calm my throbbing veins. In the face of pain, they acted like placebos. Inert as sugar. Impotent. The powdered particles clinging to each other certainly did not erase the deeper ache that seeped through my breaking heart. It had been the only analgesic that was medically permitted since the moment our daughter was a ball of cells. My history of migraines had paled in importance to this new responsibility. My comfort had only been necessary to the extent that I did no harm. For the past four months, I had needed to guard the tiny life inside me.

The headache that had hugged my forehead since the day we arrived at the hospital lived on. Selfishly, it diverted all attention away from the lower half of my body. Somehow the labor pains almost didn't exist. The moments that stitched together my inpatient stay created a bandana tied so tight the knot dug into my skull. I was certain my head would explode. I wanted it to.

“I'm okay.” I rubbed my temple, careful to only move the arm not bound by sharp objects.

“Let us know your pain level as we go,” Ashley said. Her hand lightly grazed my arm, deliberately avoiding the IV needle. The teal rubber glove robbed me of the much-needed comfort the warmth of her hand would have otherwise provided. My breathing became confused. Staccato inhaled met raggedy exhaled. The trembling in my thighs was ill-disguised under the tousled sheets. Despite tensing my twitching muscles in opposition, the uncontrollable movement revealed in the fight.

The nurses arrived in droves, flanking the bed, the machines, the tool-holding carts on wheels. My husband Jason stood his ground, claiming a small tile square on the floor next to me. He

watched intently as each person took her place in the turbulence. Glancing down he grabbed hold of my right hand. While his eyes appeared calm, a silent pleading demanded to know how he could fix this. My worried eyes returned little consolation to his plight.

“I need the instrument cart over here!” said Dr. Gordon.

“Get towels!” yelled a nurse.

The chorus of snapping gloves filtered through the chatter. Shouts bounced about the room. All I could make out was the pulsing of Sophia’s heartbeat. Drowning within the chaos, I relented to my weary eyelids. Voices faded from my awareness into a mesh of murmurs.

“This is Anne,” Ashley said.

I looked up. I willed my eyelids to open. To focus on her. To find my sanity.

From within the nursing mob, a hand reached out resting on Ashley’s shoulder. Ashley pulled the new nurse to her side. With a wide grin, Ashley’s demeanor indicated she had found our savior. Anne stood at the foot of my bed wearing scrubs like the rest. Her hand paused half-way out of her pocket, revealing a shiny rectangle.

“She will take pictures of your baby if you would like,” Ashley continued.

My mouth did not know if it should smile or frown, and the fight between the two nulled any movement. It was as if her words had injected my face with Botox.

“She does a phenomenal job. They will turn out wonderful,” said Ashley.

I fixated on the young nurse’s long blonde ponytail as it swayed gently with each of her words. Perfectly brushed into a mass of golden locks, it was free from the pain, misery, and fear that impregnated my airspace.

Pictures? I thought. The word hung. *What pictures?*

Stress was of no shortage in this prison. The anxiety of not being able to predict the future, not even one minute ahead, drove my insides into a meltdown. Pain thrived. The idea of being photographed only accelerated the beating drum inside my

forehead. My headache lived in its glory.

Pictures. Unable to dislodge the word my mind raced around it. Crazy eights, zigzags, racetrack-like rings—nothing was able to penetrate the notion. Nothing made me realize what it meant. Behind Anne, nurses continued to gather instruments. Far more metal than I realized would be needed, the aligned handles of each tool stood soldier-like waiting to be called off to war.

And here were two nurses, wanting to know if they could take pictures.

For three days, I had not left my hospital bed for longer than it took to pee. Seeing myself in a mirror had been low priority. My hair was certainly matted, sticking up on end, or quite likely both. I had not had a proper shower since we left home. Bed rest had allowed my bodily aroma to sour. Like a week-old loaf of bread, I was growing stale.

Being a novice to childbirth and maternity wings, I had forgotten that newborn pictures were en vogue.

What would our baby look like? With all her abnormalities—her oddly bent limbs, disfigured facial features, small body size—she would be the most curious subject of a photo shoot. The object of pictures that would likely be hidden from all but Jason and me. Put away in a box, or drawer under a pile of underwear, would I hide them from the judgment of the world? Or from my own? But, what does it matter what she'll look like? She's our child. Our daughter.

The corners of my mouth turned up a bit. With photos, even when our daughter no longer existed in our arms, we could prove she had been there. It meant that with time, maybe I did not have to forget. The documentation of how delicate our baby would be, how weary we looked, and how we briefly would serve as a family trio prompted an uneasy gratitude.

The normality of Anne's request coerced my tired eyes to create more tears. Like the dried-out rinds of a lime already juiced, I had thought there was nothing left to squeeze.

