

# THE LAUREL REVIEW

Volume 51

2018

Issue 1

**Editors:** John Gallaher, Luke Rolfes

**Associate Editor:** Daniel Biegelson, Richard Sonnenmoser, José Palacios Perez

**Editorial Assistants:** Korbin Jones, Morgan Wagle, Bailey Weese, Angel Ette-Umoh, Courtney Cauley, Prakriti Pokhrel, Kohl Moutray, Katelynn Metz, Sarah Augustine, Anthony Procopio Ross, Zachary Warner, Kennia Lopez

**Cover Photography and Design:** Kennia Lopez

**Typesetting:** Luke Rolfes, Korbin Jones

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

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

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



GreenTower Press

# CONTENTS

## FICTION

<b>Eric Henry Sanders</b>	Hands On	44
<b>Chris Burns</b>	Contra Mundi	62
<b>Michael Chitwood</b>	Eve	104

## NONFICTION

<b>Sarah Anne Strickley</b>	The Pacifist	14
<b>Wendy Bilen</b>	Seen (Los Veo)	30

## POETRY

<b>Adrienne Asher</b>	Burning Through Dreams	1
<b>Adam Clay</b>	Branch Song	2
	Elegy for a Different Kind of Falling	3
<b>Al Nyhart</b>	Sunday at the Park Pavilion	4
<b>Carol Durak</b>	Lorca's Piano	5
<b>Darrell Dela Cruz</b>	Organ Donor	6
<b>Bruce Bond</b>	Lesser Sun Gods of the Modern Day	7
<b>Jackleen Holton</b>	Dark Horse	13
<b>Emily Pittinos</b>	Answers	16
<b>Margaux Griffith</b>	Leftovers	17
<b>Janet Reed</b>	Into the Night Through Open Windows	18
<b>Ceridwen Hall</b>	airborne	19
<b>Kristina Marie Darling</b>	Melancholy, Sings the Mockingbird. Terror.	
	Nothing is ever the same.	20
	She Thought of his Steps in the Garden. She Could	
	Think of Nothing Else When He Opened His Mouth.	21
<b>Carlos Reyes</b>	The Tenants of the World	22
<b>Walter Bargaen</b>	Heaven's Open Face	23
<b>Cedric Rudolph</b>	Reference	24
<b>Madelyn Gardner</b>	Sundowning	26
	Presage: The Brain in Transit	27
<b>Simon Perchik</b>	*	28
	*	29
<b>Mark DeFoe</b>	Angels in the Dumpster	49
<b>Ryler Dustin</b>	To Make Color	50
	Late Garden	51
<b>Jannicane Shane</b>	Overgrown	53
<b>Tracy Zeman</b>	Star or Plow	54
<b>Diane Wald</b>	It's Just The Noise Of The Water Seeping	
	Through The Hardened Ground	58
	My Undertaker Wears A Sweet Cologne	59
<b>Annie Diamond</b>	I like our bodies when	60
	Of the spine	61
<b>Sarah Blackman</b>	Voyeurism	72
<b>Stephen Gibson</b>	Frida Kahlo's Painting Remembrance	
	of the Open Wound	73
<b>Mick Powell</b>	my student makes a video of herself lighting	
	the flag on fire	74

<b>Eric Orosco</b>	thinking about my uncle during a concert, November 9th	76
<b>Brian Batchelor</b>	from <i>Disfigured Hours</i>	77
<b>Loretta Oleck</b>	Rima	78
<b>Suzanne Roszack</b>	There Are People Out There With Courage	79
<b>Claire Bateman</b>	The Ordinary Course of Things	80
<b>Rita Chapman</b>	Taking Account After Divorce	82
	Dear Syria	83
<b>Jake Bailey</b>	Cigar Burn	84
<b>Brian Satrom</b>	Viewing Reagan's Casket	87
<b>Jamie Wendt</b>	Rooted	88
<b>Michael McLane</b>	from <i>Warm Springs</i>	90
<b>John Hyland</b>	Each Night	96
	Bali	97
<b>Kelsea Habecker</b>	Unconjugal Weather	98
	Solitudinal	99
<b>Isaac Pressnell</b>	Some Reasons	100
	Man Searching for Immortality/Woman	
	Searching for Eternity	103
<b>Mary Leader</b>	from <i>Cornucopia of Arcadia</i>	106
<b>Natalie Homer</b>	Genealogy	108
	Overlook	109
	Gravedigging, 5:00am	110
<b>Amelia Martens</b>	Making a Death Pit	112
<b>Andrés Rodríguez</b>	Drawn Curtains	114
<b>Bray McDonald</b>	The Veteran	116
<b>Christopher Rubio-Goldsmith</b>	Workshopping a Poem	117
<b>E.B. Schnepf</b>	Harbinger;Augary;Oracle;Omen	118
	Psuedocycysis	119
<b>Esteban Rodríguez</b>	Curios	120
	Tlacuache	121
	Ballad	122
	Mimesis	124
<b>Nancy Goldberg</b>	Tread Softly in Dublin	125
<b>Jessica Lieberman</b>	Blue	126
	KIKE	127
<b>Kara Knickerbocker</b>	Splitting the Family Tree	128
	A Lesson in Direction	129
<b>Melissa Andres</b>	My Mother's Daybed	130
<b>Miranda Beeson</b>	Alpha Boars	131
<b>Stephen Massimilla</b>	Ascent	132
	Through Me	134
<b>Taffeta Chime</b>	淘米 (Washing Rice)	136
<b>Tara Orzolek</b>	The mess that was left at the table, after I asked for forgiveness	140
	Courtesy call	141
<b>Virginia Sutton</b>	Postcards from Buenos Aires	142
<b>Zoe Canner</b>	secular diaspora in parts	144
	wish i were here	145
<b>David Koehn</b>	Delta 5: Septemeber 7th The Day After Reading Antin's "John Cage Uncaged Is Still Cagey" I See Waterweed Everywhere	146
	Delta 6: At The Corner Of Byron Highway & Camino Diablo There Is A Stoplight	148

*SPECIAL SPANISH/ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS*

Curated by José Palacios Perez, Korbin Jones, and Kennia Lopez

<b>Xavier Abril</b> translated by Will Carter	Intimacy	152
<b>Julio Martínez Masanza</b> translated by Stuart Silverman	Horses Also Die In Battle	153
<b>Ricardo Güiraldes</b> translated by Christopher Ringrose	Bark	154
<b>Julio Cortázar</b> translated by Carolina A. Herrera	To Read as an Interrogative	155
<b>Lope de Vega</b> translated by Dan MacIsaac	Aubade River Song The Bridge of Love	156 156 157
<b>Pablo de Rokha</b> translated by Alani Rosa Hicks-Bartlett	Spirit and Figure Epitaph of the Tomb of Juan, The Carpenter	158 159
<b>Roberto Azcorra Cámara</b> translated by Pennell Somson	Spirals	160
<b>Ricardo Nicolayevsky</b> translated by Diego Gerard	The Smoocher	163
<b>Kate Kingston</b> translated by Luisa Goveia	Qué posee Lorca?	164



# Adrienne Asher

## **Burning Through Dreams**

Curved around my dreaming  
I dive deeper.  
Cities shimmer, war-torn.  
Your image morphs into a candle flame  
wavering before me.  
Streets curve and reform under strange skies.  
Oceans surge and tower, falling.  
Lifted by the night's tsunami,  
I awake  
with dreams lying tangled in my hair,  
the taste  
of the moon in my mouth.  
Your memory  
lies flashing  
like animal eyes in the dark  
clear  
bright  
burning.

# Adam Clay

## Branch Song

Why think of the once anchored past floating  
away from a minor boundary or a standard  
form of inquiry? Bring your vision to this cloth  
knowing that plans only function as provisional,  
as though to rob simplicity from a minor cloud.  
Look up at midday. Your mind builds a galaxy,  
distracts vision from surplus: that rough surf turns up  
and up but it only distracts from what's along  
the sand. To gratify your imagination would fall into myth  
of carrying gold lightning away from rain clouds, combining  
tranquility with words stitching from thoughts. Nothing past  
stars horizon-bound or stars along this road, a turning away  
from sky but now air falls down to vision, a difficult  
thought to forgo id, to shift acorns from burning to burn.



## Elegy for a Different Kind of Falling

What is necessary about a morning that drifts through the mind  
Before words have arrived? To imagine wakefulness takes little  
Work, time or money, but the imagination dwells there, an expert  
On the mysterious beginning of desire in a land free of currency  
And bartering. Close your eyes, and what should appear will appear.  
To presume what happens outside of the realm of the mind might  
Very well be a mind all to itself: opening and closing, the trees filter  
In and through consciousness, free of the thoughts that knot the brain  
Into something almost unrecognizable. In a country whose green  
Had not yet been burned by war, a group of men parachuted down,  
Their bags filled with what would identify them when their voices  
Would not. It would be shallow to say we are all each of us falling  
Into that same ditch or into any ditch, our identity stitched into  
The fabric of how we speak and what we say. A man from the other  
Side hiked up the hill, not expecting to find the dead men there,  
Their uniforms pristine and their bodies too, the violence not even  
Written on their faces. What to make of their hair parted so perfectly,  
Their boots laced tightly, and the lavender soap in one of the bags,  
The smell of it so foreign, like a woman in a world without them?  
If the details are where the human mind resides, then between  
The details there must be some deeper understanding of what drives  
Desire out from the subconscious and into the urge to throw ourselves  
Out and into the dark waves of rain. The soldier who found the bodies  
In the ravine had been lost in the cold mud of a strange country  
For days, his hands covered with dirt he did not recognize, a sense  
Of loss he was only beginning to understand. It would seem foolish  
To say he saw himself in the dead faces of the perfectly groomed,  
Their only purpose was to take his life, and another and another.  
We might think of luck in a moment like that, but luck is only a reckless  
Form of chaos, a way of being at the right place when time is through  
With us and when we fall, it's a fall unlike any we've felt before,  
A parachute on our back unused, a notion of self tightening  
Up suddenly like a fist of tree in a storm of words.

# Al Nyhart

## Sunday At The Park Pavilion

You've stayed late,  
withstood the ninety degree heat, the mosquitoes,

the brief thunderstorm  
& the peculiarities of the woman

standing in front of you  
who can't find her mouth with the plastic spoon full of Yoplait.

She finally gives up, tosses the container onto the wet grass  
as the next speaker approaches the stage.

You strain to hear his rehearsed voice  
sounding a bit like yourself

if you were a little nervous, somewhat frightened, but defiant  
& looking for a way out

as you are now, backing slowly away from the crowd  
who won't miss you

or notice you've left the bomb unattended  
while you excuse yourself, resolute

for what you have to do today  
in the politeness of a setting sun.

