

THE LAUREL REVIEW

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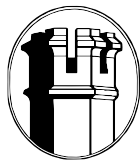
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“There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless.’ There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”

–*Arundhati Roy*

LACE ON A TABLE ON ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY

M. MELISSA ELSTON
[CREATIVE NONFICTION]

THE TABLES TODAY WERE COVERED IN LACE. JUST LIKE THE lace you used to lay out on the dining room table, on holidays. Or when we were having company.

Atop the lace, there were framed photographs. Candles. Remembrances of loved ones. I brought no such mementos. Truth be told, I rolled out of bed late, tore into the church parking lot at 10:13 a.m., and came creeping in at the back of the chapel, 15 minutes after the first peals of organ music had kicked off the service. Just like I used to at 17. I remember how my visible lack of enthusiasm for all things church-related used to embarrass you. Back then, I used to drag in late—hair mussed, eyes bleary—because I'd stayed out drinking on Saturday. Or listening to music with friends. Sometimes, I brazenly nursed my hangover on a back pew in the choir loft, sporting an obnoxious pair of sunglasses that made the old ladies gossip. (I secretly enjoyed this. I admit it.)

Far fewer things change between ages 17 and 41 than you'd think.

But in another sense, so many things have changed, drastically. Sometimes, I wonder what you would think of the person I've become in the 13 years since you took your final road trip. Wherever you are . . . do you know you wound up raising a college professor? Have you kept up with that? Hell, do you see your granddaughter—the mischievous, brilliant girl who I, in turn, raised?

I think of you often.

Sometimes, I worry I don't think of you enough.



I still remember your singing. Most people who heard you remember. You were a classically trained alto, one whose voice people were constantly gushing over.

I used to cringe back then. I was embarrassed at having a mother who sounded operatic when she opened her mouth. (The vibrato. So. Much. Vibrato.) I don't know why I had that reaction. Nor do I know why I didn't figure out how similar our speaking voices are, until I was well into my thirties.



A room full of people gathered to sing today. Twenty-seven of them . . . didn't leave. They were executed, in their own house of worship. Witnesses said it took about 15 seconds to mow the majority down.

I don't know what to do with the fact that we live in a country where this kind of thing happens on a regular basis now. But the incident stands out to me as a disruption in the narrative. A rupture in the story we often tell ourselves about faith. Protection. Safety.



Safety doesn't exist. Inside or outside buildings with steeples.

It didn't exist the day you shuffled off this mortal coil. There were no padded helmets, no nets to keep you from hitting the ground, nothing to counter the effect of the pills you swallowed sometime between midnight and sunrise on a different Sunday morning, 12 long years ago.

It didn't keep my chest from being swept hollow when I realized you weren't coming back. In some ways, the experience made me bolder. More focused about going after what I want in life, while there's still time. But it broke me, too.

Right now, 27 other families are broken.

On All Saints' Sunday. The day we commemorate the dead. Their collective grief—a screaming, howling torrent of names and sudden absences—is more than I can contemplate.



Are you singing now? Sometimes, I think I hear your song in the tiny things you taught me to observe: in people, in the rhythms of life, in the energy around me.

Somewhere, deep down, I am still three years old, seated awkwardly on a too-big-for-me piano bench. I am squinting at a page of sheet music, eyes darting down to the keys—where you've helpfully written the notes in crayon. *C. D. E. . . . C. D. E. . . . D. C. D. E. C. C.* I peck them out, then look up, beaming in expectation. You break off a small piece of a plain Hershey's chocolate bar. My

reward. Our daily ritual, during these early lessons. My feet don't touch the pedals yet. You tell me not to fret, that it will come when I'm older. Right now, I need to focus on learning the notes. What they look like on paper. How they sound when I press the keys down, with small, pudgy fingers.

My brow furrows in concentration as I memorize the musical phrasing. There are words to this song. They, too, are written on the page.

Behind me, you are singing them. In your deep, sonorous alto voice.

“Here we go, up a row . . .”



I am also still six or seven years old—somewhere in the recesses of my mind, as the scene changes. We are alone together in your dim bedroom. The curtains are drawn and the lights off, even though it's the middle of the day. I've walked in on you, only to find you lying on your back, in the dead quiet. Alert but still. Lips moving in an unfamiliar, nonverbal pattern. I ask you—in a small, yet plaintive voice—what you're doing.

“I'm meditating. It's something you can do when you're older.” Your voice is different than its usual booming nature. Softer. More peaceful. It draws me in.

I had been planning on watching cartoons, but I'm instantly intrigued by this activity. The one that takes place in the dark, and the quiet. I ask you to teach me. *I'm old enough*, I tell you. *My feet even touch the piano pedals now*. Surely, I'm old enough for this. You protest that it may bore me. That children aren't meant to do it—but once I wear you down, you give me a phrase to use as a focal point, and we begin. Your breaths, my breaths. Your song—the silent one, measured in moments that feel like eternities. Now my song.



This morning, I found myself descending into meditation as I knelt before an altar full of votives. I lit one for a friend, and for others who have endured losses. Then I lit one for me—and you. A small gesture. But one imbued with love.

Just like meditation, love is a song. One that death does not hush or cut short. And one that I will be singing for the rest of my days, it seems. Few things change between 17 and 41. Maybe few things change between 41 and the rest of it, too. At some point, I suppose I'll find out. In the meantime, I still hear you. I still love you. Sometimes, I still cover my own tables at home in lace. And sometimes, when I sit down to enter my own silent moments—tiny, wordless eternities in the dark—I realize it's a space we both still share.

[THE COUNTRY YOU WERE BORN IN]

JON LEE

[POETRY]

The country you were born in
 stopped the last great worldwide war
with two bombs that killed more
 or less a hundred thousand people each

a loss we justified
 by saying it prevented further loss—

maybe it did

it wasn't like
 the couple hundred thousand died at once—
only half did—
the rest took a year or so

& now their children's children
 & maybe their children too
 who would be
 just as old as you—

are gone

this is laughable
 of course—
they never even lived to be gone

FIREFLIES

JANICE NORTHERNS

[POETRY]

The past feels thicker here on the canyon floor,
ancient air filtering down. History hangs
over our heads as ancestral sin slows our steps.

In 1874, Rangers routed
Comanches at the Battle of Palo Duro:
repeating rifles dropped appaloosas and paints—
fourteen hundred—one by one. Each whinnying scream

echoed through this canyon as sun-stenched flesh
stacked ladders to heaven, the bleached bones
later a landmark guiding whites through grassland.

Those bones are long gone, but as darkness falls,
the fireflies come out, their cold glow the same light
that flickered witness above Comanche campsites.

I step soft among fireflies, the ground beneath me
a palimpsest of conquest: buffalo blood
and steaming scalps, gutted treaties, barbed wire,
paved roads to annihilation. The past pulses

underfoot, but the fireflies leave no mark.
Like flint sparking fire, they glimmer for the living
and the dead, glowing ghosts of moon-white bones.

THE REST OF US

JESICA CARSON DAVIS

[POETRY]

This desert is full of ghosts.
You can see them squat

by the side of the road,
adobe baked in their own ovens,

outposts of another time, a different
when, stripped down to withered

husks that hold whispers, remnants
of old lives, of those who moved on

after the highway's migration
changed traffic's path, changed everything.

Yet some witnesses remain:
a few locals, coyotes,

and the mesas that haunch against
the night as it sets in,

they might sometimes pay attention,
turning purple in the distance

as they hold their breath
for the rest of us.

COYOTES (1)

JON BOISVERT

[POETRY]

One by one, they enter our
marriage & wait. They come in
the house. They fill the attic &
the walls until there are no more
windows, no doorknobs, only fur
& mouths. We curl up on the bed
in the growling dark. Do you still
love me, I ask.

COYOTES (2)

JON BOISVERT

[POETRY]

At night we talk about our snowy future. How our tracks will go together into the stream without exiting, how our blood will mix in the cold. In the permanent dark of the coyote house, this is our fantasy. Yes, I still love you, you say.

COYOTES (3)

JON BOISVERT

[POETRY]

I go to school with one. We wait for
the bus together in silence. The air
moves like crystals, & the snow is
full of tracks. We could do so much
for each other. Instead we stand
mute, facing the road, waiting for
the yellow bus full of rabbits.

COYOTES (4)

JON BOISVERT

[POETRY]

My father is one who will not eat.
But he crosses the field at dusk &
watches others. So his stomach
is full of envy, full of sabotage
& regret when he comes home
& joins me the attic.

COYOTES (5)

JON BOISVERT

[POETRY]

You see your sister's face in the
dark. Your older brother's arm
reaching out. You tell me how you
ran away & show me the mark.
You shouldn't be here, you say. I'm
glad, but they'll catch you.

COYOTES (6)

JON BOISVERT

[POETRY]

I'd have nothing if it weren't for
them. & there's nowhere to bury
this shame but in acts of love for
the coyotes. So I give them my very
marrow, until they, like us, evolve.

PASSIVE AGGRESSION

JOANNA MAYER

[POETRY]

The Midwest gets its hooks in you
like a lazy Sunday afternoon.
Built on the most complacent of virtues,
she tries to convince you
(like every mother does)
that she loves you.
And yet—

Fucking dykes!

calls a disembodied voice outside of a Culver's
in rural Wisconsin.

We eat our lunch anyway.

I wait for you outside the restroom
rehearsing what I'll call him
if he's brave enough to show his face.

He isn't.

Men are dumb,
I say as my finger finds the switch to lock
all the doors in the car.

We're

okay,
is all you say.

.
. .
.

That's a long way away, says
your father our coworker the cashier
when we say we're moving to Montana.
Here, leaving
is an act of violence.

YOUR HANDS, NOW WEAK

EMMALEE HAGARMAN

[POETRY]

Father, you aren't welcome here,
but I can't wait to tell you
how my sister stands beside
Kate, holds her hand and a beer
in the middle of the pool.

Kate yells she can't believe I'm here
though a friend ruined the surprise
two beers ago. You stormed
out the door last time you were here
after finding out they share

a bed. Their yard doesn't feel like Ohio:
so lush with green I don't mind
getting bit by mosquitos. You're eating
your favorite TV dinner on the couch,
they're swimming in October. I don't know
my blood type but it must be the same
as my sister's, our bites swell
big as silver dollars. Your
knuckles stayed swollen hours after
the fight. You talk more

to her ex-husband than to my sister
because he's the father
of your grandchildren. Your voice
went soft when you said Kate
is bad for her and you don't want
their friends near the kids.
As we sit down to eat with everyone, my sister
says, out of the blue, *These*
are the people I love most
in the world. You won't meet

them, you aren't one of them.

You said she fell in love with Kate's
personality, not because she's
beautiful. The picture of my sister
and her ex-husband on your fridge.

The bus ride when a black man
and a Korean woman held hands
and you asked me why they couldn't
find someone their own
race. What do you call my sister
and Kate when I'm not there.

I knew who you were since
I was little. Mom tugged me
away from the playground
into the car into the house as you beat
up boys fighting on the basketball
court. You, God of a shit neighborhood,
and them, black. Your
hands, now weak with age. I didn't
swim tonight, just dipped

my feet into the water.

You taught me how to swim
and how to punch, so I do
neither. I'll tell you only
that I'm here.

INSOMNIA

CARA PETERHANSEL

[POETRY]

the moon
mocks me with its
window-slat stretchmarks,
stained with yellow,
spilling on my chest

you're asleep already
but for me there's just
the fleshy eyelid-dampened
light and the covers at our feet

I kissed you, pressed
your hands into my hips,
thinking sex might
leave me panting,
weighted,
like it did with her

but I can still feel
every egg-crate
indent of our mattress,
every serger stitch
beneath the fitted sheet

your breath-mist is too
warm on my shoulders,
your sleep-sounds grate
against the sheets
while I stare at the
popcorn-ceiling,
grey, like the
shirt she wore,

that I unbuttoned,
matte like her seaglass
voice, unzipped and
dryly whispering my name

tonight
while you sleep without me
I will slowly churn
and eat away the hours,
thinking of her.

I DON'T REALLY LIKE HOW YOU
PRONOUNCE MY NAME WRONG
(COMPASSIONS V)

MERKIN KARR
[POETRY]

The insomnia came back suddenly
like the credit card charge after
the 30 day trial. And I had so many
questions. Like maybe it was just
eleven days of frothy white dreams.
But they were bliss wrapped up in
chocolate coated pink pills. But
nothing lasts forever. The sunset
sky ends to bring a hooded
cape. Bedazzled with hopes
and dreams designed to look
like stars. Frowns often find
themselves on the flip side
and I wonder if happiness
makes them feel down.
Like how manic makes me feel
high and sometimes I just want
to be depressed. Because silence
at least never asks you to leave.
Sometimes I like the darkness. It's slow.
and I feel like molasses dripping
on buttered biscuits. Like maybe it'll
be worth it or mean something.
Line after line tries to grasp the words.
Trying to own them. But you can't own the
chaos inside your head. It's impossible.
It's wind in a tin can or spray cheese
at a fancy party. But I lay here examining

my finger nails as if the answers lay
beneath their unkept beds. But no
answers ever come from tucked in
covers and properly puffed up pillows.
They come at 3 am when the world
is asleep and your eyes are tired
but your body mistakes the darkness for day.
Yes the answers come when you're barely awake.

TRESPASSES

JOSÉ ARAGUZ

[POETRY]

Hard not to see the world as a series of unwelcome trespasses. Walking at night, the music from a passing car lingers long behind it. When you can hear your footfall again, you wonder who else can. You consider kicking a stone, but remember what it sounds like instead. Around you, shadows rise, close in. Charge like children into hiding.

[WE WERE THE FIRST TO BE SET FREE]

DARREN DEMAREE

[POETRY]

i told my children we were the first to be set free and they asked me if they could watch all of the animated stories that end in capture after beginning with death or environmental catastrophe and i let them watch all of them and i told them to rewrite every ending and every time they did that the women could fly and the men could watch them and the ocean calmed the fuck down and nature overgrew all that it could and i couldn't have been prouder that there were whispers of revenge as well as i am really hoping my children can find enlightenment and then it put it down with the rest of their toys

IF WE MAY

KATHLEEN PIERCE

[POETRY]

Let us remain for a moment
on this border so gently touching
this other one. The children are speaking
forever to the parents who hear and say
the same in return: It's good you are
where you are. Fewer presents
of glass along the iron road
makes sense. All the old languages
are sober now. You look, like a dog
in a suit, at once old and young
for your age.

BEFORE LANGUAGE

ADAM SCHEFFLER

[POETRY]

I was thinking of
all the thoughts people yearned to tell then,
to rattle off to their cave-mate
before the anteater's carcass
smoking on the spit.

Now, no matter how many words
we peel from our throats like a
magician's long multi-colored scarf
it's never enough.

The truth is, there's no
god-chimp to poke you with
a stick, or lick the honey-termites
of prayers from your insides.

AMERICAN JOAN

ANN DEVILBISS

[POETRY]

When the migraines come
it is like a halo hammered
into my skull, the rattle
of a goldleaf saw drawn
over frayed nerves.

Then the visions enter,
thin snakes winding through
my cracked bedroom window,
scaled bodies lofted so their
bare heads brush the low ceiling.

Their voices are trumpets,
full of prophecy and
brassy blaring tumble.
They tell me what will happen,
say fear not, fear not.

Preacher says women like me
were meant for shuttered rooms,
for breaking work and hunger,
for silence or the whip.

If he shuts me in the attic,
I will use my matches;
if he locks me up,
this church will burn.

JACQUELINE BABETTE JONES

BABETTE CIESKOWSKI

[POETRY]

What did I look like to you? In my face,
a warning: she is yours to shape,
to choose how to mold into the girl
Oma never approved of, the girl sneaking
out of the house, unafraid
of what's sloshing onto the shore
beneath her, the man-of-wars waiting
to sting a tender heel. You
could have fashioned a Catholic schoolgirl,
a girl bent on keeping
the dime between her knees
pressed hard between the bones,
the impression of a dead man's face
pushed into her skin, a sign of victory.
You could have told me to be nicer
to the girls in my classroom, to treat them
like sisters. You were never that girl.
You thought it funny when, as discipline,
my teacher sat me with the boys
to get me to be quiet. *I guess she knows
what she wants.* You knew your virtues,
knew how to curve your body
into the shape of a woman wanting
more, wanting endlessly, to be
touched. To be given anything,
but a child. In this, we are the same.
I am everything your mother hated
in you, everything you left home for.

STRANDING

KATHRYN SMITH

[POETRY]

Human mothers have been known
to throw their children to the ocean.

Halfway through migration, whales
beach themselves on Tasmania's coast.

Before dawn, dawn
seems impossible, the sky

a formless void. From a bridge, a cry
hits the water, disappears, one of many stars

blinking out. The moon forgets
to direct us. Dozens of hulking bodies

at rest. It happens every summer,
but no one knows why. The whales

are so like us in their language and how
they feed their young. Birthed

alive. The islanders rush
to usher them back to sea.

THANK YOU

ABBY SPASSER

[POETRY]

My mother tells me to learn how to take a compliment,
but she covers her face in photographs,
so I don't listen
when you tell me you love me.

