

THE LAUREL REVIEW

Volume 48

2015

Number 2

Editors: John Gallaher, Richard Sonnenmoser, Luke Rolfes

Associate Editors: Daniel Biegelson, Alyssa Striplin,

Contributing Editors: Louise Mathias

Cover Photography and Design:

Typesetting: Alexis Daley, Tanner Lewey

The Laurel Review publishes two issues each calendar year. Closed for submissions May 1–August 31. Online submissions accepted via Submittable. No manuscript can be returned nor query answered unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. U.S. subscription rates are \$10 for one year, \$18 for two years and \$24 for three years. International rates are \$14 for one year, \$23 for two years and \$30 for three years. Available back issues are \$5. Check or money order accepted. Address all correspondence to *The Laurel Review*, GreenTower Press, Department of English & Modern Languages, Northwest Missouri State University, 800 University Drive, Maryville, MO 64468-6001.

The Laurel Review is indexed in the *Index of American Periodical Verse*, the *Annual Index to Poetry in Periodicals*, *Humanities International Complete* and the *Index to Periodical Fiction*.

The views expressed in *The Laurel Review* do not necessarily correspond to those of Northwest Missouri State University, and the University's support of this magazine should not be seen as an endorsement of any philosophy other than faith in free expression.



GreenTower Press

CONTENTS

FICTION

Amina Gautier	Disturbance	112
James Tate Hill	Emoticon	33

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Ellen Sprague	One Man's Prison Is Prison	60
----------------------	----------------------------	----

PLAY

Mark Halliday & Martin Stannard	Tasso Tempted	160
------------------------------------------------	---------------	-----

POETRY

Kristin George Bagdanov	Monster Body	29
	Fault Line	30
Deborah Bernhardt	Maritime Duchamp	88
	Oil	89
Jason Bradford	Confession #4	75
	Confession #3	76
Taylor Collier	My Wife the Tornado	50
Shanna Compton	With Dashes Fitted, with Intent Spliced	85
	An Obsession with Dirt, a Desire for Order	86
	Never Again	87
Kay Cosgrove	Marriage	109
Kevin Craft	An Illustrated Guide to Feathers	6
Lindsay Daigle	9	134
	Fate	135
	July Flame	150
Adam O. Davis	A House Unfit Even For Ghosts, 1783	154
	Astronauts, 1809	155
	Astronauts	156
Piotr Florczyk	Pastoral	77
	Lullaby	78
Chris Forhan	Model Making	111
James Grabill	Classical Sousa	98
	We Must Adapt	99
Heather June Gibbons	Lives of the Prophets	11
	Little Evening Sermon	12
Becca Shaw Glaser	I'm in Love With All Humans! I Have a Crush on All of Them!	3
	The Planet of Lost Things	5
Jeff Hardin	Who Even Knows What His Own Voice Is	56
	A New Creation	57
Rebekah Denison Hewitt	For the Sake of Solidarity	84

Jonathan Hobratsch	Butterfly Effect	148
Rich Ives	A Disability	157
	A Male Viewer of the <i>Women in Paintings</i> Exhibit	158
Rachel McLeod Kaminer	Hither	136
	Speaking	137
	Infrasound	138
	Mondegreen	139
George Looney	The Girl Who Made Love in Cemeteries	79
	The Lyrical Prophesies of a Spanish Guitar	80
Erin J. Mullikin	Sleeping Potion	102
Ethan Paquin	Widow's Watch, Widow's Peak	7
Bill Rector	Page from a Universal Album	147
Dana Roeser	Cindy from Marzahn on the Night of the Mayan Apocalypse	140
Martha Ronk	Sugimoto's Seas	13
Justin Runge	Dear Nebraska	49
Steven D. Schroeder	nothing	132
	the city	133
Brittney Scott	Story	150
Carrie Shippers	Hell of a Hand	110
Hilary Sideris	Gift	54
	Host	55
Kevin Stein	History of Static	58
	Why I'm Auditioning Vegetarianism	108
Coleman Stevenson	It was perfectly dark until he taught me to see	52
Christine Stroud	Writing on the Wall	100
	Drought	101
Jason Stumpf	Killing a Robin	151
	Roman Stamps	152
Jacob Sunderlin	A Jobber is a Wrestler Who Always Loses	153
Carleen Tibbetts	the architecture of the machine if love	1
	the signage tells us that woman is: ____	2
Heather Treseler	From the Gnostic's Book of Genesis	129
	Niagra Falls	130
Arthur Vogelsang	According to Me	31
	My Brain's Storage	32
Sam Witt	Moonlight in the Body of the Lyre	15
Jane Wong	A Constellation	90
	An Elegy for the Selves	94

Carleen Tibbetts

the architecture of the machine is love

a woman/i
for her/me this is a song

young with trust
a-glow with bright half-life

*open the night and let the silk in
open her/myself
the meat of her/my brain
(the soft circuitry of a torn-apart flower)*

the woman/i went hungry
in another's percussive throat

a guttered self-respect
lit from within

this other-than-oneness of a thing
this unknowable vocabulary of loss

a woman/i find(s) the promise of
a swindle comforting

re:sutures-do we stay broken?

a woman/i wake(s) in the surfacing

the signage tells us that woman is: _____

a dimming down

a siloed violence

a cake-sweet recollection

a clumsy tattering

a slow dissolve

a skipping over

a taking apart

a rip-throated wail

s[he] is the alluvial hum underneath the tangled rivering

a bracketed what

s[he] begins and ends in a garden

s[he] begins

Becca Shaw Glaser

I'm in Love With All Humans! I Have a Crush on All of Them!

I love the ones with the permanently lasered landing strips and the ones
with the hairy asses
and the ones walking the baskets of water barefoot over the volcanic
hills and I love the men standing on the back yelling Hoo and Haw
and dumping
the city's treasures into the big dusty truck. I love the men
with their bones and meat and hair poking out around their penises their
balls drawn up
tight when they're hard, the vulnerable pink and brown firemen heads
with the friendly
little slits and spare
freckles. Oh our little toes, we can make them
intertwine. I want to sleep
another million years! I want to eat a quart of cookies and cream! I want
to put a needle in my clit! What a rebel!
And I love his blonde hair, how I saw big chunks of it on the peels
and skins of the compost bucket and how each month he walks it
to the collective house and slops it into the pile and I love the stone ground
flour and I love
the women who showed off as potential mates by grinding the huge stones
with their rippling arms and I love the opportunity for solitude,
how I can lay in bed for hours and no one
will shame me or hate me or exclude me or spit on me or throw bottles at
me or tell me I'm a slut or a faggot or I made up the rape story to feel
better about getting the abortion
and no one will tweet about me or lock me in solitary for masturbating
in my bedroom. My vulva it's overflowing, a bud, a pulse centering my
body, life force
inside flesh! Fuck everyone
who keeps us down! We are the tree we are the apple!
Taking it back.

The Planet of Lost Things

1.

The part of me that isn't sleeping gets up, goes outside, walks to the neighbor's trash pile, fishes out the white vinegar and the whole wheat flour, walks back up the steps, puts everything on the counter and slides back into bed with me. Heartbreak is a multinational commodity. Maybe I'm unlucky in love, or more likely, I'm a psycho-bitch with badass vocal chords and excellent texting skills.

2.

We were married at sea. Underwater I licked his earlobes. He wiggled my toes. He couldn't even bring himself to look at my drawings. I kept dreaming of someone who would fit me on some deeper spirit plane, someone with the right acupuncture to get that precise spot—twenty years into it he'd enter the room and I'd still swoon. We ended up washed-up anarchists chewing nasty microwave popcorn, scarfing water-stained Lavyrle Spencer novels on the beach, perpetually irritated by the sounds of each other's breath.

3.

So much is left unfinished. The grown-ups were heaving chairs, their legs stuck out at the top of the pile. The black sky snapped with ash and spark, stars beyond the yellow smoke, the spired silhouettes of fir trees. The biggest fire I'd ever seen. He must have been four, I would have been six. I don't remember his face but we must have danced around with all the other kids, our little bodies,

huckleberry stains around our lips, excited to be up
so late. You could spend
a century apologizing, crying blood, and still
not fix it.

4.

In the tent I was horny. The wasps began to buzz. I never respected his lack
of politics but
I loved him.

5.

A novelist said Don't go into marriage thinking it's going to make you any
less lonely.

6.

A last glimpse of his ankle, pink and strong, rising out of the dark shoe I'd
given him.
He'd rushed up the stairs to find me. On the roof of his building I was
burning
with jealousy, having spied our old condom tin in a new spot. Maybe it's
better
to be single. No one
to wrestle but myself, the responsibilities
of keeping this stick-poke-tattoo sell-out first-world body alive.
I've had to do most of the healing on my own.

7.

Only in myth is there proper
redemption. I crawl back out of my sleeping self.
I go back to Baltimore and slip into bed with him.
And on this last night, all night we hold each other, and when we shift, we
shift together.

Between us something like a baby had grown. Somewhere in the world
it's still crawling.

Kevin Craft

An Illustrated Guide to Feathers

1. *Flight feather*

At the beach a tall tree had acquired a parasail. We began by looking up.
The wind began by returning the favor.

2. *Contour feather*

We turned a corner. We turned down the job offer in Oklahoma. We
turned out in large numbers. We turned page after page in the guest book
looking for a place to turn in. Things grow round in filtered sunlight.

3. *Semiplume*

Clouds had gathered at the watering hole. There was some pushing and
shoving. There was some posturing and pasturing. Then everyone broke
for the nearest speech balloon.

4. *Down*

Sleeping bags of America, rise up!

5. *Bristles*

He seemed like a nice person
is no way to live.
These dishes will not break themselves.

6. *Filoplume*

Wind speed. Speed date. Date palm. Lamprey. Pyre.

Ethan Paquin

Widow's Watch, Widow's Peak

In the mirror sometimes at dusk,
or when light makes me feel contemplative
such as at the golden hour, passing thunder
having scratched the treetops moments before,
I feel as if I have carried for far too long
things of beauty with no more use to me,
like the photo of you on the rainswept cape
near Point Prim lighthouse, pregnant
and in blue jeans, your hair outward
as was your gaze, fixed on the Atlantic
and maybe beautifully puzzling
at what was out there, what was under
all that heft. And then I blink, the sun
vaguely wafting through the window
and silting the surface of the mirror
reminding me I'm alone in the room,
the pitter of lingering rain on the sill
reminding me the birds have left
no interest in a yellowish sky
devoid of promise. I blink and
you are with me no more,
having been with me moments before
yet far off beneath the lighthouse
and half-hidden by the sea grasses ...



You let me frame you
in the waterfall
halfway up
Mt. Lafayette,
with my camera.
We headed up, young lovers
and the thunderhead dropped

its ever-ancient serenade
of torrential rain and sparks
on our young heads. Why
are you gone from my life,
I now wonder as I ponder rain
pittering the sill, the same rain
that washed over your lithe body,
which I grabbed as lightning killed
the ozone inches from our brows,
huddling with you there in a grove
of altitude-crumpled krummholz
whose branches were as sharp
and pointed outward in accusation
as the fingers of some crone. Why
didn't we make it We made it
off that trail, clothes dried by humid
afternoon, we made it
I'm so glad we made it ...



There is the gaze outward,
toward the sea;
there is the gaze upward,
toward the peak;
there is the gaze toward,
as in facing the mirror
and down one's eyes
therein. Look how old
we've gotten ... the signs
are everywhere, as in
how easy it is to be bitter,
for example. Young people
aren't bitter—they've not tasted
enough—but they will eat
and as surely as they eat

they will know, someday.
The young dance and stand
ashore, casually stupid
and beautifully so. I know we used to be
that way, and that way is better than this way—
of measuring and rabbit-earing the days
and the slights, and welling them inside.



I will always know the timbre
of your skin at dawn, and for that,
I thank you. This beer can is half-full
because I don't really drink: as a way out,
it fails me. My way out and away, from you,
is to think of you, actually, as contradictory
as it may seem—think of sailor's knots,
and how they're perfect expressions
yet inscrutable; how they'll hold
the biggest ship in place, even as the sea
wells up and thrashes the coastline for miles.
That ship will bob, the knot keeping it in place,
that ship will go nowhere. Whether that ship
is being protected or constrained, that is
unclear. It depends on the day or mood
in which I find myself—I might like
the violent rain on one day,
I might like the cove-like warmth of your memory
on another day. For that memory, I thank you,
for that tumult, I thank you; the way I was,
I deserved no less. I should've smiled more
and I should've stared at you more intently
when you wore that purple sun dress
and then told you how its purples
blent perfectly with the purples of the sunsets
we hardly ever watched together. I would've

watched you more, watched how you peeled
potatoes, how you curled your toes as you reclined
on the couch, how you probably looked outdoors
to watch the kids roll around on the front lawn
all tangled in streamers and frisbees ... *wisdom and age*,
they say. Beer can placed on the rim of the tub,
I turn on the faucet and dash my face
with lukewarm water. I let the lukewarm sink in,
and it unsettles—not vicious enough, not numbing enough—
and so I wipe it off with my hands, not with a towel.
Now my hands and face are wet, sort of wet,
and whenever that's the case one might look
into the mirror to confirm it all—the water
and the existence of it on the skin, the water
and how it streaks over stubble and wrinkles,
burgeoning faster than ever. You're there,
the mirror reminds, I remind,
you're still there. The boats
and the tides. Pull away,
you can't pull away. I miss
your touch. I regret
missing it. You're there.
You're still there,
you're still there.

Heather June Gibbons

Lives of the Prophets

To see the bottom
of the well and say
hello and hear

only echo. To wonder
and to know.
 To hear an echo

and know what is
before it comes.
To see the bottom.

Not to wonder, to know
shadows limp across
 the wall, smells

drip off the ends
of their arms. Hello, well.
 Hello.

Little Evening Sermon

After eight years of sunny homily, the bus driver quit for what would turn out to be a monumental binge, the righteous man fell through the ice and was saved by an angel, and we could almost love each other for eternity. Funny word, eternity. You can put it near the end of almost any prayer and feel almost better about sharpshooting the sweat of the evenings. You can speed walk in circles and feel that's exactly how Jesus would have wanted it. Look at the gyre of marine litter in the Pacific twice the size of Texas. Was this what you were promised? I'm sorry it turned out to be true. But the girl really did swallow fire on the midway, and somebody saved the drowning man, and nights advanced against the stars' spin and threw their feathered hats like shadows cast backwards upon the blank-prone, nearly invisible debris.

Martha Ronk

Sugimoto's Seas

Vertiginous

A vertiginous quality equivalent to the movement of waters (despite the stillness of the photograph) overtakes the surfaces although the idea of repetition has been altered by the relation of foreground to background, a viewer so fragile as to be a mere mark, *distant, overly iconographic, such that I am looking at or staring at* repositions whatever point of view is meant to color what is seen as the opacity of surface blocks all but the most jittery of questions despite the urgency, despite the beauty impenetrable in every direction as the density and opacity of the sea stymies all human endeavor ever mesmerized by its own iteration and disturbingly lit.

Specific seas

1.
English Channel, Weston Cliff 1994

striations of seaweed corresponding to irregular winds
pushing at the distant surface darker water defining the lower edge
where there's simply no place to stand,
orientation by a long horizon
a frame split in two by the shadings of gray and an all-encompassing float
obliteration of position
free fall

2.
Tyrrhenian Sea, Corsica, 1994

As if touchable ridges formed the way fingers feel dragged
across the surface as if liquid solidified and the skin of surface transformed
into what might be written on by wood grain, each age
through which it passed,
as if tactile were rubbed into being by that which has no surface,
mere shadow holding its breath, beneath.

3.

Celtic Sea, Boscastle, 1994

Mist is mist only as rescued by light sculpting a shape out of shadow
hissing itself as steam in a sick room, breathing itself into breath
a loopy curve of white on a curve of dark
a graphic shape rotating itself as a profile turns slowly forward
as if to view an ark carrying the precarious into a Mediterranean Sea.

4.

Lake Superior, Cascade River 1995

A disk of light floats in a sea darker than sky
towards or away from what else he might have been thinking
and carves out the insistence of such unrelenting.

Sam Witt

Moonlight in the Body of the Lyre

“There’s another victim of the moon. Yes, another one like me.”
Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master and Margarita*

E

All of this happens behind the Gods’ empty empty pupil¹
Look back over your shoulder: The Polar Ice Caps are melting for
good but tonight
I’ll disappear into shelf after continental shelf of glacial ice collapsing:
into 2 bodies:
Yours & mine:

E

So those small purple flowers on the mountainside at Delphi
Appear in December now & a boy crawls back
Into the stone temple duct decades before
Toward the ruins of the Temple of Apollo,
(Though it’s generally thought to be a woman who disappears)
Toward the ruins of now: Two people trapped inside
This moment in time:
Arms & legs entwined then disentangled, Dis-
Placed by a single moon reaching us you & I way down here
At sea-bed, where I’m alone:

E

One sleeps now in a Las Vegas suburb many moons from here,
The ice caps melting once & for all, sleeps by herself, over & over again,

¹As the sepulchre stone goes groaning its sky away in a cyanosis sphere: weathervoice in a tint of discipline, punish, fear: Roll Jordon Roll · 5:53 PM - 16 Dec 13 · Embed this Tweet

In a single infusion of cash to create liquidity she turns

Inside his sleep, inside the desert, dreaming of a softly falling steady rain,
West Antarctic Ice Sheet hanging like the shining blade of a guillotine:
his head

Sunk like a small river stone in her sleep

To the bottom of her pupil

Where it stays, washed by ripples of cold moonlight but tonight
His lips are still moving, making the sound of tiny moons rising.
Now they send those bubbles up—nitrogen in the bloodstream, CO₂
particles skyward—

Toward the surface. Now they burst, one by one by one.

E

The water cannot perjure itself like we do they sing.
The water one man uses to make another man talk, in this very same
moonlight,
Twelve hours on one leg, then the other, arms outstretched on ropes.
That's the single note the stream keeps repeating down below.

E

& we make the Gods tremble into a new ocean
(Another victim of us ye Gods) Once that vast white eye has been
emptied O Gods, Gods

It can't be filled up again, not with ice anyway.

Once the black waters swell with a sudden frigid fury far up North:
Daniel Pearl's head was not the head of Orpheus of course

Hacked from his body by the Maenads down a rush

Of melted sea-ice to warmer climes but if you look closely enough
tonight

At the Youtube clip, you can see his lips

Still moving. . . ²

E

If there's a river outside your window tonight, any moving water at all,

²Maybe it was my face I saw there, reflected, drowned, unrecovered—it's 50 fathom deep,
wi thair gold kems in their hair, at sea-bed · 17:56 PM · 16 Dec 13 · Embed this Tweet

now)

We pulled each other blessedly apart in this black moonlight blood
steaming up

& melting but inside the entrails of this music
it hurts—

E

(There was a mandolin hung above your bed)

The infant Hermes took a sharp knife & cut out the turtle's insides.

(Whisper it scar matter: the prophet's severed head melting yes
by degrees)

I mean raw tonnages of carbon infusing the seas, & nitrogen, & acids:
This visitation

Turning our bodies in bed with tiny nitrogen bubbles rushing upward at
sea-bed,

N: the chemical element of atomic number 7: WE₂

(Freshwater fluxes in our bloodstreams We were freshwater rising)
The infant god drilled holes in the shell. (The cataract shall flood up
concurrently & then

It's a severely flesh-bound vowel: E: Go on draining us of this room)

Then taking some strings & other things lying around the cave,
He set to work measuring & fitting things together.

(Whisper "if" with me: play it back on videotape: in tidal waves in drought:
In waves of refugees as in: If, in the end, the flames will not
be able to resist you,

³Can I block myself from accidentally living? · 12:19 AM - 23 Aug 2014 · Embed this Tweet

E

That's why the moonlight makes me feel you again so brightly.
Like Wii had burned up all the O₂ in the air & moonlight was the only
thing left

Was a haunting pain: that's why I need the sex to make us unrecognizable
again,
Full fathom down. Why, trapped inside this sheeted mirror, this skull,
valuable,

Scarce as platinum, shining purer than pure grade uranium
Yellow cake, we conduct an even slower half-life
Breaking down into this touch, that, this depth, that, unfathomed,
unfathered,
You turn me, deep in the cell of myself,
Inside the upright mirror of my torso (& it does shine,
All by its lonesome) (behind this moonlight scrim) the "we" decays into a
newly flayed person,

Toxic assets, a shell, hydroaromatic petrolatum, a headless trunk,
A constantly eroded coastline, (I reached out to you from the
sleeper cell of myself)

The platinum sheeted pear trees were ghostly in the orchards below⁵
& a small river flashed its lower voltages in broken metal strings down
there in guts

Lyre

Where they nevertheless trembled & jangled our denuded, denatured
bodies

Restrung with gut, down here, at sea-bed:
Pluck it

E

⁵Out of the window, I saw how the planets gathered. & beyond the glassy spheres, cold
fast streams were harnessed in the oblivion to turn the millwheels · 17:57 PM - 16 Dec 13 ·
Embed this Tweet

As lesser delegates to the oracle unable to afford the full temple sacrifice
(The coin of those desolate leagues was a vanishing, no less a shining cash:
Osshhhhh)

Once had to whisper their petitions down that very same stone duct

I crawled inside of once, decades ago, at seventeen, at Delphi,
Just off the cruise ship, (*that* boy, filling the skies) (I crawled inside of you)
All the way back into the ruins of Apollo's temple,
All the way back into now, back into the you, I slid inside your wet valve
opening
& whispered my petition in new seawater rising, rising, rising, always
rising,

Rising down your inner ear—⁶

E

Said I went down to the sea, the sea was a-risin'
Provide the music of what the moonlight divines tonight in oceanic
wind:

Said I went down to the sea, the waters was risin'
(The deluge whispers back
in the key of extinction)

All alone that day—

Disgorge the trees in liquid light poured severally into our ears but
alone

I went down to the sea, the sea was a-boilin': alone, alone

E: demurs in tiny sucking currents swirling at your lips, I am always
alone

Said I went down to the sea, the storm cage was ragin'
All alone that day—

⁶& the concentric mill wheels began to turn · 17:58 PM · 16 Dec 13 · Embed this Tweet

E

A new gravity & flood of mammalian blood drains us at sea-bed in cold
ripples

Of what our moonlight bodies devour: Ocean-rise, darken the skies,

Petrochemicals, hydrocarbons, plastics, my boy: dead oceans
Shall be lifted from their beds in flaring white fires

Like the dead nations.