# Carol Durak

## Lorca's Piano

If you were to enter the house  
even today, through the tall church-like wooden door  
and look to your left  
there, in the parlor, is Lorca's piano.

It still matters that Lorca was killed—still

matters that a few years earlier  
when Lorca left the U.S.  
he was exhausted, mystified  
he wrote poems against racism, capitalism  
using more than once  
the word, *vomit*.

The piano stands, perhaps, where it's always stood.

Like a sweating bull it glints  
in the sunlight; its silence  
the black moon of the murdered.

## Darrell Dela Cruz

### **Organ Donor**

No, you can't imagine laying naked to be dissected, arms open in a lit background.

You'll be missing the point: I was in observation. Reverse engineered to be sliced open.

No, you can't imagine entering a stranger in parts. Trusting their touch like nutritional facts.

You'll be missing the point: the surgery was unsuccessful. The rejection not uncommon.

No, you can't imagine want. The humiliation of not being better. The point: a better quality of life.

# Bruce Bond

## Lesser Sun Gods of the Modern Day

The way they dragged us out of bed,  
tore us from the roots of one night's growth,

the incorrigible muck of dread and wishes.  
How they lit each furnace, each cold eye

drawn to the mirrors and coffee machines,  
to news that crackled open with the voice

of news on fire. Something in our caution,  
the genuflections of our looking up

as one might look at a steeple of flame  
above the courthouse before both crown

and chamber crumble as one. It felt like fate.  
The heat that oils the keyhole of the eye.

Needs that follow suns and sun gods still  
who fall, like us, and, in their falling, rise.

\*

A lamp then is a thing at prayer, an homage  
to the slow immolation of stars turned

monstrous as they age. A lamp is one  
part sun, another an elegy to sunlight.

An acolyte made of what it worships,  
flames that fall to earth and just keep falling.

Light smolders through the flesh at dawn.  
Another day, another obit for a stranger.

Each visual breath of print gone dry.  
Each sentence cinched with small black hole.

If you look deep enough, you see a sun,  
a temple, a temple on fire. I see myself,

a child, who followed a father who followed  
the news as some follow rules, and others

bitterness, doubt, or any of the small-boned  
uncertainties that make us us, gods gods.

\*

Long ago the one and only Father  
and Son said, some things must be unclear

to appear. They must be campfire-clear  
among the lords and branches of the pines.

They must be clear as dark between the stars  
to camouflage the gods. Long ago

I ate the bread, and I was hungry still.  
I was a kid caught in the crossfire

between day and night, day as day  
and night as the harvest of daylight.

My father taught me dreams were mine alone,  
and there we were. Eating the daylight.

The new dead were everywhere. Alive  
in us, in every unclear kid who thinks,

isn't it a little cruel and lovely to say,  
drink of this, my blood. And so, I did.

\*

It takes a full eclipse to see the deep-  
red flash of the chromosphere, the hidden

sun inside the sunlight. It takes the black  
plate of the moon to see what bodies see

when they open both vein and eye to give  
to each an image. What I do not see

longs to speak the language of the seen,  
as a child's hurt longs for lips that bind,

or a killing field for an April harvest.  
The many mothers of the savior look up

to bear witness to the cross, to Christ  
as mother, lifted above whatever history

and its dispensations. What remains  
remains eclipsed, crowned in thorns and blossoms.

\*

Suns rise and fall and with them bodies  
in the laps of mothers whose blood is stone.

Some images of kindness are neither  
cruel nor kind, but sepulcher marble,

cold to the touch, if the warden lets you.  
My grandfather died in a chair because

beds were painful, and he had no faith  
in medicine and angels of this world.

He died of faith, which was his choice,  
all of us in different chromospheres

beneath a sun that travelled one direction.  
One plow to cut the sky into flower.

It takes an eclipse of the particular  
sky to see the rose in it as mirror

of our own. Alone and cast out west,  
each in the fate of all. The many gods

in one killing field, one believer dying  
in a chair. One shadow chair pinned below.

My grandfather's house was a mansion,  
its many doors laid open in the bones.

\*

Say paradise floats above our stories.  
Does it take a story to get there still.

A mother unveils her face before the child  
with a boo. One word. The speed of angels.

Somewhere the carver blows a puff of air.  
It just might be his final gesture, his *boo*

over the names and dates laid in stone.  
It just might blow the invisible candle

to clear the stone of flame, the flame of smoke.  
To make the cut appear. More deep, more clear.

\*

They came here long ago, the great observers  
who watched the many suns rise and fall

into images they made, papyrus scrolls



that went the way of the pillager's torch.

They came and rose as did their monoliths  
whose faces crumbled in the desert wind.

And what they watched watched them on the altar  
as the widow who talks talks to no one

at the grave. The great observers of night  
read there a story full of gods because

the spirits of dead fathers and mothers rose  
through their eyes and pinned them to the heavens.

Even the horror brought with it the comfort  
of pins. Like talk. They came here long ago,

those who saw in the conquistador an angel  
fallen to earth. And he just kept falling.

And over his grave, they laid the shield he came with.  
The bright bronze cross on fire in the night.

\*

I know the loneliness of being two  
who cannot find each other in the dark.

They cannot find the dark, the lone ghost  
who would carry their abandoned parts

from the killing field to a widow's door  
or place of rest. Or passage in between.

Always somewhere a war between the gods,  
a great pillar of smoke, the wind that sweeps

the remnants of a home across the border.  
Is it any wonder god gets personal.

Our Mother of Perpetual Abandon,  
I pray this finds you with the other spirits

whose solitary god is one part man,  
the other the figure of a man in flames.

One part eye. The other the light that falls  
and just keeps falling. And not a god at all.

# Jackleen Holton

## Dark Horse

Instead of falling from the sky tonight,  
frogs are singing in the canyon. But the sunset

looks different from our balcony, the colors  
almost otherworldly, and the road

is strangely quiet. On nights like this, the TV  
turned off after the news of this week's shooting,

wildfires and flooding, more bees dying,  
and a child's red shoe in the rubble

of this morning's suicide attack,  
it's easier to think of this world as already over,

every day a rental, though we tell ourselves  
the mortgage—its Latin roots mean death grip—

will one day be paid off. We're drinking  
my favorite cheap wine, the Dark Horse zinfandel

I bought at Costco last week, but it won't wash away  
that picture, a single red sneaker, the same size as the ones

I picked up off the living room floor tonight—  
or the ones on the child with the bomb strapped to his chest.

Maybe it's sooner than we think; Costco's shelves  
empty, no red zin, no balcony, no mortgage, the rim

of the canyon dark as the gorge where the frogs congregate,  
their song the world's song, waiting for rain.

# Sarah Anne Strickley

## The Pacifist

In his harder drinking days, my father was the kind of alpha American who regularly road raged in the church parking lot. He was aggressive even in his decency. When I was a teenager, he liked to wait up for me and force me to debate various philosophical issues meant to draw forth my character flaws. He was soused and so this generally meant I'd be called upon to employ the strategy of waiting it out or obfuscating my real personality. I respected him and so I occasionally became embroiled in intense circular narratives. It wasn't until my thirties that I realized the average drunk isn't waiting for the right answer as he circles around again; he's merely circling.

In any case, I once made the mistake of wearing a shirt emblazoned with a peace sign when I went out and I was wearing it when I came home to find him sitting on the couch in the blue light of the television. He asked me if I was a pacifist. This was during that awkward mid-90s revival of Woodstock-ean aesthetics. Saving the earth was a thing many high school lockers emphasized by means of deliberately placed stickers. My wardrobe also included a tee shirt featuring a caterpillar in the shape of a question mark. In other words, I considered myself an intellectual, but was probably kind of a shit.

I said, "I don't believe in war."

He said, "What does that mean?"

And I said there was never a good reason to kill people. And then he asked me what I would do if they came into our house and violently murdered my mother and my younger siblings in front of me.

"Would you do nothing?" he asked. "Would you give them the peace sign?"

I asked him who was going to come into our house and kill us and he said no one was coming. "This is a thought experiment," he said. "You need to know what you would do so that when it happens you can act with purity."

I thought about it for a while. And then I said something like this:

What I would probably do if people came into our home and murdered my mother and my siblings in front of me would be to track "them" down and kill "them" in roughly the same way. And then, because

I was still pissed, I'd track down "their" families and kill "their" parents and "their" siblings in even more terrible ways. "They" wouldn't be around to see this happen, but I'd still be making a point, which would be "don't fuck with the likes of me."

In any case, I'd then track down "their" cousins and "their" friends and "their" coworkers—assuming "they" had one or all three—and do the same only more violent. By this point "they'd" probably have a pretty good idea of what was going on and so they might try to go into hiding or launch a counter-attack against me. So, I'd probably disappear for a while and let "them" think it was all over. I'd get word out that my new mantra was *live and let live*. I'd let people see me going around in my peace shirt again.

Once "they" were mostly relaxed, I'd go in and kill as many of "them" as I could as nonchalantly as I could. Like, no-big-deal killing. Like, I've-been-killing-for-a-while-and-so-I'm-totally-immune-to-any-of-the-moral-qualms-you-might-expect killing. And I guess I'd go on and on killing until I started killing people who weren't even necessarily "them" but maybe kind of seemed like "them" and so, on some level (OK, probably just associatively) had it coming. These "them" would be so easy to kill and there would really be no one trying to stop me, so probably "they" really didn't deserve to live. At least not like "we" do. And since I'm basically a killing machine now, I'd probably start killing indiscriminately. And if I had access to a bomb, I'd probably drop it just to have it over and done with.

What my father did, after I was done saying all of this to him, was something he did frequently then and still does when he's not sure what in the hell has happened in our conversation: he employs a ruthless pivot. On this occasion, he turned his attention back to the TV and lifted his drink. "Your mother," he said, "is in quite the mood today."

And then we talked about whatever sport was happening on the screen and, at some point, he fell asleep in his chair. And that was the last time I ever talked to him about war.

# Emily Pittinos

## Answers

it is impossible to quit:

forecasting an alternate life: hazy glow in which  
I am brighter: kinder: unorphanable: pleasure

is the undertow: I know living things do their best  
to keep from dying: but what of the soft fox

always sprinting ahead of the pack: I set a trap  
for what is good: I know the cantaloupe is ripe

when I smell sweetness through the skin: I imagine  
the touch of joy: is unmistakable:

the belly of a bridegroom: the oyster  
even without pearl: what happens when death

empties into the body: trap set and left: I return  
to the lights off: I steady to bear: the too bitter

# Margaux Griffith

## Leftovers

These are the hands that slice  
pineapple, mango, pear.

