

THE LAUREL REVIEW

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Editors: John Gallaher, Luke Rolfes

Associate Editor: Daniel Biegelson

Editorial Assistants: Hannah Kludy, Korbin Jones, Kaylie Sorensen, Alexis Daley, Alison Faulkner, Tanner Lewey

Cover Photography and Design: Korbin Jones

Typesetting: Korbin Jones

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CONTENTS

FICTION

Aimee Parkison	The Candle	1
	The Dead Walk after the Rain	2
	The Fire Escape	3
Ann Hillesland	The Wide Missouri, the Blue Danube	23
Brandi Handley	Holes	41
Jeff Ewing	Crossing to Lopez	76
Kate Senecal	My Mother on a Trampoline	99

POETRY

Aimee Penna	transitioning	4
Alessandra Lynch	Bird by the Blue Door	5
Andrew Cox	6.13.14	9
	Regret Takes Me for a Ride in a Limo	10
Andrew Miller	The Flesh of the Parables	11
	Skeleton Key	14
	Essay on Ontology	17
	Pigeons	19
	Empty Vigil	21
April Ossmann	Event Boundaries	35
Austin Sanchez-Moran	Puberty	37
Ben Sutton	From Footnotes on a City	38
Bethany Startin	Minus World	39
	Zeal	40
Brent House	Augur of Remiges	53
	Keen of Welling	54
Bruce Bond	The Organization	56
Bruce Cohen	Emergency Surrealism	58
Caleb Washburn	Don Draper as a Sympathetic Character	59
	The Neighbor	60
Carrie Shippers	Manifesto	62
Catherine Anderson	Dancing Over a Field of Snow	63
	Three Volleys in Tribute to the Horse Soldier	65
	Whose Name Means “Stars” In Arabic	67
David Dodd Lee	Or in My Throat	68
	Punishing the Myth	69

Deborah Flanagan	Luminary	70
Diane Passero	Cremains	71
	Standing in the Park	72
Grace Bauer	Ms. Schadenfreude Meets the Morotcycle Black Madonna	73
Helen Boberg	Sense Violence	74
Jennifer Militello	microscope slide	83
	the lab	84
	the lab	85
Francis Ponge	Blackberries	92
	Orange	93
	Trees Dismantled in a Sphere of Fog	94
Justin Evans	Some Day Our Tongues Will Translate Fire	97
	Some Day I Will Marry My Italian Shoes	98
Kathleen McGookey	Here, Where I Am, in October	110
Kevin Kvist Peters	The Pleiades Were Naves for Running Away	111
	Shovel Left Next to a Rock	112
Lori Davis	Trickle Irrigation System	113
	User Assumes All Risk	114
Marc McKee	Staggered Zebra	115
	Sometimes It Is Now, Other Times It Is Now	117
Mark Wagenaar	Pluto's Gate (The Little Book of Hells)	118
Martha Webster	Arctic Circle	120
Nate Maxson	Singularities	121
Ori Fienberg	Limey	122
Page Hill Starzinger	Else	123
	OO	124
Rick Bursky	Drama of a Sigh	125
Steffi Drewes	I Came, I Wept, I Consoled the Landlocked Tortoise	126
	Counting Backwards	127
Stuart Greenhouse	90377 Sedna	128
Tim Kahl	Marzipan	131
	Pot Vacation	132
Timothy Liu	The Saddest Thing is a Kiss	133
	SPF 50	134

Virginia Konchan	(G From “A is for Amoeba” Series	136
	(A) From “A is for Amoeba” Series	137
	(Z) From “A is for Amoeba” Series	138
Judith Cody	The Poem by the Dog on the Leash	139
Holiday Mason	8	140
	10	142
	11	144
	12	146
	22	151
Sarah Maclay	8	141
	10	143
	11	145
	12	148
	21	150
Gillian Olivia Blythe Hamel	()	152
	()	153
 <i>REVIEWS</i>		
John Hoppenthaler	You Can See Her Lips Move: Erin Murphy’s Ancilla	86
Jordan Smith	Lullaby (with Exit Sign): A Discourse on Dealing with Death	90
Julia Landrum	Review of Hadara Bar-Dadav’s Lullaby (with Exit Sign)	95

Aimee Parkison

The Candle

When I was a child, I set my family's house on fire. I was nine years old. My father never forgave me. I lit a candle in the window to see the beautiful flame against the dark sky as I drifted to sleep in my bed. One moment, everything was fine, the flame glowing red against the night. The next moment, the curtain was on fire. I watched it burn. Flames leapt the curtain and began to climb the wall. My bedroom filled with black smoke. Mother was screaming for my father to wake up. Wake up, wake up, wake up! I ran down the stairs to find him sleeping on the couch in front of the television.

Even now when I visit my parents in the other house, my father sometimes looks at me like he's remembering why he can't forgive me. I'm now thirty-nine years old, and I want to tell him the fire moved so fast, so much faster than I ever expected fire to move.

In the interest of repairing our relationship, I want to explain what he'll never understand about that night, but something stops me. Perhaps I'll never understand what it was like for him to work so hard to pay for that house and everything in it, to fall asleep on the couch, watching television after a long day of work, and to wake to screams and the house filling with black smoke. What was it like for him to call the fire department and wait for them to arrive, to get me and my mother safely out of the house, and then to stand outside the house with the neighbors, watching the house burn? He was watching the neighbors watching him watching it burn, and then he was watching my mother's eyes changing when they told her it was too late.

The house was already too far gone by the time he looked at me.

Aimee Parkison

The Dead Walk after the Rain

Something tells me my little crow is going to be a cruel mistress like the sparrow hawk tearing flesh from bone on the smaller bodies, blood around her eyes in too much ecstasy to ever fully open. Like her, I'm feeding. Hunting, she thrives so that one day we may eventually live under her sky. Thunder strikes, lightning like a white vein across blue skin bruised by darkness. Blind, the young open their mouths to the rain, my breath, and the cottonwood seeds drifting over the wind to fall on parched grass like the first snow that will not melt away. The new trees grow so that one day we may rest in their shadow, she in their branches, and we may call their littered seeds a nuisance as they stick to our weary bodies.

Drifting to fall, we rise again.

Perhaps the crow's ancestors were like cowboys pursuing women or wolves across the fields: they had to turn away to eventually get what they wanted. Or, perhaps, hovering, they were like humming birds: their wings could never still. The first one sniffed objects that were moved inside the caves—not like the familiar farmhouse rooms—carved chairs in the wrong corners, oil lamps hidden under tablecloths, bed facing the oven. Here dogs' ears touch children's feet, and leaves brush over skin as people sway in hammocks. Tent worms spin, webs covering entire branches like lace gloves wrapping the dead woman's hands.

Aimee Parkison

The Fire Escape

Like vultures, reporters swarmed, even though my child had been dead for years. Knitting at the causeway, I had withdrawn only to tend to memories, to heal. Tenderness was bread crumbs on the windowsill, where I fed sparrows and watched them feed while hiding my face behind curtains. Please do not come, I said as I saw fear glittering in the eyes of the curious stranger, another reporter who had dared to enter my screened porch without invitation. An eight-year-old girl survived. He showed me. I saw her in the photograph, restored. Kidnapped from her family at the age of three, my child was the body discovered in the remoteness of small ponds and lakes. It had started to ruin. Cadaver dogs were released into the woods. No explanation for what had happened. All these years, our house on that land, vacant. Then came autumn, the rusted fire escape marked by footprints, someone going in and out of the house in secret.

Aimee Penna

transitioning

your birth name slips out
like a marble from a loosely
tied bag, but we all carry
on the family conversation
while watching it roll
out of sight under the sofa

even the dog takes note
remembers its soft sound

Alessandra Lynch

Bird by the Blue Door

I.

Only the child's shovel will do—
 neon-green, simple
light wood handle.

Behind barberry and cottonwood—I am private, tucking
the bird into snow—distant
 from the house

that killed it when it veered out of its orbit,

Later I'll clean the shovel with fluid,
yellow, smelling bright as nails.

II.

After the bird dropped with a thud,
 the wind
dropped too.

 I wanted to work my fingers through the freezing feathers,
coax the wings to fan out,
 its thumbsized heart too rapidly beating,
eye open with pity,

but there was no touching it.

At night, my child presses his cheek hard against mine,
his thin-walled chest against mine
 till we're doubly pulsing.

The wind's a small unbidden sound,
 not grieving.

III.

Once I could hold someone
else's love so patiently,
distantly, you could hardly
 tell it was me loving.

IV.

I could have waited for the fox to lick
 the bird's eye closed, nudge its weight from
my doorstep, then streak off in flight,
 carrying the bird in its mouth
over the fields, over the fields
 to where it belonged.

I could have studied the crenellations
 of the bird's under-wing or sketched
its fine head with a charcoal stick. Or burned
 the bird to a teaspoonful of ash and scattered it
over the lake.

Thrill and patter of wings. Or left
the bird where it was,
 turned to other things.

V.

Before he died, a friend stored his sculpture
 Angel of Death in my house: wings tucked,
wooden shoulders hunched. His stooped frame, his shadowy face
 seemed human, seemed to need consolation.

I tried to stroke his cheek,
 but he was too tall and gaunt for me to reach....

VI.

I have cried I have not cried enough

I have ignored the compass

blackened the map with blindness

while the worms

died in the earth they kept making

I have cried I have not cried enough

I blanketed my child

before he could think to cover himself

I thinned myself as though I were a project
deaf to the forklift and dozer

I blot out grief as snow does light

I pass through mirrors—armor-cool

not having listened to what is bodiless
and breathing

VII.

the last day of february and the barberry and snowbirds
and surveyor's little orange and yellow flags fluttering

my armor shiny bits of my helmet in pieces we are in pieces one

feathery piece of us dropped and I have been talking
so much god has vanished my words a little something to bring
to a party

VIII.

Beautiful fractal—

bird with a blur for an eye, what did you
see before plummeting?— Shadow wavering

at the threshold, glommed
by light.

Later—the shock
of snow you slid into

from my light green shovel—the chilly
distances

between branches where you might have perched
and twitched. Under berry trees sacked in white ash,

how handsome in your death-suit,

sealed clean—
secret as a book.

IX.

Later, in spring, it rains and rains
and the water rises

from the drainage ditch, carrying
pitch and froth and mud and melting

snow and sodden feather-sack,
the water spilling over

the bank, over the creeping things, the ivy,

snagging what it hauls itself over, dragging
the bulk toward my house...pulling everything

unburied

closer to me, circling my ankles, insistently lapping....

Andrew Cox

6.13.14

This is not an early warning system even though this city is on the most dangerous list and still the red-tail hawks show up because this is not flower power this is not a fake walk on the moon and yet dropped in the middle of nowhere the dog does not find its way back home which causes names to appear in wet concrete while life expectancy tiptoes to the next street and invades someone's attic to raise its little bandits this is not a small pox vaccination this is not a conspiracy theory where a tail wags and a president is assassinated causing schools to close and moms to come home from work this is not a telephone call with only eleven cents in its pocket this is not a nuclear accident where a fight breaks out and those left standing have to clean up the mess of the cold war in a pin stripe suit and pointy shoes this is not a Sputnik this is not a bomb shelter

Andrew Cox

Regret Takes Me for a Ride in a Limo

Regret said they were playing games in the city where my oldest sister was in drug rehab and though I sent money it was not enough. I am not as good a person as I think I am. Regret said it is only now I miss my father who waits for me speak to him in the language of four-leaf clovers. My daughter did not escape the bad weather but at least I taught her how to use an umbrella. Go visit my youngest sister regret said and tell her X and Y add up to a number that contains everything that is going to happen to her. How nice it is to ride in a limo and look out the tinted windows at the landscape of lost chances as I sit in the backseat with my new friend and ask the driver to go faster. Regret said my mother was daydreaming in the nursing home with her mouth open wondering when one of her sons will come and take her away.

Andrew Miller

The Flesh of the Parables

In the middle of my life,
I took my inheritance and left my father's house
Because I learned—
The way one does in a small town near the sea—
He was not my father:

He a believer in the need to believe
In all my mother's stories could do nothing
But kneel down behind her, and,
In their corner of the house, drag a comb like a wing
Through the lapis shadows of her hair.

I could tell you all of my mother's stories.
They are *good ones*.
An angel, a promise, a child expected
Miraculously as a wish,
A census, a journey, a lack of accommodation.

At last, of course, it was just she and I
Under the light of that promissory star,
A glistening through roof beams,
The season winter, a man's face hanging
Like a carved head among the milling cows.

The day I left, I went to live among thieves.
They took me for a son.
By night, I fed their hogs, poured the fodder,
Slept on open stone.
By day, I learned to cut throats:

I became their butcher, who learned to cleave meat from bone.
It was no mystery.
Nothing to atone.
I was happy,
But for those times it seemed the sun shone on my knife's steel.

The sun made a single eye
Staring up at me from all that blood.
Then, I would cut and cut, and flee to other work.
But the eye shined in other places.
It made the water of the lake hard

So that some times, I thought how I must walk to it,
Or it glint in the eye of a stranger
Or it showed on a stolen coin.
Where I looked, it looked at me.
When I closed my eyes, it flashed in the lid's darkness.

Even now, I believe the most of it was a dream.
Still that day when thoughtlessly I said "Rise up" and
The swine I had butchered did rise up
Bone by bone in a dance of hooves and flanks
Rejoining, snouts rooting for breath—

Totters climbing once again into their flesh,
Though meat was chewed from off their haunches,
Though the balls of their eyes rolled
Like stones back
Over the gaping tomb of those skulls' sockets—

I was surprised.
Seeing what had I done and God-fearing,
My thieving fathers beat me.
They kicked and kicked
And when the work was done left me there in the dung-red snow.

The snow I remember, and the road,
And the Samaritan's breath, thick with wine,
But how I got to my mother's house,
Which is not my father's, I cannot say.
She was there, armed with shy questions,

Binding my wounds, and he also:
Sending my brothers to work,
Killing the veal calf he was saving,

Standing in corners, carrying cloth and pales,
Stealing kisses from my half closed eyes.

My friends, I have told you this before as if
It were another man's story so that
You may ever see but never perceive,
Ever hear but never understand:
These parables of mine are fleshed in the Son of Man.

Andrew Miller

Skeleton Key

This morning I took it and left through the garden gate
where the roses grow maverick among oak suckers
and the industry of ivy incorporates the stone walls.
We rent rooms in a four-columned Antebellum,
built with the usual means: tobacco and cotton profits,
the estate's fields grown over now with city.
At the back of the house, the round gate reads: "private,"
and I use the key for a key. I wedge it in
the wish-bone lock, twist once and hard and pull.
The springs creak their codicil of rust and give,
and I must shove the gate open and closed.

All this takes longer. It takes another ten minutes longer,
and I could have followed the drive to the car
but my wife tells me I need to leave by the garden
because leaving that way is *hyggeligt*--
pronounced *hoog-leet* in her language
and meaning nothing we Americans can say or know.

Then I drive to where the city limits are marked with columns,
and the city continues for miles: industrial parks, financial parks,
streets threading into subdivisions and tract homes
until only tree lines thicken and begin to break occasionally
at the pace of driveways and sun between limbs.

I drive to the Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Facility #4
where before the bored sea of slate,
the faces of forty-six boys sink on their palms.
This is my classroom of tables fixed
before bolted-down and backless benches.
The boys may not place their hands outside my sight.
They may not speak unless I ask.
Ears and noses once pierced with gold
scab all month long with the skin's resolve to heal,
and I watch time growing out in mohawks: blonde and brown.

Only the tattoos of skulls on biceps--
their eyes spilling out black block letters
that spell words I know too well or not at all--
remain gilded against the passage of time.

We read out loud in one voice
from a spine-long list of spelling words
crossing the fifty-year-old primer's page:
family, freedom, fortunate, federation,
each boy rewriting what is there.
Beyond each 'f' there is a 'u' he is glad to let me see.

Still I mention opportunity, wasted lives,
but even the story of my wife newly arrived in America,
seeking its language on a Peter Pan Bus out of Vallejo, California,
doesn't move them. I'm standing there,
acting out the faces of those three Mexican women
she interrogated for every bit of slang they knew,
only the word 'woman' ignites a tender burst of laughter--
or perhaps, hatred or need, whatever it takes
for hands to go back into fists, for only an instant.

This is why I will take the laundry gate.
I will leave early this afternoon,
walk back to the parking lot along the canal
that circles us all day long-- the moat that it is.
This will take longer, maybe thirty minutes longer.
I will flash an ID card to the gate guards,
and each will slip a card-key in his lock.
Between the fences, German Shepherds will whine.
Bolts will unclasp. Tumblers will resound automatic and precise,
and below their caps the guard will say nothing,
which in the American idiom,
means everything we can know or say.
This we, this you and I,
because I am speaking and you can hear me
in a common language, though I will not speak out loud
about my gate or the spring's early outbreak
in a garden built on the stolen peoples of the upper Niger.

I will never mention my wife sleeping.
I will not talk of her talking half the night
in the spondees of the language she dreams in.
The morning's cold will be pregnant in her feet,
and she will warm one under my thigh, the other
between my calves. I will not say this, or 'love.'
I say 'shut up.' 'Sit down.'
'Sound out the letters one at a time.' The ones
that pour out of the opened holes in a skull.

Andrew Miller

Essay on Ontology

Aren't they a trinity of unused parts?
Proof of the mechanic watch-maker?
This tonsil. This appendix. These teeth
so endowed with a primeval wisdom for shattering bone.
Nothing was rent from Adam's side, instead
these three vestigial magi slouched
after some faded starlight in a world, moderately new,
into the first man still warming to his second breath.

Man was an ape! Man was an ape!
My mother refuted such notions,
swearing, as she did, on the family bible,
its great sharp-edged block of red-lettered pages
squatting despotically on the coffee table
next to House and Garden,
that "Adam would have named
snakes lizards if they'd had legs!"

But Man is an ape, was an ape, and I'm ape,
and it becomes me. It's a matter of pride,
as I kneel in with the razor over the bathroom sink,
my morning chore of modeling the man,
after waking and finding my Eve, busying herself--
not counting the keys of the chest's accordion
but squeezing her breasts, probing
for a dull lump, doughy and knuckle-round,

like a serpent's egg. She's found nothing yet,
and I propose a future uncluttered of that knowledge
or any other related to these portents,
even if only tonsils, appendix, sagacious teeth.
I want none of them: nothing from the accounts
of pus and sickness, not one.

So I'm writing an essay to nobody in particular.
I'm waiting in his vinyl chair for the surgeon's
mask and pliers and oxide. I'm praying in paragraphs
for the none of it that's my share,
although my gums bob already with things
prehistoric and waiting to arrive.

Andrew Miller

Pigeons

They are always returning, who have lost
The grace of migration and fall
Like the weak of spirit:
These birds I have so much and little to do with.

And because they fly with their wings
Open in the shapes of Vs and are greyer
Than the buildings that surround them, their glamour is
They cannot be beautiful.

Rank and file, metallic colored,
Given to displays of public sex and unashamed begging,
They march like dolts
And have no knees in their legs.

It is only when the flock assembles into a formation
That circles some shabby storm of crumbs,
Or when it rises, that they wobble
And become (together) a great beast that astonishes—

Not with the daring colors of caged birds—
But with a barbaric applause
That circles in backgrounds of days
Abandoned to the seasons.

Along with the cat and the dog,
Along with the rat and the house fly, we took them with us—
A storm of wings, like the storied-lives of falling children—
Out of Eden,

And this is why they bear the leaden names
We have named them,
For “pigeon” was the first word that came to mean *Nothing*
In the mouth of Adam:

That sound he drew over his tongue
To ward off menageries of shame,
And “squab” is the sound a child makes
When he first learns there is death:

A hushed glottal coughing
As if his throat were closing,
And the grey angel he sees approaching
Comes down to land in chassis of stone.

Andrew Miller

Empty Vigil

I think of that hill top where men
Nauseated from hardtack and cold
Watched ten years for the signal
That meant the end of topless Troy,
How days and nights they stared
To the next mountain, then to the next.

Not once, do the stories relate,
How those men mistook one light
For another. Never did a brush fire
Or a shepherd's torch ignite in them
The thought that all was done
Before all was done in the distance.

But I cannot believe this. Night
After night, like a wish or angst
That walked their hearts the way
The lynx stalked the edges of their camps,
The fear and need and hope and urge
To light the fire smoldered in them all.

Until they first failed to resist it
And lit it, then had to douse it,
Until they did that same thing again,
Until they fought among themselves
About the nature of fire itself
Until dawn became bland and mute.

They never had sons or daughters.
Staring themselves blind up there,
They left the cliffs as I will leave
The six-story tall streets of this town:
With only the weariness and tears
That frays new things to the bone.

And their poems? So much time
And nothing but their voices to rub
Against the wind. They wrote them
About love and the fear of blindness,
Anticipation of failure and peace:
The tragedy that never happened.

The Wide Missouri, the Blue Danube

Budapest was a disappointment. Susan had a queasy flutter in her stomach from riding in the back of the chorus's tour bus. It hadn't been a long ride since lunch in Bratislava, but the nearly useless air conditioner vented steamy condensation over the rear windows. It smelled swampy and sweaty and she couldn't see out unless she leaned forward. Still, as they drove past buildings either sooted black with exhaust or shining like new plastic, the old Tommy Dorsey song "That Lovely Night in Budapest" played through her head. At 66 and with parents who loved big band music, she was probably the only person who remembered that song—a lighthearted number that made her think of open sidewalks, candles stuck in wine bottles and corner tables in dim restaurants with artificial grape vines twined overhead. Peering down from the bus, she didn't see a single sidewalk cafe, or anyone who looked as if they had time to spend at one. The Berlin wall had fallen only 15 years ago, but people pushed past each other as if they had been capitalists forever. She thought of another song lyric, from *My Fair Lady*, where "hairy hound from Budapest" rhymed with "ruder pest."

The bus turned, turned again, the tilt making her dizzy. They passed grimy statues, a train station whirlpooling with traffic, and a youth hostel with a pack of scruffy students loitering in front. The bus lumbered to a stop in front of a modern hotel looming over the six-lane street. So far on the tour the women's chorus had only stayed in these giant hotels, probably because the women organizing the tour thought plentiful electrical outlets outweighed charm. For Budapest she'd hoped for an old hotel with a grand lobby of stained glass and potted palms and red velvet upholstery.

She freshened her lipstick before straightening her stiff knees to stand in the narrow aisle. Her forehead was damp. She'd never sweated like this when she was young. Something had changed with menopause, and now she worried that she would turn into one of those old ladies that smelled like sour kitchen sponges. Recently she'd noticed an old man smell creeping up on Bill, the slight urine tang, the humid smell of pants worn too many days in a row. She filched his dirty shirts from the closet and grabbed yesterday's pants from the chair before he could wear them again. Dropped hints: "If you're coming to the grocery store this morning, shouldn't you shower now?" Only six years older, he already had the spotty

and veined hands, the graying eyes. “At least try the Viagra,” she’d said after their last attempt. She’d learned not to wear a special nightgown or light candles. Preparations only made it worse.

“Maybe I’m just past all that,” he’d said after a pause, face turned away. He used to whisper in her ear at the movies, “I wish I could have some sugar right now.” He hadn’t whispered in her ear in a long time.

The sidewalk glittered, despite black spots of old gum. She stepped under the hotel awning, away from the bus’s exhaust fumes, while she waited for her tapestry print suitcase to be pulled from the bus’s underbelly. A man in a short-sleeved dress shirt also stood in the shade, smoking and watching the women. No one in the chorus smoked, of course. Bad for the voice. Even the smell drifting in the windows of their rehearsal hall was enough to make the women complain. But Susan stood next to him where she could get a whiff. Bill used to smoke Marlboros.

The man took deep, quick drags, an avid, not a languid, smoker. His dark eyes reminded her of Charles Boyer, about to murmur “Come with me to the Casbah.” In America she could say something, but she only knew two words of Hungarian and he might not speak English. So she watched as the women fluttered together in twos and threes, laughing and waiting for their bags.