Pours us back down this avatar starved from within

Not 2 bodies (us, separated, miles away, entwined) but a single,
malnourished, flensed body

Cannibalizing *itself* elsewhere through the torrential rains &, in
emissions, fluids, words,

In bursting brain-chemical nebulae, I crawled inside of you⁷

& if the moonlight makes of every tree limb

A trembling string (I mean this literally) (like us, us)

Lyre,

I touched your hip out of sleep (*Touch this string for me*) exactly one
moon ago

& somewhere in Greenland an arctic lake began to drain
through cracks in the glacial ice of its bed

So that 90 minutes later, as we slept,

3 times as much water as flows though Niagra Falls

Had flooded away into the sea,

Into the butterfly-wing blue at the fringes of your iris,

Into the storm folds of that cataract sky, the darker skies initiative,

Those hairline fractures in glacial ice collapsing

Once you opened them up again

E

Only when Orpheus played his lyre

⁷One minute it's night. The next, the sky is so wounded & open & raw, you could swallow
oilpaint · 17:59 PM - 16 Dec 13 · Embed this Tweet

Did the burning wheel stop for a minute—

E

Was the burning wheel fueled on inflows of warmer water,
Vibrating strings of air: sea currents
Eating away at the underbelly say, of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet:

Enshrouded in invisible metric tons from above, thinning tongues,
Sheathed in hunger, in multitudes of torsos, in refugee waves, in
swallowing.
Slow the music of what's happening

- in 2005, a peninsula of glacial ice the size of California briefly melts & refreezes:
- in 2008, the Wilkins Ice Shelf nearly collapses, held back for the time being

By a shining string of ice 4 kilometers long & trembling: Play it.

E

Play the bivalves dissolving in seawater grown more acidic:
Play it: one man torturing another man with that very same water
In a small room without windows at a black site: with blacked-out eyes.

Play the air around Alcoa's smelters in TX, so acidic
It eats the galvanized coating off barbed-wire fencing, (Go on

eating away at the planet⁸ Bless us this day Let us consume

Give us this day our & blessed)
& a species goes extinct before it's even been discovered & named
(our daily. . .)
& the sea levels, of course, quietly, massively (play it), they rise...

⁸You could swallow that sky it's so thick, the vague color of dishwater (just before the signature strike, or the storm cage struck): a mason jar full of Jordan water · 17:59 PM - 16 Dec 13 · Embed this Tweet

E

Inside the Gods' eye, I suppose I'm turned on the wheel inside your sleep
too (Ignition
Takeoff, Turn on the air, Baibeeeee!)—Turns its landfills, oceans, tankers
of waste,
Up one coast, down the other, non-biodegradable plastics folded under
layers of soil
As my lungs continue to fill the precise inverse branching of a tree
So let us melt,
Lyre, by degrees at either end of this stone passage, Las Vegas,
Charlottesville, Delphi, the shining Poles—this taut moonlight string
Has connected our trembling
A virgin seated at each end
Breathing diesel fumes (I'm hungry, my worker beezus, my babus)
No tear-floods nor sigh tempests move this massive footprint
(Baibeeeee, wow!)

In continents of collapsing ice, raw tonnages of carbon, rising cancer
rates, raw sewage,
Skyfuls at drift in the air, oil in the jellyfish, baby octopus, baby elephant,
mother pelican
Washed up in a moonlit tide
& spreading her petroleum slick wings:

E

Fill my lungs. Inflate. Spark the combustion. Roll, Jordan, roll.
Deflate the shape of trees into twin lyres pressed together at chest
Touch the strings
Shed his great dark pools at the beating cardiac murmur,
His nipples hardened into polar blocks,
Then melting, his body lowing separately
On the slaughterhouse floor
As the virgin whispers her riddle

You turned in my solitary cell & *You*
Breathing *you* like a soft steady rain inside the desert,
Lyre, inside your dry sleep, your wet valve,
Harmonic & simple, a sleeper, touched by cold fingers:
Make of this lowing in my own throat
Subtracted from the polytonic scale
A moment, trapped in history⁹

Like us, going taut together one last time
Then jerked up on top of me like a parachute
Sitting up in a gravity articulated by 8 strings
Into the agitated air jerked from above
Or drawn from below into this wild
Cool cry
The water still makes of the moonlight below

E

Sea levels raised. Like money. The global winter has come.
New coasts, carved.

Look how smooth its surface shall be: muscle, ice rendered into fat &
spilling
A brand new shining ocean up north.
Minus the touching (I pulled out of you) & now, all by my self, in this
white cell,
The luminous fuel of species spills out onto my stomach again
Lyre
Your cold missing fingers move the strings of the oceans
Not strung with gut as I am but with moonlight,

The golden tresses of the Dead. Back down
The long stone corridor Yeah you whispered into my ear
Seawater shall pour again *Come on in* into the marble navel of the world
In a low soft branching wavelength

⁹The dinosaurs had their asteroids. We have our smartphones, on which (hit enter while walking down street) a turquoise globe emoticon spins · 4:32 PM 10 Jun 2014 via web from Weymouth, MA · Embed this Tweet

A soft rain spreads into the understory, root systems, emissions.
Simply by turning out of sleep & low, you refract & travel back
through me
A garment for these cold fadoms to wear back through your time
until I've crawled back into the warm clammy duct
of your penetralia once again¹⁰

E

The oracle is at full temple price.
Even the seastones shall melt in this godless flood,
In blue baby eyes, sputter-coated in moonlight, in every
cry,
Multitudes upon multitudes, like waves of displaced cities,
As God is come to tongue & marrow
The children bathing in diesel herein

By scattered cattle watering in moonlight on the boiled surfaces below
Red tags on their ears marking them for slaughter, right on schedule.

Pull back this bullock's neck arch your back, draw the blade.
Out pours the moonlight in great pools
Of light sweet crude & dark bright blood
Smoking in the silver light: Spills this dark fuel On the small of
my stomach
As the sybil whispers back across the millenia
Disappearing schools of fish flooded coastlines Wetland
washed away
Streets underwater Honeybee colonies vanishing like fresh water,
Along exhausted capillaries,
Waves of displaced refugees, watershed tributaries
hydrocarbon-poisoned trout: through it all
A silver pool released onto my belly spilled out
Shining milky white in the moonlight

¹⁰ The voice of one saying, Cry. And one said, What shall I cry? That death was always necessary? · 3 min ago · 16 Dec 13 · Embed this Tweet

Fault Line

Two plates will break
into mountain,
grind

measure their reach
in millennia.

So my soul
verb not noun not now but always
self

chafes my body: wool chews
that
will moves

passing without
passing by.

A year of silence: I
thinking body
thought my was my
flesh fear.

O
guttural
lurch: continental drift the inch
each shifts: I am
strangers once more.

This is the world
that ends in inches
self
that regards the and cringes.
body

Arthur Vogelsang

According to Me

Each person tells the story differently—that's the natural law—
And I think it's wonderful. The same story! Differently!
Two people bad at being people got together.
Number Two said it was a one-way street—all number One
All the time. One said exactly what was wrong with Two, each thing
In exquisite detail. In this copper barrel—yes, their relationship
Was a copper barrel containing two bad people—
None of this gnawing on the wood to get out—trapped!
None of this prying the metal bands loose to get out. Trapped
Together in seamless copper! How unfair to Two!
I mean we find out what's wrong with Two, exquisitely detailed,
But Two hasn't likewise said everything wrong with One.
And One kind of likes being the one-way street thing—One
Is beautiful and talented and likes
It being One all the time, when attention Is called to that, when
Two calls out One on it.
I have come all this way to tell you Two
Is as beautiful and more talented, but that's the way it goes.

My Brain's Storage

Others remembered my disgrace chapter and face
But I could not recall one whipping
One word two people or one, age, or the rivers
That city was on or if it was on that
Farm I visited once, and my doctor said
This was good, we have a blessing here, not a place.
And to tell you the truth, to escape the blessing
I beat up someone badly and felt grace.
But for safety I looked in back of me as I walked
Forward, turned my head a lot, plus built my body
Quick and hard and bigger until it occurred
To me (and this was how
My brain was constructed and how good
My doctor was) I thought build up your brain
Too, dummy, and you'll *remember* and I have gotten
This far, and come all this way to tell you to your face,
I knew instantly never do that! that knowing all the stories
Takes up all the space!

Emoticon

When word spread that he was the artist responsible for the emoticon, the obscene image half the Internet now clicked when they didn't "like" something, Kelly Vanderbean moved an hour east to Chapel Hill. A college town, with its annual turnover of residents, seemed like an easier place to disappear. Most afternoons he tried to lose himself in a wine bar where the staff knew his name, or the name he gave them. Wary of the line between oenophile and alcoholic, he joined an online community of wine enthusiasts. An introductory e-mail explained the group's system for rating wines. Beside the word "unquaffable" was that ubiquitous drawing that had made Kelly a millionaire several times over. He never returned to the website.

"My name is Kevin, and I'm an alcoholic," Kelly found himself saying around the hour he used to arrive at the bar. He didn't think he was an alcoholic—he hadn't had a drink in weeks—but he liked being around people with problems.

"I'll tell you this, Kevin," said Kelly's sponsor, an argumentative little person named Zachary. "The program only works if you work it."

Kelly nodded.

Zachary scowled, reached inside his breast pocket for the embossed card with a picture of the emoticon, which he liked to brandish when expressing his disgust. "Enough with the nodding. Words, friend. What the hell do I even know about you besides that you like wine?"

At the next meeting, when there was a pause between speakers, Zachary's narrowed eyes turned to Kelly. Kelly took a deep breath, humid with chlorine from the pool on the community center's first floor. When the college softball coach got up to speak, Kelly stepped into the hall.

He studied his reflection in the smudged glass of the vending machine. Minutes later, a lanky man in a brown suit was standing beside him. He bore a striking resemblance to Bill Murray with red hair in a crew cut. He fed a dollar to the machine and punched the number for pork rinds.

"High in protein, lower in fat than potato chips. I could give you eight more reasons why these are your best option. I'm Julian, by the way."

"Kevin," said Kelly.

The man had a glum expression that didn't entirely disappear when

he smiled. “What’s your real name?”

“How do you know it isn’t Kevin?”

“Some twelve-steppers take my seminar from time to time to see what genuine self-improvement looks like. They always give fake names.”

It might have been that he saw through the lie no one in AA ever had. It might have been Zachary reaching into his breast pocket as soon as his sponsee appeared in the doorway. It might have been the girl with bangs the color of Mountain Dew seated in the front row of Julian’s seminar, beckoning Kelly to come on in. Whatever the reason, instead of returning to his AA meeting, Kelly sat beside the girl, doubling the audience for what sounded like self-help bullshit.

“I’m Lael.” She smiled as effortlessly as anyone he had ever seen; her mouth had trouble containing all her teeth.

“I’m Kelly.”

“Don’t you two look cute,” said Julian, deadpan.

Lael reached under the table for Kelly’s hand.

Her arms were too long for her short torso. Her hair, save the curtain of bangs to her eyebrows, was scarcely longer than their teacher’s crew cut. An orthodontist would have loved a crack at her smile. Despite all of this, or maybe because of it, Kelly could not have been more attracted to her. Lael’s kind eyes would have forgiven Hitler. What they saw in him he wasn’t sure. He hoped it was more than a shared interest in the seminars for which Julian charged five hundred dollars a week after the initial freebie. In three weeks, he and Lael remained the only attendees, not counting the vagrant who enjoyed the introductory lecture slightly less than the introductory pork rinds.

“What is it we have in common exactly?” Kelly found the courage to ask her at the end of their third date. All three had taken place at Applebee’s, her favorite restaurant and the very establishment Kelly had referenced in the letter of resignation stapled to that first draft of the emoticon. Mr. Walkish, Kelly’s boss at the publishing company, used to insist on this bland franchi every time someone in the art department had a birthday, not once picking up the check for the guest of honor.

Lael looked at him like a puppy who doesn’t know why it’s been scolded. “If you’re going to break up with me,” she said, her voice squeaking against the strain of tears, “just do it, okay?”

All he had wanted was the name of a band, a TV show, a flavor of ice cream, some tiny hook on which they might hang a future. He tried his best to explain.

"I'm sure there are things we don't have in common," she said. You're fifteen years older than me. None of that matters. People search their whole lives to feel like we do. In some countries," she said, her nervous voice barely a whisper, "arranged marriages work because one person accepts the other no matter what, and the love grows as the couple learns about each other."

Kelly hopped down from the barstool and dropped to one knee. "Do you want to get married?"

Lael's smile took up half her face.

At the stop light before her apartment, she said, "You should come inside tonight."

The possibility of sex filled Kelly with a familiar feeling, or a lack there of. The last time he had tried, with a procession of high-priced escorts a couple of years ago, he experienced the same failure he had with everyone else since college. "Maybe it would be more special if we waited."

Lael giggled like the nineteen-year-old she was. "Not for that. To tell my dad."

Panic traveled from Kelly's groin to the pit of his gut. She led him down cracked steps to a basement apartment that couldn't have been five hundred square feet. She hadn't mentioned living with her father, but Kelly hadn't mentioned his last name or that he had a page on Wikipedia that described him as a reclusive misanthrope (needs citation).

"Don't be nervous. Daddy knew you were going to ask me."

Several questions came to mind, none of them necessary when it was Julian who opened the front door. Lael told him the good news, and he pulled the two of them into a single hug.

The wedding would be a small, quiet affair. Julian was Lael's only family. Most of Kelly's relatives had disowned him upon learning how he had gotten so wealthy. "We wish," Kelly's late father had said, "you had embezzled it. Then you could pay your debt like an honest man."

A month into their engagement, they continued to see each other only once a week, at Julian's tutorials and dinner afterward. Their Applebee's server had just delivered their food when Kelly suggested they spend more

time together.

Lael's face reddened. She bowed her head at a ninety-degree angle. "Why, so you can find something wrong with me?"

"Of course not. How is more time together a bad thing?"

Lael flagged down their waiter and asked him to box up her chicken tenders.

Kelly followed her in his car at five miles per hour, waiting a few minutes after she got home before knocking. No one answered.

An hour later, there was a knock on Kelly's door. Julian had on a white robe with a black belt. He held no weapons, only keys to the late model Prius with which he had replaced his 1986 Chevelle, thanks to Kelly's seminar fees. Kelly offered him a seat on the leather sectional of which he was suddenly embarrassed, thinking of the creaky futon in his guest's studio apartment. If Lael would come home with him just once, she might want to stay. On the other hand, she might ask how he could afford a house adjacent to a country club.

"I love her more than anything, Julian. What is she so afraid of?"

Julian wrapped a hand around his stubbled chin. "It might be more worthwhile to examine your own fear."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm sorry, Kelly, but I see nothing wrong with a young lady wanting to take things slowly on the physical front."

The physical had nothing to do with it, but Kelly nodded. He was afraid. He had hoped more time together would make it easier to tell her, easier for her to accept, but putting it off would only add to her disappointment. He said this as vaguely as possible in a letter, asking for the wedding's indefinite postponement, and taped it to her door before the sun came up.

In the morning, he felt no better. At the coffee shop, the college-aged barista employed a fake British accent to tell Kelly he had made "an excellent, excellent choice." He had ordered a regular coffee, which he considered tossing in the barista's grinning, unblemished face. Pulling out of the strip mall, he watched a middle-aged woman in a jumper walk a Great Dane into the grassy median between Applebee's and Best Buy. She smiled at Kelly as her dog dropped a turd the size of a baby's leg. Kelly sped toward her, braking inches from the concrete, the woman stumbling

backward, the dog barking. Spotting a plastic bag in her hand, Kelly rolled up his window and drove away.

“When your anger becomes unmanageable,” a therapist once told him, “make a list of reasons why you’re angry. Then make a list of reasons why you shouldn’t be.”

The first and only such list Kelly ever made involved the creative restrictions at the publishing company. “These are textbooks for young children, Mr. Vanderbean,” Walkish told him whenever Kelly asked why he wasn’t permitted to depict men with facial hair, pirates, pigs, elephants with their trunks raised, cows with udders, tongues of dogs, tongues of children, bracelets, bandanas, backwards ball caps, birthday cakes with candles and, months later, birthday cakes without candles. Never mind that his colleague drew an octopus with seven arms. Kelly was deemed “culturally insensitive” for placing a picture of an airplane in the same workbook as a crossword puzzle that mentioned New York City.

No mixed-race couples. No Latinos on the covers of math books. No parents in the company or close proximity of other parents without corresponding, gender-appropriate spouses in the same picture. Eventually, “the culture of no,” as Kelly referred to it in his letter of resignation, caused his hairline to recede, his skin to exude an unnatural amount of oil. By year two, his stomach rejected fresh fruit. A doctor prescribed sleeping pills to shorten the restless hours spent thinking about slashing his boss’s tires, replacing his hand sanitizer with depilatory cream, waiting for a cold night on which to pour water on the concrete steps to his four hundred thousand dollar home—how the fuck could he afford that when Kelly earned twenty-seven thousand a year without benefits?

Kelly exhaled slowly, another tip from his lone therapy session. “Picture the anger leaving you with every breath.” There was always more he couldn’t reach. His anger lived outside his body, a virus for which there was no vaccine. When he saw it had spread to the window of a computer store, a giant flag bearing the emoticon, Kelly double-parked by the entrance and slammed his car door.

“Help you?” asked the chubby kid with a four-inch ponytail. His T-shirt featured the emoticon rendered by well-known comic book artists.

Kelly shook his head at the stack of keyboards on which his drawing replaced the ^ above the 6 key. No less frightening were the iPhone

cases, skull caps, shot glasses and mugs, wall clocks, T-shirts and boxer shorts, none of which he had ever seen in person. Years earlier Kelly had delegated all licensing to a firm in New York with whom he corresponded only by e-mail. He gestured to the flag in the window. "I think you should take that down."

"One of those, are you?" The kid went back to the laptop he was disassembling. "Buy something or leave."

Kelly held up an emoticon throw rug in what might have been a threatening manner. "I'll take everything you have with this picture on it."

The kid rolled his eyes. "Nathan," he shouted to a cubicle in the corner. "This guy wants to buy something. I'm going to get a burrito."

An African American kid in a striped tie stepped around precarious stacks of hard drives. His unassuming handshake and the sight of a hearing aid made Kelly realize, much sooner than usual, the foolishness of what he was about to do. To apologize for his near outburst, Kelly carried to the register a pair of the store's most expensive laptops. Julian disapproved of computers, but who was to say Lael still wanted to marry him after reading his letter. Either way, he planned to drop these in the donated supplies box at the nearby middle school.

"Nathan, is it?"

The kid looked startled by his own name.

"What do you like to do in your spare time, Nathan?"

A long pause made Kelly wonder if the question was out of line. "I like movies," he said.

Kelly tried to think of another question, not ready to go home to his empty house. "What's your favorite movie?"

"I don't know. I like a lot of them."

Kelly nodded. "Well, maybe they'll make a movie about me someday," Kelly said and forced a laugh. He handed Nathan his credit card, the first time in years he had used it in person.

Nathan held onto the card for a long time before swiping it. He became rather talkative.

A freshman film major, Nathan was still learning how to use his camera. Kelly didn't care about production values. All he wanted was his story told in his own words, not those of a journalist, whose solicitations

for interviews Kelly consistently refused. Since uttering the words in the computer store, it seemed like the only way Kelly would ever be brave enough to tell Lael who he was, what he had done.

“How about a glass of water?” Kelly said, trying to steer Nathan away from his bookcase. The camera seemed to linger on the shelf of R. Crumb and Stephen King.

In the kitchen, Nathan filmed Kelly slicing a lemon in what he hoped was not a violent manner. Before he could get down glasses, Nathan was in the den, heading straight for the drawing table. Kelly offered him a view of his latest sketch, Hopper’s “Night Hawks” featuring characters from the Marvel universe. All his recent drawings were similar take-offs on famous works, fearful as he had become of his own imagination.

“Is this where you drew...” Nathan was too modest or polite to describe the emoticon.

Kelly sat on the stool behind the drawing table and explained how birthday candles and elephants, udders and tongues, ethnicities that did and did not belong on the covers of certain educational textbooks had spawned his infamous drawing.

“A lot of people hate their job,” Nathan said. “They don’t draw a...”

This time Nathan described it, the words like little hammers against the walls of Kelly’s heart. The sound seemed to echo in the vaulted ceiling.

“I think somebody’s at your door.”

Nathan followed him into the living room. Kelly received so few visitors that he once mistook knocking for a woodpecker. He opened the door to find Lael wearing a lot of make-up and a black dress revealing parts he had never seen. Surprised as he was to see her, to say nothing of her attire, Kelly asked where she was going.

“Here.” Her voice was more timid than her dress.

Nathan, perceiving the awkwardness, said good-bye without introducing himself.

“He was from the computer store,” Kelly said.

Lael closed her eyes and pressed her mouth against Kelly’s, her tongue circling his before a quick exit. “I wanted to see more of you. I just got scared.”

Kelly gave her the same tour he had just given Nathan, bringing to two the total number of tours he had given since moving in. Lael opened

the French door and took in the backyard. He listed the square footage, showed her the marble countertops and three-car garage, features emphasized by the realtor who had talked him into making an offer five years ago.

In the den, a few feet from the drawing table, Lael kicked off her high heels and lay on the floor with a sigh usually reserved for Applebee's potato skins. She made snow angels on the floor, the black dress inching up her thighs. "God, I miss carpet."

Kelly joined her, both of them laughing as their arms and legs collided. Lael grabbed his arm, raising it as if in victory. She laughed more softly as she guided it onto her breast.

Lael stared at the ceiling. Lael moved his hand onto her other breast, lowering the straps of her dress. Kelly listened to her breathe, his hand frozen. She turned onto her side, slid her hand under his belt. No matter how inexperienced she seemed, she had to know what uselessness felt like. He expected her to get up and leave. She only turned onto her back.

"It's okay if you're gay. I don't care."

He said that he wasn't. Then he wondered what she meant by not caring.

"The guy who was here earlier. I thought he might have been..."

"Like I said, he's from the computer store."

"What about my dad's seminar? About the evils of technology?"

"Yeah, well, sometimes your dad's full of shit."

Lael showed him that gorgeous, off-center smile. "I know, right?:"

They lay under an afghan on the sofa, Lael ecstatic to find a sitcom she had missed more than carpet. Blue and yellow light danced across her contented face. Kelly asked her again if she would marry him.

"Of course."

She reached for him beneath the blanket, but his response was the same as before.

"It's not a medical issue. I'm perfectly capable of, you know...by myself."

It wasn't Lael, but Nathan's camera to whom Kelly spoke of his problem the next day. "I've had sex before. In high school, a couple of girls parted company with good judgment long enough to sleep with me."

They were seated in Nathan's cubicle an hour before the store opened. Kelly kept a vigilant eye on the entrance.

"I guess the last time was in college." Kelly paused, not wanting to tell this story. "Friday nights, losers that we were, my roommate and I went to this bowling alley and played video games. These two high school girls with black hair and black fingernails sometimes smiled at us. One night we decided to ask them to buy us beer. They were maybe sixteen and we were twenty-one. Ha ha. Perfect icebreaker. Unfortunately, this night they brought along two spindly dudes with rat tails and wallets attached to chains. What were a couple of horny college guys to do?"

Nathan opened the eye not looking into the camera.

"We bowled." Kelly attempted a jovial laugh that came out, in his own estimation, a little sleazy. "We were pretty good. That's what I'm thinking when this couple in their forties sits down behind us and starts cheering us on. They're elbowing each other, laughing at something. Finally, the husband, this red-faced fellow with a spit curl in the center of his forehead, pecks us on the shoulder. 'We like your style,' he says. We thank him. He winks at his wife, and she gives my roommate and me a big hug. She smells like cough syrup and hairspray. The man elbows me and my roommate and says, 'How'd you like to fuck her?'"