These are the hands that peel  
skin now coiled on the counter.

Exposed fruit, even smothered,  
breathes inside the bowl.

Something lingers along the rim:  
speckled strawberry seeds,

amber pulp deserted from cores.  
These hands smear the edge and slide

the fruit back inside; they hesitate  
before dipping down.

Nectar seeps deep into  
the cracked red knuckles.

These hands will remember,  
even after being washed.

Janet Reed

**Into the Night Through Open Windows**

Butterflies are free to fly, fly away, high away, bye, bye. Elton John

On the nights I blew the smoke  
of Virginia Slims at the moon,  
I wished it would choke the men  
who thought they owned it.  
Nights I slipped through  
open windows, I found my Jesus  
in fruit jars juiced red  
with Strawberry Hill,  
swooning under the orange haze  
of dappled lights in empty lots  
to Elton on eight-tracks.  
The hook of a riff, a lick of longing,  
the taste of too-sweet booze,  
and a long drag of *you've come  
a long way, baby*, lifted me  
from my Father's house.  
I was sixteen,  
carousing with strangers,  
leaning into open car windows,  
singing my hymn of praise:  
*someone saved my life tonight.*



# Ceridwen Hall

## **airborne**

I wait, for now untroubled by the computer that navigates and steers, the pilot who merely watches a stream of numbers representing a map and makes the occasional pronouncement about scenery and weather. We are held aloft. Let the plane soar unfathomable, more enclosure than vehicle, an idea the engine-sound lulls and obscures. Two passengers in the row ahead watch television; Obama and earlier presidents stand at a podium and speak mutely. The seatbelt sign chimes off and on. Turbulence arises, diminishes. I attempt to read, then to warn myself: home is never quite how one left it. Our ears cloud and bloom. We surrender empty wrappers, are reminded of our freedom to use electronic devices while taxiing, to summon relatives. But first, a near rumble as wheels unfold, a sunset view of the highway and the winter grass beside it

## Kristina Marie Darling

**“MELANCHOLY, SINGS THE MOCKINGBIRD. TERROR.  
NOTHING IS EVER THE SAME.”**

The field that is the backdrop: that it will be covered in snow or burned from beneath a bed of frost. Field that is the color of her wedding dress, turning barren. The barrister parts his lips. Surely the law can find what has been lost? The landscape is a book she reads over and over, but doesn't understand.

\*

To imagine deliverance, she must keep her eyes open and closed at the same time. And never look away. She holds the flowers far from her, fist held tight against temptation.

\*

She's halfway between a meadow and the sea. One might feel we lack a more precise description: bride en route to some other coast.

\*

Comes the cold weather she remembers with displeasure: not a single worthwhile wedding gift. Pristine linens become harbingers, but no one phones for help—most of the beautifully wrapped boxes are empty.

\*

To perfect grief, the body's city turns out its lights, each window's glass gone dark beneath the ice. The neighbors can't see the old photographs burning inside the house, or her pocketbook, with its silver chain and ever-lengthening trail of coins.

**“SHE THOUGHT OF HIS STEPS IN THE GARDEN.  
SHE COULD THINK OF NOTHING ELSE WHEN HE OPENED HIS  
MOUTH.”**

Though they had always slept in that room, with its high white walls and blue furniture, she insisted that some degree of space remain between them. This careful arrangement of their bodies was for her a practical concern, not a rupture of any kind

Their house was also furnished with a small window, which overlooked the frozen shore. When his proximity became too much, she would trace the shape of the ice with the very tip of her index finger—

Roman a Clef:

Daphne { } Apollo

(Here what seems like a lack of affection  
might be rendered as a detail in the  
landscape, a glacier cleaving to reveal a  
body of water below—

His refusal of power, because of how the snow gathers, may be  
understood as

may be understood as

Imagine a French woman buried in a book. Think of the air she’s lost in  
all these years of breathing.

He fell into the room like the pause between two words. When the silence  
lengthened, she couldn’t say for certain if she was causing it

# Carlos Reyes

## **The Tenants of the World**

We leave the house  
kiss our fingertips, touch  
the mezuzah  
at the right side of the door.

During “the evictions”  
the man of the house  
before it was knocked,  
planted a kiss  
on the door post.

Each passing family  
member kissed tips of fingers  
traced the outline  
of the missing mezuzah . . .

When the Irish peasant,  
his family and possessions  
were set out on the street . . .

When Jewish families  
were taken  
from the shtetl . . .

They must have known.

# Walter Bargaen

## Heaven's Open Face

No one sees the sidewalk break  
into burnt waves on the dry surf  
of an inland coast, the crashing spasms,  
the dolphin-leaping earth  
and billowing splash of dust.

How space enters between things  
that didn't know space,  
volumes pouring into minds  
that were thinking other  
smaller thoughts, then the shiver  
that erupts into nothing.

A stratified sky of concrete  
falling upward,  
then down again, impacting  
with the heavy one-syllable voice  
of immutable objects.

Glass confetti  
of tall windows glitters  
over smoldering cars.  
The windshields a sharp sleet  
that won't melt off the faces

# Cedric Rudolph

## Reference

From the pages of your mother's book  
they scare you.  
Two men, naked  
from waist-up,  
embrace,  
bottom halves  
just outside the photo's frame.

In your mother's office, amidst  
antiseptic, cotton balls,  
*Primary Care Medicine* glints green  
from the shelf. Your mother is away  
with other lab techs  
wresting antibodies from plasma.  
She does not see you tip-toe over,  
pull the five-pounder down,  
part the book, page after page.

Two men, steel-wool chest hair,  
brown skin glossy on paper,  
poised to kiss across space.  
Their glares sear hotter  
than any your parents give.

Beneath them, the word  
HOMOSEXUAL in the caption.

It will be years before you see them  
exposed again—  
this time after baptism  
in the back room  
of Macedonia Church.

Grown men peel from wet robes

like banana skins,  
joke about the pastor's Barry White voice.

You huddle among them,  
wring out size-six socks.  
You try not to look, try not  
to see the muscled arms  
and thighs. Try to forget  
what you witnessed in the silent office  
under a lamp's godly light.

# Madelyn Gardner

## Sundowning

The evening meal served, chair cranked to its highest setting,  
until over her head a vestigial moon  
appears in the window.

Her eyes are open, cadaverous  
in a face I recognize as a sharper version of my own.

Her mind has emptied out its pockets.

This agitated stranger picking at the threads of her gown,  
who strikes out at me without warning, leaving  
a red tattoo on my bare arm.

My soothing attempts to calm her even though  
there is no stopping the echolalia of m's,  
parade of *fuck* and *cunt*.

Shrieked obscenities. Toward me? Toward God?

How I hope He will forgive me  
for wanting in the moment of a single heartbeat  
this lost woman dead.



## Presage: The Brain in Transit

From doctor to doctor my sister carries  
her brain—the woman  
who drank herself  
radiant  
to ride the thrum.

Black on film her tender mouth,  
green eyes,  
ears that beg for pearls,

all else monochrome,  
bone and tissue  
color of smoky wicks,  
a winter branch.

Scanned images layered  
into multi-hemispheres  
that seem to follow the laws  
of symmetry,

showing no evidence  
of shadowlands,  
spectral mass. No hint

of either plaque or tangles  
that soon will make  
a mockery of  
these magnetic fields.

## Simon Perchik

\*

To hold on you make a boy from paper  
pin the snapshot up so its dampness  
keeps the eyes from closing –reach around

and though this gesture stops mid-air  
it presses against his chest till the wall  
spreads over the Earth as an early map

where every stream becomes your fingertip  
comes to an end in a dried riverbed  
whose bottom stones are sentences, talk

tell you why they too no longer move  
are hiding from something still reaching out  
that is not your arm waiting to be bandaged.

\*

You darken each slice as if it is the flour  
that has forgotten where in the oven  
you learned to first go mad, alone

the way each moon before breaking open  
lets you have one last look  
mixed with smoke to make amber

then harden in the –you eat  
crust that’s been reheated, bite  
into the night sky where your teeth

come back to life, catch fire  
stripping your lips to the bone  
no longer soft, swollen from kisses

–burnt bread –you feed on stone  
while it’s coming apart from the silence inside  
–by the mouthful, what once was a love song.

# Wendy Bilen

## Seen (Los Veo)

I'm sitting on the couch watching a rerun of *Wheel of Fortune* when Dylan appears at the front door. His right sneaker, red, is untied, and he's gripping a wrapped lollipop with his left hand. I see him before he rings the doorbell, so I ask him what's going on.

'I need a Band-Aid,' he says, lifting his knee.

I wet a paper towel, retrieve my first-aid kit from the kitchen drawer, and meet him on the stoop. He sits down, knees up. I ask him what happened.

'I fell down.'

His story checks out. The children next door have been romping around their yard for the last hour. Their family is hosting a party for the mom's thirty-ninth birthday. Cousins, aunts and uncles are over. Meat is charring on the backyard grill.

I dab at his knee with the toweling and the cut emerges, a raw red line.

'It hurts,' he says.

'I know.'

Though skinny and impish now, Dylan has a smile that will one day make girls blush. I open the first-aid kit. Seeing the Neosporin, I think that's probably a good idea and squeeze a dab on his knee.

'Minions or super heroes?' I ask.

'Super heroes.'

I sift through the bag of Band-Aids, trying to make out the pattern through the translucent wrappers. Finding one, I peel it open.

'Captain America!'

'Ooh, I like that one.'

The bandage covers nearly all of the cut, but he tells me he needs another one. The Avengers do the job. I kiss my finger and touch it to his knee.

'Why you do that?' he asks.

'It helps it get better,' I reply. 'Okay, you're all set.'

He gets up.

'Tie your shoe.'

He clomps down the steps.

‘You’re welcome,’ I say, heading back into the house. Sometimes he says thank you, today he doesn’t. I remind him anyway.

Now that the weather has warmed, the neighbor kids have started relying on me again. I first met them a couple of years ago. I moved into this house in a largely Latino neighborhood just outside Washington, DC, after my second husband decided to move back to Chicago, and I decided not to. At the closing, the former owner, a young guy in a Terps t-shirt who had flipped the house in a matter of weeks, slid the keys across the table. He grinned and said, ‘There are some kids who are very excited you’re coming.’

That first day the children passed back and forth, back and forth, on their bikes, walking, their eyes on the moving truck, on me, on the chairs and boxes being carted into the house. They would argue later over who saw me first.

As I was installing five-dollar vinyl blinds in my upstairs window, the children stopped and stared up at me. I waved. They waved back.