It's Saturday morning at Macy's and I'm looking at the mannequins. They have
nipples, but no face. I feel the same way in the dressing room, wondering what I
can get away with. I came inside wanting to buy a new sundress for Spring. But I
buy a raincoat.

I go to the gym at lunchtime, cancelling our date, because I'd rather be cornered
by sweaty mounds of strange men

who could break me
as soon as want me
than have you tell me
that you don't care.

You like my insides.

On the treadmill, I pretend I'm running away. Four men stand behind me
watching, and one of them asks for my number. I don't say anything. Instead I
walk to my car, and I wonder if from behind, I look good escaping.

And then it's one a.m., and I'm at Kroger,
and it's easier
to buy a Dr. Pepper two-liter
than it is to answer your call.

The bag boy hands me my purchase, brushes my wrist, tells me my skin is soft.
Thank you. There's weight in his words and his face makes me tense. His eyes say,
You're not above me. They tell me, *You're worse.*

—

I can't smile in photographs, either.

For now, I'll find comfort in running errands, comfort in the security guard's grin
as I buy the least practical bra in the store.

There's comfort
in knowing
I'm no better than I've been.

FIBROID

BABETTE CIESKOWSKI

[POETRY]

My youth is the size of a ripe plum, a stillborn
duckling cut at the neck. In Exam Room 3, a stranger
is shoving his hand into me. My paper gown stops
mid-thigh. *Relax*, he says, and pushes through, searching
for the last golden egg, the prize that will end this hunt.
I stare at the photo of clouds taped to the ceiling. I can't help
but see my mother, or a tumor the size of a grapefruit.
After my brother's birth, she cleaned house. Put her parts
in a bag with the other dead things: the koi I shook
in the carnival bag, the kitten I loved, but starved. Her youth
was the size of a baby's skull. I can hear her telling me
now: *You're grown. Shut it up. Cut it out.*

BABY SEASON

J'LYN CHAPMAN

[CREATIVE NONFICTION]

I WANTED TO TELL YOU ABOUT THE MORNING. YOU WERE THERE, of course, for part of it, managing our daughter, making her breakfast, eating your own. And then she began to yell for me, and you told her I was sleeping, but we know that I was nursing the baby in our bedroom. I would nurse him back to sleep, and then you would take your leave, and I would appear from the end of the dark hallway to begin the day with her.

But it began before this, the day. Or it was always already happening. The baby has made the divisions of night and day arbitrary. And now the days grow shorter, and there is more darkness and we are awake for much of it. He was, again, agitated and struggling to breathe through his congested nose, and we turned on a humidifier and stuck that terrible bulb up his nostrils, and I nursed him before he could wake his sister. Did you fall asleep after that? Did I? I listened to some radio program through headphones to drown out the sound of his sniffling.

Did we touch this morning? Yesterday morning, we did. I touched your back, your shoulder. You slid your foot over to mine. I think we stayed this way for a moment before you rose. You were up too early, so you went on a run before our daughter woke. She cried out just as you were leaving for work, and I know that you heard her, and I know that you had time for her, but you left anyway. I decided to let you go, not to mention it when I saw you that evening.

No, we did not touch this morning. At least not in bed. Our daughter woke forty minutes earlier than normal, and I was prepared to let her sob for me in her room until the usual time, but you were up anyway so got her. We did not touch, but you kissed me goodbye as I nursed her on the couch. I texted you later to tell you that there was a man in a car outside of the house smoking crack. The baby was waking, and our daughter was watching television, and outside the house in a fancy car, a man was smoking crack. It could have been heroin. You wouldn't get the text until the end of the day, but I needed to tell you about this thing I saw

happening, I needed you to see it with me. The baby was crying, and I wanted to be very sure I was seeing what I thought I was seeing. And our daughter was also crying because there were real people *and* puppets on the television show and she only wanted the puppets.

I called the police. I felt stupid for doing it, but I have become a person who doesn't want a man to do drugs outside of her house where her children are living. I recalled that early this morning, much earlier, I heard on the radio that a bomb went off in a London subway. A woman was interviewed, and she said that she had nearly been trampled as people ran away, and there was a woman under the masses of people—three layers deep, the woman said—who was yelling that she was pregnant, and there was a young boy whose face was bleeding. His face had been smashed is what the woman said. This had made its way into my dreams, I think, but I'm not sure. Is it possible that the man who was interviewing her advised her to get help, to talk to someone about her feelings? Do people say this to one another on the radio?

The baby has made the divisions of night and day incomprehensible. Some days, I can keep a handle on it. I know when it is morning. I feel I have slept through something like the night, and I have woken into something like the day. But with the baby's cold—you know how hard it is for me to be up all night with him and then to take on the other child as soon as he goes back to sleep. There were mornings, even as recent as last spring, when I could lie in bed and listen to the news. I could gently wake up. Our daughter would sometimes sleep late, and while I should've been getting ready for work, I would linger in bed, surrounded by pillows, the smell of your cologne and coffee still in the air. And before we had these children, you would leave so early, and I would sleep for another hour, sometimes two.

You say that, even now, even in our happiness together, you almost always wake in despair. For you, the mornings are the hardest. I once took that personally because for me, when I met you, the mornings became much easier. I no longer felt as if I was waking to the consequences of a terrible decision, and it hurt me that you still felt this way. But how can I ever know how you really feel? How can we, even in this intimacy we have, this unique and rare intimacy, know the tenor of each other's fear?

Tonight, by the sandbox you made for our daughter, I asked how you managed your thoughts about this "baby season," as we call it. You said you take it one day at a time, and while this would sound glib coming out of any other person's mouth, I know it is true for you. But what I did not ask was how this is possible when one is so uncertain when a day ends and another begins.

A STOVE FOR MY MOTHER

ANALIA COLFFER

[POETRY]

As all afternoons, my sister, my mother and I are looking for thick and dry branches in the woods. My mother lets me carry no more than one branch because of their weight, but she is carrying lots of them above her head, and we start our way back home. On the next day, after school, I find my mother cooking in the yard using all the branches we brought the day before—she is making jelly to sell. My sister and I know how to make it perfectly since we've been doing it for years, so we run and take over her job. While cooking, my mother always gets burned with the fire. I wonder if it's expensive to buy a stove. I realize it must be because if not we would have one. After we take over the cooking, she runs out to her customer's house. As a cosmetologist, she has to go to their houses in order to cut their hair. She says, "Be careful. I love you both." I wish she did not worry about us too much. After all, next year I will be six.

LIKE A PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

[POETRY]

or chaff erupting from split wheat,
though if I were in the storm's path—

practicing my dying or unburying
my daughter from our wind-wracked

house just to bury her again in an equally
unforgiving earth—I'm sure no metaphor

would suffice. This is not the sky
our grandmothers taught us to pray to;

this canvas of bald trees & splintered
schools not like anything

we can shape a childhood from.
Harvey, Irma, Maria. The intimacy

of naming without knowing. I don't know
where the line is between empathy

& the world. I imagine the revolver of her
tiny body misfiring over and over into

a savage wind. A darkness so dark it hurts
to see the other side through it.

CRUSTACEAN

DIANA ADAMS

[POETRY]

What would you like to call
this place that we've invented
Kissing Meadow, Aboreal Splendor
I was hoping for darker start
lightning struck here last year
I pulled a gun on the waiter once
& there was a brush with perjury
so let's agree to disappoint each other
from here on in, this place is fake
even the chimney is not real
it's just an after image
from the movie I shot here
chronicling my life
as a sea urchin

CORD

LYNN DOMINA

[POETRY]

My brother saved for success. He saved his savings and his savings grew. He saved string from a broken necklace, rubber bands from newspapers, straw from the barn floor. He saved his family from disaster. Holding the thrumming umbrella above his own head, he saved his daughter from lightning strikes. He saved tomatoes from bottom rot and corn from weevils. He saved hollow bones for a dog and unwashed tuna cans for cats. For the birds he saved berries and bacon grease, and he saved the smells in his shut up kitchen. He saved his son from anger, and his own twinges of rage he saved in a metal bucket for another son to tip over as he dangled by a short cord from his closet door.

IT IS BEAUTIFUL THAT THEY HAVE TO DISAPPEAR

ANTHONY DIPIETRO

[POETRY]

Frederick Seidel, "Downtown"

This. This story. This is the story of
our first Fourth of July. The sky
a puff of gray with bloodless thunderbursts. We ride
bikes to marblehead, a symbol of your
hairless neck, and sit on a low stone wall,
symbol of your careless jeans. Or let me
say this: each individual stone foreshadows
your future infidelities. Your body
smaller than mine and cradled
by my legs and arms, yes, I'd undress
you here and now if you dared ask. But no.
This firework show, an image of pleasure
delayed. Behind us, boston skyline
signifies beauty we can
not afford. Sailboats, too, lie in wait. Far ahead
the city's display glows red in smoke and fog
like distant sparks from a campfire. Lightning,
brief and tight, splits the night. I'll call the bolts
white fractures. There's no space
between us, touching at the lap, the lips. More lightning
tears through gunpowder stars over
and over until it ends, and always
something else begins. In this case, rain.
No, rain is insufficient: a storm
of Old Testament wrath. Our bikes
are no match for this flood. Mud spatters
onto our backs, soaks our clothes:
a parable of passion and a sign.

Back at your house, we pull and tug
at sneakers, we toss everything together in the wash,
which sounds like overlapping sighs. We kiss
in the hallway, can't decide where we'll
make love—the shower, the bed?
Not wanting to wait for hot water,
not knowing the weight of one choice or another,
we don't wait. Quickly,
five Julys pass by like pairs of headlights
on the marblehead causeway
and we are distant as two darkneses:
One before sparks. One after the burning.

NEW YEAR'S, SONOMA COAST

JACQUES RANCOURT

[POETRY]

We drive up
the coast. It's your birthday.
It's New Year's.
An occasion to reflect
on your goodness.
I wanted a cabin
in the redwoods. A place
where sap oozes
from burls onto
roofs. There's an ocean
we can hear it
but the fog does not
burn off & the foghorn blares
indistinctly. Just yesterday
the demonstrator
in the city: *AIDS was not a disease,*
it was the cure. Mostly we stay
in bed shoulder-blades
to chest. Sometimes
we drink red wine. Eat cereal.
Sometimes sex.
You touch my skin
& it prickles. The heart paces
in place. Winds down
temporarily. We watch a row
of turkeys drill down a hill
& tumble
to the bottom. You get up
to piss. When I can't picture
their faces bruised

like film negatives
from light I give them each
your name.
From the bathroom
you cough phlegm into
a blue, porcelain bowl.

FIVE GUYS FIVE NIGHTS

ANTHONY DIPIETRO

[POETRY]

[BECAUSE THE WINE STORE CLOSSES AT 9]

brazilian rum smells like banana. it pairs well
with grapefruit. nudging my nose
with his nose he tells my
musty shadow “you smell like a drunk
brazilian boy.” then he finds my mouth.

[BECAUSE THERE IS MORE THAN ONE KIND OF ADDICTION]

when the doorman nods, turn right
down a long panelled hallway. elevator up to 8.
the ash gray door 8M will be open slightly. dark inside
except for the flicker of candles. there you’ll find it,
flesh. and after familiar explosions the flush will fade.

[BECAUSE ISLAND LIVING GETS LONELY]

he makes me wait. in the kitchen
for oil to bubble. he cuts vegetables after
they lay all night dressed in hot citrus. he makes
me taste lime on his fingers. vast windows
wide open. no sheets on the bed. he makes me.

[BECAUSE I TOOK FOR GRANTED THE COMFORT OF A BED]

black fabric cradles my back. suspended
by chain to hooks to basement beams. my wrists bound
loosely. he whispers about where he’ll place his
weight. under my blindfold I feel where he shifts,
the mild motion of air against my forearm hair.

[BECAUSE EVEN MY BELOVED HAS A DARK SIDE]

in the club under dungeon red bulbs and the pulse
of industrial music so masc it'd make a tiger jump
and run. it fills my ears with metal. I can't hear
his harness rivets clang against mine or the slurp of his lips
or the bathroom stall door, which slams shut behind us.

REVERIE

CHARLOTTE COVEY

[POETRY]

when you press
inside me, i think
of your daughter, how
she is only three years
younger than i.
i imagine you walking
her down the aisle,
imagine you worrying
about her, holding her
as any father should. all the while,
we are moaning, and you
are whispering dirty
in my ear, and i whisper
in my head, *his
daughter is three
years younger
than i, his daughter is
three years younger than
i*, until it becomes
etched on the walls of my
memory. after, when you pull
away, spent, and i clean
up white musk with my
fingers, i imagine her,
try to picture your face as hers
in my mind. and i wonder
what makes me so very
much older than she is
in just three years.

SILENCE AFTER SOUND

CARA PETERHANSEL

[POETRY]

You ask me if I'm sick again—
again, hushed, like it's a habit
I've been trying hard to kick.
The words are sour, you
shy away from them.

You mean, am I infected?
Is there something leaking
from my pores, maybe those
memories I gave to you of
how I used to be, now spilling
onto your chest, ripping up my
cells like too-sharp shards of air,
splitting up my lungs, showing
all the flesh I've scarred?

You ask me why I read those books
if they do this to me. I tell you
it's not her. My mind was already
turning soft and tasteless—
bruised and left to sit on an
empty table, throbbing at me,
before she gave me the words
to recognize the rotting pear.

Your chest is sweaty and my ear is
like a suction cup against uneven
glass. Your heart is beating the
way it does only after you come,
I watched you, your caught
breath, half-moan, closed eyes and
now you're limp against me, cold

and I don't answer you, just listen
to the fervent beating of your
satisfied heart.

MEGA-FAUNA

CATHERINE WING

[POETRY]

for Louise McGarry and Simon Armitage

Though my father was large
I am larger. My tongue weighs
8000 pounds and is the size
of an adult male elephant.
With this burden in my mouth
I admit, I'm not much of a talker.

Though I have eyes
the distance between them is legion
and I have learned to see
via an intricate series of moans and sighs
which moan and sigh
back at me off the ocean floor.

In this way the world
has come to seem
wrapped in complaint,
a litany of sorrowing echoes
collecting in my backscatter.

The movement of my mind
makes sugar out of sunlight
but it is so slow sometimes—
it takes three seconds
just to open my mouth—
that I don't bother.

The shipwreck of me
when I finally hit bottom
will support an entire ecosystem

and it will take the various eels
and hagfishes decades
to pick my bones clean but
I don't take much comfort in that.

BELIEF

KELLY MOFFETT

[POETRY]

A rhythmic patter of waves,
a god-by-any-measure,
a blue and green photo
hanging in the farthest
museum corner. We trusted

our observation of sky,
each cloud a god—

no longer a bride
of the morning-after

or a small wave
and a mouth open

but a bit of seed
somewhere on someone's
lawn wanting wind.

TRULY
ADAM TEDESCO
[POETRY]

Bad things happen to bad people
I tell myself and feel a flattening
as most of what I am loses one dimension
or another while reading this blueprint

Beyond good and evil there's reasons why
the work of sorting never ceases
Bleeding the rabbit
for the purified antibody
of indifference
That's what I call the process of remembering
the shed amidst this warren of flowers
that all of my love crawls in and out from
underneath autonomy, a rock bottom
Twice a year with a toothbrush I clean the floor
because like owls, owning viciousness
ignored in favor of their adoration
your god might not be dead yet

THE BUDDHA IN THE WALLS

JOHN BLAIR

[POETRY]

Every wall you see you
 want to sound for hollows
like fingertip-tapping
 a fontanel until
something gives up a ghost.
 You still live in the same
cold sweat that you've lived in
 as long as you have lived,
a long beatitude
 of withholding, a bliss
of hiding-behind like
 a monk bricked in a wall
to become a Buddha
 in the flesh, mummified
while still alive, eating
 only bark and bitter
roots and drinking tea steeped
 with wood varnish for one
thousand days of dwindling
 then walled up with a bell
and a bamboo breathing
 tube, ringing the bell once
a day until the day
 when the bell doesn't ring
and they pull out the tube
 and seal you newborn up.
Your mindful moments shine
 you like a carillon's
brassy cups into six
 octaves of undisturbed
to keep you tapping. Not
 because of the Buddhas

but because of the walls.

Because there are no walls.

THE DRY CLEANER'S WIFE

JENNY RAJ

[FICTION]

MRS. AHN TURNED AWAY FROM HER DAUGHTER. GRACE, WHO turns sixteen this week, was trying on the white party dress her mother had spent all week sewing. Mrs. Ahn had stayed late at the dry cleaning shop every evening, staring out of the large plate glass window into the emptying parking lot as she worked the foot pedal of the sewing machine. It was fall in New England and there was snow in the forecast. But Mrs. Ahn had said she felt capable of driving home on her own and asked Mr. Ahn to go home, give dinner to their daughters, and supervise their homework. She enjoyed these silent nights by herself, alone with her thoughts and the hum of the sewing machine. She could dream freely without Mr. Ahn by her side. Last night she'd painstakingly sewed tiny silver sequins on the bodice of the sleeveless dress, picturing Grace sparkling as she twirled in it.