She was new to the chorus. She’d tried out on impulse, one rainy day in January when she’d read an ad in the local paper—auditions, all voice parts, upcoming tour of Hungary—while Bill slurped his coffee over the sports section. She’d worried that her years of church choir experience wouldn’t be sufficient, the anthems growing easier as the choir shrank and aged before being replaced by a “praise team” rock band of young people. But the women’s chorus had taken her on the spot. Later she learned that they needed singers who could pay for the tour; otherwise they would all lose their deposits.

“You are the chorus?” the man asked. His voice was reedy, not deep, but it had a rasp that raised the hairs on her arms.

“Yes.” She didn’t need to ask how he knew. The women’s American voices seemed very loud as they gathered their suitcases and paraded into the lobby.

“Ah!” he said, dropping his cigarette, still smoldering, onto the ground. His shoes were scuffed, polished with a mismatched brown so that the toes were mottled darker than the uppers. “I am waiting for you. I am with the men’s chorus. We do a concert with you tomorrow.” When she nodded, he sang a little of a melancholy Hungarian song in a thin

baritone, then coughed. “Kodály,” he said, wrinkles fanning out from his eyes when he smiled. His skin was dark, his hair threaded with steel, not silver. He was only half a head taller than her, lean, probably a few years younger. He scanned her face, her white cotton shirt, her hands. When his eyes met hers again he gave her a slow smile.

“We’re singing a song by Kodály too,” she said, trying to match his pronunciation.

“You sing it for me?” He grinned, raising his eyebrows.

She leaned forward, close enough to smell his clove and sweat smell, and sang just loudly enough to carry over the sound of the idling bus: “Túrót észik a cigány, Túrót, Túrót.” Her cheeks turned hot. Roughly translated, she just sang “The gypsy eats cottage cheese,” lyrics probably written for children. A lot of the women’s chorus music was written for children. It was insulting—singing about cheese and rabbits instead of the things women should be singing about—passion, marriage, loss of love.

“We sing together tomorrow,” he said.

“Yes,” she said. And the two choruses were going on a Danube river cruise tonight. Just the words “Danube cruise with men’s chorus” on the itinerary had made her pulse speed. In *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, Greer Garson and Robert Donat knew they were in love because both of them saw the Danube as blue.

The humidity was worse here than in California. The light had to fight through the thick air, turning it gold so that everything seemed heavy and old. A breeze caught the man’s discarded cigarette, which gave one last swirl of smoke as it rolled into a gap in the sidewalk. The driver swung the bus’s luggage compartment shut, the jointed silver doors flashing in the sunlight.

“Your bag?” the man asked, shrugging his shoulders in its direction, something no American man would do.

“Yes.” She took a couple of slow steps toward the sun-baked sidewalk before the man hurried past.

“I get,” he said, picking it up by the handle and hoisting it, though the bag had wheels.

She was suddenly aware of the two pairs of shoes in her bag, the hardback copy of *Pride and Prejudice*, the international current blow dryer, the decorated platter she had bought for her sister. “No, let me,” she said, reaching out. The wind cooled the blouse at her sweaty underarm; she dropped her hand.

“I am László,” he said, holding the bag with both hands. In the

sunlight his eyes had an undertone of gold in the brown.

"I'm Susan." What a plain, American name she had. She'd often wondered what her life would have been like if she'd been named Isadora or even Barbara. Would she have married a Ricardo or Victor instead of a Bill? He used to snuggle up behind her, laying his warm arm over her breasts. But these days she edged beyond his reach, skin prickly, all she could do to keep from slapping his hand away.

The heavy bag made Laszlo walk lopsided. She hurried to open the lobby door for him. Inside it was like a shopping mall—all shining floors and echoing plaster. The women crowded around the tour leader, getting their room keys.

"I need to speak with them." He nodded at the director and tour leader. "I will see you tonight, on the river, yes?" He reached his hand out, and when she took it, rubbed his thumb across her thumb knuckle. She closed her eyes to savor the feeling.

"Yes, of course," she said, and stepped away as he turned his smile on Connie, the director. He looked over his shoulder and waved at Susan in another non-American gesture—a twist of the wrist like he was opening a door in the air.

Her room was a closet with a slit of a window looking into a narrow courtyard lined with other windows. It smelled of new carpet. The bathroom lighting was good, at least. At the last hotel she'd felt like she was doing surgery by candlelight when she put on her make-up. She had planned to nap in the three hours before the bus left for the cruise, but now she felt too keyed up. She checked the Timex she'd bought for the trip so she wouldn't have to bring her Skagen and mumbled as she figured the time difference. It would be early in the morning at home, but Bill was an early riser. She hadn't called for three days. She squinted at the numbers on the calling card as she dialed. The phone rang twice before her own voice answered. How stiff she sounded, reading out their phone number on the machine.

"Bill? Are you there?" Pause. "Bill? I'm in Budapest. Sorry I didn't catch you. I'll try later." She had wanted to hear him clear his throat and tell her he missed her, that he was living on frozen chicken pot pies and grilled cheese. Even over the phone, there would be the rumble in his voice, the rumble that vibrated his chest when she pressed her cheek against it.

Where the hell was he? Since he retired from his engineering job he followed her around the house, waiting for a lightbulb to burn out, her car

to need gas, the sink to need Drano. He would do things for her she could do herself, but wouldn't do the one thing that would make her happy.

She kicked off her red sandals, pulled down the featherbed and lay on the cool sheet, but was up in a minute, stripping off her skirt so it wouldn't get more wrinkled. It had been a mistake to bring a cotton skirt, its sailboat print so childish. Tonight on the cruise she would wear the black dress—much more sophisticated. And the necklace of orange and red metal disks she'd bought in Bratislava. She took a deep breath. She moved her hand inside her underwear, imagined the rocking of the boat. She didn't think of Bill, but a dark man, pushing her up against the side of the boat in the evening shadows. He thrust his hands into her panties. It was desperation, desperation for both of them, on the deck where anyone might catch them and he pushed inside her and she rubbed and rubbed until she came, then lay panting, the air conditioning chugging away, the light gauzy through the curtains.

The bus let them out just before sunset, the women making their way down the springy gangplank single file, like beauty pageant contestants. They all wore their dress-up clothes, hideous loose robes in dubious African prints, polyester “no wrinkle” travel dresses, embroidered cropped pants. Susan knew she looked good in her black dress with the three-quarter length sleeves edged in black crochet—a youthful touch. She'd kept her figure better than most women, so she was able to avoid the Empire waists that afflicted so many of the dresses. She wore a turquoise ring on her right hand. She had left her wedding and engagement rings at home, telling Bill they were too precious to risk.

The men were already on board, perhaps feeling they were the hosts. When Susan reached the entrance to the ship, a young man shook her hand and said something in Hungarian which she took to be “Welcome.” He had the professional smile and professionally wild hair of a conductor, and Connie was standing next to him. Susan said one of the two Hungarian words she knew, “Köszönöm.” Hello. Actually, she wasn't sure she was pronouncing it right. She'd been confused at first, saying “Kucinich,” until she remembered that was the name of a former fringe American presidential candidate, not the word for thank you. But the conductor smiled, so he must have known what she meant.

Inside, the boat was small and dark, with low ceilings and brown vinyl booths in the corners, like an Elk's Club bar. Windows showed the boats docked alongside, and overhead speakers blasted a too-fast recording

of “The Blue Danube.” The usual array of greasy cheese slices, dry rolls and plastic ham sat in the middle of the cabin. It was crowded. The men were mostly old, with comical clouds of silver hair, or freckled bald scalps, or oily, receding hair like Richard Nixon’s. No sign of Laszlo. The room smelled of unwashed bodies, old cigarette smoke and aftershave. A few of the women were trying to talk to the men, but it was clear that the men spoke very little English. An unsmiling waitress came through with a tray of shot glasses. Susan took one. It was not chilled and smelled strongly of fermented fruit.

The men’s director took a step forward, tapping his shot glass with a spoon. “Welcome to Budapest!” he said, his trained voice clear, though heavily accented. Strauss still bounced along in the background. “We are pleased to have you. We start the trip with a drink. Traditional Hungarian pálinka.” He raised his drink. “Egéségedre!” He tossed back the shot.

“Egéségedre!” the men yelled.

“Eggese...” Susan tried, along with the other women, then drifted to a mumble. She raised her glass and downed it. It was an apple brandy powerful enough to sear her throat. Some of the women choked, but not Susan.

The engine thrummed to life, and the boat slowly nosed its way out of the dock. The men rushed at the food, but Susan was sweaty and slightly queasy from the liquor. The windows of the boats docked alongside moved past, making her feel momentarily that she stood still while the world around her moved, before the singers’ boat pulled past the docked boats and into the open river.

She slipped out the door, onto the rear deck. She took deep breaths of the diesel-smelling air. The sunset lingered in heavy orange clouds that looked about to drop rain. It was too dark to see the river’s real color—just a bit of reflected orange and the beginnings of white lights on the water. Underneath, who could tell? Brown, blue. She moved forward carefully in her slick red sandals, holding the metal railing.

Up here the air was fresher, except for a smell of cigarettes. A man was silhouetted against the sky. “Laszlo!” she said, sliding up to him. He took a last deep drag before flicking his cigarette into the water. He smiled at her, but said nothing. “It’s Susan,” she said, more quietly.

“The *Túrót* singer,” he said, nodding. “I have not forgotten.”

“Why aren’t you downstairs?”

He shrugged. “I do not often get out on the water.”

“I know what you mean. I live near the San Francisco Bay, and I

haven't been on the water in ages." She and Bill had gone on a Bay cruise for their anniversary years ago. The day was clear, but when they went on deck the wind whipped her hair into her mouth and flapped her dress around her knees. The gusts were so strong, staring into them brought tears to her eyes. Bill had gone back below, but she stayed out even though Coit Tower and the Golden Gate were no more than blurs

"I would like to see San Francisco someday." His voice was quiet. He shrugged. "There is an old Hungarian saying, 'Only stretch as far as your blanket reaches.'"

"What does that mean?"

He shrugged. "Do not try to do more than your place allows." He got out another cigarette, felt in his pocket for his lighter, and lit up with only a flick of his eyes down at the moment the lighter touched the cigarette. The rest of the time he watched the banks.

Hadn't she followed that saying for years? Never venturing far from Bill's side, spending her days as the office manager for a dentist. But now she was in Hungary, wearing her black dress and red sandals. In her purse was the package of condoms she'd bought at the hotel lobby store, hunching and rushing so the other women wouldn't see her.

"Your city is beautiful," she said, moving closer. The warmth from his body made her shiver. The boat drifted in and out of tiny clouds of gnats.

"It is from out here." His arm brushed hers, skin on skin. She didn't draw away.

"How did you learn English?"

"I studied. Before... back in the communist times, I was a translator. People come and I take them places. But now, many more people know English."

And know it better, she finished for him, silently. She wanted to ask him what he did now, but she worried that he might be unemployed, since he'd been free to meet their bus.

The sunset was gone, the sky dark above, faintly green at the horizon. The boat slid down the river, passing the spot-lit domes and arches of the elaborate buildings reflected in the water. Some of the lights were out on the Parliament building. Her eyes were drawn to the dark spots. "The Blue Danube" still played through tinny speakers, but out here it was less annoying, with the slapping waves and the chugging engine.

Male singing came from the cabin, something minor but sprightly, like Irving Berlin's "Blue Skies." That song had always been one of her favorites, the bouncy tune and lyrics fighting against the minor key. The

song coming from below, though, was in Hungarian.

“It is a drinking song,” Laszlo said.

Singing with a women’s chorus, Susan had forgotten the floor-rattling bass of men’s voices. Another, newer, tourist boat sped by them, the wake striking their boat rhythmically, faster than the song.

The tune ended to applause and female whoops. There was a pause, and then the women’s voices came through the night, sweet and light and sad. “Shenandoah,” of course. There was a joke among singers that at any given time, somewhere in the world a chorus was singing “Shenandoah.” But this was a good arrangement, with the soprano melody floating above the soft voices of the mezzos and altos. And nowhere more appropriate to sing it than on a river. The wide Missouri, the blue Danube, all rivers romantic and melancholy.

Susan took a deep breath of heavy river air, damp and smelling of mud and exhaust. She moved closer to Laszlo, set her shoulder against his. His light blue shirt gleamed pale in the dimness. He put his hand over hers, his palm cupping the back of her hand as if to shelter it, his shoulder warm. He didn’t light another cigarette, but the smell lingered. They watched the buildings float past them, bright islands in the darkness.

Back at the hotel, Susan rode the elevator up with the other women who talked about going to bed early, speaking quietly to save their voices. In her closet of a room, she checked her hair, which she dyed the color of Blanc de Noirs champagne, wiped the smeared mascara from under her eyes, reapplied her eye shadow. She’d always been beautiful. Her mother used to say “beauty fades,” but even now Susan knew she carried herself differently, more confidently, than the women in the chorus who had never been beautiful. The brush raised static in her hair, which clung to her fingers and lifted up again when she tried to pat it flat.

Down to the lobby, then into the bar near the front door. She took a booth where she could see the entrance. The room was nearly empty, just a group of men in suits perched on stools. Their voices boomed through the echoing bar, competing with the television, which showed an episode of *Friends* dubbed into German. Though her stomach was nearly empty, she ordered a glass of red wine. It was dark, almost brown, with heavy tannins that numbed her tongue. She sipped and tried to keep from staring at the door. On the television, the blonde girl played the guitar and sang, the dubbed voice deeper, richer than the actress’ real voice.

From the corner of her eye, she saw Laszlo enter the bar. He was

shorter and thinner than he seemed out on the boat deck. Her palms started to sweat.

“I am sorry. I had trouble finding a taxi.” He smiled. The laugh lines spread from the corners of his eyes.

She took a gulping drink of wine. Did she swallow loudly enough for him to hear?

Rather than wait for the bartender to come to the table, Laszlo went to the bar, saying something in Hungarian as he ordered that made the men on the stools laugh. With a squeezing in her chest, she wondered if he was joking about her. Her age, her Americanness. He returned with two drinks, more apple brandy. “Egéségedre,” he said before downing one quickly. He sighed. He’d placed the second glass in the center of the table. Should she down it to be polite, even though she knew the sweetness would taste terrible after her wine? The liquor was a lovely amber—the boat cabin had been too dark to show it off. Maybe this was a higher quality.

He picked up the second brandy and downed it too.

She was disappointed, though she hadn’t wanted the drink. She knew she was old-fashioned, but she expected men to open doors for her, give her a seat on the bus, buy her drinks. He hadn’t even asked her if she needed anything from the bar before he went to order. No matter that her glass was full.

The laugh track from the television roared. American laughs, she was sure.

“It is good of you to meet me,” Laszlo said.

“Thank you for suggesting it.” She took another drink of wine. It scalded her throat. She used to think they called wine “Burgundy” because it burned. Those were the days when she and Bill drank jugs of Gallo, gave barbeques where she made guacamole, which she and her friends regarded as exotic. The 70’s, before everyone in Palo Alto took gourmet cooking classes and went wine tasting. Now those friends were scattered to the cheap places everyone retired to—Reno, Portland, Phoenix—or drawn to wherever their kids settled, Atlanta or Austin. She and Bill never had kids, so it was just the two of them alone in their shake-roofed ranch house. Around them the old tract houses were torn down one by one to make room for overgrown Craftsman or Mission-style villas.

Laszlo took his cigarettes from his pockets. Kents. All the same brands were here, just with weird lettering. He lit up without asking, using a red plastic cigarette lighter. “Would you like one?”

“Yes,” she said. He tapped another cigarette from the package, lit it from the tip of his, and passed it across the table to her. She hadn’t held one for years. She’d never been a real smoker, but she used to have one of Bill’s cigarettes now and then, at parties when she wanted to look sophisticated, or after sex, when she was still damp from love. She took a small puff, while across from her Laszlo sucked away. The Kents tasted unfamiliar, but the gestures were the same, inhaling with pursed lips, tapping the ashtray. They watched each other’s hands and eyes as the smoke drifted around them. He stubbed his out first, but she followed right away. “Come up to my room,” she said.

In the elevator, the calm glow from the cigarettes faded. Her pulse vibrated. She avoided his eyes in the mirrored walls, but there was no escaping their reflections. Her hands felt puffy and leathery. Years of moisturizer and good cosmetics kept her face relatively smooth, but her hands looked every year of her age, despite the thick cream she rubbed on them. The elevator’s ding sent a shock through her nerves. The doors clanked open. Laszlo motioned with his arm for her to go first. It was good that he followed her, because she didn’t want him to see her face.

The room looked even cheaper with him peering over her shoulder. She flipped on the light in the entryway, but no others. They moved farther into the darkness. He stepped toward her, took her shoulders and brought their lips together. He tasted like cigarettes, with a hint of fermented sweetness from the apple brandy. When he pulled away, his fingers worked at the buttons of his shirt.

She watched him without undressing herself. His hands were smaller than Bill’s, his fingers precise as they picked at the buttons, slowly revealing a white t-shirt. The cotton was so thin she could see his thick chest hair through the material. As he reached for his belt, she suddenly wondered if he was circumcised. She’d never seen an uncircumcised penis. A wave of panic burst through her, but she took a deep breath and reached for the hem of her dress. His hands, warm, smooth, came over hers and lifted too. Soon she was in her black bra, plain but with a satin border, and the matching underwear. His smoky breath panted against her cheek. She turned her head and stroked his lips with hers. His eyes were closed. Good. She took good care of her body, but it wasn’t what it used to be.

He smelled so strange. Not just the unfamiliar cigarettes, or the sandalwood soap, but a scent of his own, like mushrooms or new potting soil or heavy Napa cabernet. Something dark and musky. His hair was thick and slipped through her fingers. He wore a kind of loose knit

underwear, something between boxers and briefs.

She took his hand and led him to the narrow bed wedged against the wall. It was a small bed, but he was so much smaller than Bill it would work. He drew her into another embrace. As they stood kissing, she felt his bulge against her. She'd never thought how convenient it would be to make love with someone almost the same height. Her pulse raced. She didn't know what would happen next, but it was a good anticipation, instead of her usual dread that once again Bill would not be able to perform.

She closed her eyes. His hands moved behind her to unhook her bra, fumbling before jerking the hooks apart, but then he slid both palms across her bare back and shoulders. His hands were warm, smoother than Bill's, which were rough from his hobby of wrenching on cars and dry from mechanics' hand soap. Feel. Just feel. She moved her mouth to his again. He removed her underwear, then his, while she kept kissing him. The featherbed was still crumpled at the foot, so they sank down onto the thin white hotel sheets. His chest hair was dense and springy as moss. She handed him the condom. She thought he might question her about it—she was clearly not afraid of getting pregnant—but he was silent, maybe used to it. She didn't know if he did this with all the foreign ladies he could, to remind himself of his days as a guide, or if she was an exception. She didn't care. Her pulse pounded in her ears. He tore open the package. She couldn't help looking down through her lashes. He was uncircumcised. She wished the light wasn't so dim, so she could get a better look.

He settled back and reached for her, and she moved over him, onto her knees. The bed dug into the arthritic knots. She was never on top now with Bill—he knew about her knees—but she would do it. Laszlo fingered her. She grew warm, wet without lubricant, like a young girl. She reached down. He was hard. Relief made her sweat. She slid down onto him. They went slowly at first, trying to catch each other's rhythms. Maybe it was like Hungarian music, a different beat than American. When the two choruses had sung "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," together on the boat, the tempos had never quite matched.

She shifted her knees so that the mattress pressed lower down, but the pain moved down her calves. She counted his strokes, concentrating on the number, the speed. They'd stopped kissing. His eyes were closed, his mouth stretched into a grimace of concentration. Maybe he was counting too.

But then he pushed up hard at a new angle and she surprised herself by coming. He followed, jerking, his face unguarded and young. She wondered if she looked like that when she came too, if the pleasure stripped her years away. She lifted her leg carefully and moved to lie on her back beside him. Her knees hurt. He watched her, dark eyes narrowed. She closed her eyes.

She'd thought she might be heavy with guilt, but she didn't feel guilty. She didn't feel joyous either. The world wasn't shinier after an orgasm from Laszlo any more than it had been after the one she'd given herself earlier.

Once she and Bill had stolen away in his father's Ford. In those days there were so many fewer people. They drove into the East Bay hills and found a hillside of mustard, blooming yellow. They'd had sex twice before, once in the Ford, once on the sofa of his parents' house. But it was different in the sunshine. He laid her down on the scratchy army blanket near the edge of a spreading oak. The crushed mustard was lumpy beneath her. The late February wind was cold, but when she lay flat, the mustard blocked the wind and she felt the sun's warmth on her smooth, bare skin. The gusts hummed through the tall plants as Bill moved over her. The sun dazzled her eyes till the sky was indigo, but she kept looking at him, kept her eyes open. When she came, she saw silver sparks in the blue. A mockingbird sang, song after song, and she thought it would always be that way.

April Ossmann

Event Boundaries

Such a comfort to know
 it's temporary dementia,

when I enter a room
 and forget why I came—

to fetch a pen to write a note
 to remember the task

my brain's just mislaid—
 I've only to pass back

through the fogging doorway
 to reclaim a resolution or name—

and conversely, a relief to think
 I won't have to live

every future tick and tock
 of my anxious watch

recalling how distraught
 I was over anyone's death:

I've only to stroll
 a doorframe's border

to forget a particular grief,
 misbegotten love

or moral lapse, to escape
 the rasp of conscience

or self-flagellation,
 to visit the nations

of remembrance
or amnesia as I please.

Austin Sanchez-Moran

Puberty

James and the Giant Peach By: Roald Dahl (Novel: 1961, Film: 1996 Dir.- Henry Selick)

Every rhino,
the stupid beasts,
lives to eat
your parents.

They are dead and gone
in a jiffy, and now
you are alone
And now you turn to

being a nasty little beast
in a vast and desolate place.

So you go down
to the seaside,
a line of ink
beneath the rim of the sky,

groaning, crashing
moaning, about the grey
clouds as they charge
and you fall away,

to yell, "I am
not afraid of you!
You lump of smoke
And noise!"

But really you are just a peach
against the Empire State
and everyone who becomes full-grown
must capitulate.

Ben Sutton

From *Footnotes on a City*

The boys believe the distance from this city to the next
is anyone's childhood. So they stay with the ordinary. This foot then that
Penny the tracks until downtown is pocket change. If vibrations, then it's
circuits
to the circuitboard. The stronger boys pull what's hidden of another boy's
arms
from the depths of his chest. The train goes by like a war story
Boys repeat the tale: where the buildings should have stood
the buildings were painted on. The treeline & its torso of buildings
No tales of the rusted interior. Or the flood that entered the streets
The current of birdtongue
Not so much the voice of the water but the voice around the water

Bethany Startin

Minus World

The traveller learns to expect identical moments. The predictable motion of fireballs, the foliage repeating in the sky, and eight castles balance out the seams. But you are stuck on forward motion; walking backwards has always been an impossible feat. Look how air becomes obstacle, or how you attune yourself to flagpoles. The way into a subtracted landscape carries with it the intention to alter what is possible. I know the desire to tilt reality.

We urge linearity. We cannot in good conscience recommend further exploration.

Entry into negative space stands for a dismount. The same coral reefs recurring and the only way past the mirror is to break into it. All other exits lead to breathing in water, an accumulation of tiny deaths, a seasoned traveller preparing for sacrifice. You are so small and underwater: this means, you are ineffectual. You asked for a killing place. To walk through the wrong pipes is to say, *yes, take all of me, collapse my last lungful.*

Bethany Startin

Zeal

A blackbird is code for *escape*. A dreaming city knows no word for *aftereffect*, or *the motion of time*, or *how it will happen when the world burns*.

Below the magic city the earth becomes dry, a husk bled out and the men with blank faces. The glyph compels you upward, dream stones blending into solar flares. A floating continent means what is beneath is of no consequence, to be discarded or burnt up.

The machine conducts the movement from horses into birds. A pendant doubles in time: I am talking dreamscape, cities mottled and half-gone, the inauthentic grasslands. How we count the unmarked paths, or how the miles become granular. How the city burns up everything we have dreamed.

The twins' sister reminds us, we can be poet and butterfly at the same time.

Holes

“Your dress has a hole in it,” Jacob says. He sticks his index finger through it, straight through to my knee.