That first week I discovered a fledgling Japanese maple being suffocated by an azalea in a flower bed along the fence. I took a shovel, clippers, and an axe to the roots of the bully. The two youngest children, Dylan and his brother Bruno, dragged lawn chairs to the chain link and sat down to watch as if I were a sporting event. The others rotated in.

I was a curiosity: a woman, by herself, in a house. They tracked my every move. I frequently looked at a neighbor’s house and noticed the blinds shift, the drapes flutter.

‘What are you doing?’ Bruno would ask. I might have in my hands a bag of garbage, a roll of tape, an empty box.

Or this: ‘Where are you going?’

‘To the shed.’

‘Why?’

‘I have to get something.’

‘Why?’

And so on.

As soon as I flung the screen door open and headed for the shed, they were at the fence, crouched and spying through a gap in the collection of wooden panels leaning there to resemble a privacy fence. ‘Hi,’ I said. They ran away giggling. Once I knelt down and started in on the soil, they returned.

‘What are you doing?’

‘Digging up these rocks.’

‘Why?’

‘So the flowers can grow.’

‘Can we help?’

I said sure, so the boys ran over, and I handed them trowels, shovels, and a crow bar. They dug up rocks and bricks, helped me tamp down the dirt around new bushes and give the flowers a drink. For Dylan, then three, I designated a special job: hauling dirt in a pail from here to there. We talked about worms and grubs and how to care for a plant. Afterward, we sat on the step and sucked on popsicles.

The next day: ‘Do you have any more rocks to dig up?’ And the next, and the next.

One afternoon I was sitting on my sofa reading when I heard the creak of the mail slot and saw the brass flap rise. I glanced over, waiting for the mail to drop, but nothing happened. I got up and walked to the door, bent over and looked into the slot. A pair of little eyes looked back.

Bruno. He was five, small and precocious, known then and now as Pelón, bald, because of his buzz cut and because he shares his father’s name. I told Bruno to stop looking through my mail slot and promptly ordered a pouch. Then he started shouting my name from his front yard. As I shuffled around the kitchen, sometimes I turned to see him at the back door. One night I pulled into the driveway at 9:30, shut off the ignition, grabbed my purse, and pivoted to open the door. I jumped. There he was, his face in the window.

Most of the time, they’re bored.

These are not the families of lessons and leagues, of school plays and play dates. These are not the families who plan birthday parties for school friends, with candy-colored balloons and streamers taped to bookshelves, or host sleepovers with silly games and big bowls of popcorn. These are not the families who spend days at the Smithsonian or curl up for movie night with homemade pizzas. These are the families of minimum wage and night shifts, of walking across deserts from Guatemala and El Salvador, of remaining in the shadows. These are the families of head-toe-head setups, of rooms rented to single men. These are the families where the parents are working or sleeping, and the children are on their own.

When they put the shovels back in the shed, they noticed I had a Frisbee and asked if they could play with it. Sure, I said. Later when I noticed a jumbo bottle of bubbles on sale, I remembered their laughter.

The bin in the shed filled with rainbow balls, squirt guns, sidewalk chalk. Now they come over, and I hand them my keys.

Before I moved in, the children on either side were not permitted to play with each other. Sometimes they still are not allowed to go to each other's house. One side claims lice, and the other, I don't know. My yard has become the de facto DMZ.

Sometimes I don't see the children for days. They are kept inside, or they come out to play after dark, at 9:30 or 10:00. Bruno and Dylan's older sister Sofia appears then. Slender and pretty, she dons a t-shirt, sweatpants, and sneakers and plays one-on-one soccer with her cousin in the front yard or the street, yelling every profane word she knows. Sofia remains suspicious of me but has said she wants to be a vet. She has been driving her parents' vehicles since age thirteen. Now sixteen, she just failed her driver's test. 'By one question,' Bruno explains.

'Get the fuckin' ball!' she hollers. The younger children run, squealing and laughing. The soccer ball strikes the fence. 'Shit!' a little voice yells.

These games can go on for a couple of hours, and sometimes the children are still outside playing on a school night at 10:30 or 11:00. Juana, from the house on the other side, tells me that Bruno has been falling asleep in class. 'I overheard the teacher telling his mother,' she whispers. Bruno's mother says she will take care of it, but she is vacuuming an office building at the very time Bruno is playing soccer in the yard and shouting 'Damn!' when a particularly good shot is had. The elder Bruno, having risen for work at 4:30 am, is in bed.

When the children are allowed outside, they are confined to their yards, or mine. Sometimes a bike materializes. Gabriel generally has a fraying soccer ball that he kicks into the fence, which rattles like a tambourine. Kick, thump, rattle. Again. Again. Again.

We live across from a sprawling park, with a playground and soccer fields, and a creek perfect for rafts fashioned from sticks and leaves. I've seen an eight-point buck in those slim woods. I ask the children why their parents won't let them play over there.

The reply: 'They can't see us.'

That first summer, when Dylan spoke very little English, he lifted his arm and showed me a constellation of tiny red blisters. Poison ivy. I had it, too, and stuck out my leg. I snapped off a stem of aloe from the plant I had dug up at my grandparents' farm in Wisconsin, and smeared the cool gel on his arm. I later rubbed cortisone on the spot and bandaged it up.

Word spread. The children rang my doorbell or called to me over the fence, showing me new bruises, scrapes, cuts. They asked for Band-Aids even if they bumped but didn't bleed. They asked for Band-Aids for kids I didn't see, didn't know.

Dylan stared at me blankly when I attempted conversation, but he could say *Imma do it* (I want to do it) and *Ion poscul* (I want a popsicle). He also learned my name, calling it out cheerfully whenever he spotted me in the yard, sprinting down the sidewalk to greet me as I pulled into the driveway. He called out and ran to me even during the rare times his father was home and outside with him. He ran over as his mother left for work in the late afternoon, calling out, 'Bye, Mommy!' as her bottle-blond hair disappeared into a white SUV.

One day, as he hung off the chain link fence between our yards, he called me Mom.

His refrain became 'Wendy, look!' I would look, and he would hold up a half-eaten cookie, jump up one step, skip the length of the driveway, drive a Matchbox car along the fencepost. It didn't matter what it was. He just wanted to be seen.

Here is what I know:

The children have parents.

The parents have jobs.

Those jobs give the children access to shelter, food, clothing, transportation, and sometimes the dentist, the doctor, or the hospital.

The children, most days, get to school.

Here is what else I know:

Most of the parents cannot speak enough English to have a conversation.

Not all are citizens. Some have green cards, and others don't have any papers at all.

Some don't have insurance, for themselves or their kids.

The children have no bedtime, no regular balanced meals.

Juana and her older sister get up for school by themselves.

At six, Dylan still cannot tie his shoes.

At eight, Bruno cannot read and shows early signs of mental illness.

At ten, Julieta cannot tell time, does not know her months or seasons.

Gabriel has been held back a grade.

The children come to me whenever they can.

After the Band-Aids, the shovels, the popsicles, and the toys, I could



not retreat. I was Julie Andrews as Maria on the night of the thunderstorm, staring down a half-dozen scared kids, all waiting, waiting.

So I took them along. We walked to the playground, where they pumped their legs, swinging higher and higher, and they spun until dizzy, their hair whipping and the blood rushing to their cheeks. We hiked through the brush, through secret drinking spots littered with *Modelo* cans, to the creek. We cracked open Milkweed pods, thumbing the silky down and releasing it into the wind. We scaled boulders and bounced on a fallen tree. I pointed out minnows, river glass. We waded and splashed, and pried big stones from the mud and threw them into the water, pleased with the deep plunking sound. I showed them how to choose a flat rock and send it skittering across the surface, touching two, three, five times before sinking. When Gabriel received a new fishing rod from his uncle, we practiced casting. On the way home, I shook open a plastic bag and instructed everyone to pick up a piece of garbage. 'I found one!' they would shout, holding up an empty bottle or an old jug and dropping it in the bag.

At home, I lined the patio table with newspaper and squirted paint onto a plastic lid, and the children decorated the rocks they had found at the creek, smearing paintbrushes with turquoise, fuchsia, and gold. They strung beads on elastic for bracelets. They drew paper-bag puppets, colored canvases.

They kept coming. They came for birthday parties, shoving poop emoji cupcakes into their mouths, and Christmas parties, where they used frosting to glue graham crackers into tiny houses. They coated pumpkins with glitter and waved sparklers in the dark, etching their names into the night air. They mixed brownie batter and puzzled out math problems at the dining room table. They ran dripping through the sprinkler as it arched and waved overhead, slurped big swallows from the hose, and passed their hands through the little rainbows. I took them on the Metro, to see the monuments, the White House, the National Mall. At their request, they went with me to church.

We sat and talked about why reading matters, about how to write a book, about fights at school, about God. We talked about eating vegetables, brushing teeth, getting sleep. We talked about divorce. We talked about being kind, about why we shouldn't make fun of people who are different, about how *nigger* and *retard* are not words to be used. I interpreted their report cards for them, told them they need to read more, loaned them books.

The children pulled on me, tirelessly, and I let them because I couldn't stand to see them ignored. Maybe because I'm a teacher, and I am cursed by the need to help others learn, grow, see. When I once said to my colleagues that I'm just doing what anyone would do, they responded, uh, no, we'd just say hello and go in the house. But this wasn't martyrdom. In the same way that I am fueled by the look of recognition that spreads across my students' faces, I felt a surge of joy at seeing Dylan and Bruno, Julieta, Gabriel, Juana, and the other kids light up with curiosity and pride, to hear them brag of getting an A after we worked hard on their homework, of unfurling a new patrol belt, of turning a perfect cartwheel. I once walked outside with the dog and surveyed the mural they had drawn on the sidewalk with the chalk I had given them. They had left me a message: WENdy is the bEST! I smiled, feeling a flush of warmth I knew to be love.

I also let the children pull on me because I have no children of my own. My body refused to join egg with sperm, and the second husband who left thwarted attempts to adopt. I continue to try to be a little girl's forever family, but at forty-eight, my hope has shrunk. My motherlessness is the one subject that consistently dredges up tears.

I imagine the neighbor kids' mothers think that I should go get my own children, but then I think the same thing about them.

One night I invited five of the kids over to watch the latest Muppet movie. I had to disinvite the youngest two after Bruno vandalized another neighbor's car during a tantrum.

At 7:00 only Gabriel and Juana show up. They are eleven, birthdays three days apart. When she wants to, Juana can easily dominate any room with her wit and her disarming dimples. Though she carries a great deal of extra weight—*gordita*, her mother calls her—her size does not seem to bother her. She pulls her tight spiral curls into a puff and caps it with a big bow, looking younger than she is. At school she is enrolled in the talented and gifted track but at home still plays with dolls. Gabriel, a handsome boy with long eyelashes, is thinning out, his hair growing into longer wisps that fall into his face. *Guapo*, Juana's mom calls him. He laughs readily and even becomes silly when his cousins are not around. Soft-spoken and sometimes reserved, he tries to be good, to be kind.