The store's door opened. Nathan's coworker squinted at Kelly and shook his head. He slapped his chest, indicating the giant emoticon on his hockey jersey. His smirk became open-mouthed confusion when he saw Nathan holding a camera. Kelly handed him his driver's license.

"What am I supposed to do with this? Nathan, what does this guy want?" His eyes went back and forth between Kelly and his ID. "No way. No fucking way." He said it several times with different inflections. He introduced himself as Winston. Nathan shushed him, gave a one-sentence explanation, and Winston stood silently out of frame, holding Kelly's license by the edges like a priceless baseball card.

"So we follow the couple down this long gravel road," Kelly continued. "My roommate's pleading with me to turn around, thinking they're going to rob us. They turn onto a dirt road. A couple of miles later we park between a truck and a minivan outside some sort of barn. The husband is shaking hands with people. It looks friendly enough, so we get out."

"We're closed!" Winston shouted to a customer entering the store.

Kelly picked at his cuticles, already bleeding, a habit from his days at the publishing company. “A runner of old carpet leads from the barn door to a mattress and box springs. There’s a flood light above the bed, hanging by an extension cord. The wife starts to do a strip tease. Her husband’s setting up a camera by the wall. My roommate and I realize we’re the only ones who still have clothes on. The others, thirteen or fourteen of them, are all lined up on the carpet. My roommate ducks outside. I take off my clothes and get in line.”

Winston pumped his fist.

“Most of the guys,” Kelly said, “after they’re done, get back in line behind me. Finally, it’s my turn, but I’m not...ready. The wife looks sleepy and mean, like I’ve woken her up in the middle of the night. The guys are cheering me on. I lie down beside her, try to kiss her. She climbs on top of me. She reaches for me. ‘Does it work,’ she asks. The other guys are laughing. She spits on my chest, my neck, my face. I try to get up, but she has me pinned, her knees on either side of me. She gets close like she’s going to kiss me. I close my eyes, part my lips. She spits in my mouth. I wipe my lips. She bites my chin. I get my arm around her waist and flip her over so that I’m on top. I’m ready to grab my clothes and get the hell out of there, but she’s still holding on, you know, between my legs. Slowly she loosens her grip, nothing but fingertips, and there I am. The whole time she’s biting my mouth and chin, spitting in my face, which only made me...” Kelly didn’t say what it made him.

Winston returned Kelly’s driver’s license, freeing his hands for slow applause. “Let me guess: you drew it as soon as you got home.”

That night, during Jay Leno’s monologue, Lael put on her jacket to leave.

“You don’t have to go,” Kelly said. “Take the bed. I’ll sleep on the sofa.”

“Dad told me to be home by midnight. He was really mad when I got home this morning.”

“Let me talk to him.”

Lael shook her head. “He’s mad at you for missing his seminar two weeks in a row.”

“That has nothing to do with you and me. We’re engaged, dammit.”

Kelly put on his shoes and undid the Velcro flaps of Lael's sneakers. "I'll be back. You're not going anywhere."

When it was time to knock, Kelly's fists were already clenched. Julian came to the door in the same white robe. He stepped aside with an exaggerated "after you."

An open suitcase rested upside-down on a mound of Lael's clothes. In front of the efficiency stove lay a half-dozen roses and the remains of a ceramic vase.

"Take the futon," Julian said. "You're taking everything else."

Kelly sat down on a Barbie sleeping bag. "I thought we had your blessing."

Julian kicked shut a photo album on the floor. He looked as though he hadn't slept since Kelly last saw him. "To marry her, not hide her away in your castle."

"She isn't going anywhere. You'll still see her."

"Goddamn right I will."

Kelly took a deep breath, trying to replace anger with sympathy for this man who didn't know how to be alone. "Listen, Julian, just because your seminars weren't for me doesn't mean they won't be somebody else's cup of tea. Maybe I—Lael and I—could help you set up your own business. Website, advertising, the whole nine."

Julian, who had remained standing, finally sat down on the futon. "If you're looking for an investment opportunity, Mr. Vanderbean, I might be able to steer you in a direction or two."

The roar of Kelly's last name left behind an eerie quiet. The floor seemed to tilt. Kelly clutched the smiling face of Astronaut Barbie.

Julian wiggled his toes in front of Kelly's face. "How does twenty thousand a week sound?"

Kelly stood up on shaky legs. He eyed the door. "What does that buy me?"

"Seven days of not telling my daughter about that naughty drawing of yours."

"I'm going to tell her myself. Very soon."

"My daughter is a delicate girl, Mr. Vanderbean. I can't imagine how she'd react to seeing such a thing, let alone marrying the man who drew it."

Kelly turned over the suitcase and filled it with his fiancée's things. "I'll bring you a check first thing in the morning."

Kelly gave Nathan permission to use their project for his film class. Nathan's professor, Dr. Wilander, mentioned Nathan's film to a friend who wrote for the alternative weekly. The article caught the eye of a producer for a local morning show.

The pregnant anchor looked stricken by the emoticon, pixelated for viewers.

"And the man who drew this is going to answer questions after tonight's screening?"

"Yes, ma'am." Nathan spoke in the whisper he used when his hearing aid was turned up too high. "He's a nice guy."

"He sounds like a real peach," said a man taking a seat beside Nathan.

The anchor introduced the leader of a group planning to protest the film outside the theater. Julian gave the camera a flat smile. He wore a T-shirt bearing the words "Think of the Children."

Kelly and Lael entered the cinema through the side entrance, avoiding the picketers near the ticket window. Lael wanted to know if they were sneaking in. Inside the theater, Nathan introduced them to Dr. Wilander. At last Kelly explained to his fiancée, with few specifics, what it was he and Nathan had been up to. Lael beamed with relief.

Winston had saved two seats for them in the second row, promising to "rip shit up" if anyone got too close to Kelly. A number of the protesters had bought tickets, but a tall usher with a shaved head and the emoticon tattooed on his throat vowed to eject anyone who disrupted the show.

"I would like to invite all of you to join us again tomorrow night for the rest of our students films, which are all remarkable in their own ways." Dr. Wilander had a Scandinavian accent and acne scars that looked more like dimples when she smiled, which she did frequently. "These films are early efforts from future masters, so please watch with sympathy for what they do not yet know."

As soon as the title appeared—"Shift Six"—Kelly's chest tightened. Closing his eyes didn't block the sound of his own voice, amplified in the ceiling and walls. He wanted to plug his ears, but couldn't let go of Lael's

hand. The few times he found the courage to look at her, her mouth hung open in deep interest, or vague indifference.

Directly in front of them, Dr. Wilander suggested to Nathan places where the film might be expanded. With some work, she had told him, it had a chance to be accepted to festivals. Kelly had given his blessing, offered to pay any travel costs or entry fees. Maybe one person could benefit from Kelly's ignominious artwork.

The crowd laughed when they were supposed to, occasionally when they weren't. If the usher escorted anyone to the exit, he did so quietly. No one made a sound while Kelly described the couple at the bowling alley. During the story, it wasn't Kelly's face on the screen, but a prolonged close-up of the blood pooling in his cuticle. Dr. Wilander nodded her approval.

Lael looked at him for the first time since the film began. Her thumb stroked his knuckles. She swabbed a half-circle under her eyes, and Kelly let out a sob. Two more followed before he buried his face in her shoulder.

"What's that one going to be?" Nathan asked onscreen.

Kelly sat at his drawing table, making broad strokes with a pen. Nathan stepped around the table for a shot of the sketch pad, and Kelly brought it to his chest with a nervous laugh before the screen went black.

Dr. Wilander stood up to applaud. Many joined her. A man near the back said, "Yeah." House lights came on, and Dr. Wilander, seeing the film's subject still composing himself, announced an intermission before the Q & A.

Lael squeezed his hand, said it was okay. "I bet you could use some ice cream."

Butter Pecan, he thought, but didn't have to tell her. It was her favorite, too.

Halfway up the ramp, she turned to him and smiled. Her expression turned grave near the door, outside which her father waited in his T-shirt. Lael stepped around him, shaking her head. Julian followed her into the lobby.

"Remember me?" asked a gray-haired, gray-faced man in a powder-blue cardigan. His prim voice and sweater were more familiar than his face, on which gravity and time had taken their toll.

"Mr. Walkish, how have you been?" In the spirit of atonement, Kelly extended a hand to his former boss.

Walkish ignored his hand. His thin lips, a pair of pink toothpicks, came together for a brief smile. “Not long after you left that piece of quote unquote art on my desk, my wife left me. She took our daughter, who shortly thereafter left both of us to run away with her high school health teacher. I tell you this with some hesitation because I know how much enjoyment you derive from other people’s misery, but I want to thank you, Mr. Vanderbean, for showing me tonight that your illustration is a reflection of your character, not mine. Enjoy the remainder of your depraved life.”

Walkish turned his back as triumphantly as a back clad in a powder-blue cardigan ever turns. Winston was admiring an emoticon tattoo on the lower back of a girl behind him. Trying to get his attention, Kelly felt a fist in his kidney. A series of punches landed on his thighs and lower back.

“You son of a bitch,” Zachary said. “Holding out on me all that time.”

Kelly turned around to find his old sponsor, grinning wider than his face. Zachary climbed onto the seat beside Kelly for the first hug the two had ever shared. One eye on the lobby, Kelly nodded idly as Zachary asked about getting coffee later.

“I’ve got some ideas, old soak. Draw them up for me and we’ll split the dough. Picture this: a pecker the size of a 747, raining piss all over a cemetery.”

Kelly squeezed past him into the aisle.

“No good? I’ve got others.”

“Sorry. I’ve got to go find my fiancée.”

“That girl who was sitting beside you? I saw her screaming at some old guy in the lobby.” Zachary followed him up the ramp. “Probably one of those protesters. Maybe if they got laid once in a while, you know?”

Kelly scanned the crowd for his future father-in-law. Zachary threaded a path to the wall of video games. Lael sat in the racecar simulator, crying behind her bangs. Kelly put his arm around her.

“Not so tough now, are you?” Zachary wrestled someone to the floor in front of the Mechanical Claw. Kelly glimpsed gray hair and a powder-blue arm. He didn’t correct the mistake.

“I want to go home,” Lael said.

“Did your dad leave?”

Walkish was crawling toward the racecar, Zachary on his back. “Get

away from her, Vanderbean.”

Kelly stood up. “Excuse me?”

Walkish spoke with a hand over his bleeding nose. “Come home with me, Laura. Please, sweetheart. I’ll do anything.”

“Look, Walkish. You’ve got the wrong person here. This is my fiancée. Her name is Lael.”

“I’ll call her the name her mother and I gave her, thank you.”

“Her father’s name is Julian, you prick.” Kelly looked for him in the lobby one more time, an ominous nausea rising in his chest.

“Tall fellow with orange hair, penchant for statutory rape?” Walkish managed a patronizing smile like the ones that used to accompany feedback on Kelly’s cover designs. “That would be Laura’s health teacher, Mr. Vanderbean.”

Lael stepped around Kelly and sprinted through the lobby. He went after her, dodging high fives from teenagers in emoticon hoodies. A grinning man pushed a wailing baby into Kelly’s face. In a onesie with the emoticon across the front, the child looked like a tiny super villain.

Lael waited on the passenger side of Kelly’s car. Their eyes met. She mouthed, “I’m sorry.” He unlocked the car, waited for her to buckle her seatbelt.

“It was his idea. I swear. I was supposed to marry you so he could steal your money.” Her words raced with the car, which hit ninety-five. “When he asked me to...sleep with you, I knew it wasn’t right between us. Between me and him. That’s when I chose you. Please slow down. Please?”

The speedometer read one-twenty. Kelly pressed the button that unhooked her seatbelt.

“I’ll never lie to you again. Please slow down.”

She sat with her head between her legs, crying loudly until they were in Kelly’s driveway. He turned off the engine, walked around to the passenger side, and opened the door. She took a few steps toward the street. Kelly placed his hands on her shoulders, turned her toward the house.

The lights were on in the foyer. Kelly turned them off and closed the door.

“I love you,” she said.

He inserted both hands in her blouse between the second and third buttons and ripped it open. She pulled on the sleeves, letting it fall. Kelly

seized her arms when she started on her bra. He unhooked it himself and pushed her onto the stairs.

She said his name with question marks and then without. He unbuttoned his pants with a familiar fear, but there he was. He unzipped her jeans. She made high-pitched sounds he didn't try to interpret.

Justin Runge

Dear Nebraska

Start your engines.
Spit-shine your barrels.
Snip the red scraggles
from your fecund face.
Embrace. Give two pats
on the back and release.
Nebraska, your heart
is a pirogi in the bowl
of your barrel chest.
Your women are wise.
Scrape their windshields
with your bare hands.
Start their engines. Dear
Nebraska, fake teeth
fall into your brown grass
like spent shotgun shells.
Songs like the bullets
of a starter pistol, song-
sized holes shot through
the barely blue sky of you.
A family follows its dog
into your only forest, eats
goose on Christmas, falls
asleep. A highway cuts
you in two, to the sea.
You'll never be a shore,
Nebraska. Your ocean
is an underground body.

Taylor Collier

My Wife the Tornado

When she came home from work
she hurled her keys into the void
of our apartment sometimes they'd
wedge in the corner of the couch or
skid across the kitchen floor but that
afternoon they hit the big bookcase
and dangled over the back end of
the top shelf and though almost every
morning involved a mad scramble to
find them the following morning we
killed forty-five minutes searching
and when I finally held them up she
went to snatch her purse from the sink
where she'd left it but heading out
the door she paused at the entryway
and looked down as if the shoes she'd
pulled off and thrown in opposite di-
rections the previous afternoon would be
waiting for her right there and when
they weren't her face flushed and she
flipped a switch she couldn't flip any-
where else but home and launched into
attack mode saying I needed to give up
this poetry thing because I was twenty-
four and hadn't made it as a writer so
therefore probably never would and
it felt like invisible threads were trying
to pull me out of myself I didn't know
how to respond so I stared the front door
down for half an hour after she slammed it
behind her but how could that prepare me
for that afternoon when she came home
and peeled off her rain-soaked jacket
and tossed it on a stack of my student

papers announcing that I needed to get
a quote unquote real job or that night
when I reached out to hold her in bed
I got an elbow in my side and she said
I was just like her molester

Coleman Stevenson

It was perfectly dark until he taught me to see

derived almost entirely from phrases scattered throughout
Clairvoyance by C.W. Leadbeater

Let us consider the trained man. He sees on a higher plane,
miles from happening here, that which does not reach us till morning.

It happened occasionally with a total stranger, across me like a
dream, manifold,
but the society in me cried *Discredit! Discredit!*, wanted each of the
stations ordinary,
until I saw the investigator set his foot upon the cells of our brain
and view a former birth (ourselves tiny), Leisure all history as
we know it was formed— a far-away fragment correct in every detail.

The man will be reckoning with epochs so remote—
the aura of plants, graves he passed in etheric sight—
space will no longer need; the path is very much larger
in an adjoining room of my being: a reading room, a father's house.
I narrated to him, allowed of it, since in shades of his keener sight,
he noted the very cast of it, like a moonlit sea vanished, a vision of song,
pictures that happened, perishing rapidly by cold,
the door being left ajar. It was only necessary—
consciousness must be entered to discover in that house Atlantis itself.

Compel his aid by the dark force.

Excuse him through some aperture embarking.
Observed, therefore venture astral, physical bodies
idly by, a hundredth part of men and animals.

The man walks, transparent the mind of others whatever their languages,
the limits of the planets taking place down here.

He calls the precession: a vision of eyes in the sky
indicates an arrival, of him and through him.

The speed with which it passes is great,
gently raised and carried: a house, then a figure.
Sight of the stranger, himself as present form
assumed an astral telegraph of his attention.

His shadow walks separate yet is one.
The man who fully possesses his voice would send for his own,
would want to tell them messages—

He survived that field— to hold such sight it makes no difference
whether he be living without entanglement
or with some fresh complications in the twilight.
If dreamt of as possible, it must always be borne.
I would now be taught. But examining the illustration, it does not,
 remarkably,
give any kind of explanation. To touch it
is hardly more than that of magnifying action in the smallest,
endowed with some isolated view of the country,
its coastline between the two states
able to live, some niche in this scheme.

Hilary Sideris

Gift

Poison in German,
it still eats at you,

the luxury sheet set
I bought, one thousand

threads, but not cotton.
Nor will I forget

the diamond studs
I mentioned in my

subtle way, the ones
you didn't buy.

Host

I pardon my
son, I know it's

hard to have
a lodger in your

house, scarfing
your eucharist

wafers, and even
harder when

your guest is
flesh and blood.

Jeff Hardin

Who Even Knows What His Own Voice Is

for it ebbs and flows like spring water
and so easily could be confused for a sparrow,
for a dove, in the moments after sunrise,
and maybe your voice is mine or mine
yours and all things of the imagination
interchangeable, as Williams told us
between patients, their griefs entering
his own, for how else be the happy genius
of a household, or why want only
a singular voice anyway when there are
so many species of thoughts, so many
butterflies to follow sunny days, for
maybe you haven't heard the news yet,
but you don't have to die in your own
mind and heart but have been welcomed
into others, mine if you need rest, mine
if this be your last day, as always it is,
for we are never midway on life's journey,
dear Dante, dear Issa needing radishes
to point the way, this moment, too, ebbing
and flowing, gathering David's psalm
*for God is sheer beauty, all generous
in love* and Rilke's ninth elegy where
we're the most fleeting of all, we who
begin where we end, one voice into another,
way leading on to way, for where else
should we go but where we are going,
the two of us gathering whoever will go,
me reaching your way, you reaching mine.

A New Creation

What I was doing was praying, I think,
being up the hill overlooking the river,
though had you passed by and seen me,
you might have thought me wandering
or lost or even forlorn because of how
slow my pace was, and had you waved
or called out to me, I might have tossed
up a hand, maybe reflex, maybe resignation,
though just as likely I might have leapt
—I do that, you know—I might have
hailed your presence, as wonderful to speak
as cinnabar, as milkweed, and knelt right there
amid sage grass stalks gentled by wind.
I have no shame in such things and often,
out loud, state matter-of-factly *Do unto others*
and *my neighbor as myself*, for such words,
too, are wonderful to speak, as holy as wind,
as lashed and bent as sage grass. I don't
know any more what I'm doing in this world,
what this world is becoming, why we don't
sing all the time as a comfort, how we
walk past a snail on its journey. Maybe
what I was doing was talking to the river
on its way toward the south, and maybe
I was speaking to no one, the no one I am,
thankful for words, their presence on air,
breathed in and breathed out, created again.

Kevin Stein

History of Static

Selective deafness one learns from dad like taking out
the trash.

For practice, dial up staticky talk radio and tune out
the human voice,
savoring only wavelength buzz – a talent the kiddies
soon perfect,
so chit-chatting, yours will be the tuned-out voice.
Hear me?

My father wielded newspaper box scores as Achilles
did his shield,
fending off the day's pinko-commie yammering.
So I'd fret the Reds
dropping doubleheaders while my war's Vietnamese girl
ran newspaper-napalmed
to our house on Lincoln, who emancipated those still not
free.

"Everybody's talking but no one hears a word" sang Lennon
before his bullet.

Still not. A staticky rapping lit Detroit's flames, language
of the Strike-Anywhere riot,
unboxed speech of the quick-flicked match and those
billyclubbed heads
rapped for H. Rap. Those marches across bridges burned,
and sermons heard

but not, "peace talks" that brought neither. Still.

Those villages
bombed by jet and churches KKK-kaboomed – all that
so after football practice
we black-and-white showered together but didn't speak
on street.

A folded newspaper's all blah blah blah to the puppy,

and cops will go

ballistic at “yo’ mama” as others will at The Man.

Just what
hath daddy static wrought? Selective deafness necessitates
practice,
as does talking trash. Static palaver’s perilous to (un-)
learn,
no matter the Declaration’s lyrics and our inner ears’
blended shades.

Ellen Sprague

One Man's Prison Is Prison

I fill in the blanks. My name, address, social security number. Our license plate number. The inmate's name, housing unit, and number. My husband, Josh, has all this memorized. He has stood outside the solid front door of the prison completing these forms before. It's my first time. When I finish, I try to suck in as much lingering freedom as I can.

To be admitted into the visiting area of the Federal Correctional Institution at Fort Worth, Texas, you must have an established relationship with an inmate. There's paperwork. A waiting period. Inner conflict. You might not know what the inmate really thinks about your visit, about what you think of him or he of you. After all, you're free and he's not. And you actually have to want to navigate the barriers between freedom and what it takes to get into the same room with the incarcerated.

If you're me, you wonder, What if the guards get confused and keep me here? This barb of uneasiness pesters me well before I step inside, but I don't mention it to Josh, even as a joke. I know he'll think it's stupid. It is. We've followed the rules: we are not wearing khaki, the inmates' uniform; and neither of us has anything that could be mistaken for a shiv, the penalty for which includes time in the hole until transfer to a higher-security prison. At least, that's what would happen to a prisoner. That's what would happen to my father-in-law, locked up here for the next five years.

FCI Fort Worth does not look like a prison—the low, flat-roofed, cinder-block variety I had as a stereotype in my mind. It was converted from a U.S. Public Health Service hospital to a prison in 1971, the year I was born. Have any of the prisoners been here my whole life? If it weren't for the glistening, wagon-wheel-sized razor wire coils stacked on themselves atop fifteen-foot-high fences, along with a grass buffer zone and more chain link fence with more razor wire on top, it might be a modest retreat—a collection of butter-colored haciendas with red, ceramic-shingled, peaked roofs—an idyllic setting for meditation and philosophizing. It perches in a controlled sprawl on a hill surrounded by a ring road traveled by prison fleet vehicles. As we wait our turn to be invited in—we have been given a pager as though we're awaiting a dinner table—I spot a Ford Escape making the rounds and wonder if the guards

revel in the irony of the name.

The pager buzzes, and we approach a guard to hand over our forms. I've never even been in a local police station. I know no ex-cons. I know only my father-in-law, and I hope our visit will strike a balance between cheering him up and not making him miss the outside even more. I hope to get a sense of what life in prison is like, how Tip is coping. As I stand in the vestibule between the security screeners and the inner prison—this is definitely not a restaurant—I hope that he doesn't complain about things we can't help.

Despite removing my earrings and rings and shoes and not even wearing a belt, I set off the metal detector twice and get the wand as well as an intimate, yet polite, pat-down from the female guard. I'm pretty sure the underwire in my bra is plastic, but the wand beeps insistently. They let me in anyway. I keep moving forward but my breathing is different here, more labored.

Josh guides me by the elbow as we move through the inner prison entrance in a pod of visitors. I free myself from self-imposed tunnel vision long enough to raise my head and find myself inside the chaos of razor wire, traversing a courtyard and climbing five steps into the building where I will see Tip for the first time in over a year. My hair is windblown from the car trip, but I have tried to compensate with my outfit. I had wanted to look good, but not too good. Not attractive good. I had thought about painting my nails, but my reverse vanity got the best of me. I don't want the other inmates to notice me. But Josh has told me Tip shines his shoes for these visits. It seems only right to dress for the occasion. Tip is a St. Louis Cardinals fan, and I figure that, if nothing else, my red Cardinals shirt will be a conversation starter.