“Huh,” I say. “I didn’t notice it when I got dressed.” I uncross my legs and fold the skirt of my dress between my knees. The hole disappears from view and I forget it. My husband Jacob and I are at church, the same church we’ve gone to since we were kids, and services have just ended. We walk outside hand in hand, the glare of the sun making us squint. I can’t see a thing. But I don’t need to. Jacob leads me through the church parking lot to our car. We’ve done this every Sunday for so long that I can’t remember not doing it. Sundays we go to church. That’s what we do, morning and evening, me in my sundress, him in his shirt and tie.

Except later this evening, after an afternoon of lounging and napping, I think of not going. I tell Jacob that my head is starting to hurt and that I’m afraid it will turn into a migraine. My headaches do that sometimes, and he knows it. He’s seen me cowering under the covers away from light and sound, so he believes me without question and kisses me on the forehead before he leaves. I worry that I’ve just caused myself to have a real migraine tomorrow or the next day. But there’s a *Law and Order* marathon on tonight, the one with Vincent D’Onofrio as Detective Goren, and I can’t get enough of it. Besides, the top I planned on wearing has a hole in it in a noticeable spot above my right breast.

I like how smart they are, the detectives, especially Detective Goren. He knows something about everything: religion, philosophy, science, law, history. He’s well-read; that’s why he’s so good. That guy’s always reading. He knows things that other people don’t. He’s like God. Except that he’s not. He’s just a character on TV. I know that. But he’s just so smart. I could have been smart. I got through high school with ease. Mostly ease. I failed chemistry once. But everything else was solid B’s. Jacob got mostly C’s with a couple of D’s. We didn’t care much for high school. I might’ve tried harder. We were good kids, though. Went to church. Our church is in favor of marriage. Everyone was happy when Jacob and I decided on each other in tenth grade. We couldn’t wait to graduate so we could get married and have sex. We were 19 when we did it. We never thought twice about it. We got married, had sex, and got jobs. It’s been five years already.

I should have gone to college. I could've been smart. That Detective Goren, so smart. He sweeps over the crime scene noticing things others, even his partner Eames, do not. In this episode, a young woman has been killed, shot in the gut. There are traces of cocaine on the floor. The police assume she was a drug addict who hasn't paid and drug dealers came and took her out. But Goren notices her perfect fingernails and skin, a college degree tacked to the wall, and he notices that her apartment is clean aside from the signs of a struggle (turned over table, a thrown frying pan, scattered papers). *She doesn't seem the type*, he says. They never do, I think to myself. Nobody ever seems the type.

On Monday morning I go to work at Claudette's Card Shop. I've worked here since I was nineteen. I spend a lot of time by myself at the front of the store, near the door and the cash registers and the big bright windows. I greet the handful of customers who stroll in on a weekday morning in summer. Mostly women, usually older, people who like trinkets and figurines and greeting cards that say nothing more than "Thinking of you."

There's a candy case between the two registers filled with gourmet candy: chocolate malted milk balls, chocolate-covered peanuts and raisins, coconut haystacks, white chocolate pretzels. The rich smell of chocolate floats heavily around the front of the store. I smell it and stare at the source of it through the glass. It wasn't long after I started here that I began sneaking pieces into my mouth one at a time. It's just so easy. I'm up here by myself. There's a sliding door behind the counter. I slide it open just a few inches and pop chocolate-covered peanuts into my mouth. There's no one here to see. But, inevitably, I start to feel guilty soon after the candy is gone. I think of the words "temptation" and "guilt" and I think of God and how he sees everything. At the end of the day I ring up five dollars worth of candy and slip cash into the register to make up for what I've stolen. It puts my mind at ease.

But today I take a whole handful of malted milk balls and put them in one of our clear plastic candy bags. I stash it in the cabinet beneath the counter and eat from it throughout the day. I don't feel bad about it either, and I certainly don't put money in the register to pay for it. It's just a little candy. I'm not going to Hell for a few malted milk balls. I feel lighter since I've realized this. Lighter and less tense like if I were a cloud I'd be a cirrus cloud instead of a big bubbling cumulonimbus. I've learned a few things about clouds lately. Trying to remember things I learned in school.

On weekdays it's only me and Leonard working. Everyone calls him

Lee. He's Claudette's son and the manager of the card shop. He's 6'3" and wears swishy sweatpants every single day. Nicest guy you've ever met, but he doesn't know anything about greeting cards. Or managing a store. He was an art major in college. He paints these sprawling, multi-colored pieces with patterns of straight lines and straight-edged shapes. He's sold a few to dentist offices and one to a friend of his who owns a bar in the art district downtown, but his mom insisted he manage her store so he could make a decent living. I don't know how much he makes, but it's enough to pay for his house and car. I don't make enough to pay my electric bill. Lee's been managing the store for ten years now. I've been here five.

Lee's got a younger brother named Aaron. He comes in once a week to deliver the candy for the case. He picks it up from a candy maker downtown. Aaron's no Detective Goren. He's short and has a buzz cut. But he's smart. He tells me all kinds of things about fishing and amphibians. He studied Biology in college. He taught high school science for a few years before quitting to become a wildlife biologist assistant at Burr Oak Woods Natural Park on the other side of town. He seems to know a thing or two about human behavior, too.

"Man, those high school girls," he says to me. "I tell you, they're something else." He's unloading a twenty pound box of chocolate-covered peanuts. "They wear their shirts down so low and expect male teachers not to say anything. I finally had to quit teaching. Them and their shorts, too. It's attention they're after. Any idiot can see that. I never played their game."

I nod, agreeing and wonder what it would take for him to be seduced. I always listen to him carefully. I urge him to talk. I ask him questions. He hardly shuts up anymore when he's here. I take mental notes of everything, hoping to be smarter for it.

Later in the afternoon, after Aaron has left, an old woman with the worst wig I've ever seen shuffles into the store. I say my usual line, "Welcome to Claudette's Card Shop. Can I help you find anything?"

"Honey," she says to me, "I need a Christmas card for my husband."

"A Christmas card?" It's July and about a thousand degrees outside, but we do indeed have some Christmas cards. I lead her to the card rack that faces the glass cases of Angel figurines. "We have a few husband-Christmas cards leftover from last year," I tell her, "but next month we'll start getting all the new ones. I can give you a call when they come in."

"I like to get mine early," she says, leaning toward me as if she's sharing a secret. Her wig follows her lead and starts sliding toward me,

and I almost reach out to stop it from falling off. But it must be pinned in somehow because it stops suddenly and sits there like a sleeping cat.

“Alright, well, if you need anything else, just holler,” I say.

“Actually, dear,” she says, grabbing onto my sleeve, “they make this print so tiny these days. Can you read this one to me?”

This isn’t the first time I’ve read cards aloud to customers, and at least today the store’s empty. Not too many people buy our Happy 4th of July cards. “Sure, I’d be happy to.”

She hands me a big thick card with a giant red bow glued on the front. “To my darling husband,” I read. “You’re the warmth of my fireplace, the shine in my star, the gift in my stocking . . .” I turn to the inside. “And the light of my life this holiday season and forever.”

“Is that a tree on the front?” she asks, feeling the glittery front of the card.

“Yep,” I say, “and inside there’s a fireplace and some stockings and a couple cozying up on a couch.”

“Hmmm,” she says. “I’ll think about that one. What’s this one say?” She hands me a smaller card with a cartoon couple on the front. I can already tell this is one of those sexy humor cards that new couples buy for each other.

“This one’s a little . . . inappropriate,” I say, reaching to put it back in the card rack.

“Well, what’s it say?” she insists.

I start to read, “Let’s skip the mistletoe this year, husband . . .” I open the card and hesitate to read the inside. But she’s waiting so I read, “And go straight to jingling your ornaments.”

We stand there in the aisle silent for a moment. “Sometimes these humor cards are a little racy,” I say, apologetically.

“I’ll hang on to that one, too,” she says, taking it from me and putting it in her hand with the other card. “That reminds me of my second honeymoon,” she says, leaning even closer to me. “By then I knew a thing or two, and my husband Ralph was just a wild animal in the bedroom.”

“Oh,” I say, a little stunned. “Well, that’s—”

“Not like my first honeymoon,” she sighs, smiling, a little sad. “My first husband was very gentle. I was scared to death of sex, a virgin, you know. He was more experienced at 21. I was only 19. It took me a while to get used to it, but then I couldn’t get enough of it!” She chuckles a little making her already shaking hands bounce up and down.

I am unnerved by how much my sexual experiences are similar to

this old woman's. I can feel my face contorting, grimacing. I, too, was a virgin bride at 19 who didn't know anything about anything. I bet she was married in a small church just like my own. The reception in the basement with folding chairs and Sprite and raspberry sorbet punch. It isn't the cheap wedding I regret. It's that five years later I'm wondering if sex was the only reason Jacob and I got married.

"Now Ralphie has a bad heart," the old woman continues. "So we're real careful. But it doesn't stop us, let me tell you."

She ends up buying both cards.

I go home at the end of the day to an empty house. Jacob's a fireman and won't be home until tomorrow. I feel happy at this thought, the house to myself. The only thing that would make this evening better is a *Law and Order* marathon. I'm disappointed that the show isn't on. I start folding the laundry. I've a basket of dark shirts, both mine and Jacob's. I shake each one out, snapping it in the air before slipping it onto a hanger. As I shake out my red Claudette's Card Shop work shirt something catches my eye. A spot. After some searching I find it again. Another hole. This one down near the hem. My pinky fits through it, and it's as perfectly round as the hole in my sundress and in the blouse from last night.

"What in the world . . ." I murmur, picking up one of Jacob's shirts. I examine it carefully but find nothing but loose threads. I examine another and another of his shirts. They're all fine. I separate all of my shirts from his. Each one of mine has at least one of those smooth-edged holes. Some of them have three and four. I look in the basket for signs of circular material, the cut-outs from my shirts. Only the dryer sheets are left.

The closet doors are sliding mirrors and I catch sight of the strange look on my face. I look a little wild, my head is cocked to the side. I don't look scared. I look a little like Detective Goren when he's interrogating a suspect. He's all earnest and quizzical. He gets real close to the suspect and cocks his head to one side, like I'm doing now. Deep down Goren already knows what the suspect is trying to hide, even if Goren hasn't put all the pieces together yet. He will soon. Goren is never afraid, he's curious. I'm curious.

I throw the mirrored doors to one side. All my clothes hang like ghosts. I start on one side of the hanging rod, examining each piece of clothing one by one. My shirts are first. The first one has a jagged hole in the armpit, a hole that's been there for months from wear. But there's another hole, a perfect hole on the back, right where my shoulder blade would touch. The next shirt has three holes on the back, right down the

middle. The farther back in my closet I go, the more holes each item of clothing has. My sundresses are in the very back hanging down, some of them hang to the floor. The first dress I take down is the dress I wore on Sunday, the one that, on Sunday, had only one hole, right between my legs. Now it's full of holes. The skirt. The bodice. Even the straps. It looks like a fishing net.

I get down on my hands and knees and run my hand over the carpeting in the closet. There ought to be a whole pile of fabric circles down here. But there's nothing but a couple of tank tops that had dropped to the floor long ago, a missing sock, an old purse, dust bunnies. But no evidence that my clothes were eaten through, or cut out with scissors.

I think briefly of calling Jacob, knowing he would come home immediately. But I don't want that, I realize. Whatever explanation he'd come up with would be wrong. I'm sure of it. He'd tell me if God wanted us to know, He'd tell us himself. Jacob would only try to protect me by wrapping his arms around me and telling me not to think of it. But I definitely didn't want *that*. I want to think of it, figure it out.

I put the rest of the clothes away and close the closet doors. Restless, I straighten my vanity table and the top of my dresser. I imagine the detectives going through my things. What would they take an interest in? My underwear drawer? The desk in the living room? What items would be placed in little plastic bags and labeled "evidence"? The birth control pills that I stash in an empty migraine medicine bottle? The pills I was supposed to stop taking three months ago. The reason that Jacob and I haven't gotten pregnant, though we're trying. Goren would figure it out.

Then I realize that if Detective Goren and Detective Eames were investigating my bedroom, I'd be dead.

The next day Aaron's back in the store with more candy, a couple of boxes of nonpareils and a box of gumballs that were not ready for pick-up yesterday.

"What kind of bug eats holes in clothing?" I ask him.

"Moths."

"Besides that."

"Termites, roaches, really anything with teeth."

"Huh," I say, thoughtfully. "Do you know of any bugs that chew in a perfect circle?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Look," I say, lifting the corner of my shirt with the perfectly symmetrical circle cut out of it.

“No bug did that,” he says, smirking a little. “Looks like a hole punch. Get your shirt caught in a hole punch?”

“No,” I say. “Are you sure there’s not some kind of termite or something that chews through fabric like this?”

“Yeah, I’m sure.”

“Huh,” I say, again. “My clothes, they’re covered in them.”

He looks up at me strangely, like he’s trying to decide if I’m joking.

“I’m serious,” I say. “My whole closet. Full of holes.”

“Ain’t no bug,” he says and shrugs.

I make a point now to notice things. Like a detective. I look at customers more closely. *That woman’s purse is dirty on the bottom.* I look out at the parking lot with a sharp eye. *The red Honda has a dent in its bumper.* There’s a line of young trees that separates our shop’s parking lot from the salon’s parking lot next door. For the five years that I’ve worked here, I always thought that the trees were all the same type. But, holy crap, one of the trees has leaves with a different shape. Five years and I’d never noticed.

Aaron’s busy unpacking the gumballs.

“Hey, did you ever notice that those trees are different types?”

“Yeah,” he says, absently, “the second from the right’s a cherry tree and the other ones are all dogwoods.”

“Oh.” That Aaron, so smart.

“Cut it out,” I say. “I’m trying to watch this.”

Jacob removes his hand from my backside and places it ill-humoredly under his chin. We’re lying on our stomachs on our bed facing the TV.

“This is the third episode in a row,” he says. “I don’t know how many more people I can watch get slaughtered.”

“I told you there was a marathon on today,” I say. It’s Saturday and both of us have the day off.

“Yeah, well, I didn’t know we were going to watch the whole thing.”

He eyes my backside again and the curve of my lower back. Finally he turns his attention back to the TV. “Where’s the mystery in this?” he says. “You know they’re going to figure it out, and I bet even you already know who did it.”

“It’s not about that,” I tell him. “It’s about *how* they figure it out. And about Goren getting the killer to confess. That’s the important part.”

We lay silently for a long while. I wish he’d just doze off if he isn’t interested in the show. But when the episode ends Jacob stretches out his

arms and nuzzles his face into my shoulder. When the theme music starts for the next episode he groans, “Nooo . . .” He sits up. “No, no, no, no, I’m not watching another one.”

“You don’t have to,” I say, trying to pay attention to the details of the opening scene. “If you don’t want to watch this with me, you don’t have to. I won’t be mad.”

“*You* won’t be mad,” he says. “I’ve spent the last three hours watching this stupid show, and you won’t be mad if I leave?”

It occurs to me that even a few months ago I would have argued. I would have come back with examples of all the times I’ve watched stuff on TV that *he* wanted to watch. Re-runs of *Cops*, football and basketball games, dozens of four-hour baseball games. I could have talked him out of his anger and annoyance. By the end, he’d be lying beside me content. But I can’t tell who the victim is going to be in this episode. Usually it’s pretty clear who’s getting ready to die. But I can’t figure it out. There are two young women. Two older men. The women are escorts. It’s important that I figure it out beforehand. So I watch. I watch with a vague sense that Jacob is still talking to me, that he’s still angry. But I push that away. And concentrate.

It’s the brunette.

Sure enough, she goes down with a blow to the head. And by now, Jacob is no longer standing in the bedroom; he’s somewhere else in the house.

There are so many ways to die, I think to myself. The first episode of the marathon showed a man getting on a motorcycle. He rode off without a helmet. I assumed he’d crash and that would be the end of him. Somebody had tampered with his brakes. But, he didn’t just crash and land on the pavement. No, he crashed and went flying off of his motorcycle and was impaled by a wrought iron fence. I am positive that’s happened to someone in real life at some point. People die every day, horrifically.

On Monday Aaron doesn’t show up with the candy.

“Aaron not coming today?” I ask Lee.

“Nah, we’re good on candy until next week,” he answers.

I’m disappointed to say the least. I stand alone near the registers all day. I ring up a total of three customers before lunch. Lee hangs out in his office in the back room, doing God knows what. I eat candy from the case brazenly. I push the candy onto the customers that come to check out. “Have you tried our candy?” I ask, sliding open the door. “Here, try

some.” I put a scoop full of white chocolate pretzels in a bag. The customer accepts it but doesn’t purchase any more.

“We get this candy from downtown,” I say to a younger woman. “It’s gourmet.”

“No thanks,” she says, barely acknowledging me.

Finally, I dump the entire tray of truffles into two plastic bags and hide them beneath the counter. I bag two pounds of malted milk balls and five pounds of chocolate-covered peanuts. I simply dump the tray of nonpareils into the garbage can. The case is starting to look diminished, bare even.

“I think we’re going to need more candy before next week,” I tell Lee when he emerges from the back room.

He looks at the case. “Whoa, what happened?” he says. “Somebody rob us?” He’s joking, I know, but I don’t laugh.

“We had a surge of hungry customers, I guess.”

“Well, I’ll see if Aaron can swing by tomorrow.”

“Good idea,” I say.

Unfortunately, Aaron’s working the rest of the week. Can’t take off to make another candy run. I’m miserable with boredom for the next three days at work. I’ve been thinking of him more and more. I think of him at home when I’m cooking dinner. Sometimes even when Jacob is home, I think of Aaron hiking through Burr Oak Woods, examining bugs and leaves and lizards. I think of his matter-of-fact tone of voice and rough, bearded face. I think maybe that I’m attracted to him, but then I realize it’s probably just the idea of him. Ideas are always better than the real thing.

I feel like I’m watching Jacob and me from a distance while we eat our pork chops and asparagus. Jacob will eat anything I put in front of him. He likes it all without question, without a thought. I feel my head bobbing up and down to whatever it is he’s talking about. His broad shoulders shrug. He’s very strong. Always has been. Strong and tall and confident. There’s nothing left on his plate, and he goes to the sink to rinse it. His back is to me, and I gaze over his body.

When he finally shuts off the faucet, I say, “Did we get married just so we could have sex?”

He throws his head back, laughing, and he’s drying his hands on a yellow dish towel, the one with the daisies. “Doesn’t everybody?”

I am surprised by his astute response. But then he comes to me and bends down to kiss my forehead. “I’m just teasing,” he says. “We love each other. That’s why we’re married.”

I like his first response better. It seems more honest, like the curtain had been lifted, if only slightly. I'm disappointed. I know he believes that we're married because we love each other, and I believe the alternative.

And for the first time divorce enters my head. Divorce is against God and the church. But I'm not too worried about that anymore. I'm more worried about Jacob than about the damnation of my soul. I don't want to hurt him. But I can't seem to come up with a good enough reason for divorce, anyway, so it doesn't even matter.

Besides, life with Jacob is simple and comforting. Even going to church gives me a sense of relief, and when I listen to the sermon I can pretend that I don't doubt every word that the preacher speaks. I can ignore the fact that his preaching is based on nothing more than what he believes in his heart to be true. There's something exciting about a mystery, something you can't quite explain. But, it's getting harder and harder for me to ignore the evidence to the contrary. I can't just leave it alone anymore. I want to know how things work.

Every day now I go home and go straight to my closet to see the holes. Every day my clothes look more and more like lace. Delicate lace like clothing from another time. This evening I notice a light coming from the back of the closet. I realize it's the sun shining through a perfectly round hole in the wall, straight through to outside. I push clothes aside and put my eye to it and look out. It's only our backyard, the way it always looks: the tiny concrete patio with its two metal lawn chairs, the petunias are back by the fence drooping from the heat, our one tree is still and quiet. But, before I know it, the closet wall is starting to look like Swiss cheese. I try to catch the wood in the act of disappearing, but I'm always looking in the wrong spot.

In the morning, I bypass my work shirt in favor of a tank top full of holes. I woke up realizing I can't take another hapless day standing in front of those big bright windows in the card shop, the sun throwing a glare on everything in the store. Glass cases and glittered greeting cards blinding me all damn day. Old women tugging on my shirt sleeves. Lee swishing past me on his way out to lunch. And not even Aaron to pique my interest. I won't be able to stand it. I'll end up ramming head first into the Precious Moments display. Those porcelain figurines and their big sad eyes. Instead, I drive to Burr Oak Woods Nature Center.

"Is Aaron here?" I ask the woman at the front desk.

"Aaron? Yeah he's here," she says. "But he's out collecting samples. I

can try him on the walkie.”

“That’s okay,” I say, starting to wonder why I’m here. I turn to go but quickly, out of curiosity, ask which trail he’s on.

“Bethany Falls,” she answers.

It seems unlikely that I’ll find him. He’s probably well off the trail hunched over in the middle of some brush. But I take the trail anyway. It’s nine in the morning and already stifling outside. The humidity makes me sweat instantly. My thighs are sticking together. I can feel that my cheeks are bright red. I’m starting to appreciate the holes in my tank top, although, even the slight breeze is warm and sticky. My flip flops are rubbing a blister on the top of my foot. Dirt and wood chips are stabbing at my feet. God, it’s so hot.

And then I hear rustling. I start jogging and looking from side to side. Tree trunks are twirling past. And then there he is. He’s in his uniform: a ranger hat, khaki button-down shirt, green pants, hiking boots. He’s bent over with a plastic container in one hand and some kind of root in the other. He’s still several yards away, surrounded by tall grass and tangled tree branches. He’s where I can’t follow, at least not quickly. So I call to him.

“Aaron!”

He twists around.

“Jamie?” His face is streaming with sweat beneath the brim of his hat. He looks more annoyed than surprised. “What the hell are you doing here?”

I don’t have a solid answer. “I had to . . .” and I trail off. I start picking my way past the first line of trees.

“Hey, stop,” he says, still very much annoyed. He makes his way toward me, clomping heavily through the brush. “You can’t be off the trail.” He stops in front of me. “Are you wearing fucking flip-flops?”

I nod, stupidly.

“Well, what do you want for God’s sake?”

“To talk to you.”

He sighs heavily, growling a little at the end of it and rubs his face with one hand. “What the hell for?” He glances at his watch. “Aren’t you supposed to be at the shop?”

“Yes.”

“Well, Jesus, Jamie what do you want?”

“My shirt,” I say, lifting the hem of my tank top. “All these holes.”

“What about them?” he says, exasperatedly.

It's just so hot. I think of boiling in this kind of heat for eternity. It's what had made me so religious in the first place. The fear of burning for infinity plus one. I start swaying where I stand. It would be so convenient if I'd just pass out, right here on the trail. That would solve everything. That would get me out of this situation and out of my muddled mind for at least a while. But I don't pass out. I just stand and sweat.

"Look, Jamie. I don't know what to tell you. But I'm sure as hell not standing out here." He takes off his hat and wipes the sweat from his forehead. "Let's go back to the visitor's center, I guess," Aaron says. He walks ahead of me, plodding easily down the trail. I follow him, limping a little because of the blister on my foot that has now broken open. He doesn't know what to tell me about the holes. They mean so little to him.

I see the end of the trail up ahead. To the right is the parking lot. To the left is the visitor's center. I head toward my car, but before Aaron disappears inside the little beige building, I blurt out, "Do you believe in God?" It hurts me to ask the question. But that's why I came here. To ask. To learn something.

He looks at me for a moment. "Nah," he says, turning away from me and walking toward the air-conditioned building.

"I didn't think so," I say. Even though I knew how he would answer, his flippant "nah" still startles me. It's so blasphemous. But if I think *no*, *no*, *no*, *no* in my mind long enough, it starts to hurt less and become more factual. But his answer is not satisfying. It's disappointing. Taking the mystery of God out of the question leaves me only with what's in front of me. All these holes. But these holes are important, I realize. To me, anyway. Instead of following him inside, I make my way home.

I wonder what they would make of the holes. The detectives, that is. They would come across them for sure. The wall at the back of my closet is so full of holes that hardly any wood or sheetrock is left. It's thin like a net, one push and the wall would fall over. Light as air, it would land gently in the grass outside and disappear there among the green and brown blades. I could step on it and not feel a thing beneath my feet.