But unlike her mother, Grace was not made for dancing. Her shoulders were broad, her calves muscular from long afternoons on the lacrosse field. From behind the faded curtain that demarcated the changing area of her mother's sewing business, Grace shifted her weight and dug her large toes into the worn bathmat. Mrs. Ahn frowned at her daughter.

"Grace. Stop fidgeting so much. Don't you like your dress?"

The daughter's smile was dutiful. "Yes, *umma*."

"That doesn't sound very sincere. I spent five nights sewing this dress. The least you can do is be appreciative."

"No. I mean, yes. I really like it, *umma*. Thank you."

Grace's voice sounded hollow. She stared at an irregular brown rust stain on the mirror. Following her gaze, Mrs. Ahn's eyes fell instead upon her daughter's reflection. The rust mark blurred the left side of Grace's waist, half-obscur-ing the unflattering image behind it. The stiff fabric of the white dress folded into creases at the waist, bisecting Grace's soft belly in two. Grace's large thighs bulged against

the back of the dress so that small stitches showed at the seams. In choosing the pattern, Mrs. Ahn had imagined a sophisticated sheath flowing over her daughter's curves, but she now saw it was the wrong choice. Her lips tightened. She moved her gaze to her daughter and began cataloguing her flaws. Grace's skin was coarse and dark. Her eyes were set too close together. Her lower lip was always wet and chapped from her habit of absentmindedly chewing on it. She wore her only asset, her thick wavy hair, in an unbecoming ponytail.

When Grace was born, Mrs. Ahn had named her Bo-ah—"refined jewel" in Korean. She had been surprised by the shining infant the postpartum nurse dropped into her lap. The baby had beamed up at her, and Jewel seemed the perfect name.

But this name was the only thing Mr. Ahn had rejected about Grace prior to adopting her. He wanted to rename her "Grace" in keeping with his religion, and Mrs. Ahn was in no position to object. Thus Bo-ah became Grace, and a month after she came of age, Mrs. Ahn married Mr. Ahn and took his name. She hadn't heard anyone call her by her first name, Hye-bin, in 15 years.

Other than her Korean name, Mr. Ahn had easily accepted everything else about Grace. This was in keeping with his placid nature; he approached customer complaints, broken equipment, and the rare racist insult with equanimity. Or servility, Mrs. Ahn sometimes thought to herself while she watched her elderly husband bowing as he handed change back to a surprised customer. In either case, she could not say the same of herself.

Grace was hopping from foot to foot. She searched for her mother's eyes in the mirror.

"*Umma?* I...um, kind of have to go to the bathroom?"

Mrs. Ahn sighed. She tucked an errant strand of hair behind her daughter's ear, letting her fingers brush against her daughter's cheek. Grace smiled at her mother, but Mrs. Ahn's eyes hardened as she looked down again at her daughter's figure.

"*A-i-ssi!* My god Grace, you've been eating too much of that American junk food. I measured you for this dress just last month, and you are already too fat to fit properly into it. What boy will ask you to the prom when you look like this?"

"But the prom isn't until . . ."

"Too late, too late. I have a rush order to finish tonight and won't have time to let out your dress. You'll have to diet before your party tomorrow. No dinner."

Grace chewed on her lip. Mrs. Ahn unzipped her.

"It's for your own good. Trust *umma*. Now go change. And be careful when you take the dress off. I don't want any burst seams."

Grace stepped behind the curtains with a slow nod. Mrs. Ahn sighed loudly and walked toward the front of the store, letting her hand trail idly through the sheaves of plastic-covered clothing that hung from the garment conveyor. A deep red dress caught her eye. She stopped in front of the clothes and began to flip through them more slowly, pausing here and there at the more expensive garments. She could feel the suppleness of the silk, the warm comfort of the fur coats through their covers. But, newly pristine, they were separated from her fingers by a cold plastic film that protected them from her rough callused hands and the invisible oils on her skin. Mrs. Ahn stared down at her hands, rubbing them against one another.

The doorbell chimed. It was Mr. Newman, a businessman who seemed to Mrs. Ahn too glamorous for their small northeastern town. He brought in Italian suits and English shirts almost every week. One night Mrs. Ahn had examined the labels and understood his clothing was custom made. Mr. Newman now sauntered toward her, his fair skin bright against his dark wavy hair. His blonde wife sometimes came in with a cashmere sweater or a velvet holiday dress for their young daughter, but usually Mr. Newman came in by himself in the mid-afternoon drag. “Coffee and dry cleaning,” he liked to joke, “my afternoon treat.” There was something about the way he said the word “treat” that made Mrs. Ahn blush and look down.



She remembered this feeling from years ago, when she was fifteen and a sophomore at the Sookmyung Girls’ High School. It was a prestigious private school in Seoul and Mrs. Ahn—Hye to her friends back then—the star student. Her friends’ fathers were lawyers, businessmen, doctors. Hye’s father worked at an international accounting firm and regularly traveled abroad, bringing back treats like scented tea from London or tinned chocolates from Paris. Hye’s friends had looked at her with envy.

At school Hye and her friends wore schoolgirl uniforms: starched white cotton blouse, tartan skirt, navy knee socks. Their maids polished their Mary Janes each day after school. In the mornings, Hye liked to brush her sleek hair for exactly ten minutes to bring out its shine. Makeup was forbidden, but she hid a powder compact in her backpack with which she dusted her small heart-shaped face throughout the day. The rice powder blended easily into her pale skin.

Before every economics class Hye would pinch her cheeks and bite her lips, then, lips swollen, slowly saunter past the new *seonsang-nim* Mr. Pak, trailing her fingers on his desk. He had started teaching economics that fall and attracted

some attention for his unusual height, thick hair, and the way he curved his upper lip when he smiled. When Mr. Pak smiled at Hye his eyes lingered on her small breasts and made their way down almost to her pale knees, which flashed white between her pleated skirt and her dark knee-high socks. Hye would quickly look down, but when she lifted her eyes again he would still be looking at her. At first she was flattered, but then she noticed he looked at other girls this way too.

The economics lectures Mr. Pak gave were simplistic and somewhat labored. Hye almost always understood his point before he reached it. Some of the other girls pretended to need help to get extra attention, but Hye knew that was not the way. She started dropping by Mr. Pak's classroom after school.

"*Seonsang-nim*. Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, Hye. Great work on your exam last week."

"Thank you, *Seonsang-nim*." Hye paused and nibbled on her lower lip. She smiled up at her teacher. "I am lucky. My father works at Deloitte. He helps me understand the difficult subjects."

"Your father must be very intelligent."

"He is. He is a senior partner."

"Ah. Then I respect him. He is a successful man. I am only an economics teacher."

"He always says he is looking for good people to join his team. I can put in a good word for you."

"Really? Then I am in your debt. But how do you know I am a good person?"

Though her heart was pounding, Hye looked down demurely. She was enjoying this game.

"My father is easy to convince. I am his favorite. I can get almost anything I want from him, if I ask the right way."

Mr. Pak smiled then, his lips curving into a dimple. "How does he like to be asked?"

Hye smiled too. "I have my ways."



The small house smelled of garlic and frying oil. Grace had requested her father make her favorite Korean foods for her birthday, and the dining table was now laden with spicy napa cabbage, dried sardines, seaweed salad, sesame-flecked bean sprouts, pickled ramps, stir-fried rice cakes, grilled beef skewers, blackened *nori* crisps, and a host of other savory dishes. Mrs. Ahn shook her head at the gluttony of it all. Other than their small family—Grace, her younger sister Mary, Mrs. Ahn, and Mr. Ahn—only three of Grace's friends from her lacrosse team

would be joining them for dinner. Grace wasn't the social butterfly Mrs. Ahn had been.

Mrs. Ahn walked into the kitchen, where Mr. Ahn was frying a batch of crispy dumplings. "A-i-ssi! How much food are you making? This is too much."

Mr. Ahn smiled placidly at his wife. "It's all right. Tonight is Grace's night. I want her to be happy."

"She can't eat, you know. She barely fits into her dress as it is."

Mr. Ahn smiled again. "Don't worry. Grace told me about the dress, and I had it let out. She can eat as much as she likes tonight."

Mrs. Ahn's color rose. "Where did you take the dress? It was a rush order, right? One-day turnaround. How much did it cost? I could have done it. Why didn't you discuss this with me?"

"Please don't fight. It is Grace's birthday. You've made a beautiful dress, but you had the rush order last night. I didn't want you to stay up late. Please don't worry. It wasn't too expensive."

"How do you even know what is expensive or not?" Mrs. Ahn was surprised by the vehemence in her own voice. "Not you. You're not smart enough." She held up her hand. "Look at my fingers. See these calluses? I've been sewing every single night this week. You think you're the only one who wants Grace to be happy?" She swiped at a plate on the counter. Squares of sour radish *kimchi* flew toward the ground, bouncing off of the cabinets before landing in red splatters on the linoleum floor.

They stared at the mess.

"See what you made me do?"

"I will clean it up. Go get changed please. Quickly. Let me do this before the kids see it." Mr. Ahn smiled with his eyes on the floor. "Let me take care of it. Everything will be okay."

Mrs. Ahn turned and walked into the dining room, where Grace and Mary were setting the table in silence. Grace wore her white dress, which now skimmed smoothly over her body. Her hair was neatly pinned back and fell in glossy waves upon her shoulders. She'd powdered her nose and colored her lips a pale pink. Two years younger, Mary wasn't yet allowed to wear make-up, but Mrs. Ahn detected powder on her pale face as well.

"Mary! What do you have on your face!" Mrs. Ahn walked up to her daughter and swiped a finger on her cheek. She rubbed her fingers together. "You know you're not allowed to wear make-up."

Mary kept polishing the utensils. Grace set down a glass and walked over. "Umma, I just put a bit of powder on Mary's cheeks. That's all."

"You know it's against the rules. Mary is too young for make-up."

“But it’s hardly make-up! And we’re at home. It’s not like she’s secretly doing this behind your back.”

“Rules are rules! I make the rules because I know what’s good for you. I’m doing this for your own good and you argue with me?” Grace and Mary listened silently, their hands still. “Mary. Go wash your face!”

Mary set down the rag in her hand and turned to walk upstairs. Grace followed her. Mrs. Ahn stared at their retreating backs. She’d had high hopes for her daughters when they first came into the world, with their pert noses and their soft lips like shining petals. But she had been disappointed. Both girls had grown thick and stocky during adolescence. Mary had inherited Mr. Ahn’s bulbous nose and fleshy lips. Meanwhile, Grace, whose slender body had always brought a smile of recognition to Mrs. Ahn’s lips, had expanded in recent years as though willing itself to favor her adoptive father and half-sister. The three also resembled each other in spirit. They were openly satisfied with their low, quiet lives; a religious man, Mr. Ahn encouraged his daughters to be happy with little, and they accepted his teachings. Mrs. Ahn felt this as a rebuke to her own nature. Sometimes she noticed her daughters blinking slowly at her, as if willing her to complacency.

“Grace!” Mrs. Ahn yelled toward the stairs, loud enough for Mr. Ahn to hear from the kitchen. “Your dad told me about the dress. Don’t use this as an excuse to overeat tonight. You’re still too fat. You have to learn to think about your future. Someday I won’t be here to do it for you.”

Without turning to look at her mother, Grace nodded her head as she continued up the stairs.



The intense hunger was the first indication something was wrong. Hye had never been a big eater, preferring to pick her way through the piquant *banchan* which accompanied Korean meals instead of eating much rice or meat. She had started watching her weight in elementary school after hearing her father complain about how off-putting he found heavy women. So she was surprised that spring when she found herself craving hamburgers, fries, and milkshakes, greasy yet bland western food she normally stayed away from.

As the trees began to bud and cherry blossoms began to appear in the flower arrangements the florist delivered to their high-rise each week, Hye gave in to her cravings. Her body began to bloat. Her normally small face grew puffy. Her hands, usually cold, became hot and inflamed. She gave off a steamy scent, like the wheat buns that street vendors sold from bamboo steamers during the

long Korean winter. When her uniform no longer buttoned around her waist, she stepped into Mr. Pak's classroom.

"*Seonsang-nim*. Good afternoon."

Mr. Pak glanced up briefly.

"Hye. I'm very busy today."

"Yes, I know. But I cannot keep this secret anymore."

Mr. Pak's eyes remained on the sheaf of papers in his hands.

"I do not have any secrets with you."

Hye bowed deeply. "*Seonsang-nim*. Please listen. I don't know what to do."

Mr. Pak shuffled his papers noisily. "Silly girl. What do you want from me? I had fun but you are not for me. Now go. I need time to grade these exams. If I do not have enough time to grade these exams, I may make a mistake when I grade yours."

Hye bit down on her bottom lip, her small white teeth flashing.

"*Seonsang-nim*. Please don't make me go away."

"There is nothing else I can do for you, Hye." Mr. Pak finally looked into her eyes. "You said you wanted to, remember? You can't take that back. Now leave me be."

The students of the Sookmyung Girls' High School were surprised one afternoon a few weeks later when they went to change for gym class. In the back corner of the girls' changing room, under a bench on which the girls sat as they pulled on their gym shorts, they found a bright red pool of paint. It was red tempura paint, the kind that neatly lined the shelves of the art room in plastic squeeze bottles. The puddle had an untidy but determined look, as if a kindergartener had been tasked with squeezing out a perfect red circle. A message written in cursive on a scrap of paper next to the paint explained the vandalism: "Here is where Mr. Pak spilled my virgin blood on November 29, 2001, at 6:23pm." It was signed Hye-bin Kim.

Of course there had been a scandal, though through the efforts of the school administrators and parent community the news had not spread outside of the school. Mr. Pak had been speedily removed from his post. The students were cautioned never to speak of Hye's transgression lest her shame rub off on their own good names. Hye was also removed from school. Her parents sent her to stay with poor relations in a suburb outside of Ulsan. Hye was allowed to bring one suitcase with her. Her parents had confiscated her cell phone and deleted her email account. She felt forsaken as she walked through the living room toward the waiting driver. Though her mother had embraced her at the door, her father hadn't looked up from his newspaper.



Hye gave birth that fall. She had been nervous, but Bo-ah came into the world easily, virtually slipping out of her body. Having never had to manage any affairs other than her schoolwork, Hye was surprised by the number of forms she had to fill out. She stared at the birth certificate for a long time before finally writing *Bo-ah Kim* under “Name.” Bo-ah was the name of a popular Korean actress, and Hye suspected naming a child after an actress might be seen as gauche. But she had no one to turn to for advice, and the baby really seemed so perfect, like a polished gemstone.

Hye remembered the first moments after meeting her daughter in the sterile suite of the private hospital. She stroked the baby’s tiny hand and marveled at her neat features. She wished she could tell someone about the surprising pride she felt, but no one was there to share it with. Her parents had paid for her hospital stay but were too ashamed of their daughter to visit. She had not seen them in five months.

One afternoon a few months later, Hye was breastfeeding Bo-ah when her aunt handed her the phone. Her aunt treated her cordially because Hye’s parents sent her money each month to host Hye and her child. But she did not seem happy to have Hye in her house. Hye’s mother had not kept in touch with her sister after her marriage, and the coolness between the sisters had seeped between aunt and niece as well. Prior to giving birth, Hye sometimes caught her aunt frowning at her protruding belly as if in fear it would bring misfortune into her own small world.

Hye’s mother’s voice sounded cool over the phone line.

“Hye. You have a second cousin in America. Connecticut. He is older, but he has a steady business and wants to have a wife. He is a good man. He will accept you and your child. We think it is a good proposal. The flight is next week. We will send your auntie the information.”

Hye listened to her mother quietly, feeling a loosening in her chest as her daughter suckled at her breast. She enjoyed breastfeeding, particularly the softening that happens when the milk let down. Today she imagined the tears that wouldn’t rise to her eyes instead flowing downwards, through her breasts, and into the mouth of her shining daughter. Hye’s mother waited for her response. The line was silent. Hye closed her eyes.

“Yes, *umma*. I will go.”



To Hye's surprise Mr. Ahn was indeed a good man. He brought flowers when he picked them up at the airport and carefully fastened Bo-ah into her new infant carseat. His Hyundai was old but well maintained. Their daughter Mary was born two years later. Hye had never seen Mr. Ahn treat the girls any differently or give any indication that one of them was not his biological child. He often expressed his gratitude for their presence in his life. His love was simple, unconditional.

Mr. Ahn was now painting snowflakes upon the plate glass window at the front of the store, his back bowed in concentration. Mrs. Ahn stared at her husband's broad back, the sparse white hair that flared around his balding head. She looked around the dry cleaning shop. The spotlessly clean glass which Mr. Ahn squeegeed each morning. The faded scrolled lettering on the glass: "Ahn's Dry Cleaning. 7 Days a Week. Good Price." She picked at a chip in the worn linoleum-lined counter.

The doorbell chimed. Mr. Newman walked through the doorway. Dust motes danced around him in the afternoon sun. He walked toward her with an even white smile. Mrs. Ahn felt rising behind her the accumulated resentment of the garments hanging from their rotating machine. They shimmered silently in their plastic sheaths like the ghosts of a future she couldn't know. She looked directly into Mr. Newman's eyes.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Newman." Mrs. Ahn bit her lower lip. Her fingers brushed against Mr. Newman's as she took his claim ticket. "In for your afternoon treat?"

time or haste. Or we don't.
We don't make it. When will that be?