A fabric backdrop depicting a grand staircase looms against a wall inside the visiting area, and since I ask, Josh explains that later an inmate will arrive with a camera to photograph fellow inmates and their visiting families and friends. It's his prison job. Photographed inmates can then purchase photos and send mementoes to their visitors. Josh tells me that a winter scene, something with evergreens and snow, had been a backdrop in December. I doubt anyone sends copies of these as Christmas cards.

This visiting area is almost the size of a regulation basketball court, maybe shorter, but size is where the similarities end. Before arriving at the

prison, all I had to go on was TV and movies. The high-security inmates on TV growl and spit and glare. The low-security prisoners always look sorry, sad, pale—not necessarily pathetic, but leaning that way.

This space reveals docile men with smiling but serious—even earnest—families and friends. The meek man flanked by quiet parents. Fathers yielding to wives or girlfriends when it comes to correcting children. Everyone seems subdued. Nameless, but not faceless, each man in this room has someone who cares at least enough to come visit.

One reason I'm willing to visit is that I've always found a sense of grounding in being able to picture people when I'm not with them. When we talk on the phone, I can visualize where they are sitting, what they look at out the window, the nooks where their pets curl up to sleep. Before prison, before Tip moved to a neighborhood near us in Illinois, before I knew him as something other than the big oaf who came at the New Year to watch college bowl games with his grown sons, twice Josh and I visited him in California. His dead-end street climbed the side of a desert hill in Riverside. His dog, Rupert, patrolled the fenced yard of his basic ranch house. The neighbors across the street grew cacti. Next door was a Mexican family who cooked him dinner sometimes. On one visit he drove us into the San Bernardino mountains to one of his favorite hiking trails. Knowing him in his element, as a real person with a home of his own, helped him make sense to me. But he has moved to Texas, sort of.

Maybe I'm not ready to visit prison yet. But because Josh has already planned this trip, and his brother Garry has become ill and backed out, I find myself 734 miles from home in a molded plastic chair with nothing in my pockets and an ever-whirring mind. I have been awake since 4:25 a.m. and have driven thirteen hours from southwest Illinois to this low-security prison in Texas to visit with a man who has been serving time for possession of child pornography, a man who was a groomsman in my wedding and with whom I'd celebrated birthdays and holidays. Sometimes I just have to repeat it to myself to see if it's true. Child porn.

Josh is sitting next to me, picking at his cuticles. It's not nerves; he always does this. Sometimes there's blood, but it doesn't stop him. He doesn't seem bothered one way or another about being in prison, just a little tired from sitting in a car all day. I don't ask him to stop this time. There are lots of other things to look at and think about. For instance,

I've taken Garry's spot, but I cannot be his replacement. I feel guilty, too, about my freedom. Tip had arrived at Fort Worth weighted by shackles; we have arrived via convertible, top down. All told, he has been in prison fifteen months, with at least fifty to go. I'll be out in a couple of hours.

Josh says sometimes it can take awhile for Tip to come through the door from the innermost part of the prison, the one I turn toward each time it cracks open. I want to see him walk through that door, to be sure he's okay. At the same time, I don't want to see him because I'm still mad at him. Here I am.

On the car ride I had asked Josh a question we had talked about before, but a question whose answer continues to bewilder: "So, what has Tip said when you've asked if he ever made the connection between the girls online and Charlotte and Ellie?" These two are our nieces, his granddaughters.

Josh's response: "Here's what I said, or asked him. 'How could you, having granddaughters, support an industry like that, be mentally aligned with it?' I'm not even sure he knew it was illegal, since one of his rationalizations was that he didn't pay, only found free images."

"But he knew it was wrong, right?" I asked.

"I'm pretty sure."

"What did he say?"

"He just shook his head. He didn't have words."

When I first met Tip during a family vacation in 1993, his first granddaughter, Charlotte, was a baby and the center of attention. At the time of the arrest, she and her sister were fourteen and thirteen. When their father found words to explain what child pornography is and that Grandpa Tip would go to jail for it, they responded with tears. I don't think they really understood though. They were still too innocent, and untouched. The psychologist Tip met with several times before his sentencing reported that he was "quick to make a distinction between his fantasy wishes and reality and it was clear that he has never violated this boundary." Even the judge believed he had only looked.

I don't have words for most of this. He's in prison. We're visiting. And I don't see the need to rehash what Tip and his sons and his lawyer and the judge have already covered. Guilty.

I notice more inmates coming through the door and consider whether Tip thought he would ever be caught, if his private fantasy life would be made public. Did he think about how it would impact his family? My guess is that criminals don't really think about others that much.

We've been in our seats for fifteen minutes.

Josh has chosen three chairs near the glass door to a fenced inner yard with picnic tables. A dim hallway stretches to one side, housing a half-dozen glowing sandwich, snack, soda, and dessert vending machines. Immediately in front of us, a guards' observation post and desk tower above the dull linoleum floor, and every few minutes a couple of khaki-clad inmates mutely surrender their commissary ID cards as they check in.

Except for the fact that he has to visit prison if he wants to see his father, Josh seems unaffected. He goes about his everyday life, pays his dad's bills, doesn't broadcast his dad's misdeeds but doesn't hide them either. It's normal for Josh to work out his problems himself, without talking. That's why I have to ask questions directly, such as this one which I finally asked not long after Tip went away: "Are you mad at Tip, or what? What's the emotion? You always seem so calm about things." He thought a minute, then reminded me of a story that smashing his dad's desk to bits helped with the frustration.

Tip hadn't packed up much, though he'd been confined to his home for over a year and knew he'd be heading to prison.

"We couldn't get his desk apart, to get it through the doorway. Tip thinks it's oak. He prized that desk. Not oak. I took a hatchet to it. That felt good." That's how Josh feels.

After the arrest, Tip had nearly lost his home and his savings. He shelled out \$50,000 to an attorney who couldn't do much to help him due to the signed confession, and we loaned him some of that money. I didn't like having my money connected to Tip, but I figured if he were my dad I would help.

I lean a little to the right to peer around the guard station to a glassed-in playroom that looks to hold no more than two or three families at a time. The primary-color play structures remind me of aquarium toys, but

my still-churning stomach isn't seasickness, just nerves. "Just nerves," however, are making me question whether I can greet Tip without crying. I get this way sometimes, more from empathy than sadness. I'm expecting to face a defeated man locked up for an unforgivable crime. But I hope he's not defeated, and I don't want to believe he's unforgivable, because I'm one of those people who believes everyone is worthy of forgiveness.

I count three more inmates coming through the door to fill in the spaces between visitors. I'm surrounded by strangers, yet I feel some camaraderie with the ones who came through the door I did. What makes it worth it to them to visit? Would I knowingly talk with a child porn convict if I wasn't bound to by family?

Murmurs of conversation surround us. What will we talk about? Baseball is a no-brainer—the Cardinals are playing well. Questions about life in prison seem tricky. At least I can comfort myself with the thought that I used to interview people for my job. I know to open with something broad and easy before moving on to more delicate subjects.

I'm nervous and now a little angry. Maybe counting things will help. I tally the rows and estimate over 150 chairs forming ranks, facing a center aisle. Our front-row seats face north. Arms crossed, Josh is staring ahead, resting, waiting.

It's been forty-five minutes since we pulled into the prison parking lot when Tip enters in a short-sleeved khaki shirt and a pair of khaki pants and marches to the guard post. His required prison-issue boots have been shined. He has kept his gray-white hairs trimmed nearly to bald for a decade or more, and he sports a slightly menacing Fu-Manchu moustache below his basic bifocals. He looks okay. Josh stands up to wave and I rise as his shadow. (I've pitied other inmates looking helplessly for their visitors.) Soon Tip is close enough for a quick and awkward hug—he's a big man, six-feet four-inches and well over 200 pounds to my five-foot seven-inch stature—after which I retreat to my chair. Per visiting room regulations, inmates and visitors sit shoulder to shoulder, not facing each other, not touching except for a brief hug or kiss hello and goodbye. And once a prisoner sits down, he is not permitted to get up and move around. Josh sits next to me, with Tip to his left. Right away, it's about cars.

“Did you read about the 2011 Nissan Altima in *Car and Driver*?” Tip asks Josh, picking up right where their last conversation, a fifteen-minute-limit phone call, had been cut off. I remain on the periphery of words and space.

“Yeah. Do you like the 2.5-liter four or the 3.5-liter six?”

So while father and son ease into what I might call idle conversation, I half-listen and half-take stock of other families and friends similarly arranged. Across and to the right, four Hispanic children swarm a man I take to be their father while a slender woman I presume to be their mother sits close to him. In front of me the seated guard monitors a thirty-something black couple to my left. He gets their attention and with hand gestures directs them to face forward and keep their hands to themselves. Is anyone else watching this?

As far as I can tell, no one is watching me, not guards or inmates, and I commit to keep it that way by aiming my knees forward and holding my hands in my lap. I’m not good at getting in trouble, having the attention on me. I can feel the constriction in my throat and the flush in my cheeks when a cop simply passes by me on the road with his red-and-blue flashers on.

Why am I here again?

On that September day when Josh called me at work to report that his brother had just called saying Tip had been arrested, I laughed. Boys, even grown ones, play cruel jokes on each other, the more believable the better. In this family, the sons have always been straight arrows and the father the rebel. Tip had once been hauled off to jail and spent a single night behind bars before paying a fine for growing marijuana in a utility easement. Decades later, the episode had surfaced at a Thanksgiving dinner as a family joke. For all I know, that pot bust was funny to Tip all along. He has a way of giggling about things I don’t think are funny.

But Garry was not joking, and the arrest was for child pornography images he had downloaded, printed, and viewed on his computer and big-screen TV.

Surrounded by convicts and their visitors, now I catch myself imagining that Tip’s neighbors, including the petsitter who had reported him after noticing images in his recycling bin, looked on during the police raid through windows with pulled-back curtains and enjoyed the free-for-

all atmosphere as police removed Tip's computer, TV, camera, and family and other photographs. Forfeiture of personal property is a common penalty for Tip's crime.

I hear Josh ask Tip about his exercise regimen and refocus.

"I usually walk five miles a day, six days a week." In prison, where he can't be in control of much, Tip is thriving where he can be in control. He's not bragging, but he's proud of himself.

I consider that during our drive south, Tip might have been circling the track I saw outside, a one-third mile rectangle with rounded corners. I imagine his circuit. As he strides toward the southwest he can see, or at least hear, kids in the near distance kicking the ball around on the grassy fields. Does he think about the kids he used to coach in local park and rec leagues, or the sixth-graders he used to teach? (Why is there a school so close to a prison?) When he shortens his stride to round the corner he can distinguish the gray and white striped highway he won't travel for another five years. When he turns left again he faces the butter-colored buildings where he eats, sleeps, and waits. A final bend takes him along the short side of the track that heads back out toward the green playing fields below.

I finally jump into the conversation. If I don't ask any questions at all he might think I don't care. So I decide to make some factual inquiries, not the "how does it feel" kind. I favor the sideways approach. Pointing to a three-story, worn yellow structure out one of the many windows encircling the visiting area, I ask, "Do you live in a building like that?"

"Exactly, but Dallas Unit is over there," he says, gesturing. I guess each building is called a unit. "I'm on the second floor. You only qualify for the first floor if you are in a wheelchair or something."

At 68, Tip may be one of the older inmates, but he's not nearly in need of a wheelchair. Back in county jail in Illinois where he spent three months in early 2009, he was convinced he needed a hip replacement. Now, he says, he feels almost sprightly, and when he reports that the younger inmates remark on his fitness, his tone tells me he is flattered.

But a few weeks before our visit Tip had spent nine days in medical ward isolation to get treatment for scabies. He was fired from his job of checking out athletic equipment to other inmates because he missed too much work, and he's not really better. Now he is charged with cleaning up litter in the recreation yard, where he also re-racks and wipes down

free-weights. I ask about this job, and he admits to performing his duties as if looking to be recognized for a job well done, even in a world where his CV—the MBA, in particular—does him little good. “I did get a bonus last month,” he says, noting the \$.30 per hour base pay.

I spy white sheets catching the dry Texas wind like spinnakers, makeshift curtains in gaping double-hung windows with six-over-six panes—an effort, I suppose, to keep out the bright Texas heat. So I ask, “Do you have a window like that in your room?”

“I do, just like that. It even opens. That’s unusual in a place like this,” he says. I trust this testimony. I keep finding myself thinking that there is a lot of glass around.

I tell myself we should talk about more than his living quarters. The fact that we’ve driven this far to be face-to-face suggests that something important has to be revealed. But I don’t want to know why he did it. Besides, I’ve already heard, through Josh, his rationalizations—he lived alone, he was single. And now isn’t the time to yell at him, at least not according to my sense of propriety. Maybe I should have yelled at him before he went to prison, but at least three things stopped me: I don’t trust that I’ll be articulate in such situations; I don’t want to hurt Tip’s feelings; I don’t want to overstep my bounds in Josh’s family. Plus, I’m a wuss about directness.

Gaining courage, and trying not to yell over the controlled din of reunited families in a hollow room, I ask, without naming his crime, “Do you guys talk about why you’re here?”

“No.” It’s a declaration. “Mostly guys keep that to themselves.”

“What about your roommate?”

“Oh, my cellie.” His cellie. “No. But I’m pretty sure he’s in for the same reason.”

I don’t ask how he has reached this conclusion. In prison it’s dangerous to be found out.

In general, child pornography is unspeakable, but not unheard of. I’m struck that federal prosecutions for child pornography rose from 169 in 1996 to 2,539 in 2006. That’s fifteen times more prosecutions. Someone was talking. Or more people were looking. Or both.

Who are these people? Tip tells us about his other “new friends”—a philosophy Ph.D. from Buffalo (crime unknown) and Big Ed, a drug

dealer. Once they're on the outside they'll be able to Google each other easily enough and find out each other's misdeeds if they still care. Tip was required to register as a "violent sex offender." I can agree that it's good for families to know if they have neighbors who have been convicted—and served time for—sex offenses. He, himself, was not violent, but the crime he's been convicted of is categorized as such.

I'm curious to know how long his "friends" are in for, but I don't ask. The judge sentenced Tip to seven and a half years—90 months. He'll be required to complete 85 percent of that.

So here we are, and we decide it's dinnertime. The menu for Tip: A vending machine burger. "Garry says if you microwave the burger and bun separately it's better," he tells Josh, who is now brandishing the \$40 in quarters, unrolled and in a clear plastic bag, he was permitted to carry into prison. Tip likes things a certain way, but inmates aren't permitted to prepare their own meals. I'm not mad enough at Tip to be mean, so I slide over to the chair next to him while Josh gets their dinner. Even so, it's a little awkward. I try to sport an encouraging smile.

"Do they have classes or anything here?" I venture.

"Sure," he says. "I've taken Anger Management and a communications class from the Psych. Department. They were terrible."

I'm beginning to regret the question.

"Part of the reason I took them," he adds, "was to have something to do."

I peer over Tip's shoulder at the vending area. Josh is waiting in line for the microwave. The burger will take two minutes. What will Tip and I talk about next? I must confess I don't run to answer the phone when it rings each Saturday morning, Tip's unscheduled but regular time—but we've always gotten along. We first got acquainted through letters—his idea—when Josh and I were engaged. I've always been a letter writer, so this strategy made sense to me. Besides, I was studying in France, and Tip was living in California.

I have three letters he sent me, which he treated as formal introductions. I wasn't alarmed at the time, but I re-read them recently, curious about what they would tell me now. The first begins, "I believe I

am a combination of all sorts of archetypes, from the small child to the (hopefully) wise old man, and everything in between.” He wrote about the marathon he trained for but missed due to injury; the mountains he’d climbed in California and Alaska; his part-time appointment as a lecturer in physical education at U.C. Riverside.

Now that I know him better, this reminds me of the start of one of his monologues, or what I imagine an early session with a therapist might sound like. I also suspect the coursework he’s taken toward a master’s in clinical psychology makes him speak this way, about things like “archetypes.”

Another letter: “I have been married and divorced three times....My greatest joys and worst pains have centered around relationships.”

At the time I had thought Wow, this guy bares it all. I hadn’t been talked to this way by my elders, and I thought he was being quite courageous. Now I think he sounds no different from many struggling adults. Nothing to tell me he’ll turn to child pornography to fill an emptiness in his life.

In one letter, though, Tip wrote, “I love kids, and for the most part they love me. I have a friend with a very young baby that makes me erupt with happiness. The students in my hiking classes are at the other end of the age spectrum. I also help with an outdoor program for middle schoolers at a local church and deeply enjoy these kids.”

“Deeply enjoy.” I would never say that. Now I know that’s just the way Tip talks—he has a heartfelt way. Did he look at his students sexually? It doesn’t sound like it to me. Of course, I’m not a trained psychologist and the letters are sixteen years old.

Really, I don’t know why I’m worried about holding up my end of the conversation here in prison. With Tip, no one has ever had to talk much. Unlike his sons, he seems to process by talking. Josh and Garry didn’t grow up with Tip, but with their mom or grandparents, and neither one talks much about feelings. This doesn’t mean they’re not sensitive. In fact, they’re both trained educators and counselors. They’re just better at listening. I’m neither trained in counseling or communication skills nor do I talk directly about feelings. Maybe it’s okay to listen tonight.

Before Josh gets back I remember to ask Tip about the Christmas card he’d sent the previous December. It had rained glitter and looked a bit

like a child's artwork, and I had wondered where the colored construction paper, magazine-clipped photos, glue, and glitter had come from. I also had questions about the scissors.

"One of the inmates made it," he says. "I know they're not the most beautiful creations, but I like to support the guys this way. You know, they're doing something productive."

This is the Tip I like to know.

Josh returns with the properly prepared burger for Tip balanced atop a refrigerated sandwich for himself, and I realize that, in order to eat, I will have to cross the visiting room without an escort. Together, guards and visitors far outnumber the inmates. Obviously, I reason, the inmates aren't looking at me, but at their own visitors. No need for self-consciousness. There's no threat. I complete the crossing without incident to focus on my own dinner selection—a ham and American cheese sandwich on squishy white, precut into triangles. Expiration date: Two weeks later, my birthday. Bewilderment shrouds the face of a woman peering into the alien light of the vending machines.

"Maybe just press this one," I say, pointing to a button about a foot off the floor that I've already pressed to rotate the sandwich selections. I've never talked to anyone who has a relative or friend in prison before.

"Oh, of course," she says, and we bond with pained smiles over our sense of being rookies together. It's a little like braving the cafeteria as a parent during freshman orientation, except you already know your kid's a troublemaker—and so does everyone else.

I deposit four quarters and liberate a Diet Coke. Untouched by hands or eyes, at least those of the prisoners, I return to my seat victorious and half-listen some more. Tip can go on and on about politics, cars, PAC-10 football.

After dinner, when Josh doesn't offer Tip dessert, I question his reticence. I'm feeling bold enough to challenge Josh but not Tip.

"He usually doesn't want it," Josh replies. But Tip's home freezer always had ice cream in it. Tonight, he accepts my offer to fetch something sweet, and with the confidence of a veteran I return to the dim vending area to retrieve a \$2 sleeve of Oreos. When I can't finish my bite-sized

vanilla cream cookies, having devoured his Oreos, Tip bails me out.

Conversation flows easily, as if we were back in Tip's living room with a Cardinals game on. Then, talk happened during commercials, TV on mute. This had become the pattern during Tip's year-long home confinement. Then, I didn't ask any questions about the crime or prison. It's hard to talk to your father-in-law about sex.

I rest my elbows on my knees as I lean left, into Josh, to hear Tip, seated again on the other side. The guard doesn't notice that our legs are touching, or maybe it doesn't matter since we're not inmates. World War II emerges as a topic because Tip had sent Josh some history magazines that he had traded for.

"What book are you reading now?" I ask, knowing he is working his way through Patrick O'Brian's series about high seas adventures during the Napoleonic wars. Using Tip's credit card, Josh buys him books online, and some of his old friends in California treat him to books as well. He says he's on book sixteen.

"Hold off on sending any more. I'm only allowed three books in my locker and I've got something like fifteen." These, he says, are liable to be confiscated any time. But the guards are not searching for books, are they? Contraband of more interest would be weapons, drugs, cell phones.

"You should probably leave now." Tip says this just before 8:45 p.m.

I don't know what to think, but Josh asks, "Are you sure?" Since we have driven so far and he hasn't had visitors in months, it would be both proper and kind to stay till the very end, 9 o'clock. Yet Josh will be back the next day, Saturday, and that must be some consolation. I'm not approved for a Saturday visit, though, because my trip happened last minute, and I don't know when I'll return.

It turns out Tip's suggestion is a matter of making the departure easier for us and perhaps less tedious for himself. He must have weighed the options and consequences and decided he doesn't mind losing out on fifteen minutes if it means he won't have to clean up the trash or straighten the chairs when everyone else is ushered out. But what does he have to rush back to?

After a quick goodbye, including the cursory hugs that happen in

a precipitous departure where people like me don't understand the protocols, Josh and I line up like primary school students at the door and, with a small contingent of visitors, retrace our steps across the courtyard. We line up again, this time at a thick glass window with a gap beneath it, the kind all-night gas stations sometimes have for security. A cute, stout, black woman, last name "LeFleur. L-e-F-l-e-u-r!" she almost shouts through the window, reaches out her right hand and places it under the black light to reveal her hand stamp. She waits. We wait. "Let me out," she bleats until the guard locates her driver's license. My nerves start to prick, too, when he fumbles through cubbyholes on his desktop before finally finding my license. He sets his hands on Josh's license easily, and we huddle with the others already waiting in a reinforced glass and painted steel vestibule. We stand still with benign smiles and avoid eye contact.

The door to the prison grounds clangs shut. The door to freedom hisses open. We spill out into the parking lot like fans leaving a game when their team lost in overtime, and the tension begins to drain.

As we head to our hotel, I wonder again how it feels to be the one in prison, to be visited by people who can leave at will, by people like me who only write you two letters in an entire year while you send one every week or so. How much of being in prison is mental, more than simply a place you can't leave, especially if the fear of being shut in by accident strikes visitors like me so strongly—and, perhaps, irrationally? With the ring road and the fences and the emerald buffer zone and more fences, does Tip feel not only confined but also constantly constricted by a series of inescapable, collapsing, concentric boundaries? I imagine that the perimeter seems to get smaller, tighter, every day, and just thinking about it makes me forget to breathe.

The next day I'm waiting for Josh outside the prison at the appointed time. He's late. So I pull out my smartphone to explore FCI Forth Worth with Google Maps, a surprisingly easy maneuver. The entire layout of the facility, including the rec yard, track, fences, ring road, and even playing fields beyond the boundaries, are posted right there on the Internet.

But I still don't know what it's like to live there. And that's just it; it's not Tip's home, but where he lives. Sure, I can picture the sky, the razor

wire, the buildings. But I don't know what Tip sees when he looks up from writing letters at his desk. I don't even know if he's sitting or standing, if there are others waiting in line when he calls Josh each week. I can only conjure images of him circling the track outside, working in the rec yard, greeting the one or two other visitors he receives in a year.