'Where's Julieta?' I ask.

'She can't come. She's at her cousin's.'

'Can you see my lipstick?' asks Juana.

‘Yes, it’s pretty.’

‘I made it. Guess how.’

‘From Vaseline?’

‘From *crayons*. And Vaseline. Want me to make you some?’

‘No, I’m all set, thanks.’

‘I can make eyeliner, too.’

‘Really, I’m fine.’

I hear Bruno and Dylan outside crying.

The kids climb onto the stools at the kitchen counter. Gabriel said that he wanted to learn how to make pie, so I sprinkle some flour on the surface, plop down the dough, and demonstrate how to use the rolling pin. They become so enamored with the softness of the flour that they lose interest in rolling. They run their fingers through it and spread it around the counter.

I ask them to open the cherry pie filling. Juana looks at the can opener and bangs it on the can, not sure what to do. Gabriel sort of gets it, makes it around, opens the thing up. I hand him a spatula and tell him to scoop it all into the pie. As he pours and scrapes, he says, ‘What are those?’

‘Those,’ I say, ‘are cherries.’

Somehow we get the pie in the oven, and I tell Gabriel to clean the flour off the floor using the DustBuster. He looks at it, and he and Juana *ooh* and *ahh*, calling it the Vacuum of the Future. (Just a few days earlier, Gabriel and his cousins watched me load my dishwasher, astonished, having never heard of such an appliance.)

We start watching the movie, but they are giggling—somehow each conversation circles back to farts and poop—and Gabriel asks every few minutes if the pie is done yet.

The doorbell rings. In walks Julieta, back from the cousin’s. Her long hair is wet.

‘Oh, did you go swimming?’ I ask.

‘No,’ she said, ‘I had lice.’

She assures me that she has washed her hair, but I flinch every time she flips it against my sofa.

There is more giggling and actual farting, and Gabriel says, ‘I hope I don’t have diary.’

‘Do you mean diarrhea?’

‘Yeah, that.’

The house smells of baking pie, and when the timer beeps, I slice them each a steaming piece, finishing it off with a scoop of vanilla ice

cream, which melts and pools on the plate. They stab the cherries with their forks and gush over their accomplishment.

The clock inches past 9:30, and I tell them it's time to go. It takes a good ten minutes to get their shoes on and usher them out the door. Juana keeps calling me Mom and then smacking her forehead. They carry containers of pie and brownies, Julieta and Gabriel fighting over who will transport and eat what. I tell them that if they don't cooperate, I'll eat it all. They work it out.

The little ones are still waiting outside, and the first thing they ask is when they can come over and watch the movie.

'Another day,' I reply, exhausted but secretly pleased. 'Another day.'

Often my days look like this:

I come home. I change. I go outside to mow the lawn. The neighbor dog appears in my yard. Then neighbor child 1. Then neighbor child 2. They are swearing at each other. I tell them to quit it. Neighbor child 3 appears and wants help with his homework. He has lost one of the books I loaned him. I tell him he can't just lose things he borrows. Neighbor child 4 starts scribbling on child 3's homework. I tell him to quit it. Neighbor child 5 wants help with his homework and climbs over the fence. He doesn't understand the basic math concepts although we have done them before. This frustrates me. Child 3 wants to come over but only if my dog is tied up. I ask child 1 to tie up the dog, and she is sassy and disrespectful on multiple levels, so I send her and her sister home. She basically says that's it, forever, good-bye. Fine, I say. The other two still need help, and it's getting dark. We go inside. I tell child 3 to remove his cleats. He holds the door open while doing so, letting in every kind of mosquito and fly. As soon as we begin, the children are called home.

Rules became necessary. When Dylan returns from three weeks in El Salvador, he saunters into my yard, looks at me, and says, 'What's up, bitch?'

Rule 1: no swearing.

One day, the entire entourage has congregated in the front yard, and Gabriel is holding a remote-control car. He says that the batteries don't work. I grab some AA's from inside, and the car starts right up, headlights blazing, and zooms around my driveway, under the gate, down the sidewalk. Everyone wants a turn. Everyone will get a turn, I say.

Dylan doesn't want to wait. He grabs the car as it races by him. Gabriel attempts to take it back, and Dylan slaps him, hard. Then Dylan's

middle finger shoots up, and the other kids say, ‘Ooh, he swore.’

Rule 2: no hitting.

I ask Juana to translate.

The play resumes, and not two minutes later, Dylan clubs Julieta. I tell Dylan to go home and Julieta to take him. He swats and yells at the air, and at her, and by the time they reach the sidewalk, he is wailing. I tell her that he can come back when he is ready to play nicely. Translate. She says he is sorry. That’s good, but he can come back when he’s ready to play nicely. Translate.

Rule 3: be respectful.

A couple of minutes later, Bruno hits Gabriel, and I say that Bruno has to go home. He whines a long no and sits down, crying and refusing to move. Everyone has to leave, I say, and stomp into the house, sure they will never talk to me again and not sure I would mind. Two hours later, they’re back as if nothing happened.

Then I tried a flag system. I cut and stitched a rectangle from fabric patterned with bright yellow zigzags and threaded it onto a dowel. I explained to the children that I was not their playmate, that just because I was home didn’t mean I was available. When the flag was flying, they could come over. When it wasn’t, they should let me work.

On the first morning, I carry my laptop out onto the porch, where I hope to write a few pages before the humid air heats and sends me inside. Faces appear at the fence.

Dylan shouts, ‘We can come to your house?’

‘Is the flag out?’

‘No,’ he says, smiling his toothless smile. He keeps talking. I remind him I have to work. He runs off.

A few minutes later, Bruno appears.

‘We can come to your house?’

‘Is the flag out?’

He leaves.

Dylan returns, balancing atop the fence.

‘What are you doing?’ he asks.

‘What does it look like I’m doing?’

‘Can you put the flag out?’

‘No.’

Gabriel peers around the panels.

‘When are you going to put the flag out?’

He kicks the soccer ball into my yard and climbs over to retrieve it.

‘Later.’

Dylan returns to the fence.

‘Can I have juice?’

‘No.’

‘You can put the flag out?’

‘No.’

Bruno is back.

‘I’m hurt.’

‘You’re fine.’

He leaves.

One of their kittens sneaks through the fence.

Bruno, or Dylan says, ‘Wendy!’

‘What?’

‘Look what I got!’

‘Oh, wow,’ I say, glancing, or not.

They go away.

A few minutes later the boys sneak into my yard.

Bruno shows me an arm, a finger, or a leg. ‘I’m hurt.’

I inspect. ‘You’re fine.’

Finger kiss.

Juana’s Chihuahua sneaks through the fence.

Juana leans over. ‘Do you have paint?’

I engage, starting an unnecessarily long conversation about paint types and colors and uses, and picking said paints.

Soccer ball, Chihuahua.

Dylan, Bruno, Julieta, and Gabriel stand at the fence, pleading, ‘Can we come to your house?’

Mix, match, and repeat all day.

The children had been seen. They would not be unseen.

On Sundays, Bruno the elder polishes his pickup trucks. One is white, the other silver, emblazoned with a black skull on the side. Mammoth, they are. The children can squat and shuffle between the tires. Bruno is a burly man with an easy smile, tall and not unattractive. I see the way the boys look at him, race to grab him a towel, a bottle of water. When he disappears during the day, he works on cars, I think. In addition to the two trucks, the driveway and backyard are crowded with a Cadillac SUV, a BMW SUV, a BMW sedan, others.

He has a soft spot for animals, grinning widely at my dog or picking

up and cradling the kittens that mew and scamper around his house. Once he brought home a black and white puppy for his wife, but she didn't want it.

Just before I moved in, he had an affair with the single neighbor on the other side. He left for nine months, but he came back. Now, on Sundays, his wife babysits the little boy born of that infidelity.

I try not to judge.

I try not to judge when I see a driveway full of luxury vehicles and then child after child knocks on my door asking for glue sticks or pencils or notebooks. I try not to judge when I survey their yard, cluttered with old car parts and boxes and wires, and when the children report fleas and lice, and when they tell me they want to play at my house because it's clean. I try not to judge when the kittens, unvaccinated, unneutered, unspayed, unfed, are left outside only to birth more kittens and die from fights, exposure, illness.

I try not to judge when Julieta is hospitalized, twice, because she can't breathe at her house.

I look at this man, and the other parents, and I try to remember how hard it is for me to learn Spanish—*mi Español es muy mal*. I try to tell myself that Gabriel's mother has a reason when she makes him stay inside and babysit the kids she is paid to watch. I try to remember when the children tell me the refrigerator is empty, when they seem to be supplementing their meals from what they purchase from the ice cream truck, that I don't know what goes on in that house, that children exaggerate.

I try to check my ethnocentric arrogance, to set aside my ideas of what a home should look like, of what kids need. I try to set aside the void created by my infertility, to still the thoughts of cosmic injustice. I try to tell myself that love comes in many forms. I try, but still the anger rises, and still the children come. I want to shake these adults, yanking their faces toward their kids, and say look, or at least try.

I try to remember that I am not afraid of ICE, not working a low-paying job, or two, that I am white, literate, educated, privileged. I try to remember that I had parents who went to college, who understood for the most part how to educate and develop children. That I had parents who understood Girl Scouts and the Y, camp and pogo sticks and roller skates, who understood how to read labels at the grocery store and placed a full home-cooked dinner on the table every night, who taught me to say *please* and *thank you* and got me to the dentist twice a year. That I had parents who shuffled me around to youth group and piano lessons and softball

games, who asked me about my homework, who took me to the library and made me read, who instilled the idea of college from the time I could talk and made sure I got there.

I try to remember that I am not learning enough Spanish to communicate well with these adults, to ask them what *they* need. I am not inviting them over for pie. I am not holding reading sessions with Bruno. I try to remember that we're all broken.

I try not to judge, and I try to remember, but then I see those children and it all goes out the window. Because here, it starts. Love doesn't have to go to the National Gallery or pay for expensive dance classes, but love makes damn sure that a kid has a chance.

I walk into the fellowship hall. Everywhere, purple: dark, light, draped on tables and across chairs. Faux flower petals, vases of illuminated beads, clusters of balloons swaying gently—all purple. The family has gone all-out for Sofía's quinceañera. I sit at one of the round tables lining the walls. Around me, families laugh and share cans of orange soda. Women rush in and out. Children hurry to the candy table, treating it like a buffet, heaping palms and cups with M&Ms, gumballs, twists of licorice. I sip on a Diet Coke and smile at people who look over at me, offer my best *buenos tardes*. Though I practiced *felicitaciones*, congratulations, on the ride over, I'm sure I will forget the word and blurt out something unintended.