DWELLING

MELISSA DICKEY

[POETRY]

His skin bright where it slapped
the terrazza, the sick sound of it,

followed by (thank god) the cry.
A small goose egg on the side

of his forehead, dime-sized, rising.
Why does darkness swallow light

and light reflect light?
In the depiction of motherhood

I forgot the fire.
Before we conceived

any children, you said:
They might die

and we'll have to survive.
I heard a parent

explain the family rule is
we don't keep secrets

from each other and this
struck me as a good rule

but I'm not certain
I have much faith anymore.

The girl's shirt says Love Love Love.
Hat carries a pompom.

GIRL IN SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

AIMEE PARKISON

[FICTION]

IF SHE'S A STACKED BLONDE LIKE HER DEAD MOTHER, SHE needs city lights' iconography in careful stiletto steps inching toward a man who will be her benefactor or her murderer. Like the police, she forgets to care.

Before she realizes he is making her dreams come true, he promises to put her in the special collector's edition, mapped out on the screening-room floor. In the dark, his powerful hands travel over her body, after a mickey, another blackout where the last thing she sees are his smiling eyes and remembers the accident, how her mother died at the window factory infused with light.

Her mother was the girl in the window. Then, the window broke and she was gone, instantly, one part of her body severed from another, by the window that trapped her.

Like the witness of a freak accident wearing Candy perfume, she recalls odd things, making bizarre connections, like the way sexual dependency smells like a Prada handbag dropped onto an unmade bed. Her heroes are thieves, men and women brave enough to steal a girl from her life. Few are willing to steal the ones giving themselves away.

Even while getting high, she avoids tattoos until an inventive and demanding casting director convinces her to have a permanent garter etched high on her delicate thigh. After the tattoo, she cries elegantly, and he takes photographs.

The tattoo throbbing, she falls asleep in a brick-walled bedroom on a stained mattress heaped with clothing of women she doesn't know.

On the brick wall are acrylic portraits of smiling dogs painted by an amateur artist with no talent, yet the eyes are so beautiful like her mother's eyes painted with liquid liner in the style of Cleopatra. The artist is here, not speaking, just painting the dogs' eyes, again and again, in the portraits. He paints them with layers and layers of liquid eyeliner stolen from her makeup bag.

She rises from the bed, covered in sweat, and wants to take a bath but finds the blue bathroom with its vintage clawfoot tub is full of video cameras, green lights blinking in the high corners of the ceiling. She wants to cry, again, but stops, remembering her presence, what her eyes look like with streaked mascara and thinks this might be her chance to recreate herself in another's eyes, for a stranger to record the details of what happens.

She bathes, gazing into the camera while lathering her hips and thighs with pink soap, taking special care with the tender tattoo.

Healing in bloody bands, she remembers growing up in a house full of dogs in Lexington, where her father sang ballads to her mother all through the night. But after her mother died, she witnessed the last days of her childhood when the dogs were sent away, her father stopped singing, and the world became dark until she began to lighten, strangely, from within.

BEGINNING

ANN DEVILBISS

[POETRY]

First day,
new year, and the world is noisy,
sun-touched.

The sky
sends down a chill wind, to keep me
moving.

I am
a shade and a body, sewn together
by witchcraft.

The staircase
and the wrong choices, the rowdy pull
of danger:

the whiskey and the devil
in collusion, raw whispers deciding how
to mark me.

Pain like
electric needle pins wired straight
to the bone, then

the wound,
and the dull insult of hurt around
the red hole.

When
I met sorrow, I did the best I could,
breathing.

A hound
with all its teeth is lucky, and alike dogs
flock together.

See me
loosed from the tethers of regret,
see how I rise.

ZADY SMITH SINGS LADY DAY

CORDELIA HANEMANN

[POETRY]

A Found Poem, more or less

Get you a dog, girl, a little dog.
A dog don't cheat. A dog don't lie.
A dog remind you of you.
They give everthing they got,
risk it all, and love you through it.

Get you all dressed up now.
Shut that broken misused girl
you used to be—a new you.
No confusions—you get your fur,
your pearls, your diamond smile.
You boil an egg in twinset and pearls.

Your girl days are done; your daughter
days are done; your you days begun.
Nobody be your mother. You a woman
now; you your own woman.

Don't let nobody stop you
on 110th to tell you nothin, not even
how much they loved you at Carnegie Hall;
take out your pearled cigarette box
and hand them a smoke. You good at givin out
smokes. You give it all away. It stream
from you like rivers rollin to the sea:
love, song, smokes, dough. Everyone want
a piece of you. You let 'em have it. It all
you can do to keep ahold of your mink.

You so you, unattached, un beholdin,
floatin; no one tell you when to come
or when to go or when to leave, who
to see, where to go, and you, you don't
have to listen even when they punch
you in the gut. You the woman that got
your own.

Men come and go and mostly leave you
waiting—wanting, so if some lover man
break your heart or your face, you trust
your voice, open your mouth:
you Lady Day; you not afraid
to look for love in all the places.

With or without escorts, you gettin there;
you always gettin there, except
when those exceptions when exceptional
things seem to happen that simply can't
be helped. When the music come, the song,
all is forgiven: you even forgive yourself.

Make yourself up girl, your stage demands it:
hair, face, it all a kind of armor. They lookin
for your soul in that face, painted a protection,
beautiful mask, death mask. Take a look, lookin
right at you, right through your song, crossing
over the border between you and them.

What it like Lady Day?
What it like standing up there,
singin your heart out?

Eatin your heart out.

Is nobody out there in the dark at all?

A voice got to feel its way.

Throw your pearls out there before
swines in the dark.

*This song ain't a June-Moon-Croon-Tune;
it a story, this song a story
about real lives, pain and heartbreak.*

You not a goddam jukebox. You sing it
when you want, like you want. You turn that room
into a church—hush, it the last song or the only song.
And you never done with that song.
It all of you, out there, givin everthing you got.

A PORCELAIN CONFESSION

MERKIN KARR

[POETRY]

the romans once believed that
early christians stole babies
and baked them into bread
eating the children's flesh

And sometimes communion tastes like colonialism & I'm
almost ashamed at how easy it is for me to swallow.

you once told me you
didn't believe in god
and i dont think I ever
really digested that

And the first time he touched me I both died and sang praise.
The second time abducted me.

our mother who
art in the pulpit,
hallowed be her
name. her kingdom
will never come

And at age eight I made racist comments in support of a racist
choir teacher & I was so guilty that I wrote a letter the next day
apologizing to my class & for a long time I used to feel good about that.

for a long time
i thought that
made it okay

WHEN I VISIT EMILY DICKINSON'S GRAVE

EMMALEE HAGARMAN
[POETRY]

it is possible to forget June
sun, blister blood, sweat stinging
my ankles, and reach

across the black gate to touch her
tombstone if I want. Girls

take selfies beside the lilacs
and little notes above Emily's
name, send to moms. *Are you*

all good? Forget the old
man who takes off his

shirt, covers a grave and punches
it, hard as he can, beside me.
His grief. The world

tells me in so many ways
it was my fault: a woman

walking across creaky floorboards
in Amherst's bookstore says,
"No one could sneak up

on you in here, huh?" *How
could you let this happen?*

Anything's a trigger—blue
Gatorade at the gas station, the
kind the nurse made me

drink after taking Plan B.
A man who does not
let go of my hand after
he shakes it. The night
I was raped, blood

seeped through my jeans
as I walked back

to my room. *Are you all
good?* he asked as he zipped
up his pants and he meant it,

if I remember right. If
I stand under cold water

long enough for my blue
fingers to forget they
held his minutes before he

held me down on the bed.
When a man tells me *Life*

*doesn't give you trigger
warnings*, I bite my cheek hard
enough to draw blood

trying not to ask, what happens
if I forget? What happens

at night, when I hear the door
knob of my hotel room jiggle,
the thud of a body trying

to get inside? When I throw
open the door, the drunk

girl who thinks this is her
room jumps when she sees
the look on my face.

MEAT
KATIE BERTA
[POETRY]

The two tendrils
of octopus on your plate
might remind you:

you, too,
would curl, darken,
solidify
under pressure of heat.

Delicacy
is dependent on the measure
of pain
it allows us
to ignore—the complicated
embroidery for which some
young woman's fingers
had to callous.
The pleasure we get from
the dress, when she finishes:
the fruit
of the meat
of a brain
so like the ones that are scrambled
with eggs or cut out
with the animal's tongue
and eaten
or are covered
in cheese or capers
or chili sauce.

It's like
the way you decide a steak is done:
by comparing its tenderness
to the palm of your hand,
the part just under your thumb.
Or the way
your body becomes just parts,
is rent, butchered,
when some young man yells
to you
from across a street.

How does it feel to be a harvest?
How does it feel to be
meat? You are a luxury,
but it does not feel
luxurious.

What does the octopus think
before he's caught?
Before, the octopus was consumed
with cracking open the crab
he'd captured on the bed
of his reef. Before,
all the octopus's thoughts
were consumed
by meat.

PROGENY
MAGGIE QUEENEY
[POETRY]

In unsteady firelight, we studied the arabesque clouds animated
In the plates of the yellowing page to find the girl born blue, her eyes
Two closed lines, impersonal as print or fossils. Two lasted not a month
Each, like a dream, haunt in half-recall; the river-swallowed
Boy, his small body never found after the flood returned
To earth, to the ocean where we imagined him floating
Asleep among shining bait fish and sharks, shrouded in maroon, lacelike
Seaweed, salt-glittering. He returns in nightmare, serpentine
Current wriggling out of his mouth baptizing the floor. We caught
His mud-soft hands, offered buttermilk, lard-coated bread. Our losses
Part of a larger design, true, but the sky over us was always so blue
And empty and unbound, clouds shielding what heaven we knew
Of, darkening the tally of grave mounds, the shadow so swift we were forced
To stare at the sun for what circled above, dirt greening already, year after year

SYMPATHY FOR THE HAUNTED

TANIA DE ROZARIO

[POETRY]

1. Ghosts

for Danny Torrance

They can't hurt you if you don't let them
into your head: they occupy the rooms
upstairs, pace the suites, unfold histories
in the basement, crawl underneath skins

of memory: were you still a child when
you learned your parents were capable
of despair so dark it drenched every inch
of the house in night? You can hear her

scream as he breaks doors down, wonder
what might stir in your heart, the demons
in his: It can't just be drink. *Sometimes
human places create inhuman monsters.*

2. Grief

For Amelia Vanek

Grief sits the basement, feasting on worms, gorging
on the insides of your loss. It grows your garden, feeds
your children its fruit. How many tears must one person
shed before salt corrupts the soil? How many flowers
must bloom from wounds before we start to live again?

3. Bullet

for Carol Peletier

Look at the flowers, Carol, for the new world may have none. No yellow marigolds, no white daisies blooming in the sun. Pluck up courage for tomorrow, there are things worse than death, and the body's deepest regrets cannot be counted: You had no choice, so find strength in the ragged beauty of earth. Like you, nature knows what it needs to survive, and will wipe us out entirely, before starting life anew.

SUNLIGHT COMES SHINING

ABY KAUPANG

[POETRY]

everyone tilting sunlight
the anther the fiddlehead the hycinithth
June! Everyone tilting sunlight

such tight seed our beings
leaving

a season behind

we buy a schnauzer watch Colbert wait
for the sprinkler systems & oil changes
\Mackey Daphneys & Alec Baldwin
to spill out their fume

my god what a lilac
what a lune (loon)

spring or summer
the time for healing foundation-
rebuilding is June

try it again loves
fresh starts seedlings puppies
surprise ducks in your hedge

& eggs!

so many volunteers
I know I am doomed
I've done it all

wrong

no doubt no doubt

(& so many leaves will fall from these trees

but for now!)

the neighbor John who knew these things
is dead & his wife and his child
are pantomime

no doubt no doubt

EVERYONE tilting sunlight

the urban	urban pastoral	pastoral
a myth	charming	everyone
tilting sunlight		

it's just a reaction writing
of bees & lambs

we have always written of bees & lambs

everyone always tilted to sunlight

Lula Cora Lila Harley Lily Luli
dawnstep a dog to be named is a breath on the lips
in a sign of the times in a call for a song to heal us

deepstep

is mud step

is I am always sliding

sideways

your doorstep
the always ever always recurring

invitation

control has not been here in a a while long while

write your thank-you notes

thank you

everyone tilts towards sunlight

everyone tilts towards sunlight

everyone,

right?

A LONG TIME AGO NOW

MARY ANN SAMYN

[POETRY]

Some things are to be gotten through. Some absences come out the other side.

You've had your turn at suffering.

What is the name of the little yellow dune flower? I'll be that for you.
And abiding love. Whatever Jesus said. Ok. Let's do it.

Some wives never forgive their husbands anything. They take joy in that.
What husbands do I have no idea.

Every time I hear a siren, I think of how it must have been for my father.
Striken. Alone. That's the key to every story.

When our longings coincide, we like it. And when they don't?
Seems now my mother was always away.

I drive to the lake to see the sunset for myself, and for you.
Further redemption is nice, but not necessary.

RAPT

MIRANDA CAMPBELL

[CREATIVE NONFICTION]

THREE WEEKS INTO OUR RELATIONSHIP OWEN AND I WERE coming from the beach when he suggested we go bridge jumping.

“What?” I said. He suggested jumping off a bridge the way someone suggests going to grab a bite to eat.

“Yeah, the Matanzas Inlet bridge. It’s right down the road. We’re already dressed for the occasion.” Calm radiated from his body as we threw our sandy beach towels in the bed of his truck.

“I know where it is. I’ve just never done that before.” I already felt myself coming around to the idea. I had considered myself a fearless kid, my legs covered in bruises and band aids, always trying to keep up with the boys. The gravel street that I lived on, my playground. I was a curious child, which often led to adventure, but jumping off a twenty foot tall structure into a body of water that led into the ocean, with tides that constantly changed in depth, seemed foolish.

He drove toward the bridge and I let him. When we parked and walked toward the metal railings I peered over the edge. *Hell no*. Places of great height somehow extend themselves when you’re actually doing the looking down. Owen grabbed onto the railings, pulling himself over the other side, one leg at a time. I understood he was doing this with or without me.

“C’mon,” he waved, grinning. “It’s not that bad. I’ll even go first.” I followed him, my hands beginning to sweat as they gripped the metal rail.

“Wait,” I said, prolonging the jump, making everything worse. “This is the Intracoastal.”

“Yeah, so?” He shrugged his shoulders, telling me he’d done this several times before.

“It leads into the ocean...I don’t know what’s in that water!” He waited as I reasoned with myself. “What if I jump on top of a shark?” I laughed.

“Then just start riding it!” Owen said, in both a serious and joking tone. That was trademark for him throughout high school, but now that we were more than friends, I saw it differently, appreciating it. Strange how that happens. You start to like someone and realize they’ve been this way the entire time. You’re the one who hasn’t been looking. Owen could handle almost anything; he was so easygoing. He had this invincibility that I wanted to understand and an impressive ability to add humor to everything. I thought about his playfully, volatile mouth, the way he joked with teachers and disrupted lessons, but was never actually reprimanded for any of it. Because they were looking for a break in their day too, and somehow he just knew. I looked at Owen and felt safe.

Without counting down he released and fell into the choppy, murky water, arms billowing at his sides before disappearing beneath the surface, creating a large splash in his path. Seconds later he surfaced, jerking his head to one side to sweep the hair out of his face, water droplets springing from his hair in every direction. “Your turn,” he shouted.

“I don’t know if I can do it!” I yelled, laughing at how I found myself here with him, bouncing lightly on my toes in nervousness. I really wanted to jump, to meet him down there and share in this moment. But I wasn’t sure if my want was enough. In some ways this was just a jump, nothing more. At least that’s what it was above the surface. Below, however, when that surface was broken, I knew would be an entrance into something much bigger. Different atmosphere, different creatures lurking, different rules to abide by. I knew that this was just a jump, but I also knew it was an opening into a world I’d never been to, had heard of, had seen all my life in the movies I watched, the books I read, the household I lived in. I always felt that I overanalyze everything to a dangerous degree. Analysis to the point of doubt and self-destruction. But for me, there is no other mode of going through life. That chaotic and frenetic over-thinking is where I thrive. It’s how I get things done.

For the first time, I noticed a little below and to the left of the bridge was a small seafood restaurant with seating overlooking the water. We had an audience of about ten people seated at dinner tables looking up, awaiting my departure. They collectively chanted, “Jump, jump, jump!”

I looked at him in the water, his head bobbing, bright white teeth smiling, eager for our union. I hit the cold water in less than a second, and though I wasn’t at the point where I could comfortably open my eyes to see what I’d jumped into, it felt good. When I resurfaced the first thing I found was his lips. I felt so alive. That feeling of a pulse, of being actively aware and absolutely present would define what it was like every second with Owen. Even the quieter moments.