"We would like that very much." Jason's quiet response sent

Anne off to get set up. Turning excitedly on her heels, she smiled as she weaved around the crowded room.

A glimmer seeped from Jason's eyes. I could tell when something held him deep in thought. His face hung downward. His eyes darted around the floor as if he were searching for a dropped contact lens. Now as he stood beside me, shuffling back and forth from one achy foot to another, I believed his words to Ashley were more than just empty placeholders.

My nodding head obliged our wistful smiles.

Shocked by this inclusion into a common place reserved for other parents, reservations I had voiced to Jason yesterday, seemed superfluous. The thought of seeing our physically abnormal and extremely premature child had terrified me since the labor began. Now on the brink of ushering her into the world, being afraid of my own child seemed so unmotherly.

I leaned as far as I could to the right side of the bed. I was too embarrassed to let others hear.

"Jason, I was wrong before," I whispered.

An unexpected serenity filled my heart. Sophia's birth established our time as a family of three. She deserved all the love a mother and father could give her—all the love we could give her.

"When I said I didn't think I could hold her. Or even see her. I do want to hold her. I have to hold her."

He offered a brief smile marked with relief as I finally found my way to join him at the culmination of this nightmare.

"Okay, Babe. Whatever you think you want to do is fine." With a small squeeze of my hand, he leaned closer adding, "You can change your mind at any point."

My hand clutched his.

"I'm sure about this," I said, "I will regret it for the rest of my life if I don't hold her."

Between deep inhalations and wispy exhalations, my eyes squeezed out the contents of the room. Sweaty trails started at my tousled hairline, creating a roadmap crisscrossing my temples. The pounding in my head lavished in my winced expression.

Strain ran deep within my torso, stretching from chest to hips. The painfully twisting tourniquet that had inhabited my lower muscles was now clinging by a thin strip under the pressure from the rapid expansion within my gut. Bone on bone scraped deep within my pelvic region; the cutting pain forced the wind from my lungs with a gust and a whimper.

Gasping, panting, and sobbing, I quietly declared, “Okay...now it hurts.” My pleas for the pain medication were ignored. After three days of a slowly progressing labor, I had now waited too long. Whoosh...whoosh...whoosh. Sophia’s steady heartbeats defied her expected slow demise. She may not be born alive, one doctor had warned on our first night. I had yet to decide if I wanted that to be true.

The scurrying legs of the ant farm surrounding me settled into a semicircle of beady eyes. Dr. Gordon delicately balanced rough and gentle with each tug.

“Just push whenever you are ready!” The doctor’s words launched from the end of the bed. They were my sole navigation. I was a free agent, doing whatever I felt like should be done. When the pressure increased, I pushed. When the pressure decreased, I also pushed. The difference between the two was undetectable.

The machine at my bedside argued otherwise. With each contraction, it reliably recorded a spike on the strip of paper. All I could think about was the way our daughter would be introduced into this world. With enough players in the room to form a football team, I held the ball. I had to make this happen.

The baby felt stuck.

Is that her head? Her shoulder?

I pushed. And breathed. The air was wild as it filled my nostrils. I sucked in. I was drowning. I pushed again.

Dr. Gordon remained quiet.

Jason leaned closer to my face, clutching my hand in an insufficient consolation.

“You’re doing it, Babe. Just keep it up. It’s almost over,” he said.

As he watched for Sophia to make her appearance, the searing pressure pulsing through every muscle wedged at an inopportune

moment. Dr. Gordon's grim face emerged through her disheveled hair. Despite only a few minutes passing since Sophia started her descent, the doctor looked as ruffled as if she had wrestled a bear.

"I'm having some trouble getting hold of her. I think I need a different angle since she's so small." She turned her body 180 degrees on the end of the bed. Her face conveyed the burden she carried.

"Give me one more push, Laura."

I can't!

I don't want to injure Sophia!

She has suffered enough!

The unbearable force coerced a shallow moan to escape my throat. The last of my energy locked its target on Dr. Gordon, starting from my head, through my arms, stomach, legs. The insurmountable pain peaked in a flash, and with an exhilarating rush, it ended. I rested my head. My breathing moderated. As the shackles were released, a smile demanded an appearance.

It was over.