Brent House

Augur of Remiges

In a field of cold sloughs lost heart & salt blood
as a stole or tallit we lay in shadows of abell fire opsit God
timber & rafters of a sutler barn attame our fear its imprint root soil
flesh soil
& tonight a star of Bethlehem will appear skyrim
corradiate wisdom as elders scrolls point north safekeep & kindle warm
by paper & lightered
we sleep as if not held by a hand of spell a hand of bow a garsed past
clean wode
& a tome red hilt to present
a tree line iris light so we lay another board to flame to offal
to a dark cessation to sound a call to quarry
& in a swoop of hide gloam will rapture into talons & halfflight
a still melee to wake our stare & to shrill our portent forest to break
to stall
& to prey as a wandreth howle as an omen to mind as spittle
to silence
devil birds sap cordate fire
nightjars break as a dark rachis to split flesh & loft hunger & nightfall
tellus of near bark distant hollow & tooth feather.

Keen of Welling

We plead blessings of scissure a stern ictus & fissures of our flesh
for a secundine surge of potent strength
for fear of loss will neither fetter nor langle
& a straight sword will point as a broken shear & ossify
as casters of blackwater
rid tenebrions hid in a chest
& armour our son with tippet gorget & branch & god we plead
under a sukkah of woven cane
a schach to gather shade
& to gather a heart by bone
to gather a pulse as branches gather airs of wilderness
& a sun shall gather
pinions of starlight.

We plead blessings of hight superiorly inferiorly laterally
anteriorly posteriorly bound
we yzarn down es thow we awredy
los everall we got afore ere vury eyes & be lef not a mossle uf comfirt onst
erth & be lef poer & poerr
es if we haint nuver seen
thet minnit he yelld a spraich his voice shall not be stint
he shall prophecy in locks of alacrity
shall pass over glass darkly
to reflect a hand in a twainwall hollow as a bow of leafy strands
come early to fall drought.

We plead blessings of wend waters drunk to refet all kine
& þou shalt not fail our lunt
shall not atwond
as quaint knowledge of piecemeal tongue shall not fage us
to fret in a bowl
charact by thrin fingers
& blood hollows throuch our only claim our son & valley temple
dwells ower name
burnt vows offerings

& sacrifices from herds or womb cast down to swaddle a script alow
right & left ventricle & sough love
on flesh breached by mikvah.

Bruce Bond

The Organization

I first joined the organization
because it had the lovely aura
of an engine turning over
with no one at the wheel.
To think there is a room in me
larger than the one I live in.
I love that. The way a word
loves a sentence, a prisoner
a guard, a pair of lips the hand
returning with its cigarette.
People ask, was it my choice
or my parents. I tell them,
the company I keep keeps me.
You there, me here, and together
we make a stranger. Say we were
to shrink like candles at our desks,
or walk against the nightfall,
our shadows bled out in long
banners that, in time, dissolve.
Tough to blame the organization
any more than four good walls
for the broken marriage inside.
Talk, talk, and the big picture
turns more cruelly invisible.
If you assemble enough bodies
in the town square, they become
the nerves of one body, skinned
alive and anxious to inhale.
Or raw with the amphetamine
permission. I too was born
weak and loved my mother for it.
I held her skirt in fear of strangers.
Myself, for one. Was it the same
with you. I tied a frog to a fire-
cracker, goaded by my friends.

We were just kids inside the belly
of the beast, appropriating
something of its laugh, its giant
dread of obsolescence. That said,
it is good to be dead now
and then, good to wander far
from the city lights you worship,
the ones you break your neck to serve.
Good to cash your sick days in
and lie there, recused, an exile
in the grace of no one's nation,
to relish the sway of church bells
in the distance. God knows where.
Are they in town or in mourning,
hung heavy with the news of something.
Whatever it is, it scatters its wings
over a river that will go nameless.
All their words are one word now.
One, one, one, they say, and then
they shudder for a while. One, one,
the silence echoes. And we follow.

Bruce Cohen

Emergency Surrealism

We were having an off topic salon-chat about tattoos:
If you have one or will be getting one? How many?
Reasons & symbolism? One flirt said she wanted to tattoo
Andre Breton on her forehead & was reminded she had to
Ink the letters backwards so she could read the father
Of Surrealism when she looked in the mirror, the way
Ambulance is stenciled backwards on the front of ambulances:
Authenticity of reflective objects. How many dying
Patients croaked in a detained ambulance because traffic
Didn't pull over till realists figured out the backwards
Letter-mirror phenomena? The actual functioning of
Thought—the actual functioning of thought. When the new
Ambulance finally arrived paramedics wheeled the stretcher
Through the Emergency Room swinging doors: choppy
Commands airing towards a doctor who was & was not
Present. A man in the waiting room is blank cut in half
By whatever has transpired & what he is praying for & there
Is a sugar cube on the table next to his cold coffee & a fly is
About to land on it! At least that's what the stretcher woman
Thinks she notices as she's about to enter surrealism. Rarely
Do we admit we see this world only accurately through
Rearview mirrors & only if we check for what's about to
Overtake us, that what we need most is already tattooed on
Our foreheads, readable only in mirrors. On the streets the
Dawn laborers: bakers coated in their personal flour, molecular
Jukeboxes, homeless felines & canines are, as one might imagine—
If not strutting backwards, appear to be, because of a fecund
Wind which cannot adequately describe the flavor of water.

Caleb Washburn

Don Draper as a Sympathetic Character

I fell in love with Don Draper when my boyfriend lived in China, and while I've stopped rewatching the first season since he returned, still I think I would lie beneath Don and let him talk about his wife and how he doesn't believe in therapy. The show relies on the premise that women let men who look like Don murder them just to feel the hands of a man who doesn't care; how far we've come now, with gay marriage and all, that I can openly want the same. How tragic he can't get out of his own way. How lonely he must be when even his wife knows he's lying. I would console him through all the rough parts of aging—I think I'm young enough for it to work; I would take down all the mirrors and stop reading the Old Testament where people lived so long. In life, Jon Hamm complains about the photographs that have people speculating about the size of his bulge. Poor Jon Hamm and his probably giant cock. Jon, if you read this, I will never photograph you. My ear to your lips again, tell me how your father died; I will keep the tears out of your beard. You had a particularly rough childhood.

Caleb Washburn

The Neighbor

The first time my mother made love with another woman, she did it because of an unsaid bet. Because of a dare. She let the neighbor go down on her because of all the snide looks her then-husband gave her every time the neighbor came over drunk and flirted with her, the way the woman's hands rested casually on my mother's shoulder, and how they'd squeeze her when the neighbor laughed, like she was all those hands ever wanted to hold. My mother wanted this, she wanted her husband dead, and she didn't spend a lot of time thinking about the possible kinds of retribution. Understand that my mother loves the way Lot's wife stands like an exclamation point in the desert at the end of her story. She told me when I was young that God would only turn a person to salt for looking back at Sodom if the city had nothing left to give her; how could she have known that I would later anger her by only loving men? How could she know how many nights I would feel myself turn to salt for looking? the bitterness of my tongue in my mouth swelling. I hope she, too, had her head under the blankets that first night, that she hadn't been turned all spite, all anger by her husband, but that instead she felt herself in the moment of pleasure from a tongue that wants to unmake you. And the fact that she returned

at least a few times to her neighbor's
bed. Who is to say what real punishment is?
I find myself feeling the most sympathy
for the woman spurned, though, the neighbor.
God, she really was crazy about my mother.

Carrie Shippers

Manifesto

I admit that I watch wrestling for mistakes, moments when their timing's off, when someone lands with limbs awkwardly splayed and has to scramble, the way a ref

will keep his back to camera when he asks a guy if he's okay, face turned away in case the answer's no. I look for limps, black eyes and gritted teeth, bulky knee

and elbow wraps they didn't need last week. I worry when guys drop off the card or lose *You're fired* matches. I hope they went home to heal or hang out

with their kids, hope they aren't really getting fired, getting into alcohol and drugs. And when it comes to who's on top, who wins the belt at pay-per-views

I never buy, I know that too is influenced by factors I don't see: who needs surgery or extra push, has a contract to renew or won't forgive if promises aren't kept.

But no matter what I know about what's happening backstage, all the ways I'm being tricked so I'll be entertained, once the show begins I always get sucked in—hold my breath

or yell at my TV, feel muscles surge and jerk in sympathy. Every match has something I can map onto my life: the boss who doesn't see how much I'm worth,

false friends pursuing their own gain, the grind of showing up to work when I feel tired, sick and sore, hoping my fans will show up, too, notice how hard I fight before I lose.

There's no room for theory in the ring, no time for my mind to parse what my heart in an instant understands. When I'm watching it, wrestling feels real because it is.

Dancing Over a Field of Snow

The most flavorful Detroit-area mushrooms are found on stumps or under pine trees. In the Soviet Zone of Germany parcels containing more than eight ounces of coffee, cocoa or chocolate will be confiscated. No foodstuffs or medicines may be sent to Romania. Hungary no longer requires certificates of disinfection for used clothing. According to Armenian tradition, the pudding “anooshabour” dates back to Noah’s Ark. What happens to the displaced person who brings old country skills and crafts? During late August, early September and into November factory workers on the edge of Detroit spend hours after work looking for mushrooms to bring home to their wives. Appeals for Lithuanian freedom and a pledge to continue aid to the Polish government exiled in London marked nationality events yesterday. For instance, there is “zupa grzyhowa,” a creamed mushroom soup served with white barley or noodles, but one of the tastiest is “pierogi,” a mushroom and cabbage dumpling prepared in a crescent shape and eaten with cream or melted butter. He was smuggled into Finland and then into Sweden. His arrest by the Germans came in Berlin the day after the Germans invaded Russia. For some reason the farther east in Europe you go, the better the mushrooms, Wojsowski said. Zither playing may be an almost forgotten art in the United States. *It does no good to spend billions on foreign relations and then on the other hand pass a McCarran Act which tells all races except the Nordics they are undesirable.* To the average American, mushrooms may be just something to eat with steak, but to the housewife of Polish descent they are almost as vital as salt and pepper. A concert of six Eastern Orthodox Church choirs will be presented at 3:30 p.m. next Sunday. By European tradition, bonfires are lit near chapels dedicated to St. John the Baptist, with all members of the parish bringing fuel for the fire. *When we hunt for mushrooms, we cook them on hot stones and eat them with potatoes roasted in the fire.* For the first time in the United States, a course in the Polish short story will be taught. Bits of embers are brought home as good luck against fire, lightning and disease. According to legend, white pebbles covering the field are the bread of Serbian troops in the 1389 battle, turned by a miracle into stone so hungry Turks would break their teeth. Often pickled or fried mushrooms are eaten as a meat substitute. Seal them in a jar with a mixture of vinegar, sugar and spices. Thus pickled they stay

good for a couple of years. The word “sokol” means falcon, and to many Slav peoples, the symbol of freedom. *The Russians will strike first, leading to the liberation of the Iron Curtain areas or Russia will collapse internally, but this is less likely.* A favorite design is the “Snow Queen,” an Estonian girl in native costume dancing over a field of snow.

Catherine Anderson

Three Volleys in Tribute to the Horse Soldier

As the parade passes the Soldiers and Sailors monument, three widows of Civil War veterans will pause to place a wreath. Poppies will be laid at the graveside to honor the dead of all wars. Jewish veterans will be honored at Hebrew Memorial Park. The Latvian maroon-white-maroon banner will fly next Sunday from the City-County Building. *Some of the federal judges are reluctant to strike down laws relating to segregation because they feel indebted to the politicians who got them appointed.* Items for sale include handmade lace, linens, embroidery, etched silver from India, harem slippers from Arabia, African ritual masks and handmade toys from Yugoslavia. The Edison Post Lamplighters drill team drew cheers from the crowd when they appeared in their elaborate green uniforms and high green hats. Mr. Boyd, who took part in a Freedom Ride of white and Negro Episcopal clergymen last fall, spoke at the 99th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. *Lord, emancipate our love from self love.* The collection will help to build a factory in Poland to make artificial limbs for victims of Nazi atrocities. *Lord, emancipate our minds, our emotions, from hate of each other.* Lutnia's singers took part in a program with a group of Polish dancers, interspersing traditional Polish songs with dances such as the "Oberek" and the "Polonaise." The traveling past president of the Polish Century Club, S. Charles Nowak, has become a stamp collector's dream. One of Nowak's letters from South Viet Nam was nearly covered front and back with postage from the southeast Asian country. *Lord, emancipate our lips from carrying into another generation the lies we have told in this generation.* During the Polar Bears convention at the Pick-Fort Shelby Hotel, the association of veterans who fought the Bolsheviks in northern Russian in World War II remembered their fallen comrades. *We must be prepared to go out on a limb when necessary to test barbershops or restaurants where they are segregated.* Ukrainians in the old country think of the "trembita" as a long horn, like the ones blown by Swiss shepherds. Candles were lit and the traditional church bread, "prospora," was cut by Bishop Damaskin. He explained that the bread is made in two portions symbolizing the divine and human nature of Christ. One of Leopold's major interests is to assist victims of Nazi persecution in pressing their claims for compensation against the German government. A 23-year-old woman, the daughter of a Detroit dentist, who now lives in

the South today pledged to have her baby in jail rather than give up the fight against racial segregation. *It doesn't make any difference whether a Southern black baby is born in jail or not because the whole South is a jail.* After working on a telegram to Mr. Kennedy, Detroit Cubans listened to Havana radio to see what reaction to the blockade emanated from Cuba. Detroit is the home of the country's only complete balalaika orchestra. The instrument has three catgut strings, with a system of the semi tone, the whole tone and the minor third on each string. *Lord, emancipate our hearts from scalding pain.*

Catherine Anderson

Whose Name Means “Stars” in Arabic

Go into any cemetery in Detroit and rub the marble surface of a monument with your hand. Monsignor Jasinski called the period between the two world wars in the United States *a black hour, with racism, nationalism and isolationism rampant*. Training workers was a problem in Poland shortly after World War II when skilled technical men were either dead or had left the country. Although the parade began in what many feared would turn into a blizzard, the weather eased by the time the Detroit Edison Co. Calliope passed the reviewing stand. *McNamara*, he said, *is pushing American boys into Vietnam like he pushed dollars into the defunct Edsel*. Marble is a living compound made from molecules of coral and other hardshell mollusks, formed the same way as chalk. A USO survey of American troops in Vietnam showed the men would like to receive letters from home, pictures of loved ones, local newspapers, magazines, ball point pens, writing paper, homemade cakes, candies and cookies. How to clean the marble outside the main Detroit Public Library was still debated today. Soccer is one of the few things that brings ethnic groups together without any feeling of animosity. He was playing in Toronto and came to Detroit to play with an all-star team against the Carpathian Kickers. The Kickers won. An exposition highlight is the new ultrasonic image conversion system called Ultra-Scan that permits the user “to see the sound.” Lebanese dances are based on stories handed down generation to generation. They are all authentic and not the type seen in nightclubs. One of the troupe’s leading dancers is Kawakab, whose name means “stars” in Arabic. You are inviting trouble if you clean marble with an abrasive, but if it has to be done, do it with care and wide nozzles. Even chocolate bars are examined by X ray before going to market. Candy makers search for bobby pins or anything else that people along the assembly line accidentally drop into the candy. Michigan is an unfavorable area for marble because of the presence of salt in the atmosphere. The Legion is asking residents to send packages to American troops in Vietnam and CARE packages for the troops to distribute personally to the Vietnamese. Swedish Prime Minister Tage Erlander today called for negotiations to end the war in Vietnam while visiting on a trade mission here. Some marbles are hard and others are softer. Marbles vary in character and resistance. *As you get older the Bible means more to you*, he said. *Reading the Bible in Hebrew, you get the full thought, the complete idea.*

David Dodd Lee

Or in My Throat

from *Shadow Train* | an Ashbery erasure poem

The poet

as a reader
of regrets
can see the end

the dust
the thing we forget
the end

the grief

the instant reversed

the starlight
of dread

You are one of them

That's why
writing poetry
is relaxing

I don't use
my own face

David Dodd Lee

Punishing the Myth

from *Shadow Train* | an Ashbery erasure poem

I came

with the
shadows

through various
landscapes

Bless you

or

Like snow

come to
embellish
me

I pass you

on a

stage

Appear to me?

Ah, that's
just manners,

a secret
that isn't enough

to be
briefly thought about

The rocks have
curled
into attitudes

Deborah Flanagan

Luminary

Sir Isaac Newton, my great uncle ten times removed, tells me stars are easier to understand than frogs or apples. We debate about the first second before the universe began; conditions were so extreme I can't believe in the cosmic modesty he swears by. When I die I want to be reincarnated as an atom or a galaxy. Falling stars make people wish for good things, but they're dead: funerals don't evoke the same hope. Stars don't fall; they streak and fade like whispers. A monk makes a clock that keeps star-time: *It was the best thing I ever did*. The alarm goes off each time a star dies. This way the monk can keep his finger on the pulse. Newton gets hit on the head with an apple from the Tree of Knowledge before he figures out the laws of gravity and motion limit him. The monk finds his own way to keep time: *I have more faith than you*.

Diane Passero

Cremins

The box containing the body is placed in the retort and incinerated. I had my nails done (French tips) then picked up my father from the funeral home, in a walnut box. Wrinkly walnut shells, hard and foreign. I showed him my first tattoo, a scorpion, spanning my ankle. He didn't say anything. An eerie silence consumed my car. *Jewelry is ordinarily removed.* I wore his Coast Guard ring on a chain around my neck, feeling it protected me, like his WWII bayonet buried in the trunk of my Honda. Protected? Eerie silence. *Dry bone fragments are pulverized by a machine.* I met my friend Steve at the Rising Tide Brewery for a final toast to our fathers. He carried his dad into the familiar haunt in an oak box, motorcycle emblem on the front. He said, "The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. I strapped him on to the back of my Harley. Almost lost him on a rollover." We drank into the night, past morning, through the day, into the onyx moon, unaware of time or place. The stories we told, some true, some not so, to console what had not been consoled, could fill a pony keg or a small child's backpack. I bought a 6-pack to go and returned home without realizing I had left my father at the bar with a wine cooler resting on his box. He found his way back home eventually, water circle stain and all. *Some individuals use a very small amount of the remains in tattoo ink.*

Diane Passero

Standing in the Park

I am standing with my sister in the park. It is raining, but we are not getting wet. She's says *it's over there*. We begin to dig into the mud with our hands until we find two dolls wrapped in a yellow blanket. They are twins with hard plastic heads and soft bodies. Twin one has only the right side of her head. Twin two has only one arm and one leg. *Give me the potion* I say. I throw rose petals in the hole and fill it with gravel. At the dinner table I tell my family *I am going to live in an orphanage* and put my sister's eyes in my purse.

Grace Bauer

Ms. Schadenfreude Meets the Morotcycle Black Madonna

No dashboard virgin glowing protection
or mobile prayer -- this one is hell
on wheels, gunning her engines and ready
for whatever rough road lies ahead.
She's already been down a few,
taken her share of hits and bumps, scrapes
and side-swipes and near-misses. They've left her --
not mean, as some might suggest -- just prepared
for whatever *worst* she may someday run into.
She can laugh over spilled milk, watch water
flow over the dam or under the bridges others might
feel inclined to try and mend without braking
for nostalgia. Ms. Schadenfreude admires her
chutzpa, not to mention her leather outfit – the hint of veil
on her helmet a relic of the woman she was
before she took her place among more earthy angels.

Helena Boberg

Sense Violence

translated by Johannes Göransson

*

The slumber
and the lost time
(If I lose it
it has never existed –
only the
decomposed body
and the secret lives of insects)

: Hover in the wonderful, honey-colored light
let dreams wash through the skin
The sound from the street, people's movements
take place in me

The shadow of a strange man moving through the room

His soft scent

Days without images
Sounds fill a blind existence
The I is only an event

Electric
Overexposed urge

The red staring flowers
with frilly filaments
Dizzying hair

The boys spill
enormous
drops
in glass

The stiff face
of a clock face
The deaf snake
and the summer that was stolen from me

The decomposition process
and what follows
The dark urge
: a weird greeting from the other side

I step inside the man

Your sunroom
the droning bells
and the mist-veiled mountains

We lose ourselves on the ledge
just at mid-

Jeff Ewing

Crossing to Lopez

There wasn't as much satisfaction as I'd hoped in watching Jason fall. Seeing him suspended for a second after I'd tripped the latch—not falling yet, but knowing he was going to, I did enjoy that. But at the same time I knew it wasn't progress. No matter what had happened over the years, I should have moved beyond it. No matter that every rise of his was accompanied by a fall of mine, we were adults. I should have grown up, let the grievances fade between us. How else do you get past banging your head against a wall?

“Do you miss it?” my daughter asked just this morning, running her finger across my eye patch. When she was little, she would reach under the patch and touch the empty spot, gently. It never bothered her.

“Maybe sometimes.”

A typical equivocation on my part that she fortunately has not inherited.

“I like it this way,” she said.

It happened when we were in high school, me and Jason, crossing the Kendricks' pasture to try to catch their llamas copulating and take pot shots at them with a BB gun. Stuck out on an island in Juan de Fuca Strait, with nothing but water everywhere, that's what we had. He claimed it was an accident, that he was aiming at the tractor behind me. But we'd just split two Colt 45s and I was arguing with him about my girlfriend Tricia who would soon be his girlfriend, so yeah, I'm skeptical. I'd come across them sometimes leaning close, their eyes—two each—lingering on each other unapologetically. I didn't appreciate her sufficiently, he said, and he may have been right. So as we crossed from the road through the verdant yada yada fields with the malt liquor circulating freely among my suspicions, he extolled her virtues and my shortcomings, and I hated them both a little. I said she couldn't go a day without being told she was a precious gift and if I still had the receipt I'd return her. And yes I did call her an emotional orca, but even I don't know what that means, so as justifiable cause it's pretty thin.

It didn't hurt, exactly. There was an ache and a weird feeling of subtraction, something yanked out of me, but that was it. A red-tail circling above the ridge screeched once, then faded out, dissolved into a gray amorphousness. Not black, like you might think, just a dull spreading

opacity, which it remains to this day.

“I’ve always been fascinated by the decision-making process,” Jason said, standing in front of the classroom where his daughter and mine sat next to each other, watching rapt as he turned his mice loose in their glass box to ram into transparent doors and claw their way over stickum-painted barricades. There was no cheese waiting for them at the end, which I had thought was customary and only fair. There was no prize at all, and no discernible way out. He set them going like balls rolling downhill, noting their choices, clicking his stopwatch to record their reaction times, knowing their journey would be without end or reward.

“We remove the reward so that each decision is a distinct event enacted for its own sake. A pure choice in isolation.”

A few of the kids nodded, as if they knew what the hell he was talking about.

When it was my turn, I put some spreadsheets up on the projector, knowing full well that no kid would want to hear more about math on a day that was supposed to be a vacation from it. The numbers were meaningless artifacts from a time when I believed in balanced equations, butterflies pinned to a cork board. I closed with this: “Infinity is the greatest achievement in mathematics history. Aside from zero.”

We ate lunch with the kids at short metal tables bolted to the blacktop. My knee banged against the pipe brace every time I moved, and when the bell rang I limped off beside Jason and his mice into a light drizzle. My daughter gave me a hug. She didn’t hold my presentation against me. How in the world do we deserve such generosity?

I considered a glass eye early on—Jason’s idea, incidentally—but that was a bust. There was a place in Seattle that made them to order, custom colors, even patterns and little overlaid pictures. Tricia might like to help me pick one out, Jason suggested—it would make her feel connected to me, he said. I could get an eye that matched her eyes, or went with her shoes, whatever. Not surprisingly, things didn’t turn out as he’d intimated. She saw the socket for the first time and was repulsed. She slammed her own eyes shut like security doors, pinched them tight and turned away from my Sea of Intranquility.

The whistle sounded at the top of the grade, and we half-jogged down to the dock. Jason looked natural doing it, his arms swinging comfortably, his knees rising rhythmically, while I shuffled awkwardly downhill, scuffing

my shoes against the asphalt. The road hovered indistinctly somewhere below me, owing to my compromised depth perception. My bones jarred against one another as the ramp rose up to meet me, their connective tissue worn to threads.