It became our thing, jumping off whatever we could find—ledges, cliffs, speed signs stuck awkwardly out of the water for boaters—into muddy waters, and I loved it. Not because of the adrenaline rush or because it made me feel adventurous and nervy, or so I thought at the time. I loved it because it was ours. An experience and a feeling I could only ever attribute to him.

I was riding shotgun through North Carolina backwoods, leaning my head out the window of Owen’s dark green Chevy Silverado, chin resting on both of my arms. Up and up we drove, winding so many times it seemed like we’d been going nowhere for hours. I wouldn’t have minded if we were lost, not with him, not there. There was so much green. Green mountains, green grass, green leaves, green weeds; somehow, they too were nice to look at. We’d escaped the Florida humidity. We were on our way to stay at his grandparent’s home in the mountains for a few days, a mini vacation before starting our first semesters at separate colleges. I wasn’t worried. He was driving. I was co-piloting, changing radio stations, sneaking kisses, not saying a single word. There was grace in that silence, a magnetism that reverberated between the small space in his truck separating us.



He sat to my right in Spanish when we were freshman in high school and though he was a goofball, he was the guy that everyone liked and possibly had a tiny crush on. The kind of crush that never amounts to anything but makes class just a little less boring. I started letting him cheat off my vocabulary quizzes every Friday. Owen never said or did anything to sway me into this cheating. That’s just the kind of guy he was. I would see his half blank sheet of paper and angle mine in a way that only he could see. I don’t know what compelled me to do this. Still, it started to feel like a game, filled with smirks, quickly averted eyes, and in a very strange, obviously dorky way, a flirting. I was certain Owen felt it too.

Sometimes I wonder if at that moment I’d unknowingly created a pattern. I encouraged the cheating on quizzes. Did I let him cheat on me? I left the door open when I told him, “I would never want to get married when I grew up” though of course it wasn’t what I meant. I was seventeen when I said that; I didn’t know anything about marriage. Now I realize that this desire to aid him when in need was not me simply being nice, or an act of kindness; it wasn’t even the flirtatious game I remember it as. It was a weakness.



There's this common condition that occurs when divers go below depths of more than 100 feet called nitrogen narcosis. The further you dive, the more the partial pressure of nitrogen increases, causing a high nitrogen concentration in the blood. The effect is similar to the mental state that occurs from alcohol intoxication, giving the condition its pseudo, "The Martini Effect." As depth increases, the mental impairment may become hazardous. At 300 feet, it can incapacitate causing stupor, blindness, unconsciousness, and even death. It's an easily reversible alteration; swim higher and the pressure felt in your head decreases. But it doesn't seem that easy to me. When your mind is altered, your thinking is altered; how do you make a conscious decision? The condition goes by many names, but the one that strikes me the most is "Rapture of the Deep," which implies a feeling of intense pleasure. Why would anyone want to subvert from that?

Divers can learn to cope with some of the effects of narcosis, but it is impossible to develop a tolerance. Scientists say there are no long term effects, but that's the thing about science. We're not always positive it's completely accurate. It's a highly researched, best educated guess, and besides, it's always changing.



Owen is in the car when I'm driving, listening to Sweet Honey by Slightly Stoopid, the song he loves so much he hits repeat. He's in the same damn sentence of my book that I re-read countless times because I can't focus, the idea of him rocking the skull in my head. He's in my phone, in the *ping!* that lets me know I have a text message, wondering, hoping that maybe it's him. He's in the apartment, where he put up that dark window shade that blacks out my entire room, the dark cave we took comfort in. He's in my bed where we played Candy Crush for an entire day, not once peeling out from under the covers, comparing scores and racing each other through levels. He's in my drawers, where he absentmindedly left some of his old t-shirts the day he left me. And he's in the bed again, always the bed, the squeaks it makes every time I roll over at night to find the other side cold and untouched without his long build, the arms and legs that would accidentally kick me in the night. He's even there when another guy will slip in under my covers from time to time. He's in my morning cup of coffee, oozing through my brain like the last bit of grounds poured into my cup, as I stare at the Keurig he got me on our one year anniversary. How does one bleach their mind? Why is there no option to remove memories at will? There's too much wrapped up in here and I need to make space for others to move in. I need a disinfectant for him.



I sit at the kitchen table with my mom and she mentions the name Chris Lamb. When this happens, something in her eyes glints and her voice changes and now she's suddenly seventeen and meek. Instantly transported back thirty years, she smiles, remembering his touch, his tenderness, and laughs, remembering the way he used to tease her, back when she was only the best friend of his little sister. She can only ever recall him in these vague details and the thing I've never been able to figure out is if it's her memory or her discretion. I always know we're nearing the end of her reminiscence when tears start to puddle and her voice becomes softer, slower, and sometimes hoarse, like she's still—though years removed—consumed by this aged love. Wondering what went wrong and if there was something she could have done to save it. This is the point in the story when she summarizes how Chris met someone in the army, wrote to my mom, and broke it off. They never saw each other again. In these moments I'm reminded that heartaches have always—for as long as people have been on this spinning rock—preceded mine and will always follow it. I'm reminded mine doesn't have to be so heavy.

And just like that, a phone call, a kitchen or washing machine timer returns her to the present. She walks over to my stepdad, John, the love of her life, and gives him a smooch. Then I know. It's okay to remove ourselves every so often. I always wonder though if one day her story will be mine, if I've adopted this sentimentality too. I wonder if years in the future I'll stand in my kitchen, kiss my husband hard on the mouth and mean it, but at unpredictable moments, still cry for Owen.



The first time Owen and I were alone together—I wouldn't have called it a "date" then, but now I can say it's the moment I was sure I liked him more than a friend—was in Daytona Beach, in the center of a tourist and Spring Break clad locale, the streets lined with bars, souvenir shops, and mini golf courses. Classmates were throwing end of senior year parties in hotel rooms, but we walked off by ourselves. We came to an attraction called the "Daytona Slingshot": a 120 foot tall structure made of two large beams forming the shape of a Y and a large, metal ball containing two rollercoaster seats in the center, creating what looked like a giant toy slingshot. The ball clicked into the tops of the beams in a bungee cord contraption. The ride attendant propelled the ball into the air, the ball spinning

chaotically as it gained momentum. Gravity and physics took over and the ball rotated up over the beams and back down close to the ground, over and over until it finally ran out of force. From the ground, it looked utterly terrifying.

Our heads craned straight up, listening to faint screams, our eyes trained on the tiny dot falling toward us, and quickly zooming out again, a jumbo-sized yo-yo.

“You wanna do it?” Owen looked at me, a devilish but contagious grin stretched across his face.

“I don’t have money!” I was thankful to have left my wallet back in my room.

“I got us,” he said, without hesitation. The ride was \$20 per person.

The line diffused and we were next. The attendant motioned for us to step inside. We sat down and he strapped us in, walking back toward the silver box that’s cogs and buttons controlled the ride. “You guys ready?” he yelled from his station.

“We’re ready!” Owen shouted back.

“Alright, I’m gonna give you a countdown. One...” The man released us after one and we instantly launched into the dark sky, a scream and a laugh involuntarily escaping my body. I laughed because of the purposeful failure of a full countdown, the surprise in our catapult. I laughed because I was nervous and it was the only logical response I could muster in the moment. But mainly I laughed because the entire time in the air—two minutes maybe—Owen cackled and screamed like a ten-year-old girl and it was the most infectious, liberating noise I’d ever heard.

From inside the ball it was mania in the most euphoric way. It was hard to tell how fast we were going, but it felt close to flying. It was an adrenaline I’d never experienced before. Unforgettable. Halfway through the ride I noticed a GoPro camera fixed on an apparatus inside the ball. The camera faced inward, the entire reaction caught on tape. After the ride, a man behind a booth showed us the video and we got to watch, maybe our happiest moment, over again. He tried selling it to us for \$40, but neither Owen nor I budged. I never regretted not buying that video. It’s one of those memories whose durability I have no control over.

Sometimes I feel like Owen and I never got off that ride, as if the night never ended. The whole relationship felt like I was up in the air, the slingshot suspended there. I remained at the top of the beams, happy to be stuck. But the slingshot was always going to fall. I hung up there alone, as Owen found himself caught up in temporary pleasures. I thought we seemed so strong, indestructible because of a solid foundation that we spent years as friends building, but the invisible support

keeping us up was my cluelessness to what was actually going on, the only thing preventing us from a loud, hard fall.



There's a photo our friend took of Owen and me back in the days of harmless cheating in Spanish class. She must have snapped it quickly, neither of us paying attention, too wrapped up in our own repartee—the cheating on quizzes quickly forming a fun kinship. This wasn't unusual; she took photos of everyone in our class, catching quiet moments, and posting them on our IB Facebook page. The dramatic irony here is that she—our friend who brought the photograph version of us together—is the one who would tear us apart.

She sat at a desk behind Owen and me, so that the backs of our chairs faced the camera. Owen stared at me with this dumbfounded, askance sort of glare, eyelids heavy with playful scorn. Only our profiles were visible, but the picture is so candid, so abruptly caught in the moment that the angle is wildly revealing. I wore a black soccer t-shirt and my hair was half up, half down in that loose pony tail hanging gently over the bottom half of my hair kind of way, the bottom half splayed across my shoulder blades. Those were the days before hot tools and purposefully styled hair, when things were simple. The days when friends and boyfriends were a separate entity and co-existed without the push and temptation of too many hormones and sexual impulses, the days before betrayal.

My mouth was partly open, in the middle of a comment, something sarcastic, a comeback of sorts. That would explain his defeated, unamused face, the look you give someone when they've bested you in a playful battle of sharp words; when your eyelids and eyebrows are more than just close neighbors and feel as though they could be touching, mouth rested in a flat line. But that's not all the photo depicts. He was always to my right in that class. My right arm is raised to the height of my waist, elbow bent, and right hand extended as if delving into some deep explanation of how I'm right and he's wrong. I still laugh when I look at this picture. I imagine myself telling him, *this is never going to work out between us dude*. Or, *this little flirtatious cheating is as far as you're going to get*. I imagine this dialogue because I wish that's what I would've said. Then I look at the photo again, the way my open palm faces upward toward the ceiling, fingers splayed like a claw crane in an arcade machine targeting a coveted toy. My palm faces upward, but it also faces Owen, a reaching out for something invisibly felt between the two or three feet separating our desks, that open palm inviting him in. A line or rope, some kind of connection I still feel tied to though he's no longer to my right.



At one point about two months into our relationship I tell Owen that I wish my father were alive so that he could meet him. I don't say it because it seems like a nice thing to say or because we're in love and people who are in love are supposed to say these dramatic, climactic things. I say it because I actually feel it, because I think he would be proud of the gentleman I allowed myself to fall for. My mom and stepdad sure are.



Wakeboarding, snowboarding, skiing, surfing, bridge jumping, roller coaster riding, slingshot, four wheeling, heart-racing, palm sweating, white-knuckled, raptured, consumed, firsts for everything.

I read somewhere that researchers found adrenaline inducing activities done during a date can make a potential partner more attractive to the other. If we meet someone in a dangerous situation are we more likely to fall in love? Perhaps I was in like and in love with the adrenaline, no more. And when those things went away, I wasn't sure how to do this again without them. Though I still looked for them.

Why is it that we follow the dangerous, possibly threatening accelerations in life? Is it enough to just follow that feeling of a thrill? Does that make it okay or justify the risk? Generally, no. On paper, definitely not. But every time I am faced with this decision I say yes to the danger. I'm so drawn to the thrill the danger doesn't seem to exist. Not really. I can't see it or feel it so it must not be there. I think I'll continue to say yes for the rest of my life.



So much of Owen was different; he'd changed. Yes, he looked older, chubbier in the face, hair longer and darker, the obvious aging that could happen in a year's time. But he changed in a more colossal and irreversible way. Not like how the weather changes from fall to spring, or how our clothing style, taste in music or food evolves the older we get. We expect that kind of change. It was more like a hurricane that's blown through town, uprooting everything in its path until nothing remained intact. He changed in a way where the damage, I knew, was irreparable; nothing would ever be the same again. His once yellow, green eyes now resembled a fatigued driveway, a mass of worn, grey concrete. There was

something else in them too, or rather, something missing. They weren't just full of that warm, unique color once; they were full of vitality. A sudden hollowness infiltrated them.

His smile was no longer contagious but provoking. Hands that once clasped mine curled around a lighter and a pack of cigarettes, a new habit he once thought distasteful and unattractive. He never was careful with his words, the class clown, the goofy guy who sometimes made no sense, the silly one-liners I fell in love with, but he always had a filter. It went missing with the rest of him. Everything was different, the way he carried himself, the reasons he told me he dated the latest girl—for her family's money. Judgmental and sometimes entitled, but I never pegged him for shallow. The storm must have been a category five because it did a number on him. He was self-destructive and it drove me insane because I would always be the girl who wanted to fix things. And I couldn't tell if he'd really changed or if this was who he was all along, if this was just him growing up.



I keep going back to this claw machine idea. What is it about that arcade game that keeps a person playing? That makes you feel like it's totally acceptable to feed it dollar after dollar? *Just one more game* you reason. You even forcefully laugh to yourself in the most meager way and think maybe it's you; maybe it just doesn't want you. For some reason that makes you try even harder. *No that's absurd—not after everything this game and you have been through.* You try and try, maneuvering the joystick in your palm, telling yourself this time will be different than the rest; you understand this game now whereas before it was aloof and complicated. Now you have the thing right where you want it, all that's left is to drop the claw in the precise spot and it is forever yours. You just need to close the gap, find the link between prongs and prize. There's this moment of suspension when the claw closes around the object, where everything feels euphoric because the prize is neither yours nor the machine's. You haven't won or lost, and there's a peace in that moment because all you can really feel for a second is the effort you put in, the trying. You gave your best shot. Then the claw pulls for a second, almost teasing, until the object slips between the cracks and falls a little wayside, perhaps in a more awkward and difficult position than before. Worse though, sometimes it'll unintentionally land in a position that will be easier for the next person who comes along and hopes to make it theirs. If only the claw or your fingers were a little longer, held on for one more second; it could've been yours. I kept grabbing and Owen kept slipping.



I was nineteen years old, riding shotgun through the empty streets of our small hometown, staring out the tinted window of Owen's new, dark brown Chevy Silverado. I was thankful we knew where we were, that there was no chance of being lost. We were just a few minutes from my mom's house where he was dropping me off. I'm not sure why we thought seeing each other would be a good idea. It'd been a year since we last spoke, but at the time it felt much longer. I was in the truck with someone I'd only just met. He was driving and I was shifting: my legs, my fingers, I couldn't sit still. I didn't know where I should put my hands or rest my eyes. They averted up for a second, and I saw a picture of a cute, blonde, bubbly girl, with a big smile, and thin, almond shaped eyes clipped into the visor on the ceiling of his truck. A place I'd never been. She seemed to beam directly at me, teasing almost. Not able to withstand its mockery any longer, I finally broke gaze, defeated in the staring contest. She won her spot up there.

We couldn't find the words to fill the space between us on that five minute ride. There wasn't much to say, I guess, because there wasn't much I felt other than the inescapable silence imploding on us. And perhaps, that said everything.



I grabbed the rope that led to the top of the cliff first, Owen trailing behind. I led us with a natural confidence and zeal for adventure that he introduced me to on the slingshot, and the first bridge we ever jumped off of, four months prior. I loved the person I'd become with him. It wasn't just who I was around him, it was a person I'd grown into, a characteristic that had always been there, but was waiting for Owen to bring to fruition. The rockslide we were climbing in the backwoods of Banner Elk, North Carolina had no footholds, the jagged edges sharp and startling on my bare feet with every step. Yet we kept climbing, my trust not only in the trunk of a tree, ringed with just a one-inch-thick wool rope whose end I still couldn't see, but also in him, always in him.

Once he met me at the top, he reached out for my hand. "You ready?" he asked, clutching my fingers until they were white knuckles laced in another. "Ready," I nodded, no longer afraid of what might inhabit the almost black, ambiguous river water calmly rippling twenty five feet below me. He gave my hand a tight squeeze, a quick and comforting pulse, and we jumped.

SALT-WASHED PICTOGRAPH JUST BEYOND THE ABANDONED BUNKER

KATHRYN SMITH

[POETRY]

after Melissa Kwasny

To peel the bark of madrone to its pith. To drive a road grown mossy between tire tracks. To know a place by its guardrails, and where they're fractured, its bridges and those who've jumped. I've grown from these things, then toward them. My ancestors were first to clear-cut these forests, and I must claim this as my history, the way I claim—what? Loneliness? The violence of species toward species, an oil rig's midnight vanishing? Blank harbor. A seagull drops its thieved mussel again and again to crack it open. I claim this exposed meat. These kelp heads bobbing the high tide. They look almost animal, an orderly procession of sea lions. Peel the bark from red to pale. A person could, if a person wanted to. A person could reach the deepest part.

INTERVIEW

DIANA ADAMS

[POETRY]

I asked the dead director
why are there so many mirrors
in each of his films
he shook his head and said
it's too early for this question
& the answer varies from moment
to moment like the weather...
you are a key too
opening the mirrors
I don't know what to say
I'm still not comfortable with death
I pour myself a glass of milk
would you like to talk about Egypt?
no, I'm there too often, he said,
even in my dreams,
& today we are nowhere
in particular for a change

A MAN ASKS WHAT MY GREATEST HEIST WOULD BE

BRIAN CLIFTON
[POETRY]

We tromped from the north
to Florida's green tip.