A NEW KIND OF PAIN

DAVID LEGAULT

The fall comes out of nowhere. I am walking down a cobblestone sidewalk only a block from my new home in Prague when my shoe catches on something and I come down hard: the wind knocked out of me, my knees and elbows scraped. I moved here with my wife and children six months prior to teach at an international school—to serve in a community that was lacking, to experience a culture other than my own. Getting on the airplane to move here was the first time I'd left the United States, a secret shame of mine: the insecurity that I am ignorant or somehow insufficient due to my lack of travel, the suspicion that everyone around me is more experienced, that my own view of the world is incomplete. Four months in and I can count to ten, say hello, goodbye, and I'm sorry—the phrase I've used most often since moving here. The fall is so bad that a stranger runs over from a block away, pulls me to my feet, asks me questions I do not understand and cannot hope to answer. I wave with my hands to signify I'm fine, tell him I'm sorry before continuing my walk to the grocery store, the pain nonexistent, though I start to feel my left elbow swelling, stretching against the fabric of my shirt. By the time I get home a half hour later, my elbow is the size and shape of a grapefruit, blackening. My arm, refusing to straighten, will be stuck in a more or less permanent crook that will last for months.

*

In the board game *Operation*, players are tasked with performing a series of surgeries on a patient named (somewhat grimly) “Cavity Sam.” Cavity Sam is a man full of ailments, each more improbable than the next: he lies naked and sprawled across a surgery table, his brown hair parted down the center, his face in a scowl that does not connote pain, but worry and exasperation. Cavity Sam

has a sickness, but it is not a germ or virus: it is a series of ailments, or “funatomies,” that must be removed. Cavity Sam finds health in subtraction, and his funatomies consist of literal representations of body-themed puns, including an “Adam’s Apple” in the shape of an apple, “Butterflies in the Stomach” shaped like a butterfly, “Charley Horse” that looks like a horse lodged into his thigh, and eleven other objects that you, his surgeon, must remove for money. Of course, the most notable feature of Sam’s body is his enormous red nose: an electric buzzing light, wired to show when a player makes a mistake. Cavity Sam cannot speak, but he still communicates: the illustration of his eyes shows us his fear, the buzzing nose tells us his pain.

*

Having never been to the Czech Republic, I attempted to devour facts out of travel guides and tourism websites sites—historical landmarks, restaurants serving authentic cuisines. I can list off facts about the metric tons of eggs crushed into the mortar of famous bridges, or a church constructed out of human bones, or bomb shelters in abandoned metro stations, or the location of Kafka’s Grave, or the car where Arch Duke Ferdinand was assassinated, or concentration camps built as propaganda tools to show the world that Jewish prisoners were treated humanely. I read Kafka to try and find the city’s history, the works of Kundera, Hrabal, and Havel to understand the weight of Communist occupation. I did all of these things, only to realize that reading a place is not the same as understanding a place. I’ve learned far more from getting lost on the wrong tram or trying to admit myself to an emergency room at 11 o’clock at night: arriving at the largest hospital in the country to find the front doors locked. Buzzing a security guard to lead me through empty darkened hallways. Taking off my shirt in a waiting room before I could get the admitting nurse to understand what was wrong. A doctor rifling through a filing cabinet and pulling out a stranger’s X-ray: first pointing to me and then to the three metal nails glowing white against the stranger’s bones.

I don't want to exoticize my experience here, rather, I mean to convey that there's nothing superior about the way we approach the *system* of healthcare—language and procedure can fail all of us. However, pain itself is a unifying trait. I don't need to spend any time here explaining the way it feels to wake up from a surgery without medication, with three metal pins stuck into my bones to bend them into position, to hold them in place. The words themselves bring their own kind of pain—physical harm perhaps our easiest means of empathy. And in this way pain acts as a universal language: something we can understand—and communicate—when all words fail.

*

Operation was modeled after classic electric loop games from county fairs and arcades: the goal of such games to work a metal ring over a coiled ring without ever making contact—the consequence of losing being a small electric shock. Cavity Sam's maladies must be removed with a small pair of tweezers that are connected by wire to a pair of D-cell batteries. If your tweezers touch the edge of his body's cavity—lined with a thin strip of metal—a circuit is completed, a buzzing sound bursts forth from the machine, and Sam's nose lights up in a dazzling red glow. The game asks you to play the role of surgeon: removing organs and ailments from a patient, each extraction worth a dollar amount based on the difficulty of the task. Removing "Water on the Knee" is a fairly simple task compared to the "Bread Basket," which even as an adult feels next to impossible. Each player is given the opportunity to fill the role of the "Specialist," and bonus money is earned for completing these procedures after another player fails.

*

I find significance in the mythos surrounding the game, ever expanding, like the story about the creator of the game, a student, who sold the rights to the game for \$500 and the promise of a

job that never coalesced. I place this fact against the estimated 40 million dollars of current value, against the man's crowd-funding efforts to pay for an actual operation he could not afford. I'm not sure why I'm thinking so much about Cavity Sam now: what is it about childhood games that help me understand the world, why does Sam's pain best help me to understand my own?