One man's home is another man's castle is not a saying that applies to people in prison. Especially not if, when you hug your guests goodbye and watch them depart, you walk through the door you had originally entered, slowly remove your shined shoes and khaki pants and shirt, and submit to a strip-search.

Jason Bradford

Confession #4

The ocean mass
ages my ear
drums
to sleep like stat
ic. Sea
weed fossilizes
on my lips. An octo
pus chews
through my molars.
In the dark I try to sit
on the shore
with a sea slug.
I try to d
raw dreams in the sand.
The waves say
they are playing
every time they run a
way. Fish leap
through my eyes. A star
fish stores its
elf in my lower man
dible. My spine itches
with barnacles.
I have n't felt
this anx
ious in 29.53 days.

Confession #3

If I could say something
about the pancreas then I would
say the tomatoes are green

but then I'd have to plant them,
and it's been minutes since the sun
leaked on the bamboo floor.

It has been hours since
the phonecall.

I wish
there was some
thing meaning
ful. When the birds ask
what I want
to be, I say I sing
light
like a lantern.

Then a storm blows through a stop sign
and like a rhinoceros
I sit simply
underneath a blue umbrella.

Maybe it's silly, but.

Piotr Florczyk

Pastoral

I was born in a city—you've never been there. I rubbed shoulders with
buildings, blue
trams, and pigeons. Then I had this idea to take a hike and get some fresh
air elsewhere.

The idea wasn't mine, but nor were the oaks I hugged with strangers, or
the lashing
brook I stood in barefoot, catch-and-releasing. I followed the rules and
stayed on the trail.

Then I changed my mind, decided to leave, but couldn't find my way back.
The idea
was mine. I've carried it around like a breadcrumb; neighbors think I've
got stuff

up my sleeve. So we're learning together how to cross an intersection with
the lights
turned off, or how to tell a real turnip from a knockoff. No one complains
if, out of

boredom, I slingshot rocks at their windows, but when I stagger with a
story of the sun
climbing a fire escape in the rain, they ask not for the ending but for
silence, something

like a furrow or a dagger.

Lullaby

Wrapped in sheets like a mummy, or a wound, you can tell it is not a murmur but something lesser still that you hear when you eavesdrop on the couple

having sex next door. Their bodies, gasping and changing gears, are in the way— stuck between you and some muffled yelp that travels down the dimpled walls.

If only they stopped ringing the doorbell, those tipsy carolers, maybe you could finally hear the conch in your head. Insured by Smith & Wesson, powered by

Rita's Apple Pie, you won't catch any Zs tonight, since the footsteps and toilet flush give way to MAYDAY being tapped on the pipe above. Is fire alarm next in line?

You've fed the dying goldfish, paid the gas bill...And now you put your lips on your wife's open mouth, sorry to see it adrift on the pillow, like an island in high seas.

George Looney

The Girl Who Made Love in Cemeteries

It's the thought of them down there looking up,
she said. The shifting shape of our bodies
coming between them and constellations
they've whispered the stories of for so long
it seems they have no room for anything
more. That's what does it for me, giving them
something new to whisper under the earth.
Whether flat on my back on a marble
headstone, or standing, with you behind, me
hugging this stone angel for all she's worth.

The Lyrical Prophecies of a Spanish Guitar

Late November. The bare limbs of trees
 want to deny
the scuttled urgency of clouds

that scurry and seem to compose ballads
 an old man plays,
remembering the nearly forgotten

scents of a woman who would sing damp
 beside him in bed,
the strumming of an out-of-tune Spanish guitar

a sad backdrop after love. Nothing
 can explain the harsh
unforgiving style of this fog, how,

despite it being no more than a dampness
 in what is only
the cool of an autumn morning,

it's as impatient as something more
 solid, say this
woman in earth-tones with a son in tow

who can't be more than seven, his frantic
 hand collapsed inside
hers, larger and more insistent. It's almost

as if her hand's a Spanish ballad and his
 the repeated phrase,
a delicate, familial theme. Missing

in his are the variations, which always
and only come
with time. Or is that come as time?

The morning fog takes on the images of
their passing through it
so that, for a frenzied instant, their being

in a rush hangs in a series of interlocked
and vague tropes
of her body that are shivered through

again and again by the irregular form
of the reluctant boy
enslaved to this headlong scurry of flesh

and fallen cloud. There's music in this fog,
though it's not
the lyrical prophesies of a Spanish guitar

in tune and strummed by a lover who knows
the sturdy instrument
like the inflections of his own body

but the hollow sounds of some weathered wind
instrument, a music
made by someone's shopworn breath forced

into the confines of a columned space and released
in fingered patterns.

The music you'd hear standing in front of

Hopper's Hotel by a Railroad. Outside
it might be
starting to snow. Here there's only

the indignation of late afternoon
light filtered by
residue that leaves a dour patina

on the sills of windows that can't
be opened.
The forgetfulness of how the woman

in the slip curls into the inevitability
of her body
imbues the austere room with a scent,

maybe one the man wants to recall
through the stink
and nervous ruin of his cigarette.

Any music left between them—these
figures of lamentation
posed in this regret of a rented room,

one looking down at the pages
of a book she has
read enough to turn the words

into notes she hums lackadaisically
and the other
looking out at tracks that could be

staves for a music that could get fog
up and dancing—
must be an almost jaunty dirge

all about time and how to remember
any detail ends up
elevating loss to the level of the sacred.

Which is what the Spanish guitar,
 played by a lover
to the beloved while, outside,

everything's offered a kind of redemption
 by the laying on
of a discordant fog, claims for us all,

even if the guitar's out of tune
 and played poorly.
Music forgives everyone who listens.

Rebekah Denison Hewitt

For the Sake of Solidarity

you said you wouldn't drink until the baby is born,
but the white wine squats in the metal cooler, water beading on the bottle
& do you realize that "sake" is spelled the same as sake—which I first had
when I was twenty & it burned my throat like whiskey in Nashville,
when Josh ordered drinks as everyone decided to go, so
the whiskey went bottoms up too quick off the bar's barrel top.
Danny said that was when I was fun. Before babies
is what he meant. I wanted to do yoga today then got caught up
on Facebook, & a friend of a friend's pictures of Pisa,
you know, supporting the leaning tower with her fake boobs & her pretty
husband. I got jealous, remembering the bartender
setting Sambuca on fire in Italy, remembering
it will be a long time before Italy again because the time change
with a baby & a toddler I can barely leave for a day,
but everyone knows you can love something too much
or wrongly. Isn't that what all those stalker movies are about? And dying,
I am dying the way we all are dying, you are dying in this moment closer
than the moment before & I keep thinking we should go to Bandon
because the Pacific is still carving boulders in the sea & our sons
would catch crabs & pick the meat out of their claws & our hair
would smell like salt & don't you realize sometimes children
die and there's no way to stop that, there is no burn in my throat, there is
a baby in my body, my tongue is burning & don't you realize
fire and water are the same are the same happening this moment.

Shanna Compton

With Dashes Fitted, with Intent Spliced

Administer this, buster. In the salon the flitting
energy pours zero wedding riches on the flashes.
For unity we indulge in passes under every gable.
This for us is the same as *to seize, to call*, to talk
of Tuscany—transplanting apprehension from one mind
to another, from one book to the next in a gnomish
microscopic hand. Yes, a literate parade of our despairs!
We issue again the shutdown command, the flick
of a susurrating blade. Forget about the scurf—
think cabins and woods. Think abandoned shops
dusted with the tracks of cooing quails, threnodic
as accordions. In cyclones we trust. Count the stuff
of these eighteen warehouses while all babbles on.
We must align our quandaries and babble on.

An Obsession with Dirt, a Desire for Order

Here we travel among
all the warmer demolitions.
We chase a moderate harmony
into a third verse of little-known lyrics.

Ghastly, aren't we?
But concomitantly pretty,
happy, reorganized into dweeby floor plans
furnished with shared shelves.

Induce me to trade my latest wig.
Serve me any lame dish—I'll eat it.
Tell me the prairie is studded with icebergs.
No need to ask: I see them too.

Never Again

Three tries and three erasures.
Placing the last side
on a box-me-in,
I must or I can't sleep.

I open the book called *Never*
again so that it negates
itself. I find myself
at *intertwine*,

at *encroach upon*,
sliding into an *abrupt exhalation*.
A good idea, to breathe.
The room at night

is a different room
with morning's furniture,
the same animals, the same unseen
and unsaid.

Deborah Bernhardt

Maritime Duchamp

A drawn bridge, ahoy, La broyeuse de chocolat, adrift in the VHF dimension: what is happening? Network of Stoppages, threaded leads for mapping routes without measure. The ship's forward part of the routine—prow, inscape bow—cuts and steers. Transmissiently turns—osmotic passions! Then, to be saved, heads for the hard of the heart drive. Projecting edgy accentual parameters toward a flammable ending which sears or is from Sears. Ether oar ropes hold lineation to the prow. VHF 13 to Bridge Tender of the Delivery System: Pan-Pan, Pan-Pan, Pan-Pan, the Large Glass in Philly is filling with fine grinds. Filament figurations. Atelier motives afire.

Oil

The sun is undue molasses in the sky. Over the Deepwater Horizon
 Whither will you transmigrate, Transocean, when Choosing Your
 Absurdist of the spill, amassing, you fuel late night comedy, top hat
 In orange-level outfits. Public relations dirty slickers. Brief Interviews with
 What DFW title cannot fit the botched cleanup: Broom of the System.
 More: A Compact History of Infinity. Infinite Jest. McCain's Promise.
 A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again. Oblivion. This is Water.
 Language: An Essay on Free Will. Pure Land, pelagic jewels need resetting
 on silken gush, sparkle-spin ensilment to liftable tapestry. Tapestry,
 you longing for. Momento mori and immorally. If you did not have
 collected works of Ayn Rand could be your junk shot. "Where you want
 you want to have killed the well," said Kent Wells, a vice president. I have
 wandering mind my castle. I have no sword. I make wandering mind my sword. We have
 no place. We make leaflessness our place. *Who says that the garden of leaflessness is not beautiful?*
 We hear spun-strung trilling-song out commonplace windows. Ohm's eponymous and
 euphonious law: current equals voltage multiplied by resistance. Our resistance.
 Single cell degraders of the plume, feeding also on themselves, become marine snow.

and sodden creatures.
 Own Hazardous Passage?
 after bottom hat.
 Hideous Men.
 Everything and
 Consider the Lobster.
 Fate, Time, and
 and twinkle down
 please lift. Leave
 a junk shot,
 to end up is,
 no castle. I make
 my sword. We have
 leaflessness is not beautiful?
 Ohm's eponymous and
 Our resistance.

Jane Wong

A Constellation

“A CONSTELLATION/cold from forgetfulness” – Mallarme

When we see each other in the street we cough
To keep from talking pigeons swarm around
Our feet like roses at the base of a monument
Rotting from the petals inward

I thought the heart was a safe thing
I thought there was safety in numbers
So I gathered a crowd and called them a country
I knocked on wood to hear someone knock back

I looked in a mirror and wrung my face
The pipes above me froze I boiled water
On the stove dipping my hair like a candle
This great roaring sings along my crown

Steam rises in a room cold as a meat freezer
Now I know what warmth is for

A headache settles a root the stem of my brain
Sprouts a staircase climbing your mouth
I find comfort in cave animals
In their blindness feeling along the wall

My constant apology pushing back limbs
Until they fold soft bones soft rocks
The cavity in my mouth reopens
A black hole expands into an eye

To say to matter to give yourself over
To matter the amassing salmon
Enmeshed in nets you carry with purpose
Each Monday the garbage man

Creeps in the leaves in the yard
I think he finds me beautiful and I let him

I wear weariness like a cloak over a horse's head
Execution style the same old bag rolling
Along the luggage carousel the black hole of my eye
Grows until I become the moon yoked

In mountains twined how I wish to be twined
To be symmetrical a range of pines
Sharpening in starched air it hurts the throat
To say to clear the sky of trash

Feathers falling with the icicles of day-after
Christmas trees we both know that two miseries
Equals forgiveness loneliness minus
A potato sack minus the light filtering along your arm

In a doctor's office winter waves its deathly hand
Empathy has left me marred and bare

To cut out this overgrowth this disease
A mass of cells kissing in exponential dark
It is difficult to connect a broken constellation
The swinging hope of a parking lot light

To become a star under which you sing
My name over and again
Forgiveness is never an option
The pigeons have left marks in melting snow

We follow such impermanence the wingspan
Of a construction crane useless and sprawling
How lilacs sprawl from my toes in spring
How grout muddles my eyes I can no longer see

What relief the wildflowers that go on
In a field where I can sting and dissolve

An Elegy for the Selves

What am I afraid of?
Everything flares up.

A star explodes,
traffic merges

into one lane.
The points of a star

nudge me in my sleep.
Wake up, weak lamp.

I come to, blink
in spots. A cloud offs

into a tree, a tree
sloughs off its leaves.

A leaf turns in the dark
and it is your back.



Death sits among
my things.

A dresser opens and
a mosquito flies out.

The sky above is full
of seeds, falling.

Each morning, watermelons
huddle in a market.

My grandfather bites
into a slice slowly.

The sun sloshes above.
A truck covers the sound

of the bite, the bite
covers the simmering sky,

the tired leaves on
the tired ground.



I carry these selves
everywhere.

How an ox carries
a family across

a flood, its bell
submerged and whistling

to and fro. I have
this habit of pouring

out just so. Water
in the dip of my roof,

mosquitos stretching
forth their legs,

thinned by wind
or thinned to waste

my crueler self.



Ants tunnel through
plum glow. Legs stuck

in heart, meat of
my sweeter self.

Twilight spreads a museum
of flies circling

my mother's wrist, a bracelet
of wings and eyes.

Too far to see, I threw
a horseshoe at no

particular stake
and it wrung

a neck. Fearless,
my little amp of a head,

resounding off.



Flour covers my face
and I laugh to be

a ghost. I let loneliness
slide through me,

kin to slug and

kind to no other.

I strike stone to stone
to make every fire

in every building.
This is self-love,

as we are taught.
The eye of an eel

my father turns on a spit,
rolling in my mouth.

It was summer
when I killed the first

self. The fire did
its work and left

nothing to see but
all to spark.

James Grabill

Classical Sousa

The duende of Lorca's can be heard in Sousa—not so much from the schools, but the Marine band playing it two-thirds speed.

Ancestral long strides, rolling drums that wheel back cannon and the flag-covered fallen, arrive behind brass, whether it lifts or falls.

A college trumpeter who appears in red at half-time may be a sharpshooter who knows his aerial jazz and brass. He may be a wild songbird cutting loose, as if there's no other option.

But Marine trumpeters stand with both feet on heaviness of the ground—on solidness that doesn't move until it does, on the exact drop of the beat.

When the brass horns sound at once.

When parts fuel the whole, filling in one another.

The President strides onto the stage. The Marine brass resonates where breath's exchanged, where no sound's off.

Drums turn the wheel. Horns make Sousa talk and grieve. What has been, what has arrived and gone—hasn't been lost, when it has.

On the heart-pulse beat, what fills the horns will be streaming under speech.

We Must Adapt

Solar immensities in leaves and microflora have, of course, kept human hunger alive. Seven billion are quickly becoming eight, then nine approaching ten around 2050, unless hunger sets us back.

Each of us has similar needs, and at least archaic mothers in common, though we forget.

Through the lift or fall of electric nerve, root threads under slow-motion bearing of one to the next, the scarlet no return of philosophical doors, collisions have been written across the face of the sun—

The wall of sleep suffers from burst-horse coal.

Admiral teeth decorate the uniform ocean floor.

Torches pave a wingspan path from birth.

Affinity, unfinished, undergoes the longer term.

Emily Carr's inexorable day-lit spiraling galaxies turn through principalities in sea-bellowed blameless wind.

Where so many bodies wake or sleep, fresh loaves bake within genetic code. The double helix resonates into a next generation as the heat slides species out of sync, and how much hunger can the planet carry?

Christine Stroud

Writing on the Wall

I had a dream you went missing and the police needed a sample of your handwriting. They came to me. I was the only person who had kept any of your letter—stacks of them in a bright yellow shoe box. They took them out delicately, but the thin paper still crinkled and rustled. As the young police man with black hair scrutinized the curve of your w, the curl of your y—I realized I must still love you. It was a dream. It made sense—I was the only one in the world who kept your letters, so we must still be in love.

Then I woke up, in love with you. All morning I walked with love for you like crystalized honey, hard as amber. I made oatmeal with too much cinnamon and ate it directly from the pot. What did I care? But the day stretched out like a cotton t-shirt, and the dream started to slip away. I couldn't remember which letters I showed to the cops, I couldn't remember if I held your pillow to my face when they left—breathing you in through the nose and trying to swallow your smell. I forgot how to still love you. On the way home from work, I drove with the radio off. In the silence I felt like a small child again with her first lost tooth, probing the empty space between her teeth with her tongue, trying to remember what the tooth felt like, having trouble believing it was ever there.

Drought

We can only make love when it rains. Summer showers, sleet, thunderstorms, hurricanes—it doesn't matter. Every morning we look out the window, fingers crossed for a gray sky. You bite your nails, chewing until each fingertip turns to a dried apricot. I smoke Newports in the afternoon—frown at the white, winter sun. The TV coats the bedroom with a blue glow; the weather channel on all the time. *Another sunny weekend*, the blonde meteorologist reports with a smile. We pace the hallways in the house. I squeeze your arm when we pass.

Our therapist says almost every couple goes through something like this. She says it's about compromise, but we're not sure who's not meeting who half way anymore. We play a *Nights in the Rainforest* CD on repeat, consider moving to Seattle.

In bed I dip my fingers in the water glass, let drops fall one by one onto your back. You tell me your favorite rain memory. Once when you were camping, it started to drizzle early in the morning. The wet and heavy clouds changed the shadows and shapes in the tent, defining a whole new life. I tell you mine.

The CD starts over; we fall asleep to the sound of jungle rain on the canopy.

Erin J. Mullikin

Sleeping Potion

I.

Father.

Sleeping bundle of sticks. A fire,place

full of ashes, ashes we've spent on better news, burned up happier times,
and yes, we recall the limbs
of trees and how the terraces were full of gardenias, sweet blossoms really
so anchored in earth
that when the time came, we couldn't pull them up, but to stay warm we
had rabbit skins and many goodbyes.

II.

Stasis.

Systematic function.

A carbon copy.

Father.

Sleeping gun. A pistol whip. A jawbone aching in the fridge.

You get to know who you are in the ashes, the tubed circumference of yourself, swelling and pacing red carpet. Beetles get in when it's hot. The fleas, the menace of weeds. lantanas grown wild against the old house. No pond water nor creek skim will slake a wild thirst. The flowers submitting themselves to the hose.

III.

I saw you

pick up the battle axe. You slew the thistles and their milky productions.

IV.

Father.

Hammer.

Icicle hanging from an unpopular roof. A tuberculosis of the matter.

A hoof print or a knowing. A holographic map. A changing, a transmutation.

Your careful astronomy

like a diamond

turning black in earth.

V.

I swarm up when I come home. I make a nest in the car shed. Your
teeth have been cut out
and I watch you move your lips in a way I've seen on other people but
never on you before.
Good God, the crops are all rooted in this ground. Stabilize or forfeit.
Harvest or forget.

VI.

Father.

Dead glass hand.

The creek drying up as the cows seek water.

No nest nor nestling.

A truncated message.

A bird's song.

Kevin Stein

Why I'm Auditioning Vegetarianism

Because I cleaned my dusty Ray Bans
while Deb drove our rental east toward sunrise
that seconds as home. Because I had a vision
unaided by peyote or logic in the fashion
James lauds in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*,
though he was mostly wishful unbeliever
and never tripped the ecstatic's light fantastic
other than with wife in downy bed. Because
I spied from the Buick's window momma cow
and baby eating a burger in a car hurtling over
the prairie – no, I was the one fastfooding
really fast and they merely lolling in low hills.
Because the Buick burned fossil fuel fracked
from shale, rock cracked by pressure and water
no longer itself but something resembling water
only in being liquid if not pure to the lips,
as Communion wine's grapejuice is not that
if one crosses oneself with perhaps.
Because the light's proverbially the right light,
biblical as in *let there be*, an instant of clarity
birthed human drama as did our exiting
frothy Darwinian seas or that maybe garden.
Because of our dominion over the legions of
wild beasts, Deb drove 79 in a 70 and kept her
Oakley-eye out for cops, our seeing a function
of the general human compact, which isn't
a small auto but the contract between
our best and worst selves. Because the road
to perdition's a great I-69 of turpitude
and redemption, twin lanes North-South.
Because I had a vision of Bright Eyes the Calf
grazing in my lukewarm sandwich,
Devil's Food saved for late-night snack.

Kay Cosgrove

Marriage

Until we were both long drowned *in the darkness behind his eye.*
Across the street, a woman makes her bed.
That I was the one who ordered the beer, who lingered in a hug a moment
too long.
See my legs interred in the bath?
It is important to use the right words,
So you'll understand if I'm a little afraid
of the ocean.
I don't want to say anything more.
And I'm afraid he isn't on the guest list.
Inside his vest, I bellowed:
Yes, Boy, yes, Boy, yes yes yes.
Lying on our backs, we don't know who's
in houses, boys next to no one, *dreaming wicked*
or my *hotwaterbottled body.*
But when he promised to love,
exiting baggage claim,
to scoop me up from the fire shop and put me here,
marriage.
This is a singularly human experience.
Dirty, pretty knees,
never trust a boy who barks
when you are completely naked.
Leave the faucet on and swim toward me.

Carrie Shippers

Hell of a Hand

Hell of a hand sounds like a compliment but isn't. If the office praises you for competence, calls you a great mechanic in the ring, they mean you'll never be the main event. You'll get stuck lifting new guys up and easing old ones down, jobbing for boys on their way to the belt. Wrestlers train themselves to be unselfish in the ring, but it's hard to know you're only good enough, that no one pays attention unless you screw up. I brainstormed angles I could do, feuds that would make sense, was told to wait my turn while guys I'd taught turned into stars.

I complained no one would miss me if I quit, but I never skipped a show or threatened to walk out. I could hate my pay, the politics backstage, sloppy opponents I had to put over, but as soon as I reached the arena—before the ring was built or fans arrived, before I saw the card with my name in the middle—I couldn't wait to wrestle, pour my whole heart onto the mat, then hit the showers having done my best. It hurt to know how hard I worked for no reward, but nothing hurts a wrestler worse than staying home.

Chris Forhan

Model Making

The word is dead and who doesn't know it
and know the only urgent work and true
is done in the hush when talk stops, and who
doesn't sense a sacred luck, a sacred loneliness then
as I did—ten, eleven, hunched at a desk
in my dim bedroom, hands aglow
in low lamplight, a dribble of glue
oozing from the tube onto the edge
of a plastic fuselage, my thoughts beyond
the silver wing I would place there, my thoughts
whirling in air already around the real
imagined thing, glinting, banking out of the clouds,
and I glanced at the window—black
against blacker sky: the backyard maple,
limbs lifting in a gust, it was
a leaping beast that would
have me, grasping, and *oh*, I said, *oh*.