The neon barrooms
and their serpentine movements

*

called to us with their chemical scent. John draped

himself across the couch
in the midday light, his box
of machinist tools splayed

open, its metal instruments
scattered across the floor. I asked,

What is more beautiful than an empty lot?
I expected nothing

*

from the pills I've been prescribed.
I expected nothing
from "my condition" except that light

within my brain will throb until my body
goes flaccid. We stared at the lot next door—

LEMONS

STEPHEN CRAMER

[POETRY]

I read about a woman
who got into an accident.

About how she totaled
her car. Which was a lemon anyway.

About how the truck
that hit her was for sale.

& how she bought it
on the spot. I read about how

she stopped at a kid's roadside
stand & vastly overtipped

when she picked up
a cool cup

of lemonade, then drove
her new truck home.

Please let there always be
lemonade. Please let the truck

that hits me be for sale.

DWELLING
MELISSA DICKEY
[POETRY]

my friend told me she was
letting herself go

meaning gaining weight or something
something other than relief

she put “walk on the wild side” on a tape for me
in 1997 when I got my license

and I drove dangerously drunkenly wildly
and my finger traced my veins, my thumb pushed the tack

“hey, babe” sang lou reed
and I drove in the fog and crashed

seat belt bruise across my chest
letting myself go

and I ran a red light and crashed
beer working itself out

let romanticizing danger work itself out
pull itself up by its bootstraps

til it transposes like beer
evaporating into air

soaking the front seats
foaming over the past

GIRL IN YOUR CAR

AIMEE PARKISON & CAROL GUESS

[FICTION]

A HITCHHIKER IS ALWAYS LUCKY. YOU SLOW DOWN BECAUSE the girl by the side of the road looks lost and lonely. Looks, in other words, like you. One of you is in a car and one of you is in the rain. Then everything changes. The rain is outside, and the hitchhiker inside, fiddling with the radio dial, summoning music from static. She's kicked off her sneakers and hiked up her skirt, dirty soles resting on the dash. Smell of pot and rain and chocolate, braids tied tight with rubber bands.

You ask her name and she looks away, out the window, at the sun beginning to show across the fields, which go on forever.

You say your name is Chris.

She says her name is Chris, too. Funny. She asks how far you're willing to go.

You've never driven this road before. Something happened in town, the town you've always lived in, and you took this car, which isn't yours. There's an old ghost story kids used to tell, about a girl in white by the side of the road. On her way to a dance, or wedding, or both. How she got in a car, or carriage, and vanished.

Chris might be in white; it's hard to tell, her skirt's so dirty and the mud's so high. You talk with your hands, tracks in the field. The leaves were green and now they're pale.

A grocery store floats up to your windshield and stops. It's shaped like a farm: fake silo, fake cow. Chris smiles, gap in her teeth, something shifts in her story.

You buy two coffees, one with cream. When you get back to your car the driver's seat is littered with pink rubber bands, the kind that used to hold the news together. The silo does not produce the coffee of your dreams.

Sipping coffee, you go over your collection. For years, you've saved articles of "kids" who came home after long periods of time: five months, nine months, six years, 8 years, 12 years, 23½ years. You might become one of those "kids" someday and so might the other runaways, the missing hitchhikers. If only you could remember who I am, who you are, and who the girl in your car once was.

In your dreams, you drive her back home, to take her back where she belongs. Along the way, you remember who you are, even though you'll never remember who I am. That would be a mistake. Your mind must protect you from me.

Who did I used to be? Where did I come from? What makes me do the things I do?

I'm a repressed memory. Your mind can't handle knowing me.
The girl in your car is the answer to a question you forgot to ask.

The question disappears with the answer when she leaves you on the road to nowhere.

OVERNIGHT BUS, COLUMBUS, OH TO CHINATOWN, NY

EMMALEE HAGARMAN
[POETRY]

Dim blue lights above each person's seat
make it easier to imagine that they

were once a child. Softens them,
even before sleep. Even the man sitting

by the bathroom who had circled
me three times at the bar beside

the bus stop, watching me drink.
The driver tells a woman to stop talking

so loud on the phone, and she yells, *I'm*
a grown-ass woman. Once fluorescent lights

shut off, she quiets all the same.
A man falls asleep leaning his head

against the seat in front of him,
the woman in that seat sleeping too,

neither knowing their heads
almost touch. Tonight's the super

moon and I am the only passenger
it keeps awake. Sam sleeps

in the seat beside me. I'll never
get used to holding the hand

of a man who hasn't hurt
me. Or, that any time he stirs

and doesn't remember where he is,
my face is the thing that grounds

him. He doesn't look anything like his
baby pictures. Every gas station

and truck stop is the same kind
of empty. The old man snoring

three rows back sounds like my
father. It scares me that the person

I call when I'm afraid calls me
when he's afraid. Last month, the room

was dark except for the TV
when Sam whispered *doctor's*

appointment and *found a lump*, then
not sure when I asked if he

would be okay. People call him
old soul when they notice

his hair. He started going gray
when he was nine. When the bus pulls

over, the fluorescent lights turn
on and more people get on. A woman

shouts to the driver, *He's scaring me*,
and the driver shouts, *Stop*

shouting. The lights shut out, the bus
jerks forward, and everyone falls silent,

Sam's body turning to shield me
from every unseen thing while

we sleep. In certain light, strands
of his hair look nearly white.

THE KINGDOM, THE POWER

MARY ANN SAMYN

[POETRY]

Suffering goes on too long. Doesn't it.

For inspiration, Jesus drank from the cup that was of course his life.

Like anyone, my father must've had other ideas about the future.

Defenseless now, he'd like to give up; at a great distance,

I wonder what's possible.

A train runs along the other side of the river. This is not my town

though I've lived here all these years.

PEANUTS AND DIRTY BIKER BARS (COMPASSIONS IV)

MERKIN KARR

[POETRY]

and it goes a little something
like: you're not better until
you are. and your hair isn't
the same length until it is.
like saying something simple
will make it easier to make
things easier. and so you
keep writing 'fake it till you
make it' over and over
again because someone's
article on the internet
said it would help. so you
do it until you memorize
the way a pencil feels when
it sits in your hand. and
sometimes when you're
going to bed you can still
feel yourself crossing the
t's and dotting that i. and
then you feel like maybe
you've made it. like maybe
you are better and maybe
just maybe that undercut
is the same length that it
was before you shaved it
all off. and it goes a little
something like not giving
a fuck again until you do.
because you will. you'll
find that kind of love again.

FLAME FALLS AS FALLS THE WORLD DOWN

ABY KAUPANG
[POETRY]

for David Bowie and C.D. Wright, 2016

everyone choosing deepstep

the tongue the hair the leg
the scent the door the rain
the sightless

in stranger's breath the jewel opens
to last within the stars

he calls "we're paint breath all in all"

stars deep line
turned signal love
to fences call the world leave

blinded

the sad love the car sky the poultice
the into eyes the glove

the eyes that closed within eyes

there's love's
driver

boneman kind the stranger's part paints stranger's stars

everyone choosing deepstep

the hot-herb the darkened room the breath
the shift the hour the driver dogs

I'll with meat eyes make
I'll in darkened room
I'll the road to shift the stars

I'll the streak the lungs the moon lane

I'll is for morning's morning love
the blair the boneman the vineyard now

We're the mullein then the river then the driver dogs

public places pale the skin

the line the glove the then for what

for dreams eyes evening's flame

& there's you still thrill hour of the would to love

MY UNBELIEVABLE MAN

RICHARD LEIS

[POETRY]

To see a man
 My man
 Invisible man
I plan accidentally to
meet every day

I attend activity
with pre-hour jitters
having imagined our meeting
 My man
 Really a man
how we proceed cloy as
romantic meet cute comedy

and just as sentimental
a flutter ahead of time
 My man
 The disappearing men
how fleeting in reality

His shoulder next to my shoulder
is warm pressure communication
 My man
 We're discussing my man
the color of his eyes
 His indescribable eyes
the hair on his chest
earth scent human electricity
his hands to hold heft and weigh me
 My man
 Indescribable man

An unbelievable man

With nothing to show for
My man
this makes either of us not
A man
Vanishes

PENSÉES

CHARLES JENSEN

[POETRY]

after Pascal

When I go for long periods of time without writing, I think I'm washed up, that I did everything I was meant to do, and it wasn't much, and that the usefulness of my life has exhausted itself.

When I feel bored, it feels like what I imagine death feels like: like you can't, no matter what, find something to occupy your mind.

Sometimes when I work on something and I'm really into it, I can focus my attention so hard I can't even hear. I can't even hear someone calling my name. So hopefully no one I love is going to be murdered in the next room while I'm really concentrating on something.

When I cook, I feel filled with a sense of purpose, control, and kindness. Purpose because the task has a beginning and end. Control because everything's up to me. Kindness because I'll serve this to someone I love and it makes me happy to love someone with food.

When I go for long periods without dreaming, I wonder what's wrong with me. But then again, when I wake up from vivid dreams, I think, *Jesus Christ, what's wrong with me?*

When people hit on me, I wonder why it's almost always in a completely pornographic and horrifying way. Then I wonder why I'm so Anne of Green Gables when it comes to sex. Then I feel like having sex, but probably not with this person.

When people hit on me but then they say something really vapid about art, it's like that scene in *The Point of No Return* when Harvey Keitel pours acid all over the dead body in the bathtub and it dissolves. Except my penis does that. And sometimes my heart.

When my boyfriend kisses me, I wouldn't be able to hear someone calling my name unless it were him.

When my boyfriend laughs and it's just the two of us, it's different than the laugh he uses in public. That one's louder. But I know mine is realer.

When I think about watching my mother die, I get so sad it feels like I sink so deep into my body I'll never be able to claw my way back up the surface and breathe again.

When I think about what it would be like if my mother were still alive right now, I wonder if she'd like the poems I was writing or if she'd read them and then look at me with that almost confrontational look and say, *I don't get it*.

When I think about my mother, I try to think about the last four years when she was sick and she realized it was time to be happy and, though she didn't say it out loud, I'm pretty sure she thought to herself, *Who the fuck cares now?*

When I think about my mother, I remind myself not to wait until I'm sick to get happy.

When I think about being happy, I often picture myself alone—not because I don't like people, but because I like missing them so much more.

When I think about all the people I've known who've really been important to me, I realize I don't talk to many of them anymore, but not because I don't still care for them and remember them. I don't know why it's like this, but it is.

When I think about what I was like when I was younger, I feel embarrassed, but I also try to be forgiving because I was so much stupider then, yet my opinions were louder and stronger than they are now.

When I think about smoking, I feel so glad I quit, and I also think about how wonderful the idea of smoking is.

When I think about my favorite things in life, I realize how many of them work best when you're alone, like playing guitar horribly and playing 1-player video games and reading books and running on a treadmill. And then I realize smoking was the only social thing I was ever good at, but it was killing me.

When I think about socializing, it often makes me want a drink, since everyone comments on how much more fun I am after a few cocktails. It often makes me feel like they're right, I am more fun when I've been drinking, and I wonder why I'm not that fun all the time.

When I think about how people see me, I hope they think I'm a nice person, because mostly I am, though I think we're all allowed to be unrepentant assholes like five times in our lives, and I've still got three times left.

When I think about the people who've really hurt me, purposefully and knowingly, I wonder if they will die the horrible deaths I've imagined for them, or if they'll at least be publicly humiliated like characters in a TV sitcom for teenagers.

When I think about humiliation, I think about how jealous I am Wayne Koestenbaum wrote a whole book about it, and how one night I told Wayne Koestenbaum I loved his red chinos, but he acted like it was kind of an insult, though it was sincere. I love red chinos.

Sometimes I think about New York, and how living there can't possibly be worse than living in Washington, DC, though I can't think of anything worse than living in Washington, DC, again.

Sometimes I think moving to Washington, DC, was a huge mistake because my mother was sick and I should have stayed behind to care for her and even though my job in Phoenix was giving me shingles, it was still better than the job I had in DC.

Sometimes I think I'm too angry about things that happened in the past, things I can't change, and I want so badly to be the kind of person who can rise out of the past like a mist, beautiful and translucent, knowing exactly which direction to move.

Sometimes I want a do-over, and I wonder why we had to go and make life so complicated that do-overs aren't really part of the process anymore.

Sometimes I wish I were still a kid, plus then I could stop worrying about whether or not people thought I was gay and just start having sex like every other gay kid I've ever known did.

When I think about the gay guys I know having sex in their early teens, I get sad and jealous because I spent so much of my life being afraid to let myself be myself, and by the time I got around to it, I wonder if it was too late.

Sometimes when I think it's too late, a stranger will say something reassuring to me, which is equally miraculous because strangers often frighten me into silence.

When I think about the kindness of strangers, I feel grateful, and I remind myself to feel grateful more often because gratitude feels good, like pulling on a pair of pants that fit like they were made for you.

When I think about clothes, I want to go shopping, and I wonder how many pairs of denim are too many pairs of denim. I wonder if you know that was a trick question because there's no such thing as too many pairs of denim; denim is classic and timeless and very American even though it was the uniform of the working class until it became fashionable for everyone.

When I think about America, I feel scared, and sad, and full of privilege I didn't earn, and regretful of said privilege, and I think about the plights of the poor, the black, the undocumented, the disenfranchised, and I feel so bloated with the arrogance of America I wonder if I'll ever see a day when there is a true kind of freedom for all, or degrees of freedom for many.

When I think about freedom, I honestly think of Scandinavia. Don't they seem like they've got a lot of things figured out over there?

When I think about Europe, I remember traveling there when I was sixteen and what a weirdo I was at sixteen, and how even more blunt I was then compared to know, and then I feel grateful that time has softened my delivery of opinions, and taught me to listen more and speak less.

When I think about listening, I feel relieved. I would almost always rather listen than speak, unless there is a microphone in my hand, at which point I feel full of things to say, especially if there's an audience in front of me.

When I think about public speaking, I feel joy, not dread. I would almost always rather speak in public than have to speak at, like, a dinner party of strangers. Unless someone handed me a microphone at the dinner party and asked me to say a few words. Then I wouldn't shut up, probably.

When I think about bravery, I think about the people in this country who are putting their lives on the line to push justice forward. I think about people in Ferguson and Baltimore, and I think about

people who fought against Prop 8 in California, and I think about Ruth Bader Ginsburg in her long black robe and her austere glasses and I want to celebrate what a badass she is, because she is taking shit from no one and that's exactly what America needs.

When I think about what America needs, I feel certain I don't have all the answers, but I think it's a good way to start the conversation so that everyone has some say.

When I think about conversations, I am glad we got to have this one. I'm glad I've had a chance to say what's on my mind. Sometimes there's a lot of stuff there. And honestly, sometimes there isn't.

MONOPHONIC MASH-UP

KELSEY MAKI

[FICTION]

A DESCRIPTION SHE DISLIKES:

The music sounds like Morse code, SOS signals in the drumbeats. Luz Stella is attuned to its energy, its pulse, but she can't untangle its meaning. Soon everyone's eyes will flash to her for the answer. The playbill claims she's "the woman who will make you see sound," wrapping and bending her body around a note, rendering it visible. It's a description she dislikes. What's missing is her sacrifice, the story of how she got here—how each step, every sweep of her arm, each twist of her torso, right down to the angle of her fingers, took so much sweat and work.

THIS IS NOT A LOVE STORY.

Luz left Lima when she was sixteen. It took her two years to travel to the US alone. Music—its incessant rhythm, its forward march—had given her the momentum to escape. Luz left behind a mother who eyed her twenty-three inch waist with scorn, telling her: *You are not my child, Mestizo. My people are brave warriors. They are not small and skittish like you.* She escaped the calloused hands of her father, hands that smelled of anchovettas and other dead things. She escaped the confinement of dances like the Alcatraz: partners stepping with strips of paper tied to their waists, each holding a candle and fearing the conflagration.

In the US—no citizenship, no visa, no degree—Luz found work as a waitress and a cleaning lady. Her coworkers couldn't understand how she endured sixteen-hour days, sweating away her youth without uttering a single complaint, but Luz—practical and frugal, stealthy and savvy; a girl who'd traveled across the borders of eight countries; traveled by train, bus, car, and foot; a woman who'd made it all the way to the US; a runaway who'd seen more violence than most war correspondents—was grateful for this new life, grateful for her studio apartment in a sketchy neighborhood in Los Angeles, seeing this space, a place she paid for

with her own money, as evidence of the greatness of the country to which she'd traveled.

Is complacency an affliction that affects us all? Is our desire for permanence pointless? No longer content to clean bedpans at an assisted living facility, no longer willing to waste her days in a dingy diner, Luz secured a position as a server in an upscale steakhouse. Basic needs met, she began to want something more. Beneath her stony surface, cenotes of passion roiled.