When the door opens, I spot the children and step out to say hello. A *tía* is gathering them for their big moment. Julieta smiles through bright pink lip gloss, swiveling on her glittery kitten heels to show off her rhinestone necklace and sparkly fuchsia dress. Her hair has been curled and sprayed. Too often, with help from Sofía, she is preened into a look much older than her years, a look that makes me fear for her, but today I see the little girl in dress-up. She gives me a thumbs-up. The boys have been shoehorned into pinstriped pants and matching vests, dark purple shirts and striped purple ties. Their hair is shaved close, with some detailing, and Gabriel's is slicked into a slight Mohawk. Each child carries something: a padded album, a doll wrapped in cellophane, a tiara, an embroidered satin pillow, a basket brimming with more faux petals. I take their picture, gushing with compliments (*que bonita! que guapo!*). Their sheepish grins communicate a swelling sense of importance that, just like their fancy clothes, feels strange and wonderful.

When it's time, they process into the hall to hand the symbolic presents to Sofía. As the children pass, the partygoers chuckle and snap



photos. Sofía sits shyly on a chair in a strapless dress, a wrap pulled around her shoulders. Her mother, fetching in a fitted blue sheath, fusses over her, placing the tiara on her daughter's head. When a slow Latin beat pulses from the speakers, Sofía stands and takes her father's hand for the dance. Shoulders now exposed, she hunches slightly, self-consciously, unaccustomed to all this attention. She looks down at her feet, which move woodenly, but she is lovely and no one cares. Every eye is on her.

Such moments exist, moments when these parents slather their children with attention. I have heard reports of birthday afternoons at Chuck E. Cheese, seen the kids pile out of the car red-faced and wind-blown from a day at the beach. These occasions matter, however infrequent they may be, but how long can they sustain a child? How long can Bruno remember what his father's pride looks like? How long can Julieta recall the feeling of being cherished? How long can these children cling to a moment when they knew without doubt that they were wanted, enjoyed, loved? I wonder, too, how far an afternoon of ball pits and video games will take a child who cannot read.

I don't know what the answer is. Many of the problems that need fixing extend far into thickets of social injustice. Some don't. For the children—here, now—I want more. I want their parents to see what I see: children who desperately crave their parents' eye and embrace. I want the parents to recognize that their children are the linchpin, not the obstacle, to joy. I want the parents to grasp that their children need more. I want this, even if it means the children no longer see me.

I open the door, let the dog out, and step into the evening. The children are outside, alone. Julieta circles the yard on her little pink bicycle, a green cardboard box as a makeshift helmet. I pumped up her tires a couple of days ago. She had been riding on rims. Pedaling with inflated tires was so foreign to her that for the first few minutes she wobbled and crashed.

The boys are playing with sticks, beating on bushes, on the fence, waving them in the air. Gabriel kicks his ball against the fence. Kick, thud, rattle. Dylan calls out, 'Wendy, look!'

Now, and for as long as it takes, I look.

# Eric Henry Sanders

## Hands On

“Hands on, paws off.” That was her directive, although sometimes she stumbled over the order.

“What’s it mean?” He had wanted to ask her since the first day she drove him home. But he was in over his head so he kept quiet. She was sixteen. Three years older than he was. She smelled like cigarettes and rosewater.

Once he surprised himself when the question slipped out.

“You know that expression, ‘paws off?’” she began.

He didn’t.

“It’s like that.” She picked at her lip. “Paws off. You don’t touch me.”

It made no sense. He had been touching her. They had a routine about it, now in its third week. He would wait on the corner of Pearl and Willoughby until she pulled up in her parents’ brown Volvo. He would put his backpack on the floor and slip into the passenger seat trying to find room for his feet among the wrappers, metal bolts of unknown origin, and chewed tennis balls. On the first day she didn’t say a word to him, not even a hello. She stared moodily ahead and ground the gears. The car smelled of dog breath and mildew and strawberry air-freshener. She braked too hard at a red light on the corner and he listened to the emphysema motor.

Without prompting and without taking her eyes off the traffic she took his left hand and put it between her legs. He stared out the side window. The sharp white sun made the back of his head ache. It glinted off passing cars leaving green spots melting in his eyes. The sidewalk was relatively clean here. His hand was cramped and felt as if it were pressed into a wool mitten warm from the radiator but still soaked through from snow. He could tell from the odd clucking grimace that the middle-aged man driving the car next to him was singing to the radio, but he couldn’t hear any of the song. He thought that maybe she could hear his panicked heart thumping.

She released his hand. He surreptitiously wiped his sticky fingers on his sock. It was something he learned from a friend when they’d gotten mustardy hotdogs but didn’t have napkins.

What did she expect of him? He wondered if he should tell her where to go. He turned over the plusses and minuses: if he said something, he

would get home. If he didn't say anything, maybe they would keep driving like that, the two of them. He didn't say anything.

He dared to steal a peek at her. She wore a lot of black makeup around her eyes and he could see the suggestion of her bra beneath her thin orangesicle t-shirt. Breasts were a new thing in his world. They had only come into being within the last year or two and their originality hadn't worn off. In school he waged a campaign with himself of not looking. He wanted to, of course, but he didn't want to creep anyone out, so he tried not to look and usually became self-conscious to the point where the girl he was not looking at covered herself with a sweater or crossed her arms over her chest. His face would turn red at the thought of what she thought and he could practically hear the internal screaming: "Perv!" But he wasn't. Was he? Necks were safe. He could always look there.

Only when the brown Volvo jerked to a final stop in front of his house did he realize that she was a terrible driver. She turned to him for the first time.

"Here are the ground rules: hands on, paws off. Okay? I'll pick you up next Thursday."

"Thanks for the ride." She looked at him impassively. "Thanks." On his way to the front door of his parents' house he was conscious of his steps.

He wondered about next Thursday. Half of his thoughts were consumed by it and they divided roughly into fear, anticipation, fear, and elation. The fear subdivided into categories: fear of saying something stupid; fear of doing something stupid; fear of seeming elated; and fear of giving into the temptation to call her.

She didn't warn him not to say anything, and he didn't. He thought about what it would be like to kiss her. With no practical experience in the matter he found the idea terrifying. He was still awake when first his mother and then his father came home. He could tell by their footsteps, and he put a pillow over his head with just his nose sticking out for air. Lying that way he couldn't hear when the light switches in the bathroom and the hall were turned on or off.

It didn't occur to him that he could run into her at school. The middle school was separated from the high school, two wings of the same building. But on Monday he saw a high school girl he'd seen before. The girl's hair was half-shaved and her green CBGB t-shirt was ripped on the shoulder and held together with two oversized safety pins. Her eyes were dark. She wore a lace black bra. Her neck was normal. Just a neck. He

realized that she was talking to the girl that drove him home. Their eyes met and for a second her face lit up as if she recognized him. But just as suddenly it clouded over and she looked away. He wasn't sure what to do. He went to the bathroom and splashed water on his hot face.

Social Studies was impossible. They were reading *Animal Farm*. Did he do something wrong? Someone asked if the book was about the Russian Revolution and a boy next to him snickered. Maybe she would forget to pick him up that week. He ran over the facts of the drive home -- did he forget to say goodbye? Did he thank her for the lift twice? Maybe that was it. He shouldn't have thanked her twice. Did she want to say hi, but couldn't because of the CBGB girl? If she liked him, she would have said hi. His face felt hot again.

She was a half hour late on Thursday.

"You're a half hour late."

"Did you think I wasn't coming?"

It seemed like a riddle. He could say yes, or he could say no. He turned to look out the side window. A chewed tennis ball rolled forward from the back seat. After two blocks of silence, she took his hand. He was determined to look at her this time but couldn't bring himself to do it. He was conscious of their car driving slower than others. She closed her eyes for an instant and the car stopped short. His bag fell over. A car honked behind them.

He watched her drive off from his parents' living room window. Then for a long time he watched where she'd been.

Everything suffered that week. He didn't want to be in school. He asked to go to the water fountain but didn't see her in the hall. No one called on him in class, and he wasn't sure he'd spoken to anyone since the weekend. He thought about the brown Volvo. He thought about her. He'd never been on a date. Maybe she wanted to go out with him. He found her number listed in the phonebook and put a dot next to her name so that he could find it faster next time if he forgot it.

On Tuesday he dialed her number, hung up, checked it and called again. When she came to the phone she said, "Oh. Hi."

"Hi."

"Umm, can I call you right back?"

"Okay." His hands vibrated. He told her his phone number. She hung up.

The phone rang an hour later. It was his mother. She was sorry. Could he defrost his own dinner? Yes.

Something changed on the fourth drive home. She mouthed the words to the song on the radio. He'd never heard it before. He looked at her knee. There were the finest light blond hairs on it. He sat immobile.

"I can't pick you up next week."

His stomach rumbled. He wondered if she'd heard it. They were driving past the tobacco store where he bought baseball cards. There was a tree outside the store that was splashed with mud.

"What about the week after?"

"Hey, can you close your window?"

He rolled the window shut. Without fresh air the smell of the car made him a little sick. Maybe she hadn't heard him.

"What about the week after?"

She pulled over suddenly. She wrenched the brake and left the motor running. He watched her cross the street without looking and sidle up to a phone booth. Her legs were visible beneath it, and he watched the lazy pattern of shifting weight. He looked at her knees. She rolled one foot over. He thought about opening the window. The radio was too loud. Fifteen minutes passed. The motor continued to idle. Should he tell her he was late? Did she know he was still in the car? Why couldn't she call from home? Why couldn't she drop him off first? After another five minutes the phone plummeted out of her hand and dangled wildly on its silver cord. She crossed the street towards him. When she reached his window he rolled it open.

"Do you have a quarter?"

He twisted his body so that he could squeeze his hand into his pocket. His knuckles scraped on something. He had a quarter and a penny. He gave her the quarter. She crossed back to the phone booth. He turned off the radio. Over the noise of passing traffic he could hear her elegant laugh. One eye filled unexpectedly. With a sudden effort he punched his leg with his white fist. It throbbed. He hit it again and wiped his eye.

When she finally sat beside him he looked at her. She stared ahead. He continued to look at her. Her face was heavier than he'd remembered. He could see what she had looked like when she was very young. He could see what she would look like in fifty years. Her face would sink. The wisps of hair by her ear would still be there. He didn't care that she didn't want him to stare at her. Next Thursday would be misery.