*

Perhaps it should be obvious that there is a difference in pain beyond its intensity. Though one person may rate their pain at six and another at four, we often think of pain in other terms: lightning bolts to the head in an aspirin commercial, red blurs in the stomach for indigestion. It brings us to the pain scale, the smiling and crying faces from our pediatricians' offices, or our favorite Eula Biss essays. But electricity is the most accurate—nerves stimulated, neurons firing into our brain—which is why *Operation* at least somewhat accurately represents what it means to hurt, how we feel it too.

*

Pain is empathetic, a way our consciousness connects with the world outside ourselves. Psychologists believe it has to do with our evolution: that to feel another's pain makes us more likely to help each other, as well as avoid the thing that caused the pain in the first place. Which is good for the survival of a species, but less so for our emotional well-being. Other times, pain is an artistic move designed to elicit a reaction: the memoirs we read about tragedy and abuse, about addiction and recovery. It is in this way that we expand our mind: living vicariously through the experiences of others, to suffer or not suffer, to learn from the hardship of those who came before. Even in this language of art, we see how we progress and evolve through our shared stories of pain.

*

For some, it is a tool of persuasion: fear of pain—dental anxiety, putting off a flu shot, torture—often worse than the pain itself. Or think of it in graphic terms, how every horror movie of the last fifty years has tried to evoke emotion out of graphic violence. I can get a reaction by writing about the mole I once had removed from an eyelid: how the doctor stuck a syringe into the socket in the small space between my skull and my eyeball; how he pushed the plunger down and I felt fire spread across my face; how he then placed a contact lens to shield my eyeball as he pushed the hot metal coil against my skin; how the smell in that room sticks with me to this day. Which is to say that you may have cringed at that description, which is to say you have an expectation for how something will feel, even if you have not yet felt it, even if you never will.

*

I say this as I try to write toward the two new kinds of pain I have felt since my fall: both I had not felt before, in which language fails, in which graphic description does not properly capture. The first comes in a physical therapist's office, flat on my back while a woman twists my wrists in alternating directions, and it is so singularly painful—that it exists in an entirely new realm of pain—that I cannot stop laughing. The absurdity of this pain! That it is so beyond the realm of what could be considered reasonable, that it is worse than the surgery to my eyelid, worse than getting three metal nails inserted into bone! A flick of the wrist and nothing more, and it makes so little sense and tears pour out of me and I become somewhat hysterical. There's no lightning here! No electric shocks or flashing red lights, only a confused therapist whose language I do not speak, her worry telling me that she chalks this up, another cultural barrier between us, one that I doubt we will ever properly navigate.

*

The second pain of course is not a pain at all. Rather it is the masking of pain, the foreign sensation when electricity vanishes. It come four months later as a doctor schedules a second surgery in which the pins will now be removed. I arrive to the hospital to discover that they have run out of beds due to emergency patients, that my surgeon will be on holiday for the next several months, that my only hope of getting my pins removed is to change the procedure completely. Rather than the two nights in the hospital we have scheduled, I am told it will take less than an hour. Instead of anesthesia and unconsciousness, I will be awake: my arm numbed to the best of their abilities.

*

There are videos online of *Operation*: a group of surgeons attempting the game for the first time and laughing at their inability to perform tasks designed for children; a surgical robot performing flawlessly; a 1980's commercial where a mom overhears children playing and believes them to be dissecting the family dog; a 1990's commercial in a doctor's office where a man writhes and his nose flashes while children pull pencils and ribs out of his body; a movie parody with dramatic music and lighting over a bloodied man wearing a clown nose; a series of "Game Reviews" and "Let's Play!" videos from middle-aged men that make me embarrassed on their behalf. There are videos comparing the 1960's board to an updated 90's version (Sam now wears underwear) to a 2013 edition (Sam now leaner, with abs and a video game controller funatomy) to licensed versions including *Family Guy*, *Despicable Me*, *Spongebob Squarepants*, *Iron Man*, *Shrek*, *Minecraft*, and countless others. There are even videos of how to build an electrical circuit, to attach LED lighting and speakers, how to design your own.

*

There are videos online of the operation my doctor has just recommended. Because of course there are professional educational videos, as well as cell phone selfie nightmares. They have titles that include words like: NASTY, GRAPHIC, HARD TO WATCH. I tell you now that I should have stopped at the thumbnailed preview images, likely even sooner. Empathetic pain is meant to save us from a pain ourselves. I am discovering that it is not a tool of preparation or experience. The imagined pain I've felt, am watching others feel, has done more harm than could be considered reasonable.