Disturbance

When Sophie entered the house and dropped her outer things in the vestibule, the smell of smoke was faint, but present, as if a candle had burned down to the wick and now smoldered somewhere. “Mother!” she cried, racing through the living room for the kitchen, where the smell seemed strongest.

“In here, dear.”

Mrs. Newcomb was seated at the kitchen table, drinking coffee and Sophie’s mother stood before the stove, skewering a piece of paper. The page was stuck through with one of the little sticks her mother kept for making kebobs. The flames licked at the page. It curled and blackened, a paper marshmallow.

“What are you doing?” Sophie asked.

Her mother waved the disintegrating page. “Oh, it’s just a flyer,” she said. “They’re collecting signatures, asking us to pull you out of your Mr. Everett’s class.”

“Why?” Sophie asked.

Her mother turned her attention back to the stove and blithely continued to roast the paper.

“To show solidarity, dear,” Mrs. Newcomb answered. “They want to present a united front. They’re calling it Keep Togetherness Together! I’m going to go home and burn mine too.”

“Good for you, Sadie.” Her mother turned off the burner. She touched the blackened end of the skewer before tossing it into the sink. It fell apart at its tip and her finger was left smudged with ash. “How many today, Sophie?”

“Nine,” she answered. “Including me.” For the past two weeks the number of her classmates had dwindled, fewer and fewer showing up each day. Each day more and more parents were choosing to keep their children at home rather than have them remain under Mr. Everett’s tutelage.

Mrs. Newcomb set her coffee mug down and rose from the table. “My Seth will be in class tomorrow,” she said, eyeing Sophie appraisingly. “Just like it was any other day.”

Sophie fidgeted under the buxom woman’s gaze. Mrs. Newcomb always looked at her this way now. Her son Seth had been chosen for

Sophie, but the two were many years away from being joined.

“So will my Sophie,” her mother said. “She understands that this is not just about Mr. Everett. It’s bigger than that. Sometimes you’ve got to take a stand. Right, Sophie?”

“Right,” Sophie said—though really—she had no idea.

The next morning, there were only seven students in attendance. They sat, enshrouded in semi-darkness, waiting to see what their teacher would do next. Mr. Everett stood before them, wavering, his shadow seeming to melt. Sophie could barely see him through the darkness. Five minutes before, she and the others had been sitting at their desks and learning about waves. Mr. Everett had dropped a pebble into the glass tank of water on his desk and the class had watched as the pebble caused a series of tiny waves. He had told them that the waves were caused by the surface of the water being subjected to disturbance and then he’d zoned out right in front of them. He’d stood there for a time, as if frozen to the spot between desk and chalkboard and then—without warning—he’d jogged to the light switch by the door and turned out all of the lights. Now Sophie and her classmates sat in the dark, pretending to be brave in the face of their teacher’s unpredictable behavior.

Everything familiar became disorienting in the dark. Sophie could not see the town’s flag standing tall in the corner between chalkboard and window. Normally, she could take comfort in its presence, in its unique pattern of orange, green, and purple—it was made using only secondary colors— but in the dark, she was without comfort. She didn’t know how the rest of the class was faring. The other kids were scattered around the room, lost to her in a sea of darkness. In keeping with her pledge, Mrs. Newcomb had sent Seth to school that day. He’d been sitting in his usual spot at the desk to the right of Sophie’s that morning, but Sophie had asked him to move, believing that if they all sat spread out it would make the classroom appear more full. It had been her way of doing her part. Now that she sat trembling in the dark for long lonely minutes, wishing Seth was seated beside her, she regretted her ingenuity.

If her mother were here she would fear neither the darkness nor Mr. Everett. Her mother would snap the teacher out of it. “Be nice to him,” her mother had said that morning before sending Sophie off to school.

“Remember he needs your support, not your fear.”

Sophie pushed her seat back, gathering courage from the sound of the metal legs scraping across the floor. If she looked hard enough, she could make out silhouettes in the dark. Like the big one near where she thought the classroom door should be. Surely that one was Mr. Everett, slumped near the light switch. Even from where she stood, Sophie could make out the drooping of his shoulders and the hang of his head. She made her way slowly, touching everything along the way—sometimes the edge of a desk, sometimes a shoulder or the top of a head—until she was at the front of the classroom and Mr. Everett was in her reach. He was whispering something. It sounded like “Julie, God help me.” Sophie couldn’t remember if Julie was his wife or his daughter. She wasn’t supposed to know what had caused Mr. Everett’s new and erratic behavior, but like all of the other children who kept silent in the presence of adults, she drank everything in. All of her classmates knew that Mr. Everett’s wife had left him, taking their daughter with her. Though Sophie knew this, neither she nor her classmates nor anyone else in the town of Togetherness knew what had prompted Mrs. Everett’s drastic measure. Strangely comforted by his whispering, Sophie made her way more securely through the dark. She wondered if he’d been whispering the entire time she’d been approaching. If she’d remained in her seat, she’d never have heard him. Standing there in the dark beside Mr. Everett had a soothing effect upon Sophie. His whisper was a private thing between the two of them, something meant only for her ears. Knowing her mother would want it this way, Sophie grasped in the darkness and took hold of the teacher’s hand. Keeping her voice whisper soft, she asked, “Won’t you come home with me for dinner?”

Seated at the head of the dinner table, Mr. Everett ate everything Sophie’s mother placed before him and complimented the meal profusely. Sophie didn’t tell her mother what happened earlier that day, but she watched Mr. Everett closely, waiting to see if the teacher would do or say something peculiar. The teacher seemed normal enough, even happy to have been invited, though there were several times when he looked at Sophie as if he were about to speak, his mouth opening and closing like a fish’s, without emitting any sound.

To Sophie's mother he complained, "Everyone treats me like a leper. No one will come near me."

"We're not like that," her mother assured him.

"There are so few left in my class now. I've barely got a handful."

"That just means Sophie can have more individual attention," her mother said.

He thanked her mother for allowing Sophie to remain in his class. "They're waging a war against me, you know. They're trying to shut me down," he said. "No one trusts me anymore."

Her mother looked at her and tapped the table twice, a signal for Sophie to clear the dishes. Once Sophie got up and removed the plates, her mother turned her chair at an angle, crossed her legs and opened a pack of cigarettes. Smoking, she said, "If we're not careful, we'll soon be like the folks on the outside."

Sophie perked up at this. Rarely did her mother ever mention the outside world, a place from which the townsfolk had fought to separate themselves, a place Sophie scarcely thought of. Like any other educable child in Togetherness, Sophie knew the story of the town's founding as well as she knew her prayers. Twenty years ago—ten years before she was born— one hundred families of like-minded interests and values had gathered together and decided to leave the outside world behind. Grieved and appalled by the way most of the people they'd encountered kept to themselves, coming together only for selfish and temporary reasons, the one hundred families had pooled their resources to obtain a land grant, a charter and a ninety-nine year lease to forge an existence far away from the rest of the world. Rebelling against what they saw as a depraved way of life, the one hundred families fled it, striking out on their own, seeking not to tell the rest of the world how to live, but only to free themselves from the rest of the world. Like those who called upon the dictates of their religious faith to recuse themselves from military service or jury duty, the one hundred founder families had looked to the dictates of their spirits and recused themselves from the world. They had not seceded so much as they had claimed moral asylum. Collectively, they remitted their taxes to the government for the right to be left alone and govern themselves according to their own best interests. Seeking only a peaceful existence, wanting merely to be left alone to live as best they saw fit, they'd built

the town from scratch. Upon the acres of land they'd purchased, they'd built not only homes and industries, but a way of life. They'd planted their values and beliefs into the soil and up had sprung Togetherness, a town where relationships were not only celebrated and valued, but were a requirement for citizenship.

From where Sophie stood, there was no indication that the outside world truly existed. For all she knew, Togetherness was the only town in the world. There were no visitors, no strangers, no nothing to indicate that anything on the outside mattered. But her father had died defending the town from the outsiders, so maybe that was all the proof she needed. And now too, there was Mrs. Everett who had slipped away and into that world of which Sophie knew so little. "Is it really as bad as everyone says?" Sophie asked.

Mr. Everett and her mother shared a look just then and the conversation took a turn. They began to talk about different people in town, swapping stories and gossip like old friends. Neither of them mentioned the world on the outside or "the incident" that was responsible for Mr. Everett's current fall from grace. But Sophie knew as much about it as everyone else; their enclave of a town was too small to harbor secrets. A man without a family, a man who had been deserted, abandoned, left by his spouse, Mr. Everett was now an anomaly in their small relationship-driven town. Only adult couples who had been joined to partners for a minimum of eight years could live permanently in Togetherness. The couples signed contracts giving their pledges to remain joined together and to have their children joined to others immediately upon adulthood. Now that Mr. Everett was unjoined, the townsfolk worried that keeping him in the classroom would improperly influence the children who were his students and cause a wave of immoral behavior. The members of the town could proudly boast that there had been no divorces since the town's chartering and inception twenty years ago. But, now, thanks to Mr. Everett, there was a separation on the town's books, "the incident" as it was now being called. Nothing like Mr. Everett had ever happened before.

Dinner over, Mr. Everett rose from the table and bowed deep from the waist like a gallant. "I really appreciate this," he said. "Really, I do." He looked down at Sophie as he said it and she knew then that she had been

right to keep the secret from early in the day, right not to tell her mother what Mr. Everett had done.

“You’re more than welcome to eat with us any night. Come again tomorrow,” her mother said. “Unless you prefer to be alone.”

“No one prefers that,” he said.

Her mother walked Mr. Everett to the door and helped him into his coat. He shrugged into it and turned to face her. Holding her mother’s arms lightly, he then leaned in to kiss her. It was a perfect solution, Sophie thought. Neither of them had anybody anymore. It would be a sensible pairing. But Sophie doubted it would ever happen with her dead father standing in the way. Though her mother had been alone for some time, she’d never ceased to speak of Sophie’s father or let the memory of him fade.

Once released, her mother went to the door and held it open for Mr. Everett. There was neither passion nor interest in her eyes when she told the teacher, “I wish you hadn’t done that.”

Mr. Everett never came home directly with Sophie after the first night. He always arrived some two hours afterwards looking freshly showered and changed. When asked about it, Sophie’s mother said it was better this way, not only because it gave Mr. Everett something to look forward to while he decompressed from the day, but also because it gave them a chance to prepare for his coming. Sophie didn’t know what needed preparing, but each day before Mr. Everett’s visit, her mother found some small task for her.

On the fourth night her mother said, “Here Sophie, come help me tidy up.” She beckoned Sophie into the living room and set her to plumping the sofa pillows.

After taking a pillow from the couch and punching it in its middle as she’d been taught, Sophie asked, “How come we’re on Mr. Everett’s side?” The question had been burning in her ever since the first students started disappearing and her mother had declared that she would not allow Sophie to be one of them. Sophie was glad that her mother wasn’t boycotting Mr. Everett, but she didn’t understand why she was taking such a staunch stand against the rest of the townspeople.

“To show solidarity,” her mother said.

“But the other day Mrs. Newcomb said that the petition was for solidarity.”

“That’s one version of it,” her mother said. She took a small hand vacuum and buzzed it along the cushions. “Mr. Everett is one of the original members of this town and we owe him our reverence and respect. Showing solidarity with him is a way of upholding the principles we believe in Sophie, principles that your father died fighting for.”

Though Togetherness was a firmly established and legally recognized town, its dwellers received occasional challenges from outsiders and Sophie’s father had died in a skirmish four years ago defending their town and its way of life. She understood now why her mother was so adamant. Somehow, this thing with Mr. Everett was all about Sophie’s dead father, though Sophie couldn’t see how it was. She hung her head. In the excitement of the past few weeks, she’d forgotten her father’s memory. She was supposed to say a prayer for him every night, but she had recently let many nights go by wherein she did not.

“Pray, Sophie that you never end up alone and have to go through what Mr. Everett is going through.” Sophie thought her mother meant the ostracizing, but the look in her eyes said she meant something else entirely. “Trust me, you wouldn’t want to know the feeling.”

When Sophie still said nothing, her mother grew impatient. She set the hand vacuum down in the middle of the seat cushion and crossed her arms in front of her. “You do like Mr. Everett don’t you?”

Sophie thought back to the very first day of class. After introducing himself and making everyone go round with an icebreaker, Mr. Everett had promised that he would never raise his voice to any student, never force anyone to stand and recite, never use the ruler or the paddle and never make anyone stand in the corner. And he hadn’t. He had kept his word. Yes, Sophie liked him immensely. “He’s pretty nice,” she said.

The bell rang.

“Good,” her mother said. “Because he’s here.”

But it wasn’t Mr. Everett at the door after all. It was Mrs. Newcomb. She bustled in and peered around. “Where is he?”

“Not yet Sadie,” Sophie’s mother said.

“Well, how am I going to show the fellow my support if he doesn’t even show up?”

“He will,” Sophie’s mother soothed. “You’re early.”

Once Mr. Everett arrived, the adults sat down to the table that Sophie had helped to set. Dinner was a quiet affair, devoid of the usual desultory conversation Sophie had come to expect from her teacher. The appearance of Mrs. Newcomb at the dinner table seemed to render Mr. Everett shy. Mrs. Newcomb watched Mr. Everett alertly, as if waiting for him to speak, but the teacher kept his eyes on his plate, unconscious of her scrutiny. The meal ran its course in silence. Oblivious to the reticence of the adults, Sophie ate with the heartiness of a hungry young girl.

After dinner, her mother led their guests to the living room while Sophie prepared the drinks.

“Have a seat,” Sophie’s mother said. “Make yourself comfortable.”

Mrs. Newcomb seated herself immediately and patted the seat on the couch beside her for Mr. Everett to join her.

Sophie brought in coffee and tea. As soon as she set the drinks on the table, the three adults reached for them. Though Mrs. Newcomb and her mother had taken coffee, Sophie noticed that Mr. Everett took tea. Sophie took a cup of tea for herself as well.

“Have you heard anything since?” Mrs. Newcomb asked. It had been almost three weeks since Mrs. Everett had disappeared.

The teacher’s eyes watered. “No,” Mr. Everett said, blowing the word into the cup. Sophie watched it whispering it across the surface of his hot tea, disturbing the calm of the piping hot water and the calm of the adults seated on either side of him.

Before Mrs. Newcomb could follow up, Sophie’s mother sent her a quelling look. “Perhaps we should talk of more delightful things.”

“Of course,” Mrs. Newcomb said, duly chastised. She looked at Sophie and brightened. “My Seth is at home completing his science homework. Seth says he’s learning so much in class now.” With every word spoken, Mrs. Newcomb’s voice rose higher. “Most likely, it’s because he’s getting so much more personalized attention now.” Mrs. Newcomb sat back against the seat cushions and gave Sophie and her mother an exaggerated conspiratorial wink.

“Sophie, is your homework all done?” her mother asked.

“Yes,” Sophie said. She’d completed her homework during the day.

Mr. Everett had recently instituted a new thing called “Reflection Time” where no talking was allowed. Instead, everyone was to sit quietly and make no disturbing noises. Sophie’s best girlfriend Kristen had not shown up for the past two days, and since Sophie had no one with whom she could pass notes, she used Reflection Time to complete the homework that she knew Mr. Everett would never grade. During Reflection Time, Mr. Everett sat at his desk with the previous day’s homework in front of him, looking down at the slim stack without seeming to really see it. They were still on waves and just that day Sophie had learned about the great and destructive tsunami wave. But there had been no demonstration like before. Though the earth science lessons still continued, Mr. Everett no longer used props to make the learning come alive. The surface of the water in the tank on his desk remained calm and undisturbed.

Mr. Everett looked up from his tea with troubled eyes. He said, “I fear for her. She’s out there somewhere and she’s got my little girl with her.”

“What’s out there?” Sophie asked.

“You wouldn’t want to know,” he said. The hands which held the cup trembled.

“I would,” Sophie insisted.

“It’s horrible! So horrible. What a world! No satisfaction. No contentment. Children didn’t want to grow up to be anything other than famous. No one spoke to anyone. People spent all of their time playing with little gadgets. We lost our sense of each other, of why we were here in the first place. There was no common good, nothing to work for, to strive for. Nothing to protect or preserve. It was just an empty world. We were all becoming hollow.”

“You mean shallow?” Sophie asked.

“Hollow,” he said. “I know what I mean. You could change anything out there. If you didn’t like something about yourself, you could just replace it. You don’t like your face? You could go and get a new face. New hair. New eye color. New anything. Empty on the inside. Hollow. We all originally came together because the world outside had degenerated from a tolerable place into a terrible place. Men were walking into movie theatres and opening fire on moviegoers, killing and wounding dozens upon dozens of people at a time. Children were being placed in washing machines for kicks. Teenage boys were beaten and killed for wearing the

hoods of their sweatshirts pulled over their head. And even when there was no physical violence, there was still all of the visual violence.”

Sophie was losing the thread of the conversation. “Visual violence?”

Mrs. Newcomb explained, “It assaulted the eyes. It was everywhere you turned. Little girls like you couldn’t turn on a television or open a magazine without being assaulted by images that told them their only value in this world was sexual.”

Mr. Everett said, “The people around us were mindless like zombies. So many of them were addicted to harmful substances. One man even attacked another man and chewed off a portion of his face.”

“I remember that,” her mother said. “It makes sense with all of this evil surrounding you that you would want to leave it all behind.”

“But Julie didn’t want to come,” he said. “She said we all were separatists. She thought that we were actually making the problem worse by removing ourselves from the equation. She said we were taking some of the few people who actually could see through the muck and mire and removing them rather than using them to help.”

“Help? Help what?” Mrs. Newcomb asked.

Mr. Everett mumbled something that no one could understand. Sophie’s mother asked him to repeat himself.

“Help make the world a better place,” he said. His embarrassment was clear.

Her mother looked startled. “What a quaint idea,” she said, reaching for a cigarette and indulging in a habit Sophie didn’t remember her ever having back when her father was still alive. “It’s been a long time since I’ve heard such a sentiment.”

Mr. Everett leaned forward and eyed her mother. “Do you miss it?”

Sophie also edged closer, curious to hear what her mother would say. Leaving the cigarette behind, her mother rose from her seat and walked over to the wide window which looked out onto their front lawn. She tugged at the gossamer curtain as if she would yank it from its rod, then she trailed her fingers down the thin yellow silk. “I do my fair share of complaining about the small-mindedness of some of the folks here in the community, about the pettiness I’ve encountered since becoming a widow. Perhaps it’s my way of lashing out, getting some small and fine revenge because of the way they’ve treated me since I lost my husband.”

Her mother let go of the curtain and wrapped her arms around herself. “But at the end of the day, if this is all that I have to complain about, coldness on the part of a handful of people who don’t know what to do with difference, then I’d say I’m far better off. I remember that world out there. I can’t quite ever get it out of my head. For the first years of living here I still heard gunshots where there weren’t ever any gunshots. I couldn’t stop looking over my shoulder whenever I walked home at night or pulled into my garage. Once Sophie was born I finally realized that none of those dangers were here and I finally stopped hearing the gunshots. Do I miss it? Always wondering about my safety? Knowing there was no sense, no rhyme or reason to the way certain people behaved? There’s nothing out there for me to miss.”

“Certainly not,” Mrs. Newcomb agreed. “What a world it was!” She reached for a magazine and began to fan herself with it. “That world was just a place of falseness. False people. False apologies and false forgiveness. Sophie, anyone could subject anybody else to any sort of cruelty—betrayal, physical abuse, neglect, insincerity and just plain meanness—and it was all to be forgiven so long as the person eventually apologized. And of course, the apology wasn’t the kind to be trusted. It was a one size fits all kind of apology. All the people who had caused so much suffering, hurt and pain had to do was say something like ‘I meant no harm. I’m sorry for anything and everything I’ve ever done to hurt you.’”

“Then what?” Sophie asked.

Mrs. Newcomb shrugged. “Then you were supposed to forgive them.”

“Just like that?” she asked.

This time her mother answered. “Just like that.”

Even she, a girl too young to be joined, could see the clear wrong of such a practice, the falseness of the blanket apology, the ease of the absolution. Sophie had been taught that there could be no sincere apology without acknowledgment, repentance and atonement. Any other apology was purely a performance, as insincere as a thief apologizing for shoplifting while refusing to return the stolen items.

“There’s more,” Mr. Everett said. “If you were wronged and didn’t immediately forgive the other person, then the blame shifted from him or her to you simply because you wouldn’t get over it!”

Sophie was glad that she had never known that outside world of which

the three adults had spoken. As she listened to them speak disparagingly of the world they'd left behind, it became clear to her that she stood apart from them. It wasn't just that they were older. It was something else entirely, something she'd never noticed, never even thought of until that moment. There was a time when all three of them had been outsiders, something that she had never been and would never be. Sophie had lived in Togetherness her whole life. She'd been born in the town, born to the town. She didn't know anything else, she did not have stories of the outside world, she didn't know of any other life outside of this one. She had lived her entire life in this town that these three adults had helped to build. The three people sitting across from her had all come from elsewhere. They'd lived other lives, seen other things, had been a part of the outside world. They had stories between them which they could share or withhold, stories which Sophie herself could never fathom. Whatever they might tell her would be as alien to her understanding of the world and its workings as the story of a space creature who'd beamed down to describe life on his home planet.

"It sounds awful," Sophie said.

"I don't think Julie saw it that way," Mr. Everett said. "She saw the hope and the possibility when all I saw was danger and despair. I just wanted to keep her safe and I could never do that out there in the world."

"No, you never could have," Sophie's mother said.

After Mrs. Newcomb left, Sophie's mother and Mr. Everett continued to talk quietly. Sophie emptied her mother's ashtray and replenished the teacher's tea and still the two adults kept talking. By the time Mrs. Newcomb left, Sophie understood that the evening had been part of her mother's plan. Mrs. Newcomb had been invited not only to make Mr. Everett feel that he had more support than that of which he was aware, but also so that Mrs. Newcomb might take his story to the other parents and report back. Sophie's mother could not have done it; she was a widow and no one would have listened or taken her word for anything. But Mrs. Newcomb—strong, stalwart and Seth-doting—could be sent as an emissary to sway Mr. Everett's detractors.

The second time Sophie came to refresh his tea, Mr. Everett was lamenting over his dwindling number of students. Since the incident with

the lights, three more kids had been pulled out of his class. Now there were only four attending. He told Sophie's mother that Keep Togetherness Together! signs had been posted on his house and that threatening messages had been written on his car.

As Sophie leaned over to pour out the hot water, she heard Mr. Everett say, "Taking my students was clearly just the first step. From here on out, it's only going to get worse."

And it did.

The next week when Sophie attempted to enter the schoolhouse, she was prevented from doing so by parents standing arm-in-arm, blocking the entrance. She returned home early to find her mother kneeling on the lawn. When Sophie came nearer she saw that her mother was gathering small paper-covered rocks and making piles of them on the grass. "What are you doing?"

"These are the ones that missed," her mother said.

She followed her mother's gaze. The lower windows of their house had been egged. Several windows had been broken.

When she faced her mother again, she saw her peeling one of the papers from a rock. "What does it say?" she asked.

Her mother refused to show Sophie the words.

"Because of Mr. Everett?"