And—for the cherry on the sundae—who should we run into on the ferry?

Tricia gave Jason a big old hug, studying me with crinkled nose over his shoulder.

“What happened to you?”

“What do you mean?”

She waved me off and separated from Jason. She tugged the ponytail poking out the back of her ball cap and made the odd little clicking sound she’d always made when words failed her. The rain bounced off her spandexed limbs as she cantered in place.

“I’m training for a triathlon.”

“Good for you,” Jason said.

The water of the strait was almost black.

“Do you wear a wetsuit?” I asked.

“Some people do. I don’t.”

“Of course not.”

She tried to glare at me, but her eyes kept flicking up to my patch, decorated today with a bright whirl of Fibonacci spirals. I moved closer to the rail. She and Jason whispered, their foreheads almost touching. They’d both been married to other people for some time, but if that meant the same thing to them that it did to others it would be a revelation.

I tried not to listen, focusing instead on the bow wave rolling out toward Canada in a white arc. We’d gone there once, the three of us. To Stanley Park. We tried to get lost, and nearly succeeded, stumbling on the car at the end of the sea wall long past dark. Our island was a pale dot offshore, an afterthought. Tricia had been holding on more and more tightly to my hand as the day faded out and the temperature started to drop. Joined for good, I thought.

Just before we reached the car, Jason stumbled and wrenched his ankle. Tricia let go of my hand, and there he was between us—leaning his weight on me, his other arm looped around her neck.

“What kind of friend are you?” he said when I objected, prompting Tricia to give me the first of many scowls of diminishing appraisal. On the ferry home, we went up to the lounge and drank coffee thick with sugar. Tricia rested Jason’s foot in her lap. We seemed to be on two different boats

after that, with mine listing badly and taking on water.

Now Jason was holding up his cage describing his success in the classroom, and they were both laughing. Tricia looked at me dismissively from under her wispy bangs, then she turned away and jogged off, her shoes squeaking on the wet deck, fading off toward the bow like scavenging gulls.

Against my will, I still see her sometimes naked again beside me in our little cove on the west side of the island. She was beautiful, I have to admit, her skin like paper waiting to be written on, smooth and unmarked in the first good sun of the year. Her northern pallor translated as beauty against the gray rock, while mine came across as something sickly and deprived. She stretched languidly and rolled toward me.

“It’s almost worth living here on days like this,” she said. I agreed one hundred percent.

I was wearing a new patch, bright red with a gold-rimmed star in the center. She’d touched it playfully once or twice already—I didn’t like it, but she was so open beside me it seemed ungracious to object. Then she started to lift it; I could feel it hinging like a secret door. I grabbed her wrist, squeezing harder than I meant to.

“I just want to see it again.”

“No you don’t.”

“It won’t make any difference.”

I don’t know who she thought she was kidding.

She made the clicking sound, pulled her shirt closed over her perfect breasts and rolled away from me again. Something in the vicinity of my heart collapsed. The sun disappeared behind a cloud, and as far as I know never came out again.

She waited an appropriate period before dumping me, out of respect for her own sensitivity. She wasn’t so shallow as to hold my infirmity against me—she insisted on that. It wasn’t the sunken egg cup where my eye used to be she objected to, it was my inaccessibility. Though to most people’s minds I’m as accessible as a *People* magazine.

Meanwhile, somewhere not far away, Jason was waiting all sympathy and hard-on. She complained, he commiserated. What a burden lifted I was! How had she stood it so long?

“How long do they live?”

“Who?”

“The mice.”

“I don’t know. Four or five months, I guess.”

“Is that normal?”

Jason nudged the box with his foot.

“Do they suffer, you’re asking.”

I didn’t know if that was what I was asking. Really I was just making conversation, but Jason had never had time for dithering. Even crossing the Kendricks’ pasture he took the straightest line. The trajectory of the BB to my eye was nothing if not direct.

“That’s what kids usually ask. That’s what they care about, and that’s ok. I mean they’re kids, I expect that. They’re not going to care about reaction times, cortex development, autonomic versus somatic. I mean, come on.”

“But I should.”

“Well, look, it’s survival. What separates us.”

“Ah.”

“You flinch or you don’t flinch, and there you go.”

“Yep. There you go.”

I wondered if he’d ever tried to chase the neurons that go haywire when someone breaks your heart or stabs you in the back. If anybody had. That seemed like a sure bet for a grant.

Off to our side, a boat full of tourists sped along beside a small pod of orcas. The orcas looped and arced. Every time they turned, the boat turned. The people in the boat were bright orange in their life jackets, bunched on one side of the boat so that it listed unnervingly. We heard the captain say something over his microphone, and some of the orange blobs shifted back to the other side of the boat.

Jason smiled, leaning on the gate in the rail. He always stood there when he crossed, so he’d be the first one off at the other end. The gate rattled. The safety chain, normally clipped through a rusted hasp, dangled over the side and clanged against the hull.

“How’s CeeCee doing?” he asked. “Better?”

“She’s fine, yeah.”

“Not everyone’s cut out for . . . whatever. Success. Advancement.”

He tapped the mouse cage with his toe and smiled again as the mice scrambled down their hallways, turned in desperate circles in their cul-de-sacs. After blowing into his cupped hands to thaw his fingers, he reached down and flipped open a trap door in the top of the cage.

“The kids seem to like her anyway. She’s got Miss Congeniality sewed

up, if nothing else.”

With a little flourish like a magician—which is what I think he’d always seen himself as, conjuring traps and mazes from straight lines, making animate objects disappear with a wave of his wand—he snatched up a tiny, wriggling mouse and lifted it out. He held it by the tail, watching it arch its back and claw at the air with its inadequate feet.

“The world divides up in essential ways.”

And with that he dropped the mouse over the side. A little white shape descending, bouncing once on the wake from the ferry and disappearing.

He smiled and made a mental note as if he’d learned something. His nose, pink in the cold, twitched. I wondered why we’d stayed on the same island all this time, bumping up against each other whichever way we turned. We could have left any day, either one of us.

He went under briefly before bobbing back up, eyes wide and bald spot showing. As a vivid illustration of my backward progress, there was Tricia again shaking me by the arm. I could see the spray of spit as she cursed me, red blotches on her cheeks, her chest heaving in fury.

She reached up and yanked my patch off.

The triumph in her face as she brandished it like a scalp, shook it victoriously and threw it over the side.

“There you are!” she screamed. “There you fucking are!”

True enough. True enough.

The tourists picked Jason up. He was a strong swimmer—even in wet clothes with a soaked jacket pulling him down—and something still stronger was pulling him in the opposite direction. It wasn’t love for his wife or children, or the shadow of unaccomplished accomplishments, fame yanked away. No, he knew what I knew—this episode would cement my position on the island, deep in the shadows of better men. It would be my last nail.

And what could I say? It was an experiment? I was studying him, timing him, noting the twitch in his face, the fear in his eyes? Hardly.

He pointed a righteous finger at me, and everyone on the boat and on the ferry turned to look. I waved. A big, slow wave, like we were long lost friends who’d finally found each other again. Oh what the years had done to us! Oh the stories we could tell!

When we slowed on the approach to the dock, I reached down and clipped the chain back onto the gate. The rain was coming down harder, pinging off the deck and boiling the water down below. I tilted my head

back and let it fall into the cup of my eye. It filled pointlessly, like a battered artifact left behind by some dead tribe, one drop at a time.

Jennifer Militello

microscope slide

The object has its figure. The instrument magnifies the lurch. Telescope to our planetary cells cloudy and with brine, spherical and with the thin singe of paper.

Its convex cylinder collars the source and we see with an adjustment: candle/liquor/wire/screen

I diagram that which is joined with water. I diagram particles axon-filled. Load at the lungs. Unload at the blood. Laminated. Copper as hypothesis. Copper as oxygen pale in the mouth.

Because the blood would be bottled with bile.

Saline causes no mutation. Saline causes flint to the flint to the flint. Spark spark. Manifest and mineral, the spread of its granules destroy. Another dilution.

At a counterfeit coagulation, its shell goes hollow, its plated nature parcels out step by step a remembered reach or injection of code.

The curiosity of us mushrooms. We lean in. Results dissolve. We record the generated bottom again and chart the mentioned proportion.

Results result.

Inquiry leads to a convenient forgetting of the body. Inquiry leads to an outtake of air. Inquiry leads to the braided hair of the highway being let down. Inquiry leads to the cavitied hours racing toward their coalition, left unobserved.

Jennifer Militello

the lab

What I studied studied me. Or ignored me. Indifferent and turning sharply. Soothed from a turbulence I didn't understand. What I studied parted like water and then returned, the very adversary of the spirit, fed vividly with silver and a filth made of frog's skin and Queen Anne's Lace. The poisons shone from it, hot with motion, caustic as the zero place, uniform in their extinguished grinding. Limestone-fiery and blessed as the heat.

I was struck by the found vibration it made, by its music both putrid and glassblown, robust, by its blind yield and sounding board, and how it made a carpet of all one could see, the way a prism takes the eye and slices from it the whole so that gravity returns to color and it can be perceived and be at rest. At best, it took months to find this core. But once I saw it, I was amazed.

Jennifer Militello

the lab

I printed it out. I stamped it with the sole of my shoe. I check the time, my pocket watch ticked: I invented a character to don a waistcoat. I was. Then I am. The rats proceeded through the maze. They found their way back to the cage and a door slotted shut. They were fed. Again, they were rewarded.

The exit sign lit the hallway red.

All the arrows indicated how to move in an emergency. Then changed their minds and direction faltered. My knuckles cracked. Reality was not real. The wheels on the janitor's mop bucket squealed as he passed. Such a beloved/muddy water.

I cooked it up like a controlled drug. Like a control.

Ingredients mixed and the simmer. The scent. Color came and went. The outcome was good. The results told me what I can confirm.

Nearby, the river chewed the half-gone light.

John Hoppenthaler

You Can See Her Lips Move: Erin Murphy's *Ancilla*

Murphy, Erin. *Ancilla*. Beaumont, TX: Lamar University Press, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-9850838-5-4.

Erin Murphy's sixth collection, *Ancilla*, is comprised of poems pulled from her consideration of historical source material. Via dramatic monologues, erasures, and epistles, the work seeks to complicate our notions of history through the imagined voices of the hardly-known minor characters whose lives were juxtaposed with those of famous personalities from the arts and sciences, philosophy, and popular culture of the past. Thematically, the poems concern themselves with traditional dramas of power, desire, feminism, confession, jealousy, and conspiracy, and these dramas are meant to—and do—reverberate with contemporary urgency.

Murphy's project is not so different than that of Natasha Trethewey's oeuvre; that is, as she explains in an interview in *Waccamaw*, Trethewey begins "with the historical impulse and the impetus to recover from the margins the stories of those people who often get left out of public histories." Trethewey's mission is to restore what has been erased from, or ignored in, the public record so as to complicate, interrogate, verify, contradict, and otherwise reconsider contemporary notions of historical "truth." Part of the project of Trethewey's poetry is also to make sense of her own complex place (as a mixed-race, Southern, female poet) in history. And this is what must always be at the root of such looking back to see ahead: to recast history for contemporary readers so that they may reexamine deeply-held, though rarely questioned, notions of personal belief, and to allow the creator of these historical fictions to better understand her own complicated negotiations with modernity. As Trethewey makes clear in an interview with Lisa DeVries, "The story mingles in my own blood; it is that voice that has to tell the story."

And so it is with Murphy's *Ancilla*. Murphy frequently employs the art of literary ventriloquism in these poems. As John A. Hodgson points out, "Ventriloquism, as it unsettles both voice and attribution, also unsettles critical boundaries." If we look carefully at Murphy's poems, if we get past the illusion of an "other," we can see her lips move; we see the poet herself gradually appear between the lines. We are meant to. So, while it is true that her subjects, "clothed in darkness and shadows" are

“illuminated,” (31), it is also true, to borrow the words Murphy puts in the mouth of famous pantomime Jean-Gaspard Debureau’s son, Charles, and instead place them on the lips of Erin Murphy, a contemporary woman poet, “. . . Father, the rules / have changed. We can speak now / in our acts. . . . / It is who I am / and what I do . . .” (61).

So many of the poems in *Ancilla* are poems that cast female speakers in situations in which they struggle with notions of what it means to be a woman in her time. These women reveal themselves not necessarily as heroic but as human, as victimized certainly, but also as complicit in their own personal dramas. In “Alma Mahler, Postnuptial,” for example, the poem’s epigraph presents the reader with an excerpt from a letter Gustav Mahler sent to his fiancé in 1901, a year before their marriage. Contained therein is a list of demands and expectations, including the requirement that Alma forgo her own aspirations as a composer. Thwarted desire gnaws at her until, after the death of one of their children, she began an affair (with architect Walter Gropius), effectively ending their marriage. No innocent, Murphy’s Alma is shown as bitter, resentful and accusatory: “. . . I’ve given up / my music. I’ve given up // my name. You treat me / as you treat your // orchestra: like a lion / that must be tamed” (22). That same accusatory tenor is present in the monologue given Friedrich Nietzsche’s sibling to utter in “Nietzsche’s Sister.” By most accounts, Elisabeth Alexandra Förster-Nietzsche, who married Bernhard Förster, an anti-Semitic agitator, enjoyed a close relationship with her brother until her marriage to Förster. Murphy’s Alexandra, however, is motivated by anger at her secondary place in the family, insulting Friedrich for softness of disposition and mind. She is full of spite for having been, to her mind, ignored and for playing the “part / of mascot . . .” to Friedrich, “a boy / named for a king” (26). She confesses that it is this feeling of having been disrespected that caused her to turn “to Bernhard, / to everything you / loathed” (26). There is a compelling body of evidence that suggests Förster-Nietzsche falsified Friedrich Nietzsche’s works and letters (while editing her brother’s writings after his mental breakdown in 1889) so as to have it appear that he, as did his sister, supported Hitler’s agenda. “I will scream / and stomp and kick / and cough and spit: / I will make noise” Murphy’s Alexandra blurts at poem’s end, providing us a damaged and dangerous figure who is not less and not more than a man; rather, she is portrayed as a human being susceptible to the same hostile motivations as any other, the poem (and Murphy) acknowledging women are every bit as complex and prone to underhandedness as men, and as hard to parse.

But not all of the poems in *Ancilla* concern themselves with historical women and feminism. Some address issues of class, and some reveal historical competitions and political debates of different sorts; behind all of the poems, though, is the implied call to reexamine our assumptions about what motivated (and continues to motivate) historical figures, the need to reveal what may well lurk beneath our simplified and often naïve notions of history and how these notions play out in contemporary culture. Perhaps Murphy's erasure of "The New Colossus," "Emma Lazarus's Statue of Liberty Sonnet, Abridged," best represents this central thrust of her collection. The Lazarus poem was not originally attached to the Statue of Liberty's pedestal; it was placed there in 1903, seventeen years after the statue's opening in 1886. To quote from my own essay, "Like Cranes on the Wing," "Neither French law professor and politician Édouard René de Laboulaye, who is generally credited with the idea for a monument, nor the young sculptor Frédéric Bartholdi, who ran with the idea and created the statue, intended that it serve as a beacon of welcome to all comers; rather, the monument was intended to serve as a memorial to U.S. independence." The case is, however, that the act of attaching the poem to the statue has served to alter the ethos of the United States vis-à-vis immigration. It has created a mythos. We have internalized the falsehood that, all along, the statue's presence there in New York Harbor was meant to serve as a welcoming beacon, that on the copper lips of the "mighty woman with a torch" are the words, "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" The words that are poised to issue forth from Murphy's "brazen / mighty woman" are more akin to those of many who—back then and in our own time—do not share the noble sentiments of "The New Colossus," as was the case with Lazarus contemporary Thomas Bailey Aldrich, whose poem "The Unguarded Gate," published in 1895, ends with the lines, "O Liberty, white Goddess! Is it well / To leave the gates unguarded?" Murphy's "mother of / pomp" is provided "lips / yearning to / refuse / our shore, / send these homeless / to the / door" (68). The poem makes us uncomfortable because it reveals what we know to be true but hate to articulate: the "American Dream" is as much a fiction as is the poem. There is no romanticizing here; there are no pulled punches.

Ventriloquism, in its common sense, is accomplished via illusion and misdirection. While, on some level, it is certainly fair to say that poetry (even poetry that claims itself as "true" or "confessional") is a project of

artifice and manipulation, it is important to allow as well that, as with any piece of writing, audience and purpose must be factored into any complete explication of the text. And so it is with these poems in *Ancilla*. Erin Murphy examines history, “mingles” what seems verifiable with what can only be imagined in her “own blood,” and it is Murphy’s voice, in disguise, that tells us what she thinks we ought to know. And she’s right.

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Jordan Smith

Lullaby (with Exit Sign): A Discourse on Dealing with Death

Death and the afterlife are difficult subjects, but for Hadara Bar-Nadav in *Lullaby (with Exit Sign)* they are an inspirational gold mine. Through her use of surrealistic imagery Bar-Nadav creates poetry that shows a passing of time and instills a darkened view of what life means within the reader. Bar-Nadav's collection of works allows the reader to experience memory and sorrow through the poet's point of view. Though the dark imagery might prove difficult it is merely used as a catalyst to explore the deeper meaning behind the ephemerality of living things and what is left after they are gone.

Bar-Nadav's first poem does well in setting up a scene that carries through the entire collection. Very cleverly Bar-Nadav grabs her audience with the humorously macabre lines, "I slept with all four hooves/ in the air or I slept like a snail/ in my broken shell." ("*Lullaby [with Exit Sign]*": 1) The imagery and alliteration "slept, snail and shell" are what stick out to the reader and make a compelling introduction. The odd imagery is consistent throughout the poem, "A giant exit sign/ blinking above my head" (1). Though that image, might at first seem surreal and unexplainable, Bar-Nadav's writing also has a sense of clarity to it. She is describing something difficult in a way that makes sense to her, and it is up to the reader to either make sense of her images or not. In the first poem of her book Bar-Nadav makes it clear to the reader that she is not interested in covering up the harsh reality of death and life in general, rather she embraces our life with its inevitable exit and struggles to find the beauty within it.

It becomes quite clear early on in the book that our poet is deeply interested in the fragility of our existence. Bar-Nadav approaches the theme of death in a somewhat cyclical manner. In her poem "I Don't Like Paradise" Bar-Nadav gives us a scene where a father is healed of all his ailments,

Father/unpins his raveled limbs, repairs the impairment of
paralysis and blot of/ stroke. The clot now eased, the blood
released, wanders the heart, / humming (9).

The reference to paradise in this poem suggests that the father is ascending or has ascended to heaven to meet his daughter where, "Our juicy mouths gloss/sweet. We are sugary plastic, a shiny Paradise" (9). For most this is a view of what it is like to be in heaven; everything is shiny,

beautiful, what once ailed us is gone, and we are the idealistic versions of ourselves. There is no more pain or suffering in heaven. Though to the narrator of our poem the sweetness is what sickens her, “But I never felt at Home in shiny” (9). The narrator would much rather feel the pain and remember her father as she did when she was home. Bar-Nadav concludes the poem showing how fragile this façade of sweetness truly is

Felt the starlings darkly underskin, their mustard points beaking through the taffy chew of us. Our bitter cup of collapse. If they scavenge/the too-small opening of our ears or devour our eyes, a thousand wings will/sour the scene, and all things broken break again (9).

The poet seems to say that there is a danger in “shiny.” Though it might be nice to have everything as it was before it can just as easily be shattered.

In the poem “Suspension” Bar-Nadav uses the voice of a corpse to illustrate what it might feel like to be either the mourned at a wake or to be prepared by a mortician. In the second stanza of the poem we are asked the question “How much bone/ do you need to/ recognize my face?” (45). The voice of the poet seems to be somewhat snarky. The people that are going to be seeing the departed most likely already know who it is they are mourning, so why not show their true condition? The mortician even goes so far as to collect photos as a reference to reconstruct “The way I used to be” (45). It is so important to the mortician for the deceased to look the way it did while it was alive but to the speaker it seems futile. It doesn’t seem to understand why it is so detrimental that it should be suspended in time. Rather than accepting death the family and friends would prefer to hold onto this person’s existence. The exploration into the feelings a person might have as being “repaired” or “reanimated” shows how strange the job of a mortician might be. In attempting to keep the body as it was while they were alive we are fighting a battle we simply cannot win. For Bar-Nadav grief is necessary. It is the experience of loss that makes us human, and through our shared experiences of death we come together.

Though Bar-Nadav’s subjects tend to be dark it is not merely for the sake of being dark and macabre. She uses death as a springboard to examine behaviors surrounding death and how humans deal with the passing of a loved one. The language used in these poems is haunting. Bar-Nadav’s writings allow readers to ponder what death means and how to find the beauty in perhaps one of the most difficult subjects.

Francis Ponge

Blackberries

translated by Joshua Corey & Jean-Luc Garneau

Typographical bushes invented by the poem on the path that leads away from things (or toward the mind), some fruits formed from an agglomeration of spheres, each replete with its drop of ink.

*

Blacks, pinks, and persimmons cluster together: they offer up the spectacle of a dissipated family at various ages, a very tempting addition to the collection.

Behold the disproportion of the pips in the pulp, unappreciated by the birds: so little left at bottom when the beak and the anus trade places.

*

But the poet in the course of his professional stroll picks up the seed of reason: “It is thus,” he said, “that a very fragile flower succeeds by a great number of patient efforts in overcoming the defenses of a daunting tangle of brambles. Without many other qualifications—*blackberries*, of course they are blackberries—the poem is made in the same way.”

Francis Ponge

Orange

translated by Joshua Corey & Jean-Luc Garneau

Like the sponge the orange wishes to regain its shape after it has endured expression. But where the sponge always succeeds, the orange never does: its cells have burst, its tissues have been torn. The rind alone retains its shape by grace of its elasticity; meanwhile an amber liquid spreads itself distributing the refreshment of sweet smells. Naturally. But often as well the bitter consciousness of a premature expulsion of seeds.

Must we choose sides between these two forms of resistance to oppression? The sponge is nothing but a muscle filled with air, with clean or dirty water; these exercises are ignoble. An orange tastes better than a sponge, but it's too passive. Its fragrant sacrifice repays the oppressor with something he doesn't deserve.

But we have not said enough of the orange if we only recall its peculiar function of perfuming the air and pleasing its executioner. We must focus on the glorious color of the liquid that, better than lemon juice, forces the larynx open wide enough to pronounce the word as well as for drinking it, without causing the lips to pucker or the tongue to recoil.

There are no words to express the admiration deserved by this tender, delicate, and rosy oval balloon, its thick absorbent humid flesh whose epidermis is very thin but highly pigmented, tastefully caustic, stippled just enough to catch the light and display the fruit's perfect form.

But at the end of this too brief (if thoroughly rounded) study we must come to the point, or pip. This grain with the shape of a miniature lemon displays on its outside the color of the white wood of a lemon tree, while inside it's pea-green, a tender spark. We discover inside a sensational explosion, a firework of flavors, colors and perfumes emanating from the fruited balloon itself. It's all in the seed—the relative hardness and greenness (in itself not tasteless) of the wood, of the branch, of the leaf—everything in miniature, the *raison d'être* of the fruit.

Francis Ponge

Trees Dismantled in a Sphere of Fog

translated by Joshua Corey & Jean-Luc Garneau

The leaves, already disconcerted by their slow oxidation, are stripped in the fog that surrounds the trees, mortified by the retreat of the sap in favor of flowers and fruits, which lost their grip in the great heat of August.

In the bark stretch vertical gutters channeling the accumulated moisture to the soil, having lost interest in the live parts of the trunk.

The flowers are released, the fruits are deposited. From an early age, the renunciation of their living qualities and of parts of their own bodies has become a routine exercise for the trees.

Julia Landrum

Review of Hadara Bar-Nadav's *Lullaby (with Exit Sign)*

In Hadara Bar-Nadav's latest book, *Lullaby (with Exit Sign)*, the speaker of the linked sequence of prose poems borrows from and elaborates on lines from Emily Dickinson's poetry. Throughout the book the speaker tries to cope with and reflect on her father's death. The sounds of medical machinery, dying breath, paranormal activities, and farewells all subconsciously connect to readers in a poetic way, and she leaves a haunting chill that reflects on what losing a loved one feels like.