*

I'm writing toward the disconnect between what we feel, what we see, what we can and cannot communicate. Which is to say that a board game gets nowhere near our pain but helps us understand it. Which is to say that the Hasbro Corporation eventually donated the money to pay for the *Operation* inventor's surgery. Which is to say that occasionally the cobblestone sidewalks of my new country are interrupted by small brass plates commemorating those who lived in these buildings before being stuffed into railcars and sent off to genocide, that the reflective shine of the sidewalk breaks my heart as much as the stones break the rest of me. Which is to say my doctor tries to comfort me in French because, for the first time in my life, my last name has a significance here. Which is to say, that when I am brought into a small operating room—after I lie on the table, after I am injected several times with unknown drugs and the numbing effects begin inching through my arm—a curtain is placed over my arm and rigged to a gurney so I cannot watch the procedure. This would be the end of the story if not for the perfect placement of my head upon the table, the perfect alignment with the convex lighting fixture overhead, the reflection that shows me the doctor's hands and an exposed patch of skin: a distorted view of what I was never meant to see.

The second pain of course is not a pain at all; it is the body's response to a pain that isn't there. It is the wet feeling on my arm as I bleed from a wound I do not sense. It is the sight of your own arm sliced open while imagining the pain of it, empathizing yourself. It is the sound of metal being clipped, pliers taken from a small metal platter, it is your heart racing and your body sweating, going into shock: the body hearing a pain that my mind cannot.



MEDICAL ARTEFACTS FROM THE TOWER OF BABEL

ALEX KAZEMI

Medicine is too full of hard sounds. Words that fall heavily to the floor.

Take the word plaque. It ends in a hard-snapped k. A plaque in an artery sits on its wall slowly growing until it finally fissures, violently cracking like an opening of the earth below our feet. *Thrombosis*. Blood quickly coagulates, clots, covers over the rift of exposed tissue, quickly building crimson layer upon crimson layer of thrombus until it ceases the hissing flow. Pulse, pulse, pulse, crack, stop. Infarction.

Surgeons wield a knife, but better a scalpel, allowing them to score and scar. The word itself cuts precisely. A slip would sever. Blood would pour out, the change from the neat circulate to the messy haemorrhage. Circulate tries to become coagulate, perhaps too late—a plug to stop life spilling away down the hole.

In the intensive care unit there is quiet, artificial sleep. Ventilators shush the air in and out of patients through tubes. Sometimes that is all you hear—ssshhh, click, sssshhh, click, a breathing incantation. Patients spike fevers, the hard p and k becoming little mountains on the temperature chart. Eventually febrile becomes defervescence, the temperature curve falls away like waking from a dream.

As doctors, we build walls out of our words too.

We take the patient's history whilst we carefully stack our words like bricks until we can cautiously peer over the top of them at pain and misfortune, pronouncing our diagnoses in other languages

from the safety of the other side. These bricks are made from the clay of older times.

Erythematosis - er-ith-em-a-toe-sis.

Phagocytosis - fag-oh-sight-oh-sis.

Fasciculation - far-sick-you-lay-shun.

To the layperson they sound like spell words. The sounds hide the shorter, blunter literal meanings; quick and final sounds - red rash, eat cells, twitch.

Someone once said we were trying to be too clever so we should forever more speak in words that no one understands.

That is all about consonants. I prefer the words with long vowels. They are softer, more connected, better understood. Small gaps in the wall where one can sneak through a holding hand. Breathe, feel, sleep, dream, heal, cure, flow, peace.

There are many less of those, but I think we should use them more.



DISORDER

SHARON NICOLE COLE

He stands at the edge of the kitchen sink, staring down into an abyss of mashed potato-stained water, bits of corn and pork fat debris bobbing along the surface. He flips the disposal switch up and the metal sink spits and bubbles with strenuous effort. Seizure waste. Heaving and smashing, attempting to shred through mounds of over-indulgence, with little success. He pours a plate of oily brussels sprouts into the water and they thump through it like stones, splashing a piece of corn onto his forehead.

“It’s clogged.” I yell from behind my Cosmo magazine, perched atop a kitchen chair, knees tucked under my sweater, pants absent, “She ain’t got no more room in there.”

He flips the switch down and looks in my direction, “But what are we going to do with all of this waste?” He gestures towards the dirty dishes on the counter, full of chicken bones and egg shells, burnt toast and apple pits.

I sigh and put down my reading material. I stretch and I yawn and I make my way to his side, breathing in the smell of impending rot. His eyes stay fixed on the sink of murky water as he flips the switch up again, the piece of corn slipping from his face. Grabbing the bowl of eggshells first, one by one, I labor through the shells, crunching and swallowing, ridged on the way down, I lick the insides of the bowl and move on. On to the coffee grounds and bits of bread, flaccid celery and brown banana flesh, I keep going. I make it to the chicken bones and the cartilage and I grind, and I gnaw and I swallow. Over and over, slivers get caught in between my gums, in the skin of my throat, I chip my teeth and the taste of my own blood floods my mouth as I chew. I lick it all clean. My belly groans and aches, swollen and sharp. So full.