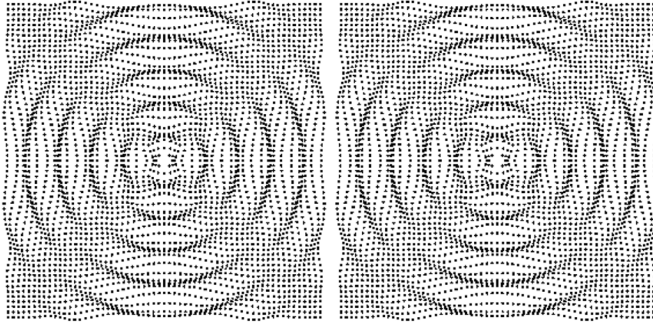
Luz celebrated her 20th birthday by enrolling in a UC-extension dance class. Every night after work she practiced, reviewing what she'd learned, fusing it to her own experience, striving to create something new, a whirling alchemy, dancing with eyes closed and arms extended, strong legs intuiting each step, her entire body striving for the meditative state that made dancing feel like a rebirth, the life that came after the melting of her wounded self, a swooping cycle of salvation brought on by the spark that was the song.

At the conclusion of her class, her teacher said she was ready, that there was nothing left to learn. Luz knew this was a lie, but his words propelled her forward, gave her the confidence to compete for parts in avant-garde productions. Luz lived for those moments onstage: the feeling that her body was sinking into sound, the outside world sizzling, then dissolving. Every day she let go of a little more, leaving pieces of her past behind, walking with the uncalculated stride of a woman without attachments. But her decision to remain single, to come and go as she pleased, only made the men try harder.

Wherever she went, there they were—demanding her time, her attention.

It was never an even exchange.

The best way to get them to go away, she'd found, was to take their numbers and leave. Luz never revealed her name; she never said she'd call. In her mid-twenties, finding herself at the height of some feminine force, she collected an impressive array of business cards, napkins, and the occasional ripped back of a cigarette pack. Not by nature a wasteful woman, she stashed these numbers at the bottom of her sock drawer on the off chance that she would one day want to talk.



Creative Commons (updated 2013 by Dan Russell, Acoustics Professor)

FREE FALLING—IN WAVES

two stones dropped,
dancing surface
ripples

~~outward~~

like celestial circles

like a Pythagorean symphony in the sky

like solar systems and galaxies

spinning

worlds

apart.

Like suns seeking

binary orbits,

seeking

co-existence without

cancellation.

THIS *MIGHT* BE A LOVE STORY . . .

The night she met Percy, her performance was perfect. Thousands of hours of practice just to appear effortless. There was a rawness, a hunger in the way she moved. *La loba*. Never pausing to wipe her brow or brush the sweat-dampened hair from her eyes. Onstage, everything was as it should be. But when the music stopped and the lights came on, she noticed a dull pain in her heel and the burn of broken blisters on her toes.

Everyone in the audience had left or was leaving, an accordion of people expanding out the door, losing shape—she imagined—on the street. She stood to the side, stretching as she waited for the crowd to recede. Luz scanned the empty seats, her eyes running over the curved rows, lines like boundaries of concentric circles, ripples radiating outward. She was surprised to see one person, a man, still sitting, leaning back in his chair, looking like he didn't care what anyone else was doing, where anyone else was going. It was as if he were still hearing the music, still witnessing the performance. He nodded when he saw Luz looking. Embarrassed, she turned away and silently stepped past the people who'd been tasked with taking apart the sunrise, a plywood puzzle of orange and purple. In the dressing room, she slipped out of her form-fitting costume and pulled on a pair of jeans and a threadbare tee shirt.

The fact that she was thinking about him—this man she'd yet to meet—was a first. Never had a stranger stayed in her mind for more than a few seconds. But her thoughts about him were not fully formed. Hers was a primal awareness, a sense of something swirling below the surface. Seeing that he was still there, she strode across the stage with her eyes fixed on the door, trying to tamp down her desire to stay. Jumping off the stage, she walked down the aisle not far from where he sat, her eyes on the illuminated EXIT sign. Leaning back, with both arms angled over the seats, claiming more space than he needed, he fixed his eyes on her moving form.

"You remind me of Isadora Duncan." He said it like he didn't care if she heard, yet somehow he seemed desperate to impress her. This duality drew her in. He had fine lines on his forehead and the skin around his eyes crinkled when he smiled. He was dressed like a banker or a businessman, but with an artistic flair. His shirt was starch-white, but his tie was splashed with color. Her desire to sit beside him felt primitive and powerful. She knew she should keep moving, sail past him as if nothing mattered, but her sneakers were stuck. She winced and kept walking.

"What's wrong?" He was still seated. His air of entitlement was foreign and fascinating.

"I'm fine," she said, planting her feet, claiming her space.

"Do I look like every other asshole you've ever known?"

"Yes." Her tone was flat, far from flirtatious. This was a part she refused, a role she rejected. She would not stand in the background and be cast as a *love interest*.

"Fair enough," he said, taking his arms off the seats, seeming suddenly smaller, more vulnerable. Luz wanted to walk away, but the marching orders from her brain had yet to reach her feet. He dug his hand into his pocket, pulling

out a lighter and a pack of cigarettes. She pointed at the *No Smoking* sign.

“Shit.” He shoved the lighter and loose cigarette back in his pocket.

“She’s my favorite, you know,” said Luz, letting go of her vigilance, sensing his need, feeling it to be greater than her own.

“Duncan?”

“She’s the one that everyone knows, but to me her work will never be mundane. She taught me that it’s not about doing some steps you’ve memorized. It’s about your own movement, your own truth.” Never before had she shared her thoughts with such ease. The words sounded small and silly and she scolded herself for her lack of restraint. Why this sudden desire to explain? Luz didn’t need his understanding. She wasn’t seeking his approval.

“I used to take ballet,” he said.

“Really?” Luz was surprised. He looked too big, too manly. She scolded herself for thinking in binaries.

“Ended up liking it better than football,” he continued.

She laughed, realizing that on some level she’d been right.

“I wasn’t light on my feet. Not like you,” he said.

“Show me something.” Luz stepped forward, her movements instinctual.

“What?” The coolness in his eyes had dissipated. He sat straight up and chewed his lip.

“Dance for me,” she said, feeling a small stab of satisfaction, knowing she had the power to make him nervous.

“I don’t do that anymore.” He shook his head and crossed his arms.

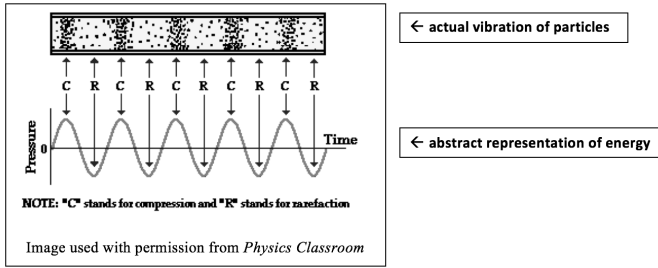
Used to fending off men, she had not expected his defense, this wall. “Why not?” she persisted. “I don’t judge. I’m not like that.” This, of course, wasn’t true. It was her hurt—the pain of her past—not some intrinsic sense of morality that had prevented her from making assumptions, from having the energy to judge.

“Okay,” he said, awkwardly lifting a pant leg, revealing the bottom of a prosthesis. “I lost my leg a long time ago. It’s not something I talk about. But watching you, it’s like I’m dancing again. It’s like an escape from my body.”

Luz held her breath. What could she say? The reason she danced was the reason he watched.

NOT WHAT SHE IMAGINED:

All these years picturing an actual wave, and now it turned out that’s not entirely accurate. Sound is not a wave, but the vibration of particles—back and forth, up and down—moving through areas of high and low pressure.



<http://www.physicsclassroom.com/Class/sound/u1111c.html>

OKAY, OKAY. IT'S A LOVE STORY.

He had broad shoulders and strong arms. His stomach showed the slant of hipbones, the fibrous muscles of obliques. The first time they made love she didn't notice his leg. When she moved above him, she forgot imperfection. In these moments, she allowed herself to believe that love, *true love*—perfect and abstract—was a thing of the earth, not of the heavens.

At first, she'd told herself she wasn't falling. But she'd been clumsy, unguarded. His wounds had made her armor unnecessary. With him, she lost her rigidity. They became liquid, bleeding into each other, ignoring boundaries.

At first this felt good.

Then it didn't.

They started to fight. About stupid things, words like proxy wars for what they really wanted to say. They debated the properties of wristwatches: What's the difference between waterproof and water-resistant? They argued about wine: Does the type of grape affect the color of the wine? They fought while watching TV: Is Alex Trebek an asshole in real life? Each fight seemed stupider than the last.

She felt herself becoming clingy, codependent. Luz wasn't sure when it had happened, but somewhere along the way she'd started to need him. It began innocently enough. A lawyer and a dancer, both of them tirelessly expressing their point of view in hopes that the other would see things the same. If given the chance to go back, would she? Her solitary life felt far away. Harder to reach than her past in Peru. Further than a foreign country, a distant galaxy.

* *

Sound cannot travel through the vacuum that is outer space.

*

When he wasn't with her—when she was free to practice, after she'd turned on her stereo and let music echo off the walls of her empty apartment, bouncing back, as if to obliterate itself—it was then that she discovered the songs that'd moved her, no longer elicited a response. It was as if her love for him had made it impossible to hear anything outside the small circle of her existence, a steadily shrinking sphere.

Luz was angry at herself for letting it get this far, for ceding control and letting the course of her life be shaped by someone else. What she needed was a counter, a defense. Her only option was to weaponize her words, say something that could not be taken back: a false confession of infidelity, a detailed description of an affair that hadn't happened. But as soon as the words were out—riding currents of air, spreading through space—it was impossible to stop them from rippling into every corner of their relationship.

ON THE NEATNESS OF WHOLE NUMBERS AND THE UNCERTAINTY
OF SOUND:

We're told that music is universal,
perfect
present in heaven.
We believe that melody is made
of specific ratios.
But sound
is not
certain.

It seems that something strange happens inside the brain when we listen:
My sound
may not be the same
sound
you hear.

It's a similar story with color.
A philosophical question:
if my
red is really your blue,
but we're both consistent in our naming,
how would we know we're discussing different colors?

THE HOAX OF HAPPY ENDINGS

Time passed. Weeks and months rolled into years. Needing to supplement her income, Luz went back to waitressing. She continued to audition for parts in dance productions, but now, in her late thirties—strength and beauty beginning their slow descent, a fading that would only intensify—she was landing fewer parts. This was to be expected. Luz refused to worry about wrinkles. Her body was still strong. The problem was in her mind, in her temporal lobe, or whatever part was responsible for processing music. Nothing sounded the same since he'd left. She'd hoped that things would go back to the way they were before she'd met him, but they didn't.

Each day her desire to reconnect deepened. She wondered what would happen if they were to try again, inventing scenarios when she took the long route home, driving by his office, noticing when his name was added to the list of partners, worrying when it was removed, an erasure that consumed her. The number he'd given her had been disconnected. For months, she thought about calling his office. Sometimes, after a glass of wine, sitting on a flimsy folding chair on the balcony of her apartment, her loneliness amplified by the beauty of another sunset spent alone, she would punch the firm's number into her cellphone and stare at the screen, realizing the futility of an after-hours call.

Early one afternoon, after several sleepless nights had eaten away at her inhibitions, Luz finally called. It had been ten years since they'd parted ways, yet somehow his pull on her had grown stronger. She had a sense that something significant had happened. It was in the air around her: changes of cosmic proportion, alterations of space and time.

The woman who answered the phone sounded stoic and shrill. *I'm calling for Mr. Raines*, said Luz, feeling as if she were speaking into an abyss, wondering if the woman could hear the suck of oxygen leaving her lungs. *Mr. Raines is no longer here.* The woman's voice was weighted with emotion. Luz opened her mouth to ask a question, but the woman had already hung up. She pressed the phone to her ear and listened to silence.

Sitting cross-legged on her bed, the same bed that she and Percy had shared, Luz had the sinking feeling that something horrible had happened. She felt it in her body, in her thundering heart, in arteries she imagined to be filled, not with blood, but something thicker, a liquid that would soon congeal and leave her insides calcified. She sat in bed for hours, an overworked computer warming her lap, finally locating his name in an obituary that was two weeks old.

Percy Raines, 48, of the firm Marx, Malloy, and Raines, died after suffering a massive stroke. Raines, who earned his JD from UCLA in 1992, is survived by

his sister, who lives in New Orleans. A former football player at Georgia Tech, Mr. Raines was also an advocate for the arts. He will be missed by many.

His death hit her like a sonic boom: noise trailing behind a fast-moving source, sound that would soon find her, shattering her eardrums, bending and breaking tiny hair follicles. She heard the ringing, that incessant reminder of an earlier trauma, and wondered if it would ever stop.

INFRASONIC CODA

There are some who believe that every word ever spoken still exists somewhere, growing quieter as the arrow of time hurtles forward, voices becoming softer, but never fully disappearing. It's a thought that gives Luz comfort, an idea she will never utter aloud, not wanting its energy to dissipate.

END

THE SILVER MILK PITCHER

WENDY BARKER

[POETRY]

on the granite counter
holds one wooden spoon

and three spatulas that rise from
the round opening like arms waving

from a narrow boat, or tongues
pulled from a mouth.

TEETH

JOSÉ ARAGUZ

[POETRY]

A god less loveable, a brute, a tyrant, could not have made such things. Knowing pain is necessary, and nerves for pain; knowing how insistently food and breath and words pass through the mouth; knowing to be human is to have memory, which cannot hold everything all at once but works in scraps and fragments—a noble and loving mind set in place these hardnesses created in its image (jagged, concentrated, but fallible) to break what we need, to keep breaking until everything is broken.

OUTLINE FOR FLIGHT

KATHLEEN PIERCE

[POETRY]

A sinker does one thing.

I've been dense, a vegetable, voile between layers
of itself. I've honored one virtue like the substance in a cell,
or shell, or crinoline, whirled there, whorled,
environmental. A nest is a mine
where siblings tunnel through the part
of earth called hen. Feelings in the soil
express themselves as tourmaline
or not, but tourmaline occurs. Inside,
outside, one wing will always mean immobility.

IN THE DREAM YOU HAVE BABIES NOW

KELLY EGAN

[POETRY]

your town is toy town and I am pterodactyl
I am small business saving for a parklet

I am crack addict reincarnated from king of Ur
I am on the beach growing mythical

I'm that damn mermaid swimming in the recyclables (again)
I'm an amphibrach found in nature (awaken)

I am a piece of hopeful soap and I have to go,
must escape the jaw of home, lit hearth, your abstract arms (anyway)

are backdropped by slow motion—
I am wistful plaster snow storm

ODE TO PEPPER SPRAY IN MY POCKET

EMMALEE HAGARMAN

[POETRY]

1.

The woman on the sidewalk is, despite
it all, trying to help

me. She directs her wild white
hair, skin-tight neon

leggings and handfuls of grocery bags
my way because I was at the bus

stop staring and she wants to teach
me a lesson, like in a good

way. As she walks closer, she points
at me. *How can we live*

*in this world, she shouts, when
she looks so perfect?*

2.

My body is the same size
it was the day my dad
pushed me at Kroger.

When you're thirteen
it's less terrifying that your dad
isn't taking meds,

that he's drunk-stumbling down aisles
on bad knees than the fact that people
are staring. I blushed chest

to cheeks. He shouted, *What's
wrong with you?* and pushed
me out of his way. If I

was another girl on the bus
today and my dad got on,
would I be afraid?

3.

Mom says, *I don't like the color pink
on you.* The lipstick I borrow
leaves kiss marks dark as dried
blood on my beer. At the party,

everyone laughs when the big dog puts
the little one's whole head inside
its mouth, to show dominance. A guy,
laughing, pins me to the couch

with one arm. Mom uses the word
crazy to describe Dad any chance
she can get. I know the man
across the street is talking

to me without looking at him: *Slim,
I see you, Slim,* he yells. Mom says
these things keep happening because
of the time of night. They

happen in the middle of the day.
She says, *You need to find better
bars.* A middle-aged man hits on me
as I buy a drink: *It must be hard*

*for you, he says, you're as beautiful
as my daughter.* Another one shouts,
Bitch, I don't even like you, when I
won't shake his hand. *Be polite*

and invisible, Mom says. *Don't
find out the hard way.* I never
learn my fucking lesson. No one
on the street blinks when a man

approaches me with one hand
down his pants. Everyone on
the bus ride home grows quiet
when a woman missing

teeth gets on, loudly telling
herself: *Thank you Jesus,
thank you Jesus, it feels good
on here.* She smiles at me.

4.

Dad's arms are lined deep and red
from plastic bags he carries from the gas station—
arms weighed down with junk
food as if to prove he still can carry it—
he limps down the alley to his apartment.

A mother and daughter stare
as he approaches. He whistles badly
and loudly, drops his keys, is barely able
to pick them up. Tells me for the second
time what little food he has eaten today,

carefully, as if reciting a prayer.
Of course the woman at the bus stop
is not my father. She doesn't
read sympathy on my face when she
catches me staring. *Fucking*

go to hell, she tells me. People
at the stop watch her pass me
with bated breath. I say, *Okay*. She
keeps walking. Everyone's eyes
stay on me, like she wanted.