Bar-Nadav's poems are impressive in their use of evocative image and sensory details. In "Dust Is the Only Secret," the speaker of the poem describes a dying man whose body changes as time passes. The speaker also discusses how the father faced paralysis and the mundane life events that happen to a sick person but are odd and upsetting to someone in full health. Bar-Nadav uses sensory visual detail when she writes, "Between sponge bath and morphine. Between warfarin and vomiting. / Current, rubber, hiccup, vex. The body lit up, needled, electric" (16). In these lines, Bar-Nadav shows her readers what the dying man looks like and, in doing so, the medical details weighing down both the sick man and those who love him. Another great example of Bar-Nadav's sensory detail occurs when the speaker reveals how "machines chirp metallic lullabies. A neon line blinks across a black screen" (16). Bar-Nadav uses sound as a transitional moment that makes the readers envision how a scene sounds because when they read about the flattening heart monitor, they can also hear its beep. The move is powerful and the reader does not even realize it happens unless he or she stops and considers specifically the sound and visual aspect of this poem.

Throughout the entire book, Bar-Nadav writes in a way that captivates her readers and makes them see not only the struggles of her speaker, but also the struggles they themselves face—not being able to sleep, non-stop noise, feeling general frustration, and being unsure how to cope with death. Bar-Nadav uses her extraordinarily evocative sensory images to completely submerge the reader in the tormenting details haunting the speaker. In "Close Your Eyes to Catch a Ghost," sounds are used multiple times. Bar Nadav writes about carrying the dead under her eyes

who yawn and pull out
my stitches, who yawn
and sing to my teeth
one night of shivering,
another of sweat. They beat
my ear canals like bells (33)

In this poem, the speaker tries to cope with the dead through a restless night. Bar-Nadav uses action with the words pull and beat and sound with the words yawn and sing, to make her readers visualize and hear the speaker's struggles of falling asleep at night, similar to how a person can struggle to fall asleep if someone else rips stitches, yawns loudly, or sings beside them. Thinking of those who have passed keeps the speaker awake.

Overall, Bar-Nadav explores how difficult it is to cope with death by describing the world around her and how the speaker of her poems sees a specific moment. She ensures her readers can sense all that goes on in the poems she writes on a subconscious level that allows her style to flow from one mind to another and from one story to another. Bar-Nadav connects to her readers on an emotional level through jarring and sensory details and narratives.

Justin Evans

Some Day Our Tongues Will Translate Fire

God is a currency many of us have already spent,
but mine fell through a hole in my pocket while
walking the entire San Francisco's Powell-Hyde route
in a dream. I spent a half-year trying to find it,

always sleeping in the wrong place at the wrong time.
I do not think I will ever find it now that nobody
has the patience to let me sleep the hours away while
they are forced to go to work early and earn a living.

Justin Evans

Some Day I Will Marry My Italian Shoes

There is a fire inside my brain telling me the Rapture will be here next Thursday, and I need to make sure I have enough toilet paper and peanut butter stored deep inside my bunker for those unfortunate souls

left behind. The fire inside my head is evangelical, quoting Bible verses I have never heard of, tells me I have to stand on the corner of 1st South and Main and let all of the sinners know what's soon to come.

Today I read the news of another consecrated virgin marrying Jesus. She'll probably be the last one. I can count on one hand how many days are left. Do you know if you are going to be coming with me or not?

My Mother on a Trampoline

I don't have a key to my parents' house. It's been a long time, six months maybe, since I've come home, and it doesn't feel right to ring the doorbell. The apartment building is brick and tall enough to blot out much of the setting sun. I lean against the railing flecked with old black paint and rust, favoring my left foot, and consider the doorbell. Upstairs the windows are open. My mother's curtains, transparent and intricately patterned like the wings of some exotic bug, make flickering appearances on the other side. On my tiptoes, I can see the shadows of my brother Thomas and his pregnant wife, Mallory, who, even just silhouetted, looks angry and uncomfortable.

I'm late. It isn't really my fault. The train out to Long Island at this time of day is never reliable – always a slow, strange ride. And there's a storm. I spent the bulk of the ride staring at my reflection in the train window, imagining I was someone arresting to look at, that these folks thought me wistful and inaccessible because I have delicate hands and dancer shoulders. Or maybe my red hair, the one beautiful thing I inherited from my mother (although comparatively mine is more like strawberry blonde while hers is literally red like a brick), was wispy and slipped out of my ponytail elastic in the right places. Whatever the reason, I imagined I was a thing to be watched – an obviously cherish-able and mysterious item even to strangers – and I leaned my forehead against the window while the couple behind me quibbled about dinner, and the man to my left shotgunned a terribly concealed bottle of Jack Daniels from a paper bag.

The problem is that I'm always late, when I show up at all, for family gatherings, and I know Thomas is already talking shit about it; and maybe Mallory is telling him to relax. She is saying something like, "She has a lot on her plate, Thomas," because that's how she talks: in scripts of clichés that don't really make any sense; and the whole family is sitting around the table with raised eyebrows and crossed arms nodding their heads like those bobble dolls my father has on his car dash.

Or maybe not. I take my cell phone out of my pocket, and before I hit "send," Mom is standing in the doorway in a soft-looking, threadbare silk robe. She looks pale, almost as translucent as those kitchen curtains, but her face is smeared with garish shades of pink and purple eye shadows, rouge, and lipstick. Her smile is wan and puckered, and she leans against

the doorframe with a dramatic malaise, her fingers travelling up the wood like the tips of a gangly branch. She is a sinewy and fragile marionette of a woman with too many teeth and not enough skin.

Last week was her second chemo treatment.

“I dressed up fancy for the cancer party,” she says.

My mother made online invitations. There were koala bears in the background. A month ago, when I came home between dance rehearsal and my bartending shift, it was waiting for me in my inbox.

Dear Thomas, Polly, and Mallory,

Yesterday a doctor told me I have breast cancer, so I have to start an intensive round of chemotherapy in seven days and cross my fingers I don't have to have surgery. Don't worry. I'm not dying. We would love to have you at the house on Sunday October 15 to celebrate my narrow brush with and escape from death, and to say farewell to my good looks (no woman looks good bald, now does she?)

And Polly, it'd be nice if you brought a date.

Love,

Mom.

I read it three times, and then slammed the laptop closed and sat on the hardwood floor, spread my legs and leaned over to touch the toes on my right foot. My hamstrings get tight when things are stressful. Then I freaked out and hiccup-cried into the phone at Thomas who assured me that he'd been with both of our parents just the day before and “for real, she's going to be fine.”

“She couldn't even call? She sent out invitations?” I sniffled. “What the hell?”

“Oh you know mom. Real feelings are hard for her.” We both paused for a while. “You should go over there before October,” he said.

“Yeah, I know.”

But I never did. I had a few terse conversations with her on the phone, after which she'd hand it over to my dad and he'd say “Are you a famous ballerina yet?” and I would say “No, daddy, maybe tomorrow,” and then we would hang up. I went to rehearsal, I went to work, I went to sleep and I did it again until I got on the train this morning. This is basically how it's been with my parents since I decided to move to Manhattan to dance. My mother maintains a constant stream of disapproval and passive aggressive distance while I resentfully refuse to make any moves to bridge the gap, and my father sits squarely in the middle paralyzed by his crazy love for

the both of us. It is perhaps he that suffers the most between the three of us.

And right now to my mother who is ready to party despite being primed to maybe get one of her boobs chopped off I say, “Mom. Stop.”

“You’re late,” she says, moving out of the doorframe, and motioning for me to come inside, “and alone.”

“Yeah, well, the train...” but I already know it doesn’t make a difference.

“Just come upstairs,” she says and turns around to make the climb.

I follow her, my legs feeling like sandbags. My hurt knee is throbbing, reminding me that if I don’t want to blow my audition tomorrow, I should be at home with a frozen bag of peas on it watching reruns of *Gossip Girl*. Inside the house there is too much light in the kitchen - candles on the table, on the counter. The air is thick and wavy with lazy vanilla scented smoke. Maybe my mother is thinking of holding a séance. The whole apartment is hushed except for the distant hum of a television. I put my umbrella on the coat hook, my tote bag on the floor, and then shake my arms out of my raincoat. Dad walks over to take it from me before I can hang it on the other coat hook. He puts his hand on the small of my back, kisses my head.

“Glad you made it, cricket.”

This helps, this normal exchange. No one is dying when I am called cricket. I watch my father move down the hallway into the bedroom with my things. He has a heroic walk. Like a ball player.

In the kitchen Mallory is cutting onions with a large knife she obviously doesn’t know how to use. Her nose is wrinkled, her eyes wet - she is sporting a full-body snarl. Thomas reaches for the knife. “Let me, honey.”

Mallory drops the knife on the cutting board, says, “I’m pregnant, not incompetent,” and scuffles into the bathroom.

Thomas looks up at me. “She’s having an emotional pregnancy.”

I smile. “Clearly.”

It’s nice to have a sort of moment with my brother where he isn’t trying to remind me that he’s better to our parents than I am. It’s not very often that I feel like we’re on the same team.

My brother’s shoulders are slumped under his blue “life is good” t-shirt. He cuts the onions in slow easy movements, and I notice a bald spot on the crown of his skull. I wonder if he knows it’s there, and then realize it’s likely that our mother has pointed it out on multiple occasions.

She worries about these sorts of things, so much so that by the time I was nine I was a professional calorie counter. This is partly why I've gotten as far as I have dancing. This is also partly why I let my brother be the better child.

Thomas looks much older than he is, and watching him cut these onions I feel worried about whether he's actually happy. I reach my fingers into the bowl next to the cutting board and start nosing on the raw green beans inside of it. They make a loud crunch in my teeth, and Thomas slings a disapproving glance in my direction.

"What? I'm hungry." I shrug and keep chewing. "So, how's everything, you know, besides the stuff with Mom?"

"I dunno, Polly. Fine, I guess." I reach for another green bean, and try to peek through the curtain out the window. The storm is picking up, and it sounds like Thomas is trying to pace his chopping of the knife to the beat of the rain. He's not, but I think about how impressed I'd be if he were. I cast about for conversation topics, but I can't bring myself to ask about whether Mallory still has morning sickness or his six figure paying job in the financial district. I guess, also, I'm waiting for him to ask how I am.

Instead he says, "You know it wouldn't kill you to be around more. Mom really misses you. I can tell."

I look at my feet, at the ugly yellow tiles on the kitchen floor, and say nothing partly because his directness threw me off a little bit, but mostly because I disagree.

Finally, I manage, "I work a lot."

Thomas, my sweet, bossy, big brother looks at me with his head cocked to the left. Since he was a kid he had these giant eyes— perpetually disappointed and startled, giant eyes— the kind that could hush a room. Right now, they are this way for me, and all I can do is raise my eyebrows and cast a pleading shrug in his direction because, sure, it's disappointing that I've conflated coming home with grovelling for my mother's love and positive affirmation. Sometimes things are just like that, and it isn't like I'm not disappointed, too.

"Will you finish these?" he asks pointing to the cutting board, and stalks off toward Mallory in the bathroom.

I don't know what the onions are for. There's some sort of roast in the oven, and potatoes boiling on the stove. Maybe for mashed potatoes.

Through the kitchen window I can see the tiny pool behind the apartment building that I used to swim in almost every day in the summers when I was a kid. Thomas is almost nine years older than me so instead

of swimming he'd sit on the deck with my parents reading comic books while they smoked cigarettes and read the paper. In the pool I made up elaborate dance routines. Every twenty minutes I'd call to them to watch me, and they would lower their reading material and stare impatiently through their neon rimmed plastic sunglasses. I had such a small window in which to impress them, so I dove underwater and did handstands and somersaults with a desperate zest, my toes pointing out of the water in a perfect diagonal line.

When I surfaced they were always reading again, but I kept trying. After a few hours in the pool, I'd scamper down the ramp onto the deck and stand next to my mother, my hair dripping onto her magazine. She wiped the water off of the page and looked at me with puckered lips.

"Polly, you shouldn't be such a show off. It's off-putting."

Later in the living room, I drink wine. My father has a beer. Everyone else has tea. Mallory, in better spirits, is talking about the baby whom she is considering naming Bianca.

"I still think Samantha is a better choice, dear," my brother says.

"I want our baby to have an elegant name. You know, something *meaningful*. Like, if our daughter was a grilled cheese, and her name was Samantha she'd be made of American cheese and Wonderbread. Bianca is rye bread with, like, gouda and mustard or something like that. Get it?"

We don't, but Thomas nods dutifully. "Sure, baby."

"I obviously want it to be a girl. You know, my midwife says that if you have sex only on Wednesdays you'll definitely have a girl."

"Is that right? Is that what you did?" My mother wants to know. Thomas sits up and leans forward, and my father makes meaningful eye contact with me then rolls his eyes.

"Mom!" Thomas says.

Mallory changes the subject by saying to my mom, "They say the third trimester is just a dream, and I gotta say, I think they're right! I really have never felt better." It's amazing how she speaks with such ease to my mother, and what's crazier is that Mom is warm to her in return. Tolerant at least. My father and brother have gone into the kitchen to get dinner finished, and I am alone in my corner of the couch rubbing my sore knee, running through my performance for tomorrow while I half-listen to Mallory's giddy chatter. My gaze settles on the coffee table directly across from me upon which there are potted, plastic daisies in real soil. This seems like something Mallory might have read about in a magazine giving

advice to people who are bad with plants. Probably she and my mother made it together.

I imagine, for just a second, what it might feel like to be Mallory. Mallory, who doesn't do much (she stopped having to work when she married my brother) but is at least about to perform her most basic biological function, probably knows little about being lonely. I bet her life is all right. Across from me, my mother's body is resting on the couch, draping over it, really. It's like somebody placed her there, arranged her like you would a few pillows, but she's too light to make a dent in the cushion. Her eyes are dim though she's trying to look interested. Even still, all grey and sallow, she is stunning in a preternatural way.

When she was nineteen Mom did a fashion shoot for Sears. It was the kind of thing where a talent scout spotted her in the mall and set her up with an amateur modeling contract. In the photo she wears a straw hat on top of her mountain of fire colored curls. She stands on a park bench in a yellow flowered dress and pointy heels. Her smile is as if she had saved up every millisecond of joy she ever felt and when the cameraman said "go!" she let it all escape her.

She kept one of the original photos on her dresser next to the upwards of fifteen tubes of red lipstick in slightly different shades. I'd count them when I stood on the stool next to her while she pinned up her hair, talking me through all the steps of priming. I don't know how many times she told me about that day, hundreds maybe. By heart I could tell anyone about the photographer who had a blond mustache greying on the tips, how it was actually only forty-five degrees outside despite her summer attire and that they gave her celery, OJ and bottled water after the shoot. Sometimes the details she recounted were different, but every time she said, "It was the only time I ever felt like I had anything important to do, or anything valuable to offer." Usually she'd be leaning into the mirror, cleavage making a timid appearance, dabbing her lipstick with a piece of toilet paper. Getting paid to be pretty made her feel like her "life was finally beginning," she'd say. Then she'd end the story of her one photo-shoot long modeling career saying, "Then I was pregnant with Thomas, and that was that." The subtle implication that her life has ended in some way then was not lost on me, even at six.

Strangely, it was around nineteen that I started to dance professionally which is when I would have to say *my* life really began. Things had been changing between me and Mom ever since I was chosen as lead dancer

for *Swan Lake* in the tenth grade. At that point, I had been taking ballet since I was nine, and this was the performance where I knew I had done something spectacular. I knew that I had found my calling. Backstage my father blubbered into my shoulder about how proud he was of me. Mom handed me a bouquet of roses and said, “I’ve never seen anyone move more beautifully in my whole life,” but her voice was far away and bitter. Rather than feeling like I had finally done something good enough to make her proud, I felt like I had betrayed her in some way. She was silent for the entire drive home.

Dancing became a thing I had abandoned the family for, which is what she said and not what I felt like I was doing. I rarely ate dinners at home because I rehearsed long hours after school. I had performances on weekends, none of which she ever came to even though Thomas and my dad often did. Perhaps I disrupted my mother’s idea of the natural order of things by proving myself to be greater than unremarkable. I imagine these kinds of competitive relationships happen all the time, particularly with women like my mother who are beautiful, charismatic and get pregnant young.

I’m starting to get hungry, and just as I notice this my father brings me another glass of wine, himself another beer. I start paying attention to the conversation again. Mallory wants to know how Mom’s first round of chemo was. At the word chemo, my mother’s face pulls into itself, collapses like a crushed carton of milk. There’s a long pause before she says she doesn’t want to talk about it. This is a thing my mother does to add a touch of drama to whatever moment a group of people are paying attention to her, and I am immediately suspicious that this means she *does* in fact want to talk about it. I think, she just wants us to know that it was so difficult, that she is traumatized. I expect her to launch into the details within a minute, but she doesn’t, and then I realize that she’s legitimately in pain just thinking about it. I am a complete asshole. The wave of guilt is almost unbearable.

I lean forward, dipping my face into my wine glass, and in my mind I can see her in a weirdly big leather chair plugged up with an IV. I hope there is a doctor there who is tender with her even when he’s dumping a bunch of poison into her body. I bet my father read *Popular Mechanics* in the waiting room with sweaty palms. All of that gunk is in here, rolling around in her guts like some sort of sludgy tsunami. A death tsunami. My mother is sitting in front of me with a death tsunami sloshing around her gray doll-body and I can’t even come over for dinner every two months. I

should have brought her Pedialite. I should have brought her some head scarves.

We sit a while until my father stands up and tells us dinner is probably ready. I'm the last to get up. For a second, because my knee is pulsing ominously and seemingly promising a failed audition tomorrow, my thoughts flit away from my mother and over to the fear that I will not make it as a dancer. I am twenty-three. I'm ten pounds heavier than I should be. My window is about to close. I cannot afford a bum knee. Then I watch as my brother holds Mallory's forearm to help her waddle out from the confines of the couch with one hand resting on top of her belly as if it's a thing that exists separately from her. I bet his hand is reassuring. In fact, I know it is. He used to hold my arm like that when I was learning to ride my bike. Then he turns to our mother, guides her to her feet, and she yields to him, grateful for familiar hands.

Thomas probably touches our mother often. They hug sometimes. He helps her up stairs. He may have even taken her to the doctor with dad. When they got home she probably threw up in the other room while he watched *Dick Van Dyke* or something and drank a diet coke. I sit alone in the living room for a minute before drifting into the next room.

At the kitchen table my father says Grace.

He is grateful and says it out loud, squeezing my hand with fingers on my wrists. We are all embarrassed by his naive devotion, his uncomplicated faith.

With my eyes closed I remember *Swan Lake*. I think about my mother's face that I could see in the reflection of her car window, and am surprised at the force of my resentment. I go back to gracious thoughts. I love my dad. I am grateful for my dad. I think these thoughts so hard that I worry they might make my ears explode. When my eyes are open my mother is in front of me, sitting erect and looking like a bereft caged bird. Thomas fills her plate with mashed potatoes and corn and slices of meat, and I can see the sides of her throat working, pushing down the nausea. I motion for my brother to stop, and she picks up her fork, pushes food around then swallows the extra saliva in her mouth with a subtle gulp. When everyone's been served we all start eating.

"Oh, you're eating meat now?" she asks me.

"Yeah, my knee is acting up. I feel like giving it protein will help it heal."

"Well, that explains why you've filled out a little."

My ears are hot. I bite the inside of my cheek. She's baiting me, and I

know it. It's unfair to respond defensively. It's essential that I do not reveal that she has just hit me where I live. I try to think about how sick she is, how awful she must feel sitting in that chair while the chemo oozes into her veins knowing that it will make her unbearably ill. I think about how much I hate puking and how often she's going to have to do it. I can't begin to understand how scared she must be of it not working and then having to decide whether she should give someone permission to remove one of her breasts. I cannot admit how scared I am that it won't work. The conversation drifts in other directions. Thomas just got a promotion at work. Mallory is considering getting involved in an urban gardening club. In my head I can hear Mom telling me that I've filled out as if it's on a repeat tape loop. I try to replace it with thoughts like "my mother is very sick. I love my mother. My mother is very sick. I love my mother." This is moderately effective, and by the time we get to dessert I've mostly calmed down.

"You know, Polly, I've been thinking that it might be time for you to consider what's possible for you career-wise. You really have given this dancing thing quite a shot. We're all very impressed with your tenacity."

"Mom, I haven't quit, like, the shot giving is still happening. I have an audition tomorrow."

"Well, I just thought because of your knee...I'm just saying that you could open a dance studio perhaps. Teach little kids? Make some actual money? Just in case."

"I don't want to teach a bunch of fucking children, mom. I'm a dancer. I want to dance."

"Polly..." my dad sets his hand on my wrist again, "not today."

My mother puts her hand over her chest, displaying its blue and purple splotches. Her eyes dart around the room. I should apologize, but the best I can manage is to say nothing else. In some dark part of my belly I know that I am cruel. I feel it balled up inside of me like a black little animal.

For a long time, no one says anything. The room becomes an orchestra of eating sounds. We all lift our ice cream filled spoons, then cross and uncross our legs. My dad drinks his beer with a slight slurp. My mother is sighing and not eating, and I keep thinking horrible things along the lines of "she should've known I would react that way" or that she's being dramatic to get attention again, but I suppose it's her right to cry at her own party. I'm sure I'd do a lot of crying if I had breast cancer. At

rehearsal my dance teacher often yells at me to get soft. “Unfurl, darling, unfurl. You’re so *tight*,” is what he says. So I try to get soft for my mother. I love my mother. My mother is very sick.

We got rid of the pool when I was eleven. There was a tear in the liner. My father got us a trampoline to replace it because I was really into gymnastics at the time. Once, at dusk, after drinking half a bottle of Chardonnay my mother climbed onto it. Her hair was pinned up in a curl pile on the top of her head, it was my favorite way that she wore it, and she shakily got herself up to standing in the middle of the trampoline. I watched her from the window, my hands on the credenza and my mouth half open. She was a total vision with the sun setting behind her in all kinds of pinks, purples and oranges, standing in cuffed sweatpants and a drape-y white t-shirt. She bent her knees and then jumped with a kind of lightness totally foreign to the rest of the ways she ever moved, and as she gained momentum the pins began to fall out of her hair. She just jumped with all of her hair flowing around everywhere, so close to flight like some majestic, mythical creature. My mother on a trampoline: poster child for joyful abandon, just like in the Sears photo. I don’t know that I have ever seen her intentionally have fun since.

Across the table my mother has wrapped her arms around herself. She has begun to cry, and is sniffing and swaying a little. This is the only noise. In fact, it’s so quiet that I can hear the fire eating the wicks of the candles.

“I don’t want to have cancer,” she wails.

The room comes alive a little, and we tentatively murmur wordless comforting noises as she pets a section of her own hair.

“It’s just all going to be gone,” she says. “I’m going to lose all of my hair.” My mother is an ugly crier. I know because I’ve inherited it from her. I imagine that her tears are toxic and full of chemo, and I think “God, that is horrible,” because her hair really is beautiful. She probably has no idea who she is without it.

“DO something,” I mouth to Thomas, but he is looking at Mallory who is looking down at her lap. I turn to my father whose face is twisted with helplessness.

She cries a little louder, bubbling over, then whispers, “I won’t even be anything anymore.”

When I stand up out of my chair, I’m thinking about the trampoline. When I walk to her, and put my hands on her shoulders, I believe a little that I am sorry for her, that I can help her or at least that I want very badly

to. I put my hand on her scalp.

“Mom, how about we just get rid of it all at once? OK? We’ll just do it right now.”

It feels like years pass before anyone responds in any way besides staring up at me with blank, dumbfounded looks, but finally my father makes a move.

“Abby, she has a point,” he says. He crouches next to her and touches her face, coaxing her. “Come on, sweetie, this will be good for you. Good for everyone.”

“You’re just going to shave it?” my mother asks me.

“Well, do you just want to let it fall out?”

Mallory is excited. “Take control, Abby! You’re an empowered woman!”

Mom doesn’t say anything else, but I can see in the way she’s sitting that this is as close to an affirmative answer I’m going to get.