“But what will we do with all this waste?” He points at the churning sink, the water and the muck still reeling, going nowhere. I sigh and bend myself over the disposal, lips hovering above the

brown water. He holds my body steady from behind with one arm.
He makes sure to pull my hair back for me with the other.



BUTTON

SHARON NICOLE COLE



THE END

HOLLY DAY

the typewriter lies dead in the corner
all the clickety-clacketing finally silent
the house is finally quiet. I can get
up now, now that the beast is dead I
can get up, go to the kitchen, make
myself a pot of coffee.

in the evening, I invite some of
the neighborhood children to bring baseball bats and
oversized circus mallets to my house, cheer them on as they
smash the keys
of the dead typewriter sideways, again and
again, until there is nothing but a gaping hole where “qwerty”
used to mock me from across the room, and again until
the factory seam splits right down the middle, and the whole

thing falls apart
like a watermelon split in
two.

SURPRISE

KATIE QUINNELLY

Sarah says if you apologize too much try saying surprise instead of sorry

I came in late again last night surprise I sat down at the table and spilled a beer on you surprise early in the morning when you were trying to sleep in I dropped a loud pan in the sink surprise I always step on your feet when we're dancing surprise I took up smoking again surprise I asked if I could smoke in the car and you said "too late, isn't it?" surprise it already reeks in the upholstered seats surprise I nearly ran down a groundhog in the road surprise I went missing for a few days surprise I know you were up waiting to hear from me surprise I wrote down all of your secrets and published them online surprise the worse the secret the better the material surprise I blame myself for your drinking habits surprise I blame you for mine surprise my boss said it's ok as long as I don't get drunk at work surprise my dad said it's ok as long as I don't get drunk alone surprise I'm drunk again surprise I'm all alone surprise I thought about killing myself again today surprise but I felt sorry for whoever had to find the body surprise I didn't like thinking about the parents breaking the news to my students surprise I called off work again today surprise my mental health just isn't in the budget this month surprise I know I said I'd take the trash out but



LE PETITE

ELIZABETH KING



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

ELLERY BECK is an undergraduate student studying at Salisbury University. She's currently studying English and is also a member of the Honors College.

LAURIE BLAUNER is the author of seven books of poetry and four novels. Her most recent novel, *The Solace of Monsters*, won the Leapfrog Fiction Contest and was a Fiction finalist in the Washington State Book Awards. Her essays have appeared in *PANK*, *Superstition Review*, *StringTown*, *december*; and *Sycamore Review*.

KATE BOND is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing at The New School University in New York, NY. Her work has been previously published in *Chronogram Magazine*. She is from Boston, MA.

SHARON NICOLE COLE originates from a tiny farm near Allen, Nebraska, where she fell in love with creating and dreaming while playing among the rows of corn and broken-down Fords. She currently graduate assists for the WSC Press in Wayne, Nebraska, working towards the completion of her MSE in English education. Timothy Cook, an Edgewater Chicago native, graduated from Loyola University with a BA in philosophy and from the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College. His poems have appeared in some places, and he is a recipient of a grant from the Mookie Jam Foundation, which supports artists living with multiple sclerosis.

DALLAS ROW is a high school English teacher who lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. A solo exhibit of his photographs from along the 49th parallel, "The Other Border," was mounted recently at Praxis Gallery in Minneapolis. You can see more of his work at dallas-crow.format.com.

HOLLY DAY'S newest poetry collections are *A Perfect Day for Semaphore* (Finishing Line Press), *In This Place, She Is HerOwn* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), *A Wall to Protect Your Eyes* (Pski's Porch Publishing), and *I'm in a Place Where Reason Went Missing* (Main Street Rag Publishing Co.).

LAURA GADDIS is a blogger and writer of memoir and personal essays. Her writings have appeared on websites such as *Scary Mommy*, *The Mighty*, *Still Standing Magazine*, and *Tiny Buddha*. When not writing, she teaches psychology courses at Miami University. You can find more at www.lauragaddis.com

FABIÁN GONZÁLEZ GONZÁLEZ (b. Uriangato, GTO., México, 1987) attended the writing programs at Sonoma State University and San José State University. His work has appeared in the *Río Grande Review* and *Penumbra Literary Magazine*.