He noticed that she rested her hand on the stick shift. He reached out and slowly traced her knuckles with his index finger. She didn't pull away. She had a triad of bulky silver rings. He looked at the fine blond hairs against her faded rope bracelet. He put his hand on top of hers.

"Paws off," she said. She was quiet when she said it and kept her eyes on the road.

When she pulled up to the curb in front of his parents' house she continued to look ahead and not at him. He waited with the car door open.

"Will you pick me up the week after?"

She waited for him to close the door. He did. He turned away quickly.

The house was cool and dark. It smelled of cleaning products. The banister running up to the second floor felt oiled to the touch but nothing came off on his fingers except the smell of wood polish. He sat on the stairs.

He wanted to call out and hear his voice echo in the narrow hall. If he did, he knew he'd regret it. No one would be home for hours. He knew how he'd feel. He knew the metallic ring it would leave in his ears. He considered getting the phonebook. Page one hundred and forty.

He called out and felt like a kid.

# Mark DeFoe

## Angels in the Dumpster

Inside the pillared library a gaggle  
of students are penning purple epics

about angels. When they have spent all their  
metaphors, depleted their bandoleers

of profundities, each reads to the group  
what they have wrought. Everyone murmurs Yes.

good. That is so cool. Meanwhile outside, city crews,  
preparing for winter, swing long rods, knock

seed pods from the well-trimmed trees, raking them  
to the dumpsters. The pods hold minute beings,

homunculi with shimmering wings. The pods  
puzzle the workmen's rough fingers. They cock

a chapped ear to unearthly strings in  
perfect harmony. It drifts away. Though good men,

they do not succumb to the spiritual.  
Back in the library, the poets name their angels,

waiting to be dazzled. At the smoldering dump,  
animals forage. When they hear the music,

they chatter wildly. Then the pods burst open  
and the little men, singing, rise up, swirling

in the holy sparks. There are no humans here  
to kneel. Only small creatures, trembling,

transfixed and glorified by this strangeness.

# Ryler Dustin

## To Make Color

Every morning, my grandmother cleaned the Fischer stove  
in the back of her trailer, lifted ash in a shovel, careful

not to spill even a little gray dust. *Precious*, she said, her breath  
smoking in the cold. *Precious* in the winter's first lavender

not-quite-light, and you could smell it, the faintest acrid hint  
of ash, a crispness calling you from bed. You could watch her

cap it in a chicory coffee can to stack among others, back bent  
from a long-gone fever. *For the garden in spring*, she said.



## Late Garden

1.

On Easter we made  
love though  
you were bleeding  
and after you showed me  
how to plant flowers

in the hollows  
of trees—

          watched me claw  
black silt  
from the just-thawed  
riverside  
to scoop into the bowl  
of a fallen fir—

          loosely, you said  
so rain  
          can trickle through

and make the new  
shoots ache.

2.

Rows of sweet corn whisper  
around a house  
like the one you were born in—

clapboards dusted  
with pollen, pathways  
                          winding like tributaries  
toward the steeple a few miles off.

I am pissing downwind  
          carefully. Bon Jovi  
                          blares from your idling car.  
          We drive off, sweet scent

of corn in our skin,  
our rumor  
    on the lips of leaves.

3.

In your hoop house  
    we spread ash and fold out  
                    the terrycloth  
    to keep the new seeds warm—

    weight the corners  
with bricks, brush  
    slow spiders  
away as the dusk wind  
draws over the field.

    My finger shivers  
on sudden softness,  
cotton nests  
    on a cool brick's underside—

three clusters of eggs,  
one burst  
    with bright bodies

small as lacquered dust—

dispersing,  
a just born star.

4.

Sometimes the sun slows  
down  
everything. I lower  
my lids

to feel it, hot  
heavy  
on skin.

I open. You laugh  
and distant lindens  
    leap  
    like fish in the wind.

# Jannicane Shane

## **Overgrown**

Garden arms  
Leagues of ivy, pothos,  
and kudzu -  
Wrap around me  
and make yours.  
Let my remains beget  
your veins -  
Leaves take hold of my whole -  
Possess me in shades  
of deep green and citrine.  
Conquer me  
with your overgrown grace.

# Tracy Zeman

## Star or Plow

Inside the longhouse the dead are arranged  
according to rank corrupt bodies  
shrouded in animal skins  
dog teeth potsherds cut wood  
stacked along the outer walls  
as women collect the bones of their kin

For the charnel house bows arrows tobacco  
a bear paw a turtle effigy pipe  
a fledged sparrow rubbing its neck  
on a hackberry branch a mask of seashells  
finding its way west by trade  
a buffalo jump a new blind flood

Shattering the Clovis & leaving a mark  
in the black mat running through layers of strata  
after water filled the land  
horse camel dire wolf *bison antiquus*  
extinct or expatriated “that phraseless melody”  
perhaps in the rediscovery one *you* will be found

One “shiverer round the door”

\*

Unearthed in the black court  
that line in the rock for *ice & empty*  
for *star* then *plow* the sure-to-come  
is never close enough  
to unsettle the edge of the human landscape  
a narrow tract of grass along the highway

Black-eyed Susans blazing stars  
& cattails in the medians along the railroad

a biologist discovers a rare wingless grasshopper  
*keyacris scurra* in the kangaroo grass  
Jefferson's enumerators sent west to populate  
his drawing room his science of specimen & capture

Of geometry democracy steel steam  
seed & theft for the good of us all  
for the good of shining persons  
with hearts all one stone a country bird  
heels to law & need a country boy  
locks the plains in a grid

We are all freeholders still

\*

This alienated posture we went out upon  
the world as "went out  
upon circumference" to fix a flux inside  
the rain a rain that follows the plow  
as it drifts & divides  
to gain a foothold against a ghost

As if air could be netted  
"sturdy little countenance against the wind"  
fifty million bison now  
forty-five million cattle an outline for our eventual  
inability to escape from circumstances  
home implies a border implies

The mountain plover a ground feeder  
the burrowing owl occupying a prairie dog's nest  
to roam is not to be without  
form but rather to be formed in serial  
unsluiced from a territorial tyranny  
stands of blue bunch wheat grass & willows

Unlining a creek bed sunken silted & fast

\*

To sluice or still a creek with cattle  
carcasses in winter a wintry condition  
moves steadily down “the dream  
of civilizing a wilderness” more than half the range  
had lost more than half degraded by grazing  
the riparian the headland the hill

How could imagining lead to obsolescence  
a wayfarer the root’s white foot a force  
under snow or fire increasers & decreasers  
hay-balers barbed wire & antibiotics  
this underpinning “a postponeless creature”  
no darker despot so restful in the enclosure

The enclosed constructions of the present  
become hard to recognize as home  
for bluebird for Henslow’s sparrow for bobolink  
these fields without fencerow  
or windbreak new oligarchy  
“the sound of the prairie being plowed

Was that of a fusillade of pistols”

\*

Knowledge as the composition of a body  
subsoil aquifer trail of thorn & thistle  
at any given moment divisible  
*savage nomad* disciples when the west was  
abundant in fescue bunchgrass & light  
unbent “if what we could—

Were what we would” cessation implies  
succession sediment ash dust sand  
seed a borrowed dwelling itself an echo  
yourself displaced envy what is already

false or scarce “the color of the grave  
is green” “the color of the grave is white”

Is reprieve to replace us no employment here  
in this weedy plutocracy of parceled plots  
with no way to overcome  
enough life as almost straight  
as most unlike a snowbound hill an elk  
in a winter range a blight of dry lightning

Mountain scissoring a big sky over grass

Diane Wald

**IT'S JUST THE NOISE OF THE WATER SEEPING THROUGH THE  
HARDENED GROUND**

I locked my radio in the desk drawer and it kept on playing for sixteen years. Remember the psychiatrist who had a model of a ship in his therapy room? Nothing like that. Everything I said had been proven false, but the jury still heard it. I had fallen down the stairs but I did not die and I was not buried. But therefore I know. It was that time of winter when the towels get dry just by being in the house. If I could I would steal cakes off the tea tray, while the wonders of the world returned slowly, one by one. My moss intended to enjoy itself every day, in spite of the maddening drip-drip-drip you could hear from the ruined four-poster as well as the driveway.



## MY UNDERTAKER WEARS A SWEET COLOGNE

I mean, I like it. He gets up close to you, real close – he has to. It’s his job. You know he’s probably going to say you belong underground, but it’s not the man’s fault, not at all. Better him than some others I can think of. And if you’re not dead you don’t have to listen to him anyway, but just in case. The only advice he ever gave me was “never give a dog a tomato,” but he didn’t explain why. He looks like the kind of guy who has a falsetto. Not that he uses it, just that he has one. And if you ask him too many questions he will tell you he’s been exhausted by the surreal that day and will have to get back to you. And he will. He’s a gentleman after all, and I suspect a bit sad but not depressed. I glimpsed the inside of his Audi: filled with clouds. Last year he fell in love with and married one of his clients. He’s a great guy.

# Annie Diamond

## **I like our bodies when**

; are soft, are fruitflushed  
, borrowed cotton next to cotton

, are prepositioned (against, against)  
; am butterflyed (split-pinned-prized)

, am cartographed, am canonized  
, am mouth back wrist thighs

, am water sign, am shoe size nine  
; am some times less than sum of parts

, but some times (now) more. Now  
, when we are with our bodies

; our hips agree  
, am half in love with evidence of bones

, am opposite of archaeologist  
, nothing buried, nothing past

## Of the spine

200 distinct bones in the adult  
skeleton, 26 of those spinal, 5  
of those lumbar. 2 of those  
I broke.

But breaking backbones needs  
another kind of verb. *I broke 2  
lumbar vertebrae* sounds  
like dishware.

*Fractured* is better,  
more medical, but still.

*I fractured 2 vertebrae*  
sounds too much  
like I chose it.

English needs better verbs of  
accident, another construction  
between

active and passive;

*I fell 30 feet through  
a roof*

too intentional,  
*I was falled* not  
right either.

First

responders, weeks later,  
told me I fall good, must  
have a flair for it.

I should have broken  
arms or ankles, never  
been able  
to walk again.

I should have died, none  
of them said. I am not un-  
grateful. I have  
good luck, strong bones,  
no memories. I am about  
the same.

# Chris Burns

## Contra Mundi

Our whole world was less than a square mile, and though we were always moving we were always completely fenced into it. Our parents liked it that way. They didn't want the world outside the fair and found the fences comforting, but I still get claustrophobic thinking of it and still wake up sometimes sweating and feeling like I can't move. When my parents said things like "One day you can operate any ride here, Elena! Take your pick!" they didn't know I would later joke "Is death a ride? Can I pick death?" They meant well, but every time they talked about our future we despised them a little more. Every time, I was one step closer to running away.