The phone rang and her mother ran inside to answer it. Sophie followed her into the house, but went into a different room and silently picked up the other receiver. She heard a stranger's voice. The voice shouted at her mother, saying too many things too loudly and angrily for Sophie to understand. Sophie recoiled from the anger and the volume. Without waiting to see how her mother might respond, she slipped the phone back into its cradle.

After the letter-covered rocks, there were thinly veiled discussions on the radio stations. There were Keep Togetherness Together! pamphlets and flyers. Then there were the bumper stickers. And the large white wooden signs stuck deep into the ground in front of their house that were just like the ones on Mr. Everett's lawn.

Then there were the people. They waited outside in packs, hoping for

a glimpse of Sophie or her mother. Her mother predicted that they would soon get bored and go away. Instead they stayed. Each day their numbers increased as more and more came. Sophie didn't even realize there were so many people in her town. It was as if the whole town was there at once, outside on their lawn. They were angry at her and her mother, but Sophie didn't know why. When asked, her mother adopted the same tone she'd used to explain the birds and the bees. She explained that sometimes living in a place like Togetherness could be difficult, but that Sophie shouldn't blame the folks in town. Her mother said that they didn't know any better and were just suspicious of other people's ways. The only problem was that Sophie, her mother and Mr. Everett were now the other people. Sophie pretended to accept the simplified explanation, but she thought to herself that there must surely have been some townsfolk who supported Mr. Everett. Surely, there had to be some people on their side, but who they might be, Sophie couldn't guess.

One week later, Sophie woke up to find the crowd had dispersed. She came out from her bedroom and went down the stairs and opened the front door to find the protesters gone. Only their debris remained. She went outside and stood on the dew-covered lawn and slowly began to pick up their trash. The townsfolk had left their wrappings, their cups and their straws. Every now and then, Sophie picked up a crumpled dollar and pocketed it. Soon her mother came out and joined her. Stunned, neither of them mentioned the absence of the crowd.

Sophie was the first to see Mr. Everett approaching from across the street. She waved, although she felt much more like mourning. Mr. Everett looked like a broken man. His clothing was disheveled, his hair uncombed and his eyes bleary. He looked to her as if he hadn't slept in some time. Sophie had never seen him like this before. She didn't know what to say to him when he crossed onto their lawn.

"Rough night?" her mother asked, scooping trash into a large plastic bag.

Mr. Everett kicked at an empty can of soda and sent it clanging down the pavement. "I don't have anything left," he said. "Nothing at all. They took it. Everything."

Sophie thought the teacher had been robbed. She dropped her trash

back onto the lawn and approached him, intending to take his hand the way she had done that first day in the classroom when he'd turned off the lights. She reached for his hand and Mr. Everett grabbed her and turned her, holding her in front of him, his forearm crushing her neck. Her mother screamed. Mr. Everett backed away from her mother, dragging Sophie with him.

"They burned my house down," he said.

"I'm sorry," Sophie choked out, assuming that he was talking to her. It was only right that he should blame her. After all, she had taken him from the classroom that day and brought him home. Maybe none of it would have happened if she hadn't.

"Sophie, don't move!" her mother cried.

Pressed against him as she was, Sophie couldn't have moved if she'd wanted to. She smelled the acrid scent of smoke on his clothing and wondered how long Mr. Everett had fought with the fire. He smelled like something burning. A fierce calm took Sophie. She wasn't scared at all. Although the face of his watch bit into her throat, she didn't think Mr. Everett would ever really hurt her.

"Let her go!" It was her mother's voice again, but Sophie barely recognized it. Already she was distancing herself from it all, already she was slipping away, regarding her mother as a woman she faintly knew, already she was siding with Mr. Everett.

"I can't," he said. "They'll never let me go. It's the only way."

Her mother's face was fierce and sharp. "So you'll hurt us? We've been kind to you."

He shook his head. "No, not you. Her, maybe. She's been kind. You think I can't see your pity for what it is? I don't need your help or your dinners."

"I don't want you to take my daughter out there," her mother said.

"Julie's out there. My daughter's out there!"

"P-please don't hurt my baby," Sophie's mother cried. "Don't take her hostage."

Sophie listened as if this all were happening to someone else. She was not terribly interested in the outcome. She and Mr. Everett would go. That she knew. Her mother would not be able to stop the two of them. They were tsunami waves, big and seeking, moved by forces of nature beyond

their control. Her mother could not hold them back.

Mr. Everett said, "It's a kindness, really. She doesn't belong here. She'll see everything differently once we're gone."

Mr. Everett, don't be scared. I'll go away with you, Sophie wanted to say.

"You won't hurt her?" Her mother was crying now, the sharpness gone.

"I—would—never—hurt—" He looked at his arm and seemed surprised to find her throat crushed behind it.

"Take me with you," her mother said. "I don't belong here either anymore."

"No. I don't think so?" There was a question in his voice, as if her mother had the answer.

Her mother pressed on. "We'll look like a family traveling all together."

"A family?" Mr. Everett asked as if he'd never heard those words put together in just that way. "Traveling? Together?"

"Yes," her mother said, nodding and smiling as though to a child.

"A family," he whispered. Sophie felt his arm slacken at her throat.

"Come Sophie," her mother said, holding out her hand. Mr. Everett let her go.

"Go and get your things," he said, following close behind. "Hurry!"

Her mother led her up the stairs to her bedroom. It seemed to Sophie as if she'd been away from the room for days and years rather than minutes. Her mother lingered at the window in Sophie's bedroom and Sophie looked around the strange room, knowing that it was hers but not really believing it. Ever since Mr. Everett said she was going with him, it had not been hers.

Sophie sat on the bed while her mother packed for her. It did not seem real to her that this thing could be so easily done, their lives wrapped and tidied so neatly, but there was the proof of it in her mother's slow but efficient packing. Her head bent over an opened suitcase, her mother said, "If there's something you want to keep, you'd better take it now, Sophie." Sophie felt no sentimental attachment to any of the items her mother packed; she had a feeling that she wouldn't need these things in her new life. Mr. Everett hovered in the doorway like a specter, oddly silent and watchful. Sophie sat back against the bed, ignoring her mother's

urgings. Briefly, she wondered if Seth would miss her if she went away with Mr. Everett or if he would begin to keep company with Kristen, the Newcomb's second choice for him. She'd always liked knowing that Kristen was runner-up to her, second in all the ways that counted, but now as she thought of Mr. Everett waiting just outside her bedroom door, standing at the edge of the stair's landing, Seth did not seem like such a concern. Kristen could have him. Sophie was putting away her childish things now. She liked Seth well enough, but now she saw that Seth meant nothing and never could.

As soon as they left the house, the crowd converged upon them. Signaled by Sophie's mother at the window, the townspeople came and blocked the pathway between the front door and the car, surrounding them on all sides, separating Sophie's mother from Mr. Everett and trying to separate Sophie too. Sophie was holding Mr. Everett's hand tightly, too scared to look up and see how he was taking all of this. The parents, the townspeople, were all so many tall bodies surrounding her that she saw only torsos, buttons and belts. She gave Mr. Everett's hand a squeeze to let him know that she would follow, that they would stay together no matter what, but Mr. Everett did not squeeze back. He looked down at her and spoke to her one last time, in as gentle a voice as the one he'd used that fateful day she'd overheard him in class. Then he let go of Sophie's hand and allowed the crowd to devour him. So loud was it in its satisfaction to have him it did not stop to hear his last words. Sophie was the only one close enough to hear. Later, when her mother asked her, she would pretend not to know. She would keep the secret and never tell anyone that in the end Mr. Everett had apologized. He'd said that he hadn't meant to disturb anyone. He'd apologized for any harm he might have caused. He had said that he was sorry—so sorry—for everything.

Heather Treseler

From the Gnostic's Book of Genesis

"I love fools' experiments. I am always making them."

Charles Darwin

In the beginning, there were words (although not always) and the terms of endearment we tried out often sounded antique. Someone, overhearing,

might have thought we were trying to write a letter: sex dependent on the syntax of salutations, getting the tone of feeling right, from the beginning.

Later, you might have sounded like an orangutan trying to hail a taxi: a smug yellow cab taken back to the safety of bars, stale peanuts, those wistful gawkers at your home

in the Bronx Zoo. As a woman, I was clearly as dangerous as Manhattan where the fauna are not tender, only tempting. Fluent in several languages, languishes, the monkeying around.

Niagra Falls

They called it, in those days, the American bride's second biggest disappointment: after a wedding held on a Sunday to the soft rustle of silk stockings; chiffon cake and popcorn chicken; bachelor GIs ginning up in the church parking lot; a girl's mother earmarking her bridal handbook. The honeymoon motels by Niagara Falls are still painted the palette of Rita Hayworth's imagined blush, floral tones of a baby's nursery. In a prior century, stunt masters staged the Falls' evident danger: burling themselves into emptied pork barrels that were never meant to hold a man or to hurl him headlong into a force greater than the sum of his understanding. Sublime, Wordsworth termed it, whenever beauty abjectly

terrifies. On vintage postcards turned the sepia of nostalgia, newlyweds pose by the Falls in leisure suits and plastic ponchos, practicing the Cold War posture of looking smart alongside apocalypse, some still shy in their togetherness, others coupled like the creatures in Noah's getaway ark: glad to be saved if unsure of the destination. They squint into the mist that falls around the washboard sink in the gods' watery kitchen, tamed abyss doubling as a generation's tableaux of bliss: all history's hagiography. It was my birthday. You brought me to a vista of equitable cascades split by a national boundary, its American side lit with small red lights to look like rosé champagne. That day, you'd led a concert in Buffalo, its smug flatland the antithesis

of romance: nothing there sexily precarious, nothing falling down except in the rare instance of two cellos accidentally necking in adulterous clatter to the floor. Music, like nature, abhors a vacuum unless you are

John Cage and silence a symphony. Oh, to be without song or at least not in the hotel's Jacuzzi suite on a fiftieth floor above the actual cascade and its narrow bib of land enticing to confident suicides. On my birthday, an instinct to hide under the trampoline bed: handwringing, Miltonic, ruing time misspent beside a continent's virile monument to "Nature's power." For once, I hadn't forgotten my socks: only an interest in sexual chores given New Age eponyms; Cinderella bargains without a closet of real Manolos; solace of faux certainties in the long amnesiac nod of ever-after.

Steven D. Schroeder

nothing

for you a lullaby
about surveillance
states & yr safety

a fairy story I tell
w/ data protection
data blanked out

a security blanket
to block yr face
vs. anthrax

that black site
is nothing serious

dread nothing
threat level RED

nothing laws end
mass nothings

for you a nightlight
ignited by vigilance
against predators

nothing scary
under yr bed
recording this

the city

the city sits open
alone on yr porch
in an ice storm

I flatten the city
but it still can't fit
thru yr mail slot

I return the city
tho it was a gift
& I broke it

for yr own safety
don't go on a bus
by the graveyard

don't go looking
in that doorway
marked BAKERY

don't go east
b/c the feral cats
learn too fast

please don't go
I city you

Lindsay Daigle

9

One of the muses plays the drums. She likes
most things and factory smoke. I say to her
I like pairs. I dress my bullets up in dance

tunes and wait. She manufactures
a kick, is sort of funny, umbrella-catches
bodies before they come. She makes them

define space, hands them scissors. My room
bangs walls like the bridge, like the moment
her call fevers a shuffling release and says.

(after 9, Damien Rice, 2006)

Fate

And now it's covered
with leaves. He sure speaks

slowly. It's cold this morning.
In the meantime nothing happens.

Only the jumping, barrel-gripped
patience, keeping our hats on.

I'll give him a carrot. He'll describe
the tree as it falls down, calls it

orphan. He should have been a poet.
Quell the failed compost. It smells

of friction and flint. Of climbing
heaven and gazing on the likes

of us, our make-believe
boots, our blood. Oh rising

ground, metal-methods,
speak slower.

(after Fate, Dr. Dog, 2008)

Rachel McLeod Kaminer

Hither

children do
children make
'Here I am you called me'
the velvet, some say, feels like owl feathers

continuing to dream but not what-of
call, call not
want not

owl feathers, the child is saying, like velvet

raise the stone of help
I'm here ironing my I don't know
and my what you've undone

let me come be in your language
with my nothing to say
and my no words to say it

Speaking

She's a real gem, that blue prince
she says my mother's never dying

Taking my epiphany along to bed with me

To offer the neck is not the question
I'm not taking these things up

I wake up in my body, my blue prince body
Where I want to have come from
who I want to have

You smell your own
a mouthfeel like mercury

When do we know what we do
She doesn't die

On the off-chance I'm beautiful, it's my mother

And heat leaves me
and air

Infrasound

the two ears
a knife was it a knife

empty *as the noise of an host*
person who receives *longwinged*

to have a beautiful ear: a place to bleed in turns
the hoop
to carry it hollow: to take it completely

the loudest sound possible before the air splits

too wide open no swan no membrane
coil in the narrows

trammel and untrammel
wreath and untwist
wreath and *I would lay by the hours*
that which makes a complete

bend down the tubes
clot pinna swallow pinna

the swan muscle near the neck
the crook of the neck *knife*

brittle skin
stiff skin
two isn't enough host

longwinged

Mondegreen

bones are what I mean
bones aren't clean *I speak*
bones had bodies on them

as an animal of heat
Lorine's laugh twice aloud
sharp, happy

bones have gristle and frayed meat
it is no shield can block these
even when it's thick it's thin
sawing and ironing

lips won't form the words I speak
As if it were true and you wrote as if

Dana Roeser

Cindy from Marzahn on the Night of the Mayan Apocalypse

On the night of
the end of the world
I had a vigorous
Chinese massage—
forty minutes including
reflexology—
in a cordoned-
off area in the center
of the walkway
across from the Hickory
Farms kiosk in the
Tippecanoe Shopping Mall
in Lafayette,
Indiana. It was
just after
sunset on the shortest
day of the
year.
Lying there,
fully clothed (except
for my feet
and calves—the masseuse
took off
my socks
and pushed
up my leggings),
I was
approximately 80%
myself,
like that woman,
“Cindy from
Marzahn,” welfare
recipient

from East Berlin, in
 The Times today,
who said her stand-up
 comic self
comes in at approximately
 80% of her
“actual” self, Ilka Bessin.

My personal
effects in two white
 plastic receptacles
just below my downward-
 pointing face,
my coat strewn
 on a folding chair. People
could have swept by
 and robbed me—
of keys, credit card,
 bobby pins,
barrets, of the Swarovski
 crystal
necklace I asked my daughter
 to get my husband
to buy me last
 Valentine’s Day.

I wish
I could tell you
 that exposing
my personhood
 this way
nearly sixty years old and
 clothed in copious winter
layers under fluorescent
 lights
with secularized Christmas music
 blaring from
the public
 address system, occasionally

peering through
 the face rest
at the linoleum floor,
 getting
karate-chopped and brutally
 kneaded by a tiny
Asian woman,
 could have
conferred the
 “ego strength”
Katherine keeps
 referring to
that would
 fit me
for my new
 life after
the apocalypse
 of disappointment,
unemployment, knee
 blowout, back
kink, aged-out
 obsolescence,
irrelevance,
 almost
unbearable worry
 about my
children,
 etc. Make
me viable. Not
 like before,
as, yes, that was
 pretty much
imagined, but
 as never before.

Ilka became
 “Cindy” by
mistake; she’d called
 a comedy club

for a job as a receptionist
and while she was reciting
her woes, the manager
stopped her
and invited her
to audition
to be a stand-up!

You gotta love
that manager, O Naked One.
Sex-Thrasher.

When Ilka was
just Ilka,
before she became
“Cindy,” her
80% representation,
after however
many ignored
résumés, she sank
into the sofa and
the overweight
of her invisibility,
where anything
went because
nothing did.
She was waiting
for something—
black helicopter,
silver drone,
the Four Horsemen
of the
Apocalypse,
maybe a Pleiadean
cluster fuck. She was waiting
for something—
when she rose
up as Cindy
she was wearing

a too-tight pink
spangled sweatsuit, a giant
plastic peony
in her over-permed
hair. A thick
layer of
makeup with
brown lip-liner.
“The reason
I’m here today
is because the
people who called me
said, ‘Cindy,
we need a little more
sex appeal
in the performance. . . .’
And now I’m here.
Actually, I’m not doing
so well. Excuse
me. I don’t
have a job.
But I’ve completed
my course studies
and I finally know
why I don’t
have a job. I am
simply too
good-looking. The problem
is that
in the rejection letters
I receive,
they always say, ‘Miss
Cindy,
you have to work on
your looks
a little bit.’ What am
I supposed to
do? Should I make
myself look

ugly or what?”

I reconstructed myself
in coat, scarf, mohair beret,
Valentine’s
necklace, on and under
the folding chairs,
naked in my
layers, invisible, as
only post-menopausal
women can
be, in the center
of the heavily
trafficked aisle
in the Tippecanoe
County Mall
four days
before the birth
of Jesus or
facsimile, on the
possible actual last
night of
the world.
Threading
the gauntlet
of “Smoked Cheddar
Blend”
and garish red
salami, “Spiral Sliced
Honeygold Ham” and
“Sesame,
Caraway & Sea Salt
Crackers,”
princess-cut
diamond
engagement rings and
tennis bracelets:
exorbitant “push”
presents

glittering in the glass
 case of Fred
Layton Jeweler,
 and out Exit E
to the frigid
 parking lot, rows
of car hoods
 idling under
greenish street lights.
 Disappointed
and thrilled. The
 pavé diamonds
of frost pressing
 down on
those hulks. No signs
 of the apocalypse
locusts banging
 into my face
lashing me with
 the tails
of scorpions. Just the
 frost-covered cars
brooding under the
 pale green
energy-saver
 street lights. And
Cindy out there
 somewhere
with her
 80 or
her 100% self.
 Somebody
standing on a crescent
 moon with
a crown of stars
 over by the bus
stop.

Bill Rector

Page from a Universal Album

The Google camera car passed our house, as it does everybody's, but I didn't see it go by.

I asked around, and no one else had noticed the Google car, either.

Keep an eye out for a white Prius with a bulbous camera protruding from the roof like an astronaut in a ticker tape parade. No one will be paying any attention to it.

Driving a Google camera car, that's the job I'd like to have.

Our house is blurry, as though the camera's mind was elsewhere at the moment of the photograph, perhaps recalling the rim of the Grand Canyon at sunrise or a surprised face under a bright scarf in a crowded bazaar in Zaire.

Window-eyes, forever half open. Pear tree in leaf, pixelated junipers, mid-afternoon shadows creeping from under the spruce to see if everything is as it was.

Jonathan Hobratsch

Butterfly Effect

Patience is the art of collecting teeth
from a retirement home floor or vice-versa.

I swear the shag carpenting in my apartment
has grown three inches with cobwebs therein.

The wind, when the door opens, plays these
webbed strings like an orchestra of harps:

Homeland Security. I own five ashtrays
but no ashes. No one does, except

that stooge that broke his father's urn
over his brother's head, claiming he was

the best family man. A familiar cloud
surrounds them like an angry ghost,

or genie. What should I wish for? The air
clears showing the clarity of my lost chance.

Even rain is an opportunity. What does
the desert have to offer? The buffet

I visited in Arizona had 56 varieties
of sand. Sand, yet, no sea to crenellate it.

Like a chess set missing the four corner
pieces, this changes the game. Outside,

as if a horizon, butterflies obscure
the distance, becoming stretched,

like a mirage, or maybe, me.

Brittney Scott

Story

After the dentist hit her when she said it hurt After he put her so far under she couldn't wake up she spent the next twenty years with rotting teeth and missed all the dances and her mother drank and her brother drank and her father drank and kicked the dog hard enough to send him under the vegetable garden where she ate all the snow peas in the middle of the night because she didn't realize no one had a job no one had money no one had hope and dinner was rice and snow peas for a week except now it was just rice

After the city came and built a sewage plant across the street her yard filled with shit and tampons every time it rained After the paper came and took pictures of her family standing filthy on the porch unable to leave unless they waded After the city came again and spread lime to fix the problem but everything turned lime green and everything every thing lime

After her brother shot a hole in the linoleum in the window his head with a gun she didn't know what kind she knew it was black and heavy and left constellations aching in red on the bedroom wall behind his head she looked at him when he could still see

After her mother kept trying to kill herself once twice three four but couldn't she saved all the letters in a lonely box After her father died After the seventy year old women he was necking tried to get him out of the coma by promising a stiff drink she didn't know where his ashes scattered but remembered they placed his urn on top of a purple velvet cloth and when she asked why the cloth was purple they said it was a color people found soothing and she agreed.

Lindsay Daigle

July Flame

I feel like they're running us out of town. We walk down the street. I wear a belt around each thigh. We turn left at the dead end sign. They are bent smoke. They are running us out of town. All downhill town. Does that mean sweet skull sounds? My clothes are too big. Things are different now. Dead end. They are there. We are at the tower again. I want to scale some brick mountain like it's something good. Dead trees, a string of commiserating branches on the ground. I remember an easy way down. Wrong, fallen animal. Sweet skull blues. What looks to be a winged drop is bruised oblivion-limbs. There's time to look above me for vibrations, thick as my legs. Enough time to brace myself for the impossible exit, the hot push of some other sky.

(after July Flame, Laura Veirs, 2010)

Jason Stumpf

Killing a Robin

You keep your place as the lost forms shimmer over kitchen plates in ever-more enticing patterns. And this is living as you always dreamed it, except you are thirstier now than we have ever been in dreams. The flowers have a holiday appearance, milky as in photographs in dreams. But here the spider crawls along the screen door as you are happy simply waiting for the night to end, your voice and another vaulting over commonplace extravagances.

Roman Stamps

The gray material of morning refreshed its grip whether you chose to call it smoke drifting past a window or the distant shadow of some giant bird upon the sea. The days go on revising themselves as you go on trying to keep your place in them. Each is more like a French film heard through kitchen walls or insects pinned in frames amid the sickly smells of what is meant to outlast. The musicians persevered even in low passages. Some disappeared behind the other voices as the timbers creaked. Whether or not the leaves outside where green or fire orange all along the hillside, to be swayed thus by the wind is a promise. But rain, with its habit of interrupting, cannot help but drown the shadows of birds and trees, boats moored along the shore.

Jacob Sunderlin

A Jobber is a Wrestler Who Always Loses

My friend Grosso has been fired by more chickenshits
in kitchens, more chickenshits in hardhats
on site, more chickenshits with their liquor licenses

out of date, chickenshits with conceal
and carry permits, more
chickenshit bosses who wear digital watches

than I have. We're standing in the mud,
in a field, getting stoned watching one horse
try to mount another horse

and talking about work.
Work for Grosso is making ornamental refrigerator magnets
in a factory with flextime.

Sometimes, he gets a break in the boss's garden
and picks her squash, which he says
she calls *sqwawush*.

There are these hogs, big
black ones, in a pen. *Which one is the old boss hog*
Grosso wants to know.

That horse getting fucked?
She won't be for now—
she wanders away, and bucks, and we

like her for that. We really
saw this, in a field, and Grosso coughed.
It's legal to smoke drugs if you're in a band, he says.