ROBIN GOW'S poetry has recently been published in *POETRY*, *Furrow*, *carte blanche*, *FIVE:2:ONE*, and *Corbel Stone Press*. He is a graduate student at Adelphi University pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing. He interns for Porkbelly Press. He is an out and proud bisexual transgender man passionate about LGBT issues.

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE was the winner of both *Aesthetica Magazine's* 2018 Creative Writing Award in Poetry and the 2017 Ledbury Poetry Competition, first runner-up in the 2018 Julia Darling Memorial Poetry Prize, and a recipient of 3rd Prize in both the Cornwall Contemporary Poetry Festival's 2018 Competition and The Plough Poetry Prize 2017. This is his fourth time appearing in *Thin Air*.

DANE HAMANN is an editor for a textbook publisher in the southwest suburbs of Chicago. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from Northwestern University, where he serves as the poetry editor of *TriQuarterly*. His chapbook, *Q&A*, is available from

Sutra Press and his micro-chap, *What the River Made*, is from Ghost City Press.

ERIN JAMIESON holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University of Ohio. Her writing has been published or is forthcoming in *After the Pause*, *Into the Void*, *Flash Frontier*, *Mount Analogue*, *Blue River*, *The Aironaut*, *Evansville Review*, *Canary*, *Shelia-Na-Gig*, and *Foliolate Oak Literary*, among others. She currently teaches English Composition at UC-Blue Ash and works as a freelance writer.

ALEX KAZEMI lives in Auckland, New Zealand where he works as a doctor in Intensive Care Medicine. This causes him to move in and out of some strange worlds, so he spends his spare time writing. This is amongst his first published work.

E.E. KING is a painter, performer, writer, and biologist. Her books include Dirk Quigby's Guide to the *Afterlife*, *Electric Detective*, *Pandora's Card Game*, *The Truth of Fiction* and *Blood Prism*. King has won numerous awards and fellowships for art, writing, and environmental research, most recently the Whodunit 2018 award for The Hollywood Portal. King was the founding Director of the Esperanza Community Housing's Art & Science Program, worked as an artist-in-residence in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sarajevo and the J. Paul Getty Museum's and Science Center's Arts & Science Development Program. Her landmark mural, "A Meeting of the Minds," (121' x 33') can be seen on Mercado La Paloma in Los Angeles. King has also painted murals for Escuelas Para La Vida in Cuenca, Spain and in Tuscany, Italy. She's worked with children in Bosnia, crocodiles in Mexico, frogs in Puerto Rico, egrets in Bali, mushrooms in Montana, archaeologists in Spain, butterflies in South Central Los Angeles, lectured on island evolution and marine biology on cruise ships in the South Pacific and the Caribbean, painted murals in Los Angeles and Spain and has been published widely.

NORBERT KOVACS lives and writes in Hartford, Connecticut. His stories have appeared in *Thrice Fiction*, *Westview*, *Gravel*, *STORY*, and *Ginosko Literary Journal*. Norbert's website is www.norbertkovacs.net.

AIMEE LABRIE works as the senior program coordinator and adjunct lecturer for the creative writing program at Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences. Her short story collection, *Wonderful Girl*, was awarded the Katherine Anne Porter Prize in Fiction and published by the University of North Texas Press in 2007. Her second collection of stories, *Animal Shelters*, placed as a finalist in the BOA Short Fiction Contest and will be published by Running Wild Press in 2019. Other short stories of hers have been published in *Pleiades*, *Minnesota Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Permafrost*, and other literary journals. In 2012, she won first place in *Zoetrope's* All-Story Fiction contest. "Ducklings" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize by *Pleiades*.

BROOKE LARSON is a writer, collagist, and sometimes wilderness guide. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Columbia University, and is currently a PhD student in English at the University of Louisiana. A collection of her lyric essays, *Pleasing Tree*, is forthcoming with Arc Pair Press.

COURTNEY LEBLANC is the author of the chapbooks *All in the Family* (Bottlecap Press) and *The Violence Within* (Flutter Press), and a Pushcart Prize nominee. She has her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte and loves nail polish, wine, and tattoos. Follow her on twitter: @wordperv, and IG: @wordperv79.

DAVID LEGAULT'S book of essays, *One Million Maniacs*, is now available from Outpost19. Other recent work appears or is forthcoming in *The Normal School* and *Hotel Amerika*, among others. Although he calls the Midwest home, he currently lives in Prague, Czech Republic. More work can be found at www.onemillionmaniacs.com

ALLIE MARIANO lives in New Orleans. Her writing has appeared in *CutBank*, *Saw Palm*, *Day One*, and in *New Orleans' Times-Picayune*. She is the nonfiction editor for *Midway Journal*. She is currently working on a novel, and she's happy to be here.