When I return from the bathroom with a towel, scissors, and my dad’s clippers, everyone has assembled around my mother who’s sitting in the middle of the room, perched on the chair. Mallory is rubbing her belly, and Thomas has his hand on the back of her neck. I move past my father, and then swing the towel around the front of her like a bib. Mallory hands me the clip holding her hair up, and I use it to fasten the back of the towel. Standing behind my mother, I pull her hair out from under the towel and begin to braid it. Even though I can’t see her face, I know her eyes are closed. I also know that she has stopped crying. When I lower my chin down to the top of her head, the image of her wild trampoline jumping is flickering in my mind like a rickety home movie. I want her to be that, to have that freedom. I want us all to have that freedom. Into the crown of her head I ask, “Ready now?” and her head bobs up and down for “yes.” I press my lips to her hair in a gesture of affection I haven’t made since I was a teenager, but she feels just like I remember her - smells like the same baby powder and sandalwood. The top of her head moves toward me, and I imagine that with her chin tilted forward toward the windows there is something serene about her face - that maybe there’s a brightness and bravery there. So I snip the braid leaving about two inches of an untamed thicket of curls. She inhales sharply as it falls to the ground. The clippers hum when I rake them across her head, and the curls unlock themselves from her scalp falling to the ground until the pile on the floor is a fire. Until her head is a soft furry bulb like a peach. Until I am soft, until we all are soft and I know that I do love my mother. I love my mother and she is very sick.

Kathleen McGookey

Here, Where I Am, in October

Trees offer their stained glass leaves to the light. Wind ripples the lake and carries the fallen ones to shore. Clouds thin as smoke rise up. You know how beautiful all this is. There, wherever you are, do you have weather? This question no longer absorbs me. My grief is barely a shadow now. A brown snake, sunning itself on the dirt road, does not move when I walk by. A woodpecker taps, insistent. This world is not a mirror, with each of us on opposite sides. Here, where I am, a hunter has dumped the halves of a skinned deer and left its head resting on its tangled legs. The flies have not found it yet. A cricket chirps the same note again and again. The sun warms me. The wind moves through the trees like breath.

Kevin Kvist Peters

The Pleiades Were Named for Running Away

we are slops
 of chemicals
 juice

some ground never thaws

only pauses
 to listens
 steeping

in colophon
a night

silhouette sway
 hairs cold

as hung
 your skin
mantle from

 wondering
where madness goes

said pock marrow
 why
for you no

remnants itching
 for polish raw

rosewater tinged
 croak wood
 sleepless
 now skeptical

Shovel Left Next to a Rock

The ocean is black with a candied head softly using its waves to pull the vegetation into itself it must pass the time somehow trust the organisms asserts one type of hope which is why you made the doorway from lace embraced rust on older tools as they insist upon smell air vows it's wine the gloom is of magnesium the insects are out to coax their very nature prophetic chambered their sardonic symphony a comprehensive rhythm witchcraft & kelp are marginalized in tandem I leave habits everywhere wind swings on each shoulder to suggest changes of thought or mend paint drips disposed on a log carbon's density leaves behind its search party wanting their hunting grounds to be tangible not speculative or existential a gull hovers & drops a crab others descend upon helplessness the cliffs are secretive but mistake not they're headed somewhere maybe to colonize a binary meeting place- who is mocking who I eat violets as I watch them or whatever purple flower this is I revel charcoal function poised in a barren land lock because Saturn's vinegar atmosphere boils and I am jealous untended clamor striations deposits follows I didn't know what to do so I began picking wildflowers & placing them on the back pages of books as a small present to myself when I finished on the jelly cliffs teasing the pacific a privacy detail vows cadence tincture few windswept trees curve over the road a gnarled tunnel I'm concerned that I don't understand how gravity can spin a planet in place & not crush us even in this informative age there are some things I want to know but refuse to learn like why waves turn white in their tumble experience (visual dominance) perception: thoughts to reinforce & justify perception frozen vegetable medley in a bag when do you recognize mold I have demands staring into each others eyes as you licked blood from the finger a man removed fresh lilies from the grave I can't stop seeing disembodied bird wings on the ground & recently the decapitated head of a raven which seems too metaphoric to be real succumb to preserving the useless feeling in the context in space water cut with the hand's blade

Lori Davis

Trickle Irrigation System

How stupid to say: *the green wigs of the trees keep browning while summer continues singing.* There is something faintly sexy about vacant storefronts and all I want to do is touch your hair. My foot has taken root. My toes are tubers. My ankle need a drink. There was a large crop of crows, this year; they named themselves ravens. Sandy dirt is not the same as dirty sand; trust me. Imagine high-fiving with ceramic hands. When I turned the door knob, it turned right back. Baby, no one's heart has a handle. The wind is always negotiating. I'd love to lay in bed with you, play cover tunes, and massage your feet with cerulean blue paint, but I have a barcode sticker stuck in my hair.

Lori Davis

User Assumes All Risk

There is a puddle under the ice machine and a bedtime story writing itself. I am on the top bunk with a hot, parking lot architect discussing the implications of random red paint. He is a specialist at catching lizards out of the corner of a story. Can we dislodge some logic around here, please? Unfortunately for him, I never learned how to ache properly. My heart is throat-high and spinning freely. I am too tired to right all of the slights. Lizards drown easily in shallow, sugar water. And I cannot help you laminate your escape plan. Be careful. Some flowers grow extra chances; some bend from all the bees. My heart was throat-high; not now. The red on the curb didn't work.

Marc McKee

Staggered Zebra

Every time we look up it's 1:23 or 2:22
or 1-2-3, easy as 222 miles to Louisville
now who are we going to listen to
so we'll make it through the opiate dusk?
Let it be something that hits us
into feeling, please we are bleeding out
despairing, please let us be jolted.
That was close, the dusk
almost got us into that last bed,
instead we leapt backward
into a thunderstorm outside Nashville,
we joined Sam Cooke in song
and turned falling glass nails into glances
from an insufficiently hungry predator.
Once it's luck, twice it's luck, three times
it's easy to mistake for imperishable skill.
Two by two by two the wedding party
moves down the aisle
and two by two by two they return
the world subtly altered, subtly older.
We know we're not long for this yes
yes yes so let's let's let's. 123 years
from when this here first seizes into being,
it is 1889. 222 years ago it is 1790, long
romantic period to hear some diminish it
even though then one could see
one's breath in winter as evidence
that one could fill a balloon with a soul
like a blossoming cloud. So hard to jump
anywhere but backward, staggered
as we are, zig-zagged of brain and grace.
Back then was before, now is increasingly
after Biggie Smalls, but he'll always have wanted
the same thing as anyone else: numbers
to cling to, odds to confound ends, ends

that soothe means, consistent glimmer
giving us that hook, someone trying
to show us our matter matters
and our matters meant. Have you been
a zebra like a candy glass statue
drilled by some awful force? You try to rise
into your brand new lean like it's a lean
you mean to. What numbers born again as plots
fly wildly through your new constitution,
struggling to return you?

Marc McKee

Sometimes It Is Now, Other Times It Is Now

The bird with a haphazard of cellophane
swivels now beaking a flash of white fire now
I think I missed a frame: decidedly unfluid
doth the bird's head move but so like a film
the gaps make the world and some gaps
are bigger than others. Now there's a graveyard
stuck in my exhale now I'm too full
of something barbed and desolate. We all know
Pittsburgh makes nothing happen,
you may say I'm a dream, but I'm not
the only gone. We come to see metals
decay, we abide with hot dogs and cold
beer. To wherever we can be saved
will we convey ourselves, dragging
trunks or sad songs or limbs in disrepair.
Do not despair. You reveal your magnificent
and crippling optimism when you call
any one of us citizen. Oh you young, bright
bolt of foil. Say light. Day might.
I always know the flight thing to say
so you run from me like wisdom.
Jack Gilbert told me and everyone else
that similes are weak, but your armada's
only as strong as the most tender boat
and whatever is both like that tender boat
and not that tender boat. Now it's summer
aggressively, all up in my grill. One dope move
was called code-switching but I wanted
to invent code-fusion. Then re-invent it.
Then re-re-invent it, till I'm brought
out of here as something else, now,
something that love now, its oar a hand,
tacks toward like land.

Mark Wagenaar

Pluto's Gate (The Little Book of Hells)

Even birds I released at the opening instantly perished,
Strabo wrote of a cave known as Pluto's Gate—the door

to hell. And now it's been found in Turkey, when all this time
I assumed it would turn up in Jersey somewheres.

Or inside a bagpipe in a bag with cats, that's backseat in a clown car
with twenty-three Bozos & Noodles past seatbelt capacity.

You might say the cave has nothing on the rain
of artillery whistling down into Aleppo. Or that hell is the minute

of flames a Tunisian fruitseller stood wreathed in
before kneeling to the crackling tongues that consumed him.

~~~~~

But there are quieter hells. Like not recognizing your brother  
at the nursing home, listening to him describe the summer days

& Christmases of a stranger's life. The end began as a tremor,  
my wife said, I could see it in the letters that arrived at camp.

The blurry *D* in *Dearest*. The *C*'s crescent moon in *Chelsea*  
twisted like a coat hanger. The letters that began to run together

because the letters in a nucleotide sequence had been struck away:  
the body's correspondence with the gathering dark

it spends the rest of its days gathering. What's behind the letters  
you're reading now, & what's behind the shadows they cast?

~~~~~

Nights & ends beyond knowing, a day the alphabet
becomes an alphabet of agony. PU was the shorthand given to plutonium

when it was found, as a joke. A poison with a half-life of eight
million years. One that works its way through the body until it nests

in the bones. And that is how the dead still speak: with particles that shine
in all directions for hundreds of years, invisible SOSes for no one

& sent by no one into the last dark. A poison as close to eternal as any.
And what is memory but the bones casting the light of past days