Adam O. Davis

A House Unfit Even For Ghosts, 1783

1. An ant farm
in ruin.

An abacus
of rain.

Your colony
withered
to a filmy
photocopy of
its former
self.

2. A time when
the stars were
known as
cholera, the sky
struck through
with ruby
sharkfins,
infectious
and radiant,
at once.

3. Time is
the colony that
farms our ruin.

Time is
the farm
we have yet
to colonize.

So say the
sharks,
ants,
abacuses,
stars.

Astronauts, 1809

Mute as math allows
the sky is a cinder

block smashed by
hydrogen and moth

light. The Earth a blue
penny in a black pool.

There is no more
romantic muscle

than homelessness,
the history of never

having had too precious
to dispel. This sky is

not spite nor ill spirit
nor Cain. This sky

is forecast and we are
the tower to oversee it.

Astronauts

Night: incumbent.
The sky looks like

a taxidermy of
a sky I once knew.

Hours earlier I
swallowed an

anagram for harm
as if I were nothing

more than a broken
thing that forests

rot. Now a hive,
I hum as a hidden

wilderness heats my
blood. The horizon

is a red memory
of light. Come, newly

polished world, and
break these hands.

Rich Ives

A Disability

I might just want you for tonight. I was never here for walking.
Two legs up. Came down hard. That's how.

A new philosophy opens a new body.
Is it really mine? The opposite of empire is

a flightless moth that lives its life on the energy it stored before birth.

The opposite of my manufactured parts is
so old-fashioned he speaks in daguerreotypes.

He's a pervert. He drinks milk after sunset.

The opposite of his pigeon hats is
where I located a recording of my more aggressive slippery shirt.

I didn't know my night was that big.

This is a Seattle cage and the migration has been redecorated.

This is a stage and the migration has been won. The former legs
have begun to exist when I think about them.

I might just want them for tonight. You were never here for talking.

I need only a hint to live inside. If something wants in,
there will be a way out. Don't call it satisfaction. Don't call it acceptance.

A Male Viewer of the *Women in Paintings* Exhibit

Women in paintings don't expect you home for dinner.
They don't toss their hair at the neighbor's husband, or,
if they do, everyone knows they've been caught at it.

Women in paintings know about the little pockets in the skin
where we keep a different kind of memory, and they fill them
with things you don't realize you noticed in impossible colors.

Women in paintings say, This is where we've never gone, this
is far enough, this is where I will live, but the men say,
We're safe now. How can we dream of danger here?

Women in paintings are like a mother's kisses, earthy and far,
sucked up from the garden just before seed, lifted one slow
piece at a time a little further into the sky that still holds them.

The women in paintings are never the righteous ones on their
perch
that illuminate Kierkegaard or innocent girls in clean dresses,
who will soon know how to get ahead of themselves.

Only one symphony ever mastered the women in paintings,
and they rose into the rain and played their lives again inside it,
as they had done so many times before in that same lonely
music.

A sack full of them was taken from the river and left singing
on the endless bridge, and here's their flower disrobing again.
It's not even half as lonely as you thought inside. Enough

girls still live there to draw a real man, but his legs are green
and still caught in a different view of himself. He doesn't
even understand how much he really knows about helping,

and he doesn't realize he's interrogating his own dreams—
women in paintings often answer imagination with a question.
The next moment is always theirs. You don't have to answer.

The colors and shapes are so unreasonable you can always
trust them. One knowing expression seemed happier and gentle.
I thought I had a choice when I offered more than I had to give.

Mark Halliday and Martin Stannard

Tasso Tempted

(The palace of the Este family at Ferrara in 1573. Princess Leonora sits in her dressing room, reading a manuscript, while her maid Irina brushes her long dark hair.)

Irina: So dark, and yet shining so!

Leonora: Yes...Irina, dear Irina, can you make excuses for me this evening? I shall not dine with the court.

Irina: What? Nonsense, sweet child. You must. You are expected, you would be missed!

Leonora: I shall not go. I am indisposed.

Irina: But you know that Count Bustafo will be there—in all his masculine finery—and he'll want to banter with the girl he means to wed.

Leonora (*tempestuously*): Let him banter with his own reflection! I want to be alone—and to read poetry in my chamber.

Irina: Ah. The verse of young Tasso, perhaps?

Leonora: Oh, I'm not so sure about young Mr. Tasso. All that "soldiers glad by heaps to harness run" palaver. It's all very well but sometimes I wish he'd change the tune a little. Crusade, crusade—that's all you ever hear with him.

Irina: I think—

Leonora: Don't think! Do my hair!

(An almost-silence descends; only the sound of brush against hair can be heard. That, and the cries of geese being throttled outside in the yard.)

Irina: You said the other day that young Marcovaldo has a unique lyric voice.

(Silence; brush; geese.)

Irina: Perhaps you prefer the strophes of young Malpiglio?

Leonora: Irina, you ask too many questions! Go and tell my mother my head is aching and I won't be down.

(Exit Irina. Leonora communes with herself in the mirror. Lights dim on this part of the stage. Lights come up on scene at other side of stage: the gentlemen's smoking room downstairs. The poet Malpiglio is pacing anxiously. Enter Albano, a palace messenger.)

Malpiglio: Well? Did you show the Lady Leonora my sonnet about her hair?

Albano: I did, sir.

Malpiglio: And her response was what?

Albano: She smiled. In a way.

Malpiglio: In a way? What way? Albano, thou seest this dirk? This dirk will taste thy blood if thou dost trifle with Malpiglio. Now say, what manner of smile, bespeaking what coloration of mind, did grace the lips of the lady?

Albano: 'Twas not so much a smile, perchance, as –

Malpiglio: As?

Albano: A smirk.

Malpiglio: A smirk? Dost see this dirk? I'll have no smirk, but you shall feel my dirk!

Albano: You're not allowed to smite palace messengers, so put your dirk

away and hearken to what I have to bespeak. She is somewhat taken by another, one becalled Marcovaldo. I heard her say he has a unique lyric voice.

Malpiglio: But does he have strophes?

Albano: She didn't say; she said she preferred'st him to Tasso.

Malpiglio: Preferred'st him to Tasso? But what of Malpiglio? Gadzooks!

(Enter Count Bustafo, bustling.)

Bustafo: Did someone say Gadzooks? 'Twas my nickname in my rugby days. Oh, I could tell you stories! Those were days of chianti and whacking!

Albano: Your gracious Countness, dinner will be served within the minute, the tapers are lit, the pinot noir is being poured.

Bustafo: Ah, good Albano. Here's a peck of ducats for your stout yeomanship. And what of the sparkling Leonora? Can I be sure of sitting next her? Accouched in propinquity, so to speak?

Malpiglio: Excuse me. I don't feel well. *(Exit Malpiglio. Retching sounds are heard.)*

(Enter Irina nervously.)

Irina: Albano, my Lady is indisposed. She cannot dine with the court.

Bustafo: What!

Irina: Her head aches, your grace.

Bustafo: Does it! From reading all that trash of poesy, I doubt not!

Albano: I shall inform the Duchess. *(Exit Albano.)*

Bustafo: This is ditchwater on my crumpet, I must say. I had so creamingly anticipated an evening of extreme neighborliness with the Princess.

(Enter Malpiglio drinking from a goblet.)

Malpiglio: What what? What? Leonora not to dine?

Irina: Alas no, sir. My Lady is indisposed.

Malpiglio: She will get over it when she smelleth the roast goose, forsooth.

(Enter Tasso, disguised as a clown/juggler.)

Tasso *(to himself)*: As I thought—Malpiglio the plagiarist is here to nuzzle my blessed pussycat. But she will refrain, methinks. And yon Bustafo—he will find that being a Count counteth for nothing. I must find my Leonora. To her balcony!

(Exit Tasso, disguised as a clown/juggler. He passes Albano who enters.)

Albano: As the rabble would say, “Come and get it.”

Bustafo: Albano, tell me, who was that clown?

Albano: A mere juggler, your Countability, who hath entertained the Lady Leonora at odd moments.

Bustafo: Odd indeed.

(Lights dim on the gentlemen as they go to dine. Lights up in Leonora’s chamber. She is anxiously peering out between the lush curtains at her window.)

Leonora: Betimes when fierce desires we juggle,
Sweet hearts get wounded in the struggle.

(Enter her cousin, Lady Guiline, tall and striking, with a sharp nose.)

Guiline: Good evening, cousin. That was a foul verse.
Even Malpiglio could hardly do worse.

Leonora: Guiline! Fair cousin, what dost thou here? Dinner is served

below, and baby artichokes are involved.

Guilina: The same question could redound on you.

Leonora: Ah! I have no appetite.

Guilina: Mmmm. Not for food, perhaps.

(A thumping sound comes from the balcony.)

Guilina: I sense that someone craves some literary criticism.

(Leonora runs to her cousin and clasps her imploringly.)

Leonora: Oh, cousin, dear Guilina,
You shan't betray me, you shan't be mean!
You had your thrills once, you had your fun,
Though now, alas, you're forty-one.

(Leonora runs out on the balcony, where she encounters Philatelo.)

Leonora: Who, pray tell, are you?

Philatelo: Philatelo, miss. From Philatelo's Balcony Maintenance. We had a call about this balcony.

Leonora: What do you mean?

Philatelo: Apparently, miss, it's been unsure of itself. It's been doubting its ability to be a balcony to the toffs. Sometimes these balconies suffer from a sense of insecurity, and we at Philatelo's Balcony Maintenance pride ourselves on being ready to come at any hour of day or night to shore them up, as it were.

Leonora: But I haven't noticed anything wrong.

Philatelo: You wouldn't necessarily notice it yourself, miss, until the crisis came and you found yourself suddenly down in the garden.

Leonora: But I don't think—

(Suddenly the balcony collapses. Leonora and Philatelo are cast down into the garden, along with quite a lot of balcony rubble.)

(Guiline looks down from the doorway that led onto the balcony.)

Guiline: Such falls must occur when lovers go nuts;
Or else when someone hacksaws the struts.

(Enter Tasso, eagerly, in his clown/juggler suit.)

Tasso: Guiline! Where is thy fair cousin, she who is so much younger
and smoother of skin than thee?

Guiline: She ran out on the balcony, in her silkiest gown—
As if to meet a lover—or perhaps a clown.

Tasso: Leonora, I cometh!

(Tasso dashes past Guiline and plummets down into the garden.)

Guiline: A chivalrous scribbler, he had a lot of gall;
But this was perhaps not a fortunate fall.

(Enter Malpiglio, holding a roast goose wing.)

Guiline: Where didst thou get that goose wing, which looketh so tasty?
I trust my interest seems not too hasty.

Malpiglio: You look'st quite tasty yourself.

Guiline: Ah Malpiglio, you have won me with those words; an easy
conquest, I realize; but it has been so long . . .

Malpiglio: Indeed, we are neither of us the stuff of romantic dreams. Yet
your hair is quite nice, and I shall write a sonnet about it.

Guiline: Which I shall accept, without the illusion that you are a great

poet. Sheer vitality and sheer presence count for something.

Malpiglio: Do they ever!

(Malpiglio throws his gnawed goose wing out the balcony doorway, and embraces Guiline. They tumble together onto Leonora's bed. Lights dim while they make snuffly noises.)

(Spotlight on Marcovaldo, alone downstairs.)

Marcovaldo: I seem to have missed the dinner, and Albano tells me the Lady Leonora has been taken to the hospital. I am left with nothing to do, as if my life had no point—like a drama with no center of value.

(CURTAIN descends thunderously, as it is made of concrete.)

Contributor Notes

Kristen George Bagdanov earned her M.F.A. in poetry from Colorado State University, where she was a Lilly Graduate Fellow. Poems of hers have recently appeared in or are forthcoming from *Cincinnati Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *32 Poems*, and other journals. She is now a PhD student in Literature at U.C. Davis.

Deborah Bernhardt is the author of *Echolia* (Four Way Books, 2006) and *Driftology* (New Michigan Press/DIAGRAM, 2013).

Jason Bradford is an MFA candidate in Poetry at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Poems have appeared, or are forthcoming in *Jubilat*, *Fruita Pulp*, *Jellyfish Magazine*, *Rogue Agent*, and *North American Review*. *The Inhabitants*, a chapbook of poems, was published by Final Thursday Press.

Taylor Collier currently lives in Tallahassee, where he's working on a PhD at Florida State. Poems have previously appeared in places such as *Birdfeast*, *Diagram*, *The Minnesota Review*, *The Normal School*, *Washington Square* and others.

Shanna Compton is the author of *Brink* (2013), *For Girls & Others* (2007), *Down Spooky* (2005), and several chapbooks. A book-length speculative poem called *The Hazard Cycle* is forthcoming. She is the founder of the Bloof Books collective and works as a freelance editor and book designer.

Kay Cosgrove's work has appeared in the *Massachusetts Review*, *Conduit*, and *EPOCH Magazine*, among other journals. She is currently a doctoral candidate in the University of Houston's Creative Writing & Literature program.

Kevin Craft is the editor of *Poetry Northwest*. His books include *Solar Prominence* (Cloudbank Books, 2005), and five volumes of the anthology *Mare Nostrum*, an annual collection of Italian translation and Mediterranean-inspired writing. He lives in Seattle, and directs both the Written Arts Program at Everett Community College and the University of Washington's Creative Writing in Rome program.

Lindsay Daigle is a PhD candidate in poetry at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where she also teaches undergraduate writing and literature. She holds an MFA from The New School. Her work has appeared in *Barn Owl Review*, *Quarterly West*, *The Adroit Journal*, and elsewhere.

Adam O. Davis' poetry has recently appeared in *Barrow Street*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *Gulf Coast*. He can be found online at www.adamodavis.com.

Piotr Florczyk is the author of *East & West: Poems* (Lost Horse Press, 2016), a collection of essays, *Los Angeles Sketchbook* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2015), a chapbook, *Barefoot* (Eyewear, 2015), and six volumes of Polish poetry translations. He lives in Los Angeles.

Chris Forhan is the author of a new memoir, *My Father Before Me* (Scribner, 2016). He has published three books of poems and won a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and two Pushcart Prizes. He lives with his wife, the poet Alessandra Lynch, and their two sons, Milo and Oliver, in

Indianapolis, where he teaches at Butler University.

James Grabill poems have appeared in numerous periodicals such as *The Oxonian Review* (UK), *Stand* (UK), *Magma* (UK), *Harvard Review* (US), and elsewhere. His books include *Poem Rising Out of the Earth* (1994) and *An Indigo Scent after the Rain* (2003). A long-time Oregon resident, he teaches 'systems thinking' relative to sustainability.

Amina Gautier is the author of two short story collections *At-Risk*, which won the Flannery O'Connor Award (University of Georgia Press, 2011) and *Now We Will Be Happy*, which won the Prairie Schooner Book Prize (University of Nebraska Press, 2014). Over eighty of her short stories have been published, appearing in many reviews.

Heather June Gibbons is the author of the chapbook *Flyover* (Q Ave Press, 2012), and her poems appear in journals such as *Boston Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Forklift*, *Ohio*, *The Southeast Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Blackbird*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Drunken Boat*. She teaches creative writing at San Francisco State University.

Becca Shaw Glaser's poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Birdfeast*, *Alimentum*, *Pentimento Journal*, *Quaint*, and *New South*, among other publications. Nonfiction work appears in *The Icarus Project*, *Mindful Occupation: Rising Up Without Burning Out*, *Off Our Backs*, and other journals. She's currently an MFA student in poetry at Syracuse University, and the nonfiction editor for *Salt Hill*.

Mark Halliday teaches at Ohio University. His sixth book of poems *THRESHERPHOBE* appeared in 2013.

Jeff Hardin is the author of three collections: *Fall Sanctuary*, recipient of the Nicholas Roerich Prize, *Notes for a Praise Book*, and *Restoring the Narrative*. His poems appear in recent and forthcoming issues of *North American Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Southern Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Southwest Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Missouri Review* (online), *Southern Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. He lives and teaches in Tennessee.

Rebekah Denison Hewitt lives in Black Mountain, North Carolina with her family. She is a librarian and a reader for Orison Books. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Midway Journal*, *Sou'wester*, and *Literary Mama*.

James Tate Hill is the author of *Academy Gothic*, winner of the 2014 Nilsen Prize for a First Novel, to be published in 2015 by Southeast Missouri State University Press. Originally from Charleston, West Virginia, he holds an M.F.A. in Fiction from the University of North Carolina Greensboro and an M.A. in English and Creative Writing from Hollins University.

Jonathan Hobrartsch received his MFA at Texas State University. He has taught for Pace University in New York City and Austin Community College in Austin, TX. Currently, he is the assistant editor for the *Literati Quarterly*, as well as a blogger for *The Huffington Post*. He lives in Austin, where he cobbles away at his decade-old unfinished and unstageable werewhale play.

Rich Ives is the 2009 winner of the Francis Locke Memorial Poetry Award from Bitter Oleander and the 2012 winner of the Creative Nonfiction Prize from *Thin Air* magazine. *Tunneling to the Moon* and *Light from a Small Brown Bird* (poetry, Bitter Oleander Press) are both published in 2015.

Rachel McLeod Kaminer grew up in the Southern Appalachian mountains. Her first book, *As in the Dark, Descend*, is forthcoming from Writ Large Press in 2016. Recent work appears in *OR*, *The Volta Blog*, and at *Wet Crossing*. She lives in Los Angeles.

George Looney's eighth book of poetry, *Meditations Before the Windows Fail*, came out from Lost Horse Press in 2015. He founded the BFA in Creative Writing at Penn State Erie, is editor of *Lake Effect*, translation editor of *Mid-American Review*, and co-founder of the Chautauqua Writers' Festival.

Erin J. Mullikin is the author of the chapbooks, *When You Approach Me at the Lake of Tomorrow* (Slash Pine Press) and *Strategies for the Bromidic* (dancing girl press), and her poems and short fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in places such as elsewhere, *ILK*, *Spork*, *Birdfeast*, *inter|rupture*, *The Yoke*, and *Best New Poets 2014*. She is a founding editor for *NightBlock* and *Midnight City Books*.

Ethan Paquin is the author of five books of poems, most recently *Cloud vs. Cloud* (Ahsahta Press, 2013). He lives, teaches, and climbs in the White Mountain region of New Hampshire.

Bill Rector is co-founder with Mark Irwin of Proem Press and was formerly Poetry Editor of the *Yale Journal of Humanities and Medicine*. His poems have appeared in a wide variety of journals.

Dana Roesser is the author of *The Theme of Tonight's Party Has Been Changed*, winner of the 2013 Juniper Prize. Her first two books, *Beautiful Motion* and *In the Truth Room*, both won the Morse Prize.

Martha Ronk is the author of 10 books of poetry, most recently *Transfer of Qualities* from Omnidawn Press, long-listed for the National Book Awards in Poetry, 2013.

Justin Runge lives in Lawrence, Kansas, where he serves as poetry editor of *Parcel*. He is the author of two chapbooks, *Plainsight* (New Michigan Press, 2012) and *Hum Decode* (Greying Ghost Press, 2014). His work appears in *Best New Poets*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Colorado Review*, and elsewhere.

Steven D. Schroeder's second book, *The Royal Nonesuch* (Spark Wheel Press, 2013), won the 2014 Devil's Kitchen Reading Award from Southern Illinois University. His poetry is recently available from *Crab Orchard Review*, *Cream City Review*, and *burntdistrict*. He co-curates Observable Readings in St. Louis and serves as a board member and contributing editor for *River Styx* magazine.

Brittney Scott received her MFA from Hollins University. She is a recipient of the Joy Harjo Prize for Poetry as well as the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize. Her fiction has appeared in *Quarter After Eight*. She homesteads on seven acres in rural Virginia.

Carrie Shippers's poems have appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *New England Review*, *North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Southern Review*, and other journals. She is the author of *Ordinary Mourning* (ABZ, 2010), *Cause for Concern* (Able Muse, 2015), and *Family Resemblances* (University of New Mexico, forthcoming) as well as two chapbooks.

Hilary Sideris is the author of *Most Likely to Die*, poems in the voice of Keith Richards, published by Poets Wear Prada Press. She lives in Brooklyn and works for The City University of New York.

Martin Stannard's most recent book is *Faith* (Shadowtrain, UK, 2009), and *Poems for the Young at Heart* is due from Leaf Press (UK) in January 2016. He teaches in Zhuhai, China.

Ellen Sprague writes personal essays, translates from French, and is planning a trip with college

students to Slovenia to learn about the literature and language there. She earned her MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her essay “Braking for Buntings” won the Linda Julian Award for “most outstanding essay” in the 2014 *Emrys Journal*.

Kevin Stein has published eleven books of poetry, criticism, and anthology, including the collection *Wrestling Li Po for the Remote* (Fifth Star Press, 2013). He teaches at Bradley University and currently serves as Illinois Poet Laureate.

Coleman Stevenson is the author of two collections of poems, *The Accidental Rarefication of Pattern #5609* (bedouin books, 2012) and *Breakfast* (Reprobate/GobQ Books, 2015). Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in a variety of publications such as *Paper Darts*, *Seattle Review*, *E-ratio*, *Osiris*, *Mid-American Review*, and the anthology *Motionless from the Iron Bridge*. She teaches at the Independent Publishing Resource Center in Portland, OR.

Christine Stroud is the author of the chapbook, *The Buried Return*, released in March 2014. She is the senior editor of *Autumn House Press* and lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Jason Stumpf is the author *A Cloud of Witnesses*. His latest project is *@ThisJustNow*, a story told in tweets. He is head of the Humanities Department at Walnut Hill School for the Arts.

Jacob Sunderlin has received residencies from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA and the Djerassi Resident Artists Program. His poems are in *Ploughshares*, *Gulf Coast*, *Narrative*, *Third Coast*, *Forklift*, *OH* and elsewhere.

Carleen Tibbetts is the author of the chapbooks *a starving music will come to eat the body* (FiveQuarterly, 2014) and to *exosk(elle), the last sugar* (Zoo Cake Press, 2015). Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Fact-Simile*, *Cloud Rodeo*, *Forklift Ohio*, *The Journal Petra*, *Powder Keg*, *glitterMOB*, *Small Po[r]tions*, *TYPO*, *Datableed*, *Flag + Void*, *Souvenir*, and elsewhere.

Heather Treseler's poems and essays have appeared in three books and in *Iowa Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Boulevard*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Pleiades*, and other journals. Her work has received support from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is an assistant professor at Worcester State University.

Arthur Vogelsang's six books include *Expedition: New & Selected Poems* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2011) and *Orbit*, due from the Pitt Poetry Series in Spring, 2016.

Sam Witt is the author of two poetry collections, *Everlasting Quail* (UPNE, 2001), winner of the Katherine Nason Bakeless Prize, and *Sunflower Brother* (Cleveland State University Press, 2006). He has taught at Harvard University, University of Missouri-Kansas City, and at Whitman College. Witt is an Assistant Professor of English at Framingham State University and the Poetry Editor of *Jaded Ibis Press*.

Jane Wong's poems have appeared in journals and anthologies such as *CutBank*, *Octopus*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *The Volta*, and *Best New Poets 2012*. She holds a MFA from the University of Iowa and teaches literature at the University of Washington. Her most recent chapbook is *Kudzu Does Not Stop*.