MARY MAROSTE received her BA in creative writing from Western Michigan University, and is now pursuing an MFA at Virginia Commonwealth University. She is the recipient of the AWP Intro Journals Project for her poem "Landscape with Sharp Rocks". Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Mid-American Review*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, and others. She is from Houghton, Michigan but currently resides and studies in Richmond.

A faculty member at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, JOSEPH MILLS has published six volumes of poetry with Press 53. In the spring of 2019, he will publish *Bleachers*, a collection of short fiction. More information about his work is available at www.josephrobertmills.com

A native New Yorker, JAMES PENHA has lived for the past quarter-century in Indonesia. Nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and poetry, his poetry will appear in *Headcase: LGBTQ Writers & Artists on Mental Health and Wellness* to be published by Oxford University Press in 2019. His essay "It's Been a Long Time Coming," was featured in *The New York Times* "Modern Love" column in April 2016. Penha edits *The New Verse News*, an online journal of current-events poetry. Twitter: @JamesPenha

ANASTASSIA PUGATCH is an MFA candidate studying poetry at George Mason University. She spent the last several years teaching English in China and Thailand. She has a Master's degree in Language & Literacy from Harvard University, and a Bachelor's degree in English from Skidmore College.

KATIE QUINNELLY is a climbing instructor in West Virginia. Her work has appeared in *the Anthology of Appalachian Writers* and *Threadcount Magazine*, among others. Her chapbook, *Sparrow Pie*, is available through Egtooth Editions.

NELL SMITH is a field biologist and writer currently based in Northern Arizona. Much of Nell's work is ecologically rooted as she examines the interplay between people and place. Her poetry has been published in *Entropy*, *Hawk & Whippoorwill*, *Sky Island Journal*, *the Aureorean* and *Alligator Juniper*.

ANDREW SUTHERLAND is a Queer theatre practitioner and writer working between Western Australia and Singapore. Theatre works include *Poorly Drawn Shark*, *Unveiling: Gay Sex for Endtimes*, *Baby Girl*, *Chrysanthemum Gate*, and *Ragnarok*. He was awarded Overland's Fair Australia Prize for poetry 2017. His work can be found in various publications including *Visible Ink*, *The Suburban Review*, *Muse/A*, and *From Whispers to Roars*.

DANIEL UNCAPHER is a Sparks Fellow at Notre Dame, where he received his MFA. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Penn Review*, *Tin House Online*, and others. www.danieluncapher.com

EMILY VIEWEG, MFA, is a poet and playwright originally from St. Louis, Missouri. Her work has been published in *Foliage Oak*, *Red Weather Literary Magazine*, *Soundings Review*, *Art Young's Good Morning*, *What Rough Beast*, and more. She lives in Fargo, North Dakota where she is a mother of two, volunteer cat wrangler and office assistant.

JOHN WALSER, an associate professor of English at Marian University-Wisconsin, holds a doctorate in English and Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Spillway*,

Mantis and the Normal School, as well as in the anthology *New Poetry from the Midwest 2017*. A three-time semifinalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize, he is currently submitting three full-length manuscripts for publication. His *Edgewood Orchard Galleries* has been a finalist for the Autumn House Press Poetry Prize (2016) as well as a semifinalist for both the Philip Levine Prize (2016 and 2017) and the Crab Orchard Series First Book Award (2017 and 2018).

TOBEY WARD received her MFA from the University of Oregon, and her writing has appeared in *The South Carolina Review*, *DC Magazine*, *Red Rock Review*, and *Temenos*, among others. She lives in Philadelphia where she works as a copywriter.

ZACHARIAH CLAYPOLE WHITE is a recent graduate of Oberlin College. His poetry has appeared in the *Albion Review*, *The Plum Creek Review*, and *Scalawag*. His flash fiction also appears in Anchala Studios' recent anthology, *The Collection: Flash Fiction for Flash Memory*. He currently lives in North Carolina and works at Flyleaf Books.

SCOTT WILSON lives in Chicago where he writes essays and helps edit the *Hotel Amerika* lit journal. He has a BA in writing from the University of Iowa and an MFA in nonfiction from Columbia College. His work can be found in the *Chicago Anthology* by *Belt Publishing*, *Bicycle Times*, *Quip Music Magazine*, *Paperbark*, *Stoneboat*, *Saftfronts*, *Route 7*, *Thin Air*, *The Write Launch*, and others.

JESSICA YUAN is a Kundiman fellow and Best of the Net nominee, and her poems have been published in *jubilat*, *Boulevard*, *Ninth Letter Online*, *American Chordata*, *Zone 3*, *Pedestal*, and others. Jessica currently lives in Boston, where she is a graduate student studying architecture at Harvard.