back through the body? The days you've lived projected against the day
you're living. And what is memory's halflife but the rest of your days

~~~~~

if you're lucky? And if you're not lucky the world becomes estranged  
to you one name at a time: neighbors, the bloody bird beneath

the window. Years collapse against each other like bookshelves.  
The body unlearns the world even as it unlearns itself, so a fork becomes

an alien tool, buttons refuse their openings. Breathing becomes an art  
as nuanced as calligraphy. And then there is the hell of concealing a hell.

When your pen quivers ever-so-slightly, a seismic needle trembling  
with the shudder of underground rivers on the other side

of the world. When even an extra adjective will betray you:  
I'm doing much better, the letter says, I'm doing very well.

*Martha Webster*

## **Arctic Circle**

And, with that,  
he kaleidoscoped  
my girlhood.

My heirloom diamonds—  
just ice doldrumed  
in a saltwash of memory.

It doesn't matter.  
Either way  
I'd be a killer.

*Nate Maxson*

## **Singularities**

It is a great naivety  
To assume that a word can equal a cure  
A silver bullet to the past, what evangelical nonsense  
And yet there must be something  
Did you know?  
That in the remake of King Kong from the 1970s  
Kong climbs The Twin Towers  
And fights off planes  
Christ-like though, he loses (of course he does)  
Destiny can be subtle too  
For example  
There is no electricity in my bedroom  
And I almost appreciate it (never mind my inability to actually fix the  
problem)  
There must be a word for that, for these things  
For the hindsighted glee of a man dressed as a giant ape defending America  
But I don't know it  
I am an American, after all  
And even in our passion plays  
We only speak one language

*Ori Fienberg*

## **Limey**

She is the daughter of the man who has been stealing limes from the moon, that inveterate hoarder of lusty, duskened citrus, which it keeps as a proof against scurvy that it fears could strike unexpectedly, causing the moon to pop from the sky, like an orbiting tooth from the galactic gums.

The limes are hidden beneath the softest silt, and must be approached silently, then coaxed from their sub-zero slumber with phosphorescent entreaties and talk of the sea. Only then can the man pack them into Demerara rum-stained barrels before sliding down the first shoots of dayspring to the ground.

She catalogs and then candies the limes to bet in her monthly poker game with our Sun, which has entered its adolescence and constantly threatens to expand and envelope us all in a maelstrom of fire: but then, what more could a parent wish from its child

*Page Hill Starzinger*

## **Else**

Go back to the beginning of the beginning and the oval filled with  
1,000,000 eggs.

Cilia beating their microscopic hairs in the fallopian beneath the iliac  
artery  
and in front of the ureter.

Almond-shaped and pearly grey, ova yolking nucleus to an odor  
sperm might sense. . .

Every month, tumbling out of my body.

Something to do with not trusting  
myself, this childlessness.

Something to do with squandering  
what I'm given.

And here  
one must find gentleness.

*The owl of Minerva*

*spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk*  
my father says to me

by way of Hegel, about something else entirely. We must soldier on.  
*Send me the bonbons, they'll get me through*

*to the end.*  
I lost?

Who else have

OO

Likely it happened in a different way.  
It's a story  
I can rewrite.  
It's my story,  
I can rewrite it.  
There are things to see clearly:  
A. I never went out of my way to have  
a child.  
B. The endometriosis was  
severe, I lost an ovary, appendix. . .

See  
I had choices,  
others took them. Plural.  
People can, and will, adapt. I  
mean adopt.

Grief is something to revise. Or,  
to sit with quietly. Try to  
sit with quietly. Even the  
quietly  
is difficult. Itchy.

C. I am fearful of something going in my body.  
Afraid of not taking proper care.  
This is not going well.  
I'd like to end  
as soon as possible.  
Ooplasm  
is the yolk of the ovum.  
Germinal, nutritive, paired and the ovaries suspended, tethered  
by ligaments  
to the peritoneal cavity.  
There are facts one can start with.

*Rick Bursky*

## **Drama of a Sigh**

The nail on my left pinky is three and half inches long,  
the length prevents my finger from burning  
when I set it aflame to light an occasional cigar.  
It's not attention I want sitting alone in a dark bar,  
it's a small flamboyance I allow myself. I am what happens  
when a meteor crashes into a forest covered in snow.  
I wish I could take credit for that statement  
but it was said by a woman after we spent three days together drinking.  
She also said when she dies she wants all the beds  
she ever slept in burnt in a giant bonfire.  
I kept the impracticality of desire to myself,  
simply nodded and stared at the brown liquid in my glass,  
finally breaking the awkwardness by telling her  
that when I die I want every chair I ever sat in similarly destroyed.  
She didn't see how that was possible. I agreed,  
this was the sensibility that kept us together.  
Yesterday it took an ice cube in my drink exactly six minutes to melt,  
something that always brings good luck. Not wanting to squander luck in  
a bar  
I walked out into the afternoon rain, then it hailed, then it stopped.  
Sunlight between passing clouds reflected  
on and off tall glass buildings like Morse Code from God.  
Before sadness was an emotion it was the eighth day of the week.  
Then astronomers came along and ruined everything.

*Steffi Drewes*

## **I Came, I Wept, I Consoled the Landlocked Tortoise**

To not want to be held by anything other than the first interval. To believe in only the wind that is happening now. I came, I wept, I consoled the landlocked tortoise. Wave to the lady in the turret. Someday you too will go hunting for the strongest root system in the forest. Finding fistfulls of prairie grass that feel most like family heirlooms. The second and third sparrows are intent on achieving new levels of brightness. The village sundial will never know otherwise. Every peak hour begins with water, with water comes a softening of self and sand dune. There is no such thing as a retractable philosophy. These rocks play for keeps.

*Steffi Drewes*

## **Counting Backwards**

The morning is born through binoculars, our beginning to spout sweet doubting fountains, all the intricacies of what could have been. Let regret pass on the back of a blackbird.

Soon after saying heave-ho and frayed hem, it's fallen south of the fenceline and digging for turnips.

Examine each wrist bone, skin creased and flexing tendons, sidelined by skinny blue streams, arrows to the underworld.

Trace along the palm, mapping a new memory. Bodies make connections because it is easier than leaving a trail of breadcrumbs, leaving the door unlocked or bone fragments untagged.

Yes, this is where the wires go, straight-laced, linking sky to more sky, between bobbing tree branches.

In between the forest and the fast forward, picture a soft spot—the boy who toddles and tosses his coin purse, chasing after anthills. Enough, little pigeon.

If not for gods of fire or the boy selling blossoms, I would call home more often. Would translate the blur of a dog tail into three different tenses for you.

Having tested granite against gravity, tracked lapwings and time zones, take the cloud animals at face value. Watch the lizards doing push-ups. Count to hero, count to big big sun.

*Stuart Greenhouse*

## **90377 Sedna**

In 1984  
Sedna was excited

not to be  
PSO J318.5-22

passing rogue planet  
ejected

from WISE  
1049-5319

by the tidal perturbations  
of a passing

brown dwarf  
at least

I have a name  
or will

Sedna said  
in 1984

year I first paid  
for a haircut

said mom  
no more bowls

no more Star Wars  
figures Chris I said,

I'm done with computers  
Daniel, no more,

no more being you, me,  
now I am a man

Sedna said  
I am happy

my orbit while eccentric  
perturbs no-one

not like those jostling  
planets down there

and sure  
I keep my distance

variably—sometimes  
closer, sometimes

so far out that  
a passing rogue planet

like PSO J318.5-22  
seeing no-one else

around  
might think to pull me along

but I say no  
I have a track

solitary  
foreordained

I'm sticking to it  
and even when

I close to  
the perigeal warmth

I'm never so close  
even as Neptune,

outer ice giant,  
primordial

guardian  
of the interior;

I know my place  
my orbit is my own

and if no-one  
knows me

for it, Sedna said  
in 1984,

year I grew lonely  
for myself,

still I am inside  
the heliopause

still I am part of  
the whole.

*Tim Kahl*

## **Marzipan**

Marzipan, the zoo ostrich was chased around her cage by the large male, and when he caught her, he put her on the ground and broke her leg with his amorous output, from which she never recovered. Heaven help her, and some day it will. It must, and those of us overtaken by the beautiful puzzle of more responsible deaths, will send animal magic in lieu of flowers. We'll tattoo the image of a dog smoking a cigarette on the back of our hands and another one on our thighs of rats nesting in the insulation of the attic. How many of them are there now? We ink more to keep up with the demand. They keep multiplying like pigs' hearts in their pens, their percussive beats in sync with each other but only because of a tiny clump of cells that maintain their pace. They carry on singing the hymn of the hiker after he broke his leg, eating all those crickets and moths.

*Tim Kahl*

## **Pot Vacation**

We wanted the weed from the Nixon Administration again, something elegant and not too dramatic like Olivia Newton-John. We joined the other older tourists still reeling from New Year's resolutions: to eat more posole and tamales, to share the secrets of pruning orchids, to call the parents living in a cabin in the Tennessee woods. We slouched towards Colorado anticipating sudden numbness and slurred speech. The new strains promise a potential for treating seizures. Yes, we might maintain the full range of motion for our limbs until we can no longer drive the loneliest road in America, across the Beehive State, into Grand Junction. We are singing our smoking songs because none of us has kept up with our drinking. Our license to frolic among the foodies has been exchanged for a chance to live as one with the smokies. We will join them leading the swordplay at the anime convention. We will scale the Dawn Wall at El Capitan with them. We will follow them as well as a flock of navel gazers can follow anyone. We will spawn a new era in brain chemistry, further and further into mental distraction . . . until a path appears.

*Timothy Liu*

## **The Saddest Thing is a Kiss**

without feeling. A fly-by  
drive-thru air kiss, or worse,  
all eyes fixed on a family-  
sized peck to the cheek

during the holidays in a room  
that reeks of potpourri  
sprayed from a goddamn  
can. The connubial kiss

that has to be redone.  
The status-update kiss  
with all parties tagged  
and subsequently liked

or commented on with  
a chain of less-than threes  
when what needs to be said  
is Get a Fucking Room!

Stolen and surreptitious  
trumps those fictitious  
Kodak story-book scripts—  
sunsets caressed by air-

brushed waves drier than  
my nana's pussy. Slurp  
slurp slurp go the lips.  
Gobble gobble gobble

goes the mouth chasing  
after cherries that bounce  
from one end of a vintage  
screen to another, all of us

down to our last quarters.

*Timothy Liu*

**SPF 50**

If you were in one of the 13,237  
yellow cabs on their way to this  
park where I sit, perhaps I'd feel  
so much more at one with all these  
trees heavy in bloom in spring's  
mild fury—your name on my lips  
a mantra no one else can hear  
not for all the grass grown tall  
enough to show the wind rippling  
through it. I live almost everyday  
without you, soon to breathe in  
mown lawns, cut hay, a roadside  
tractor pulled over in bales of  
oil-blackened fog, all my windows  
rolled up. These days, one hardly  
sees butterflies in the meadow  
let alone children with nets—  
all eyes affixed to touch screens  
that look more and more like  
the billboards through my youth  
where a Coppertone girl in pigtails

got her towel torn off by a terrier  
pawing the tan line round her waist—

my father's Rambler giving chase.

*Virginia Konchan*

## **From “A is for Amoeba” Series**

G is for gas-lighting, the spell under which you convince me I'm crazy for liking to live, sunny-side-up cognate between to speak (gag binding mouth), while doubled-over my own exteriorized consciousness (a lie). G is for Garth Brooks, golems, and gastric bypasses: the effort, inscribed in tomes (e.g. Malebranche's *The Search After Truth*) to say two or three words: I exist, or will, the insistent pulse of declarative intent marked credit in your black ledgermain, where speech acts stands for X, and done deeds, for Y. Parole matters, but not nearly as much as *Langue*, linguistic matter's matrix granting clemency before the guillotine of Abraham's inexorable hand, severing the head of the lamb.

*Virginia Konchan*

## **From “A is for Amoeba” Series**

A is for amoeba, auto-correct of the leitmotif,  
asset price bubbles, aristocracy and architecture:  
structural design, as distinct from expressionist  
rage. Aligning my printer page, I asked Allah,  
Buddha, Christ: make me more than a copyist  
of Archimedean proofs, my skin the sleek  
non-resisting elision of serial commas,  
accuracy of transmission as amanuensis  
my glorified secretarial goal. Honorary  
and dues-paying member of the actor’s  
guild, I script history’s rerun, low-budget  
production of talking heads in airless  
parliamentary chambers of so-called  
state, monopolistic tyrants violating  
anti-trust statutes until forced to abdicate,  
as was King Lear, their nepotistic crowns.

Virginia Konchan

## From “A is for Amoeba” Series

Z is for zygote, atoms  
shuttling from meiosis to  
mitosis at the speed of  
light, in an archegonia  
or Porphyria tree. The  
human bestiary: a long-waged,  
oedipal war, decisive victory  
given to the committee-approved  
prodigal, ousting the lemmings  
shuttling between one and zero  
in a binary programmatic code.

*La Gloire*: Zelda Fitzgerald, after  
reading the Great American novel  
(blinking price index of a bankrupt  
economy siphoning surplus from slaves),  
up and fled, her *roman à clef* an homage  
to language from beginning to end  
(*Murder She Wrote*, she wrote;  
*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, she said).

*Judith Cody*

## **The Poem by the Dog on the Leash**

...you're choking me you're choking me you're choking me you're choking  
me you're choking me you're choking me you're choking me you're choking  
me you're choking me you're choking me...

*Holiday Mason*

**8**

from *The "She" Series: A Venice Correspondence*

(The answer is no, regarding the key she wears around her neck, which swings just above the alabaster of her cold belly, an unopened cork in a bottle which, without breathing, will coil.

Thursday & the preemptive sigh  
of the front door closing, another pure mini-saga of cost reporting—

it's not good enough to be vigilant; one must act accordingly.)

*Sarah Maclay*

**8**

from *The “She” Series: A Venice Correspondence*

She had *wanted* to say: something about the night yard full of its white flowers (Vita’s or Vanessa’s, she could no longer recall),

but when she looked again they were candles—a yard of white candles—lit, incandescent, luminous.

And, she had to admit, that thing on her leg was refusing to heal.

Lace—she had thought she’d begin—or some other word with an “l”—lord, lard.

These are the sounds like plates, like petals of rounded, falling white.

(And that this was a kind of gesture—)

*Holaday Mason*

## 10

from *The “She” Series: A Venice Correspondence*

The winter inside the afternoon slipped back into the afternoon  
recalling the lateness, the passage of hours.

She did not really wish for an end to life, just to pain, which otherwise  
seemed implausible.

(Claim. Clamor, chemise, calm—the proper temper of a woman as  
reflected in advertising & the standard of eternal beauty.)

The promise of the floating white flowers was told to her & remained—  
but perhaps as shroud, or rest, or fresh snow & so, as a result, she often lit  
candles

to keep the darkness off her shoulders.

The “I” that created the “she” was keeping her distance, but not really.  
There were the particulars

of a stained tea cup, the trees which kept dropping some slippery seeds all  
over the porch outside the front door.

Some struck her arms, one her cheek, she turned it the other way, of  
course—but slipping, slippage, silage, sadness, all too possible, what with

the loss of history & heritage—the “I” losing her farther eyesight, while  
the “she” had bouts of sleeplessness & cowboys

still threatened in bars to kill each other with a single bullet,  
& Russian royalty stopped writing poems, going instead for a better  
showing

on the canvas of the world—making bad movies & bad football.  
It had been a brutal year of following the wrong music.

*Sarah Maclay*

**10**

from *The “She” Series: A Venice Correspondence*

It’s questionable: whether there is a “she”—  
a “she” with her heart full of bees.

But there are eyes that tame them.

And then they lift—the bees of assumption—  
disperse, like clouds, a soft marine layer reflecting heat,

a butterscotch heat and, therefore, tangerine as well as gray

until no bees, but ants—so tiny they’re almost specks of dirt,  
as though survival has required a sudden further miniaturization

—as she floats, stunned at her floating,

above the jets, the bubbles, within the womb of the pool, the heat—  
she floats like a large green leaf, soggy and limp

enough that one could remove her with the twist of a stick—  
her body would follow

(as ants spill over the edge with the sleepy un-grasp of her hand—)

*Holiday Mason*

**11**

from *The “She” Series: A Venice Correspondence*

*Consider the wings of certain rare butterflies, she says— & how we vanish.*

The question really is: whether or not he will get lost & lose his head—  
or will he lick from the rim, as if kick-box training, will he tough it out

& reach to touch the emerald fold, the elegant watery gap  
before  
it dissolves back into the vastness—

*It burns, he says.*

*I know—she whispers & leans closer—one can justify  
any belief, even none.*

*Sarah Maclay*

**11**

from *The “She” Series: A Venice Correspondence*

*The butterfly wings are broken. She said.  
Then we must fix them. He said.*

*Holaday Mason*

**12**

from *The "She" Series: A Venice Correspondence*

A single bell  
spun at its center.

There was no one there.  
The dawn

was a puzzle  
in pewter hush—  
    small whispers, increments

seeping in, like a tea ceremony.

When she placed her tender  
foot to the earth,

it was supple, velvet.

When she raised her eyes,  
    the world was hung

    in white crystal—wet sighs.  
It seemed to be this that aroused the murder

of crows, but even they were subdued & graceful.  
Breadfruit, lemons, crooked  
half-formed oranges uncorked  
    & seemed to twist in joy.

And when it was warmer,  
before the people

began to come outside,  
she saw the many

parts of prayers still dissolving  
into the moss & the un-bloomed trees were strewn

with the branches of other trees

in the fondest embrace.

*Sarah Maclay*

**12**

from *The "She" Series: A Venice Correspondence*

The night did not end in pewter  
but in a patter  
of rain,  
slipshod  
over the skylights  
and dim light.

Here was a way to tell the events  
of the evening  
if one removed the rugs:

Essentially, the couches were false  
(if comforting)

without pattern—

and pattern, established,  
repeated—

[here is where it burst]

the overlay

of the lie of simple  
uniformity—

of color, texture,  
expectation,  
match.

Pattern  
on pattern, on pattern: this was the way.

The rain  
in and out  
in its silver.

Silver beyond the metaphor  
of tears—

*Sarah Maclay*

**21**

from *The "She" Series: A Venice Correspondence*

They smell "her." (Let's assume, for a time, that "she," in fact, exists.)

The four dogs bark themselves to the edge of the fenced-in yard:  
one hundred crows fly north.

Looser than migration.

Into the white-tinged apricot of sky, its French trees butchered, clumped.

(Curette, the dental hygienist had said. It's something I have to do.)

Across the street, a drove of dwarves and pink flamingos. Several  
leprechauns.

To make the teeth like silk.

And plastic witch-hat Christmas trees, stranded in ornaments.

There's no escaping the leaf-blowers.

What is it to be very old?

(The white Continental, covered with a plastic tarp and bricks.)

To slowly walk, with one's slow dog.

To be, rightly, bewildered.

This is not a way to seduce, but seduction's overrated.

(In the sink, the clippings of the nails. Old cologne.)

Holaday Mason

22

from *The "She" Series: A Venice Correspondence*

(She finally arrived (after having been nearly forgotten), leaving

her reflection glancing off the rear-view mirror of the canary-yellow Chevy Impala—

the impact of her image lingering & gradually demisting

the fogged-up windows, the chrome.)

*Every dawn came over the hill differently & although the hill seemed the same, it wasn't,  
it changed*

*at every glance of light, of sound & so*

*she escaped again & again,*

*& he did not seem either to notice, or somehow had persuaded himself to ignore the fact of her freedom, her increasingly satin patina.*

(No one knew the vehicle was unlocked & thus accessible from the right front passenger side. It was easy to be distracted by the bumper stickers, which one had to be very close to, to make out.)

*He therefore could continue the ruse of the self with no self-accusations, no mirrors, no blades. His hair began to fray & take on a life of its own. It had the steaming scent of ore.*

*Gillian Olivia Blythe Hamel*

( )

sometimes after one drink you trip and fall on the walkway above shibuya crossing.

you see two businessmen holding each other up and it's kind of okay.  
or, sometimes, you drink a bit of wine and go nowhere.

her in a glass box from ages 14 & up; everything before then was enough  
not to remember.

I read a lot of books about rape and wells.

lives are divisible into parts: book one, 1999-2002, book two, 2002-2006  
and so on. basic arithmetic limits her understanding  
in all of them, shying from the first person. almost all of them.  
certain kinds of people measure time in cigarettes. they have family in  
southern China.

they tend to want one or more cities at a time:

tokyo, london, copenhagen. the older ones think of whole countries.  
a way of measuring.

this as far as you get—it measures people as they take up space.

eventually you forget every place

you have been. france: long gone.

even the first time you saw the pacific took some digging. some music  
you've heard is more perfect than the rest.

rachmaninov, for example: it was always russia and not russia. picked up  
anywhere but

never finished. that was a place too and not a place. every name was made  
up

and prevented understanding, as any would be.

every window fogged irreversibly. no, I don't want to think about fogged  
——windows.

*Gillian Olivia Blythe Hamel*

( )

a potted plant flies up and comes back down, behind the street  
where you made your target  
and that's as far as this relationship is going to get, where your needs are  
filled  
in teasing and linguistic failures. it's a miserably long process.  
now cutting costs and corners, it's easier on yourself, pushing upward  
when it was not a target as it was. further a means of entertainment.  
throwing pots. ~~I don't~~ anyone is foremost on the mind.

blacked out and you know  
they won't come anymore. they move off and never get your letters. she  
kept them in a box.

anyone ~~this is how you show affection~~  
'I don't' remains: there's potential abroad as here there is something wrong  
with us  
and for all improper looks and purposes they may be right. I've too much  
thought  
to object.

constricted and on foot, without the safety of windows  
in percussive shortness of breath and minimal eye contact, unsuspecting  
we both know what happened, or 'I don't,' theoretically,  
to talk about this anymore. I prefer to dance with strangers.  
measure your vocal range with tape.

please stop. she doesn't know what she's saying.  
she holds all this, assumptions spilling,  
and she has no idea. just stop, please.

~~you never came here like you might have.~~  
I peel it with all parts of my hands.

it's performance, of a kind.  
eventually she'll see him come in

and this taken out of context, brought to assumption  
your peculiar script I ~~don't~~  
I'll wait here quietly, to do something with my hands.  
it won't stop spinning.



## Contributor Notes

**Catherine Anderson** was born in Detroit and is the author of *Woman with a Gambling Mania* (Mayapple Press 2014) and two previous volumes of poetry, *The Work of Hands* (Perugia Press) and *In the Mother Tongue* (Alice James Books). She lives in Kansas City, assisting new immigrants to become skilled interpreters and translators. The lines in her prose poem are from news articles by James K. Anderson, published in *The Detroit News*.

**Grace Bauer's** book of poems, *Nowhere All At Once* (SFASU Press), received the Society of Midland Authors Book Award in Poetry for 2015. Her previous books include *Retreats & Recognitions*, *Beholding Eye*, and *The Women At The Well*, as well as four chapbooks. A new collection, *All The Supposes*, is forthcoming from The University of New Mexico Press. She teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Helena Boberg** lives in Stockholm, Sweden. Her books include *Repuls* (2011) and *Sense Violence* (2013). She participates in a feminist-literary project "Poetry and Equality in Sweden and the Middle East," which involves women writers from Sweden, Palestine, Iran, and Iraq in workshops to facilitate translating and networking among female poets based on sharing experiences with literary practices and living conditions.

**Bruce Bond** is the author of fifteen books including, most recently, *For the Lost Cathedral* (LSU Press, 2015), *The Other Sky* (Etruscan Press, 2015), and *Immanent Distance: Poetry and the Metaphysics of the Near at Hand* (University of Michigan Press, 2015), and forthcoming: *Black Anthem* (Tampa Review Prize, University of Tampa Press), *Gold Bee* (Crab Orchard Open Competition Award, Southern Illinois University Press), and *Sacrum* (Four Way Books). Presently he is Regents Professor at University of North Texas.

**Rick Bursky's** most recent book, *I'm No Longer Troubled By The Extravagance*, is out from BOA Editions. His previous full-length collection is *Death Obscura* (Sarabande Books). His poems have appeared in many journals including *Field*, *American Poetry Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Conduit*, and *Iowa Review*.

**Judith Cody's** poems were quarter-finalists for the Pablo Neruda Prize and are published in over 90 journals. Cody was Editor-in-Chief of the first "Resource Guide on Women in Music," she wrote the internationally noted biography of the composer, "Vivian Fine: A Bio-Bibliography," Greenwood Press and "Eight Frames Eight," poems. She edited the PEN Oakland anthology "Fightin' Words." She received the University of California Master Gardener lifetime achievement award. [www.judithcody.com](http://www.judithcody.com)

**Bruce Cohen** has published four volumes of poetry: *Disloyal Yo-Yo* (Dream Horse Press), which was awarded the 2007 Orphic Poetry Prize, *Swerve* (Black Lawrence Press), *Placebo Junkies Conspiring with the Half-Asleep* (Black Lawrence Press), and most recently *No Soap, Radio* (Black Lawrence Press). His new manuscript, *Imminent Disappearances, Impossible Numbers & Panoramic X-Rays*, was awarded the 2015 Green Rose Prize from New Issues Press and will be published in 2016.

**Joshua Corey** is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *The Barons* (Omnidawn Publishing, 2014). *Partisan of Things*, a new translation of Francis Ponge's first collection of prose poems, from which the poems in this issue are taken, is forthcoming from Kenning Editions. He is also the author of a novel, *Beautiful Soul: An American Elegy*. He teaches English at Lake Forest College.

**Andrew Cox** is the author of *THE EQUATION THAT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING* (BlazeVOX [Books] 2010), the chapbook, *FORTUNE COOKIES* (2River View, 2009), and the hypertext chapbook, *COMPANY X* (Word Virtual). He lives in St. Louis, Missouri where he edits the UCity Review ([www.ucityreview.com](http://www.ucityreview.com)).

**Lori Davis** teaches English and creative writing in Palm Desert, California. She was the poetry editor for the *Coachella Review*. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Salt Hill*, *Cimarron Review*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Cream City Review*.

**Steffi Drewes** is author of three chapbooks: *Magnetic Forest*, *Cartography Askew*, and *History of Drawing Circles*. She organizes Featherboard Writing Series at Aggregate Space Gallery in Oakland. Her poetry collection, *Tell Me Every Anchor Every Arrow*, is forthcoming from Kelsey Street Press in 2016.

**Justin Evans** lives in rural Nevada with his wife and sons, where he teaches English at the local high school. He has published four chapbooks and four full length collections of poetry. A fifth book, *All the Brilliant Ideas I've Ever Had*, is forthcoming from Foothills Publishing.

**Jeff Ewing's** stories, poems, and essays have appeared in *Sugar House Review*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Crazyhorse*, *Southwest Review*, *Utne Reader*, *Catamaran Literary Reader*, and *Cimarron Review*, among others. He lives in Northern California with his wife and daughter. You can find him online at [jeffewing.net](http://jeffewing.net).

**Ori Fienberg's** short prose appears regularly in venues such as *Boaat*, *Diagram*, *Mid American Review*, and *Subtropics*. He works for the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University and lives with his wife and dog in Evanston, Illinois. Check out [lavastep.com](http://lavastep.com) for 5-paragraph essays.

**Deborah Flanagan's** manuscript, *Or, Gone*, was named the winner of Tupelo Press's Snowbound Series Chapbook Award. She was recently nominated for a Puschcart Prize. Her work has appeared in journals including *Agni*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Ploughshares*, *FIELD*, *The Southern Review*, and *Drunken Boat*, among others.

**Jean-Luc Garneau** is a native of Québec, Canada. He has published a book of short stories and poetry, *La rivière des morts*, also numerous translations of poems in *Poetry* and in *The Battersea Review*. He is also the author of a book in bilingual lexicography, *Semantic Divergence in Anglo-French Cognates*. He teaches French and linguistics at Lake Forest College.

**Johannes Göransson** is the author of six books of poetry (including *The Sugar Book*, 2015). He has also translated a wide range of modern and contemporary Swedish-language poets, including Henry Parland, Ann Jäderlund, and Aase Berg. He teaches at the University of Notre Dame and edits Action Books and Action, Yes.

**Stuart Greenhouse** is the author of the chapbook *What Remains* (Poetry Society of America), and the recipient of a 2014 fellowship from the New Jersey State Council of the Arts. Poems have most recently appeared in *Denver Quarterly*, *Diagram*, and *Spork*.

**Gillian Olivia Blythe Hamel's** work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in VOLT's 20th anniversary issue, *The Volta*, *The Offending Adam*, and *Laurel Review*. She is managing editor at Omnidawn Publishing and editor of *OmniVerse*. Gillian also co-publishes *speCt!*, a chapbook series and book arts imprint, with Peter Burghardt and Robert Andrew Perez. She lives in Oakland, California.

**Brandi Handley** earned an M.F.A. from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where she contributed to *Number One* magazine. She currently teaches first-year writing at Park University and English to international students at an adult education center. She lives, teaches, and writes in and around Kansas City.

**Ann Hillesland's** work has been published in many literary journals, including *Fourth Genre*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Sou'wester*, *r.kv.ry*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Anderbo*, *Corium*, and *SmokeLong Quarterly*. It has been selected for the Wigleaf Top 50 Very Short Fictions and presented onstage by Stories On Stage. She is a graduate of the MFA program at Queen's University of Charlotte.

**John Hoppenthaler's** books of poetry are *Lives of Water*, *Anticipate the Coming Reservoir*, and *Domestic Garden* (Carnegie Mellon Press). With Kazim Ali, he has co-edited a volume of essays on the poetry of Jean Valentine, *This-World Company* (U of Michigan P, 2012). For the cultural journal *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact* he edits "A Poetry Congeries." He is currently an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at East Carolina University.

**Brent House**, an editor for *The Gulf Stream: Poems of the Gulf Coast* and a contributing editor for *The Tusculum Review*, is a native of Nacaise, Mississippi, where he raised cattle and watermelons on his family's farm. Slash Pine Press published his first collection, *The Saw Year Prophecies*, and his poems have appeared in journals such as *Colorado Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Journal*, and *The Kenyon Review*.

**Tim Kahl** [<http://www.timkahl.com>] is the author of *Possessing Yourself* (CW Books, 2009) and *The Century of Travel* (CW Books, 2012), and *The String of Islands* (Dink, 2016). He appears as Victor Schnickelfritz at the poetry and poetics blog *The Great American Pinup* [<http://greatamericanpinup.wordpress.com>] and the poetry video blog *Linebreak Studios* [<http://linebreakstudios.blogspot.com>]. He is also editor of Bald Trickster Press and *Clade Song* [<http://www.cladesong.com>]. He is the vice president and events coordinator of The Sacramento Poetry Center.

**Virginia Konchan** is the author of *Vox Populi* (Finishing Line Press), and a collection of short stories, *Anatomical Gift* (forthcoming, Noctuary Press). Her poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Best New Poets*, *The Believer*, *The New Republic*, *Boston Review*, and *Verse*.

**Julia Landrum** is earning an English major, creative writing minor, and technical writing minor at the University of Central Missouri. She tutors at the UCM Writing Center and interned with *Pleiades: Literature in Context*.

**David Dodd Lee** is a visual artist, fiction writer, and poet. His latest book of poems, *Animalities*, is available from Four Way Books. He is also the author of a book of erasure poems, *Sky Booths in the Breath Somewhere, the Ashbery Erasure Poems*. He is currently completing a book of short stories, a novel, and two new books of poems.

**Timothy Liu** is the author of ten books of poems, including the forthcoming *Don't Go Back To Sleep* (Saturnalia Books) and *Let It Ride* (Station Hill). He lives in Manhattan.

**Alessandra Lynch** is the author of *Sails the Wind Left Behind* and *It was a terrible cloud at twilight*. Her third book, *Daylily Called It a Dangerous Moment*, is forthcoming from Alice James Books. Her work has appeared in *32 Poems*, *the American Poetry Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Ploughshares*, *Volt*, and other journals. Currently, she teaches writing and poetry to the undergraduates and MFA students at Butler University.

**Sarah Maclay's** braided collaboration with Holaday Mason, *The "She" Series: A Venice Correspondence*, is due out from What Books Press in Fall 2016. She's also the author of *Music for the Black Room*, *The White Bride*, *Whore* (all, U of Tampa Press), and three chapbooks. She co-chairs the Creative Writing Committee at LMU, and often conducts workshops at Beyond Baroque.

**Holaday Mason** is the author of *Towards the Forest*, *Dissolve* (New River Press) and two chapbooks. *The Red Bowl: A Fable in Poems* is due Spring 2016 via Red Hen Press and *The "She" Series: A Venice Correspondence*, a collaboration with Sarah Maclay is forthcoming on What Books Fall 2016. Pushcart nominee, widely published, Holaday is a psychotherapist in practice for 22 years, and a photographer. [www.holadaymason.com](http://www.holadaymason.com)

**Nate Maxson** is a writer and performance artist. He is the author of several collections of poetry, most recently *The Age Of Jive* and *The Whisper Gallery*. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

**Kathleen McGookey's** poem "Here, Where I Am, in October," is from her newest book, *Stay*, which was published by Press 53 in September 2015. Her work has appeared in journals including *Crazyhorse*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Epoch*, *Field*, *Ploughshares*, *The Prose Poem: An International Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Quarterly West*. Her book *At the Zoo* is forthcoming from White Pine Press in Spring 2017.

**Marc McKee** is the author of *What Apocalypse?* (New Michigan Press, 2008), *Fuse* (Black Lawrence Press, 2011), and *Bewilderness* (Black Lawrence Press, 2014). He teaches at the University of Missouri at Columbia, where he lives with his wife, Camellia Cosgray, and their son, Harold.

**Jennifer Militello** is the author, most recently, of *A Camouflage of Specimens and Garments*, forthcoming from Tupelo Press in 2016, and *Body Thesaurus* (Tupelo Press, 2013), which was named one of the top ten poetry books of 2013 by Best American Poetry. She teaches in the MFA program at New England College.

**Andrew Miller** was born in Fresno, California. His poetry has appeared in such literary magazines as *Yemassee Magazine*, *Shenandoah Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Spoon River Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *the Massachusetts Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Ekphrasis*, *Nimrod*, *the California Quarterly*, *Hunger Mountain*, and *How Much Earth*, an Anthology of Fresno Poets. He lives in Copenhagen, Denmark, with his wife, Inge, and his daughters, Hannah, Emily, and Eva.

**April Ossmann** is the author of *Anxious Music* (Four Way Books). Her work here is forthcoming in *Event Boundaries* (FWB, 2017). She received a 2013 Vermont Arts Council Creation Grant for the manuscript-in-progress.

**Aimee Parkison** is the author of *Woman with the Dark Horses* (Starcherone 2004), *The Innocent Party*, (BOA Editions, Ltd., American Reader Series 2012), and *The Petals of Your Eyes* (Starcherone/Dzanc 2014). Winner of the Starcherone Prize for innovative fiction, Parkison is an Assistant Professor of Fiction Writing at Oklahoma State University. More information is available at [www.aimeeparkison.com](http://www.aimeeparkison.com).

**Diane Passero's** work has appeared in *Driftwood Press*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, and *The Birds We Piled Loosely*. She lives in northern Indiana.

**Aimee Penna's** poems have appeared in *Basalt*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Meridian*, *Switchback*, *Transom*, and *Whiskey Island*, among others. She's an ESL instructor and an editorial assistant at *The American Poetry Review*. She lives outside of Philadelphia with her cinephiliac husband.

**Kevin Kvist Peters** is currently an MFA student at Saint Mary's College of California and is the Bay Area Lit Scene Editor for Omnidawn Publishing's online literary journal *Omniverse*.

**Francis Ponge** (1899-1988) was a French essayist and poet best known for his prose poems about ordinary and natural objects, from 1942's *Le partis pris des choses* (soon available in a new translation as *Partisan of Things*) to *Le Savon (Soap)*, a long poem first published in 1969, and *La Fabrique du Pré* (1971).

**Austin Sanchez-Moran** recently received his MFA in Poetry from George Mason University. He now works as Education Coordinator at The National Steinbeck Center in Salinas, California. His poems have been published or are forthcoming in *The Sundial Review*, *Fjords Review*, *Rawboned*, *Texas Review*, *Rivet Journal*, and *45th Parallel*

**Kate Senecal** is the fiction editor of Storychord.com where her work has also been featured. Other fiction of hers has been featured in *The Foundling Review*. Kate received her MFA in fiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts in 2013. She lives and works in Western Massachusetts.

**Carrie Shipers'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, 2016) as well as two chapbooks.

**Jordan Smith** is an undergraduate student at the University of Central Missouri. Jordan has had poetry published in *Arcade magazine* and continues to write and submit work to various publications. He is currently working on his BFA and is scheduled to graduate this spring.

**Bethany Startin** recently received her MFA from the University of Alabama. She was born in northern England and lives in Amsterdam where she works as a copyeditor. She was the 2014 recipient of the Hill-Kohn Prize from the Academy of American Poets, and her work is published or forthcoming in *BOAAT*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Tinderbox Poetry*, among others.

**Page Hill Starzinger** lives in New York City. Her first full-length poetry book, *Vestigial*, selected by Lynn Emanuel to win the Barrow Street Book Prize, was published in Fall 2013. Her chapbook, *Unshelter*, selected by Mary Jo Bang as winner of the Noemi contest, was published in 2009. Her poems have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Fence*, *Kenyon Review*, *Pleiades*, *Volt*, and many others.

**Ben Sutton** is the author of the chapbook *Then, the Unabridged* (Black Warrior Review Chapbook Series). His poetry won the Kay Murphy Prize from the University of New Orleans and *Bayou Magazine*, judged by Dawn Lundy Martin. Other poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Best New Poets 2013*, *The Literary Review*, *Redivider*, *Sycamore Review*, *Salt Hill*, and *Washington Square Review*, among others.

**Mark Wagenaar** is the University of Mississippi's 2014 Summer Poet in Residence, the 2014 winner of The Pinch Poetry Award, and the 2013 winner of the James Wright Poetry Prize, the Poetry International Prize, and the Yellowwood Poetry Prize. His debut manuscript, *Voodoo Inverso*, won the 2012 University of Wisconsin Press' Felix Pollak Prize.

**Caleb Washburn** is a poet from Kansas City. You can find some of his recent work in *The Atlas Review*, *Bat City Review*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *The Journal*, and *Vinyl Poetry*, among others. He is the managing editor of the online journal *Twelfth House*.

**Martha Webster** has recently published poems in *The Cortland Review*, *The Collagist*, and *Prairie Schooner*. She lives in Amityville, New York.

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