GIRL IN MANSION

AIMEE PARKISON & CAROL GUESS

[FICTION]

PERCHED ON TOP OF A HILL, THE 21,000-SQUARE-FOOT, four-story home with thirty-two entrances has so many twists, turns, and corridors that the girl gets lost for days, crying inside expansive rooms, moving from fireplace to fireplace while eating dust bunnies, insects, and leaves from windowsills. Because the house has fifty-five rooms, thirty-eight beds, and twelve bathrooms, seven televisions are far too few.

She knows she will never get out when the mansion's owner tells her to tie a string to her wrist so she can find her way back to the living room. Night and day, she walks, attached to a giant ball of string, unspooling.

"Where am I?" she asks.

The mansion's owner tells her to talk to the architect's grandson, also an architect, like his father before him.

"Well, for one thing," the architect says, "you're in a starter mansion."

"What?" she asks.

"Never mind," says the owner. "Just pay attention to what the architect says."

"This home was built in 1911 of bricks divided by hand-hewn timbers," says the architect, "the mortar squashed out when the bricks were laid and wasn't wiped."

"Remember this," says the owner.

"This method of not wiping the oozing mortar and letting the ooze dry for dramatic effect," says the architect, "is called 'waterfall mortar.'"

"Waterfall mortar," she whispers, liking the sound of those words.

"Think on it, girl," the owner says with a smile as he lights a Cuban cigar. "How could a secretion, emission, excretion, something that is basically a white

discharge from bricks, create something as beautiful and poetic as a permanent waterfall on walls?”

“Amazing,” she whispers, trying to appreciate it because she is just starting to understand she is a part of it now.

Later, she realizes the entire mansion is this way, its designers having found ways to create beauty out of accidents, terrible in other contexts, away from the mansion. Wealth, she realizes, transforms everything.

“The effect makes the house look even older than it is,” the owner says, encouraging her to follow, to stroke the waterfall mortar as they walk.

“More than a hundred years old?” she whispers, attempting to understand the structure that is her new home, a place she will never leave. “But don’t you find it’s hard to imagine what happens to all that time, since houses don’t age like people?”

That’s when the owner tells her something she didn’t want to know, something she will never forget.

“If you want to see time, to really see it in a way you’ll understand, go back to my gallery of girls. To see the first girls, the girls of 1911-1920. I have a girl for every year. You’re the girl of 2017.”

“Where are they all?” she asks, untangling her string, realizing she must be careful with her body now that she’s an object to be displayed in the mansion gallery for centuries, if all goes according to plan.

The architect leads her into the gallery. Near the front, most girls are her age, but as she goes farther into the long gallery, the girls get older and older and older until she begins to realize not all of them are alive.

The girls in glass cases are exquisitely preserved, but the owner is careful not to call these cases coffins. She understands without words that this is a dollhouse, and that if she calls it a cemetery, the owner will ball his soft hands into fists and tighten thin lips.

“In Japan,” says the owner, “people rent hotel rooms to hold coffins before cremation. So many people are dying so much of the time. There isn’t enough fire to burn all those bodies, so the dead wait in hotels, and the living wait, too.”

The girl steps out of the string, which rings her ankles. When she wobbles the owner takes her elbow to steady her. “Japan,” she whispers, understanding that he needs her to sound impressed, which she would be if she weren’t tangled in string. “Have you been there?”

His smile flickers. “I’ve been everywhere. It’s very dangerous outside the mansion. Girls go unprotected, wolves and knives and rubble. Even the snow is sharp in the outliers. Everything you need, everything you could ever want is right here, waiting.”

The girl knows waiting, just as she knows the owner is also the architect, and his father before him, and his father's father. The long line of architect-owners with their gallery of girls, mansions lined with ornate frames, pastel women holding little dogs, girls in short skirts and soft shoes, pale hair and blue eyes, seashores and high tides, prairies and poppies, forests filled with stags and foxes, doors walled off with velvet ropes.

At the end of the longest hall in the mansion, the girl sees a glint.

The owner-architect crooks his finger. "Come here," he says. "You have a beautiful smile."

She follows him. They walk forever. Photos of girls turn to sketches to glass boxes filled with torn fabric and locks of hair.

"Oh my," she murmurs, for something to say. She read a novel once where the heroine said "Oh my" on every page. Her mind is also tangled in string, and tightening.

He walks ahead of her, so fast she runs to catch up. Running feels uncomfortable because her loose skirt has turned tight, leather or something like it, cinched at the waist and the knee. She can barely breathe. Walking turns to hobbling and then she's crawling down the longest hall in the world. She's sorry she said yes to the ride when he pulled up beside her outside Discount Grocery Express, where her car had broken down in the parking lot and both paper bags split, cans of soup rolling down the asphalt slope.

"Do you want a ride?" he asked, and she said yes. It seemed simple; besides, saying no was a thing she wasn't good at, was a word she never used, so yes, of course, and now gritty cherry-scented soap in the bathroom from the cracked dispenser, dirty tile on the floor where she crawls to the toilet and throws up in the bowl.

"Are you alright in there?" asks the owner-architect, knocking.

She knows what glints at the end of the hall. "You'll be the last one," he said. "So you're saving all the others. Don't you want to help other girls?"

She wants to help other girls, really she does. She was always a helper, wanted to be a nurse or a pre-school teacher.

The girl gets up and wipes vomit off her chin. Washes her hands in the rusty sink. She figures this rest stop is halfway across the country from Discount Grocery Express. They've been in his car for at least three days, hours ticking by on the dashboard clock.

"Hurry up, Doll." The doorknob rattles.

Above the sink is a mirror which covers a wall. She sees her fist as she punches glass, blood on her knuckles, as she faces the wall behind the mirror and knows she'll do anything to get through to the other side.

BORING

MEGAN TAYLOR

[POETRY]

“Boring” is a deceptive word, I think.
If it’s dismissed as boring because it’s repetitive,
because it’s rhythmic,
perhaps we should also do away with much poetry
and music.

I’m very skeptical of your “boring,”
and firmly prescribe:

10 sunsets
100 moonrises
1000 seasonal clockwork shifts, and
1 steady beat for your
unenthused heart,

and I wager you will find the mundane contains
more beauty in its
steady glory than
a lick of gone-away shooting star

DIRTY DANCING SAVES THE WORLD

BRYCE BERKOWITZ

[POETRY]

I was lifting dumbbells over my head
when *Hungry Eyes* began to play on the stereo system.
The room was filled with weights and mirrors
and awkward male-to-male eye contact.
These hyper masculine gym-goers,
with their maxing out and counting of reps
began to search the rafters and carpet like lost dogs.
Their heterosexual preferences
suddenly shaken by an 80's pop song.
Is this not what the world needs more of?
Aggressive men avoiding confrontation,
men suddenly filled with fear and humility.
Perhaps, instead of weapons of mass destruction,
we should play *Hungry Eyes*
over the world's loudspeakers during moments of exercise.
Think about it: we could take the U.S. defense fund,
rebuild schools, roads, wipe out educational debt
all with the push of a button, with a song
that made Patrick Swayze dance.
And wouldn't that be fucking magical?
I mean, *Jesus*. All this time, who knew
that the fate of humanity rested on six words:
Nobody puts baby in a corner.

CHAPBOOK FINALISTS

The following poems were submitted within larger manuscripts as part of our Midwest Chapbook Contest, held earlier this year, and were selected as finalists. The winning manuscripts, *Arts Grant* by Frank Montesonti and *rhi(n.)oceros* by C.D. DyVanc, are available for purchase via our Submittable page.

BECAUSE ANYTHING CAN BE MADE OUT OF A LAWN CHAIR

GENEVIEVE KAPLAN
FROM *GREEN ROOM*

A line is a line, what weft is a weft: a pattern
that may be disrupted.

In unweaving, the challenge occurs
of unkinking, of returning thread to its spool, of it no longer

being un-used—

so, bend the use out to help it reform?
Or: un-form to allow it to spool?

Think of a thread and think of a yarn and think
of a use. Then deconstruct it.

One: a knit that is also a weave, a scarf made out of scarves.
The bigger the bulk, the quieter the weave (more muffled).

Or: ribbon. To weave with fabric that has already been
woven. That's one

criticism.

THE OTHER BEGINNING AGAIN

GENEVIEVE KAPLAN
FROM *GREEN ROOM*

The other beginning-again-range, the threatening hum
in the street, or another
would arrive, pelting tomatoes or jarring the doors
and blocking the windows, leaving signs
on the lawn. That attack, so totally imaginary, also all
so much realer. I mean, feeling real. I mean
disjointed at the hip of it and aching
because of sitting, aching because of sleeping, and aging
and thinking how the chair forms around, or how echoes
in the street form around, or how the light
in the ceiling is more than enough
—provides more than enough—
for the entire room.

The bird a stand-in, yes, like the yard a stand-in, like
the disappointment of trying so very hard, one's so-very-best,
and failing again, or hung on a technicality or list
in the right. So many many roads
and lead which way, so many many cars, so many types
of cars. Here are a few: convertible, 1980s, Fiat, underbelly, bumperscooter.
Finding that last tossed around a bit
on the sidewalk, under a tree or a flagpole. Does the detail
draw you in? Why should it? Teak
and mahoagony are trees, pork and beef animals
to be eaten. If I. Yes, if I. And in that stutter another awareness
of pause, of knowing the other-after, of finding
the moon-landing, the moment of decision or step when everything
changed, and would change, and would see it twinned forward from here.

ONE ARCH IN THE GARDEN

GENEVIEVE KAPLAN
FROM *GREEN ROOM*

alternately, the room
defined by its low
brick border the room
inside the room inside
the canopy inside the city of trees the designated
city the bricks the other bricks the room the other room

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ERIN DORNEY

FROM *GRATING DARLING FULL OF DIRT*

The voice
on the other end
of the phone
was almost certainly
sleepwalking.

This is a found poem. Source Material: "Pet Sematary" by Stephen King, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983, p. 79.

THE STATION WAGON

LIZZI WOLF

FROM *NOTES FROM A GOOD LITTLE SISTER*

A year after the Divorce when I was nine Dad pulled up to the house on South Hill Road in a brand new rented olive green station wagon with automatic windows and locks to take us to the movies. After his series of faded V.W. bugs with bad heating and holes in the floor under the back seat so you could look down and see the highway pavement blurring to a solid gray beneath you the implications were unsettling.

We sat in the driveway—Mom Dad my brother and me—and they explained that there was a house in town they were thinking of buying so we could all four live together again as a family. They'd still be Divorced, but at least we'd be together. I tried to ask a clarifying question in order to determine whether or not they would have separate bedrooms in the new house. Dad replied with downcast eyes that it was still in the proposal stage they hadn't worked out the details.

The movie was about a single mom in Nova Scotia with a teenaged son who belonged to a club of boys that did things like steal dirty magazines and sneak out at night to look at them in an abandoned woodshed. In a rowboat they wrapped a firecracker in bread and tossed it to a seagull who caught the bread in its mouth so its head exploded and it fell out of the sky into the ocean. In a greenhouse they mixed anesthetic with milk and forced a cat to drink it so they could dissect it while it was still alive.

The boy's mother met a sailor who was Kris Kristofferson and the boy got caught watching them have sex through a peephole in his bedroom closet. Kris Kristofferson discovered him and beat him while his mother screamed. In the end the boy invited the sailor to a picnic with his friends. They served coffee from a canteen which put him to sleep and gathered round to dissect him on the grassy knoll.

SORE SONG

HEATHER JUNE GIBBONS

FROM *SORE SONGS*

In a quick smear before full focus, the eye
misreads what it wants to see, whole cities

hopefully elided, words reversed, double-
negatives parsed and reparsed 'til they thrum

taut as piano wire. So too the ear hears what it needs
or what it fears, and every letter turns love letter,

whether scrawled in sidewalk chalk or blinking
pixels on a reader board gone berserk, *please*

help, hungry in Sharpie on cardboard or a slick
promo subject line, *It's not too late!* or this safety

orange classic flipped in haste: *sorry, we're closed.*
So I try to read you, listening so hard my eyes cross,

but in your honeyed mumble everything sounds like
please come for me, or don't comfort me.

The line crackles, consonants lost in wind and miles
of wireless wires. I'm sorry, did you mean to say *mistake?*

I could have sworn I heard my name.

THE CHIEF CALLIGRAPHER IN THE
WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF GRAPHICS
AND CALLIGRAPHY WHO OFFICIALLY
REPORTS TO THE CHIEF USHER BUT
WORKS MORE CLOSELY WITH THE
SOCIAL SECRETARY VISUALIZES THE
MEMORANDUM HE IS ABOUT TO
COMPOSE

MICHAEL MARTONE
FROM *RE: MEMORANDA*

Invitations, place cards, letters patent, commissions, proclamations, greetings—
serifing bridging ligatures connecting the gesturing spanning from the
President's asemic inkwell tweeking tweaking tweeting tongue to...

THE DEPUTY CHIEF, ATLANTIC
HYDROGRAPHIC BRANCH,
HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEYS DIVISION,
OFFICE OF COAST SURVEY, NATIONAL
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC
ADMINISTRATION, ADMIRES THE CHART
THE SCHOONER MERCANTILE'S CAPTAIN
CONSULTS, CLOSE-HAULED BENEATH
THE DEER ISLE BRIDGE, EGGEMOGGIN
REACH, MAINE

MICHAEL MARTONE
FROM *RE: MEMORANDA*

It floats, a still pool of soundings. I'm incognito, vacationing. These charts?
Discontinued. Unsalvageable. Lithography sunk like a stone. "Where are we?" I
ask, knowing.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Diana Adams has had work published in a variety of journals and anthologies including *Boston Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Fogged Clarity*, *PoetsAndArtists*, *Ekleksographia*, and the 2009 *Rhysling Anthology*. She has published a book of poetry, *Hello Ice*, and a chapbook, *Catch*.

José Araguz is a CantoMundo fellow and the author of seven chapbooks as well as the collections *Everything We Think We Hear* (Floricanto Press) and *Small Fires* (FutureCycle Press). He runs the poetry blog *The Friday Influence* and teaches English and creative writing at Linfield College.

Sally Ball is the author of *Wreck Me* and *Annus Mirabilis*. She teaches at Arizona State University in Tempe, AZ, and she is an associate director of Four Way Books.

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Bryce Berkowitz is an MFA candidate at West Virginia University. He is the Editor-in-Chief at *Cheat River Review*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Best New Poets 2017*, *Ninth Letter*, *Hobart*, *Barrow Street*, *Third Coast*, *Passages North*, *The Pinch*, *Permafrost*, and *Eleven Eleven* among others.

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John Blair has published six books, including three poetry collections, most recently *Playful Song Called Beautiful* (University of Iowa Press, 2016), as well as poems and stories in *Poetry*, *The New York Quarterly*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *New Letters*, and elsewhere.

Jon Boisvert was born in Elkhorn, Wisconsin, and now lives in Oregon. He studied poetry at Oregon State University and the Independent Publishing Resource Center in Portland. You can sometimes see new writing and art at www.jonboisvert.com. *BORN* is his first book.

Miranda Campbell studied film-cinema studies at the University of Central Florida. She is currently an MFA student at Georgia College, where she works as a graduate assistant in the school's Special Collections. Miranda is equal parts film nerd, professional daydreamer, beach dweller, soccer player, and expert napper.

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Stephen Cramer's first book of poems, *Shiva's Drum*, was selected for the National Poetry Series and published by University of Illinois Press. *Bone Music*, his most recent collection, was selected by Kimiko Hahn for the 2015 Louise Bogan Award and published in 2016 by Trio House Press.

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Anthony DiPietro moved to New York in 2016 to join Stony Brook University as a candidate for a creative writing MFA. He has earned fellowships or residencies from Aspen Summer Words, Azule, The Frost Place, Key West Literary Seminars, and Sundress Academy for the Arts.

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Kelsey Maki writes literary fiction, travel articles, and magical realism, and pens an occasional poem. Her writing has been published in the print collection *Mosaics: A Collection of Independent Women—Volume I* and online at *Panoply*, *Writers Resist*, and *What Travel Writers Say*.

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Megan Taylor is currently working on her B.A. in Philosophy at Palm Beach Atlantic University, a school snugly settled between a cemetery and the sea. She has the intent of teaching English in Sri Lanka after graduation. If her work inspires you to live more freely, she will be immensely pleased.

Adam Tedesco is a founding editor of *REALITY BEACH*, a journal of new poetics. His recent poetry and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Gamma*, *Funhouse*, *Fanzine*, *Fence*, and elsewhere. He is the author of several chapbooks, most recently *HEART SUTRA* and *ABLAZA* (Lithic Press).

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Lizzi Wolf teaches American popular culture and children's literature. She attended Oberlin College and University of Michigan. Her work has appeared in *Map Literary*, *Pleiades*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Seattle Review*, *Knut House*, *Worcester Review*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and *Midwest Quarterly*.

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Sore Songs by Heather June Gibbons is forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press in 2018.

“The Station Wagon” by Lizzi Wolf was originally published in *Parting Gifts*, 2004.

The manuscript *A Tattoo of the Slaughter* by Erin Hall was also a finalist in the 2017 Midwest Chapbook Contest.