John Iverton, my best friend, was a natural showman and could convince anyone of anything, so he seemed interested when they talked like that. I didn't have his confidence then. The best I could do when they talked about our futures was avoid cringing. I would fix my eyes on some point on their face and stare. I imagined myself as the most defiant force I could, the Zipper. The Zipper was a ride like a semi-truck was a pickup. It was a clanking, rending monstrosity, an insult to any rational world. Its uncomfortable seats and unpredictably spinning gondolas slinging along its also spinning 60-foot oblong frame could make even the strongest people queasy. If there was a ride that didn't give a shit, that wasn't afraid to show its height and muscle, it was the Zipper. I wanted to be defiant like that, to be gigantic and unyielding, fierce against the face of them.

It was hard not to hold our parents' zeal for their own isolation (and for ours) against them, but it wasn't their fault. They were stuck in time. When you live in a traveling fair no one sees the world in terms of time, not really. Sure there were days of the week, birthdays, holidays, but there wasn't any sense that the passage of years mattered. The only thing that ever changed was what we put in the deep fryers. Our lives were supposed to be just like our parents lives had been, and their parents. They would have been too, except we had something our parents never had which could show us so much of the world outside our own: we had iPhones.

I spent all of my time with John, and most of it watching TV shows or videos and dreaming of the outside. I was eleven and shy. He was thirteen, and in charge of it all. He had just started to find peach fuzz across his upper lip and was very proud. I was showing the slightest sign of breasts

that would eventually grow, though they never got big. We'd known each other our whole lives but we were at just that age when people started to joke about us dating, and old enough to get the jokes.

My parents operated a food booth selling foot-long hot dogs, the ones with the ends sticking inches out of the bun to prove how gigantic they are. They'd come back to our trailer at night dripping the sickly sweet smell of boiled sausages on top of the French fry smell that seeped into everyone in the food pavilion, just one of the many odors of the heart disease, cholesterol, obesity that took so many people I knew as a child. I still fight back a gag if I walk past a hot dog cart.

John's parents operated a Midway booth – the one where locals try to throw ping pong balls into jars filled with water, and if they land one they get some cheap stuffed animal to give to a girl or their kid or whatever, and if they miss John's father or mother or one of the teen workers would upsell them, always talking some patter:

“One more try, only an extra dollar! Get that prize!”

“Your choice of any animal on the bottom if you sink the next one!”

“You're not going to quit now are you?”

The Midway thrives on ego, on the idea that you, *yes YOU!*, can win this dumb little thing if only you try hard enough. The games were for the most part honest, just really hard, and the barkers were great at keeping your wallet open while you kept humping the dream that your next try was the winner.

John and I spent our days being home schooled with the other kids. We were all of us stuffed in a trailer reading or doing math problems over and over again. Our teachers were mostly the grandparents or the oldest kids and we never knew who would be in charge on any given day, but it didn't really matter for all any of them cared what we learned. They knew we needed a basic education but never expected us to need anything more. They seemed more concerned with keeping us contained. So we practiced reading or math or whatever for a few hours but mostly I just remember the older people telling stories, or the kids playing dice or cards or just sitting, sweating and slack jawed, and waiting to be released.

After school we'd run errands for the adults, moving tickets or money or notes through the park, pushing canisters of generator gas or propane, whatever. I often ran errands for Leroy, who was one of the oldest people still actively working. Leroy was a mechanic. He fixed rides when they broke down, but mostly he tuned them up and kept them running so that they wouldn't. He could fix anything. When there was problem with one

of the RVs the owners couldn't fix, Leroy would take care of it in no time.

Leroy really belonged there. He was definitely old school, as "fair" as anyone could ever get. The lifestyle, the movement and bad food and sun, they had ravaged him as much as any of the old timers. His skin looked like rough leather and he had crags down his cheek like peeling paint, not hidden at all by his grizzled stubble and thin sideburns. His fingers were thin and bent and senseless from a lifetime of handling tools and working with hot engines. He smoked and drank constantly, though I rarely saw him drunk. But despite the time and bad habits and gas fumes, the burns from engines, he was undiminished. He wielded hammers and torqued lug nuts and talked away to whoever would listen. He was old enough to remember when the games were rigged and everything was a con. He even remembered Geek shows from when he was a child. And he was old enough to still talk in Ciazarn, the carny talk our grandparents used. My parents would slip into it if they were stressed or frustrated, or if they were trying to be difficult or confuse a local, but it had (thankfully) filtered out by my generation.

Still, all of us kids could understand it. Ciazarn was really just English with a lot of slang mixed in so that "rubes" or locals couldn't understand what you were saying. At its most complex it was like Pig Latin – they'd add z's into syllables and it would sound like gibberish unless you were used to hearing it. Leroy talked it so well it seemed like a completely different language coming out of his mouth. It was the sort of thing I generally hated in old timers, but Leroy was so good-natured, and he didn't talk down to me. Whenever I came around to see if he needed any help he would teach me about what he was doing. After days spent not learning anything in school and just sitting around bored, it was nice that he paid attention to me. So even though he called himself a "waxie" rather than a mechanic, and talked about going to the "donniker" when he meant bathroom, or about fixing "zamps" whenever he was working on a kid's ride, I liked working with him.

When we were done with school and errands for the day, and when our parents were working night shifts, distorted in neon, hustling locals too exhausted and strung out on junk food to make good decisions, John would come and get me, saying "Let's go eat," and off we went to the 'exotic' booths.

For us, the exotic food section was a forgone conclusion. The shawarmas, curry, and Thai stands were all together, right next to the alligator tail or ostrich burgers or whatever weird shit the fair was serving

as a novelty. These were separated from the mainstream foods – the hotdogs, turkey legs, and ice cream – by whatever deep fried horror was working that season. Deep fried Oreos or Twix bars, deep fried bacon, Pop-Tarts, Kool Aid, all of it (as far as I was concerned) belched up from Satan’s asshole just like the rest of fair. Some seasons they’d have deep fried butter. Just butter, because the way people eat at the fair, and the way the people who live in it eat, we might as well all have just said *fuck you heart! Fuck you, old age! I don’t need you!*

The reason I hated the food and the reason I had to escape were the same reason: my grandmother. She’d died when I was eight, of diabetes. She’d taken care of me and lots of the other kids when our parents were working their attractions, and I missed her so fucking much. She was in the hospital in Florida and already missing a leg when we went out that season. I don’t remember what city we were in when she died, just that no one was there with her, that she died alone while we were on the road eating the food that killed her. When we went back for her funeral it was one of the few times I wasn’t surrounded by the fair. That’s when I decided I would leave one day and never look back.

John and I avoided the Deep Fried section. We knew that was food you could only get at the fair, and we wanted to eat whatever seemed farthest away. The exotic foods were an escape. Learning about Vietnamese sandwiches, eating chow mein or Swedish meatballs, that was just us practicing for our future. We’d take our foreign food to whoever’s trailer was unoccupied and watch TV or YouTube, scroll through Instagram, and dream of the bigger world from our small, miserable one, and we’d plan our future somewhere else.

My plan was to be a forensic investigator. We binge-watched several versions of CSI and they always did cool things in cool places. They wore nice clothes and seemed so confident. When they ate out, they ate in restaurants with tablecloths. John and I, who’d only ever eaten at the fair or fast food, would try to guess what they were eating. State fairs have a lot of food, but none of it looks like the food on TV. Our conversations would go, “Is that a chicken? It’s so small.”

“Right? A leg that small would never sell next to the Giant Turkey Legs.”

“Lobster looks . . . complicated . . .”

“Why do they have such big plates but they’re never full?”

“I’ve never seen lettuce that color in real life. What do you think that salad even tastes like?”

Wanting to be a forensic investigator may have been odd, but not as odd as John. He wanted to be a surf instructor. The fair spent every winter in Florida so we knew the ocean, but he had never surfed. He just liked surf movies. We streamed *Point Break* over and over, along with *Step into Liquid* or *Chasing Mavericks*, a dozen others. And don't get me started on fucking *Surf Ninjas*. Every once in a while he would give in to my pleas, my "NOT *Surf Ninjas* again" or even "Okay, a surfing movie, but how about *Blue Crush*?"

"Okay, *Blue Crush*," he said once, "but only because you look like Michelle Rodríguez."

"Michelle Rodríguez isn't even the star of *Blue Crush*," I said.

"Elena Isabella Tejada," he said, using my full name, "that doesn't mean you don't look like her. You're *totally* a Michelle Rodríguez!"

I knew I was no Michelle Rodríguez – I was as dark as her, but my features were too plain, and I wasn't near that tough – but we were adolescents trying on flirting, and it was flattering to hear him say it. John knew how much I admired her, how she was so ferocious but so cool all the time, even in interviews when it was really just her talking. She wasn't afraid of anything. I could never star in a movie, not even a movie like *Blue Crush*. Jon could have been in one of those movies, though. He had the same look as the surfers in YouTube videos, tanned from being outside all day, lanky, with long and wispy hair and eyes that didn't need sunglasses, and he smiled like a surfer, and was always smiling.

So me, the nervous future forensic investigator, and John Iverton, the upbeat future surfer, would sit on the floor of my parents' trailer and escape to Miami or Las Vegas or Hawaii, and plan our real escape.

It wasn't until much later that I thought to figure out what a forensic investigator really did. I Googled it. It turns out you need a lot of school, but being home schooled by people who were home schooled meant getting into universities, especially the sorts of universities with high-end science programs, was never going to happen. I could read an IMDB description or the captions on an Instagram, but honestly, even the Wikipedia pages about forensics were pushing the bounds of my language skills. Maybe more importantly, the more I read about forensic investigating the more I realized it just wasn't as fun as it looked on TV. And trust me, that's a concept I get. The fair isn't as much fun when you live in it.

No one ever knew that John and I tried to run away. We had walked the fence for weeks, looking for an opening as though it was a religious ceremony. I wanted us to climb it, or just to go out the front gate during



the day. Either would have been easy. But John said it was better to wait for it to give us an opening, that it would be a sign. So I waited and we walked the fence. Every new city could be the one where someone got lazy.

This time, someone had done a shit job putting it up and it was missing the tie-offs, one whole section just propped against another. There was no moon, and it was July and warm outside. Everything was perfect for a getaway. It felt like fate. We packed bags and hid them behind the Mirror Maze. Late at night after the final security sweeps, wearing our darkest clothes and leaving no notes, we met in the shadows behind the Gravitron where older kids went to make out. We made our way behind the quiet midway games, crossed the open central corridor under the Ferris Wheel, and slipped through the nighttime-dead rides until we were behind the Maze. Once there we crouched low, scanning the empty parking lot.

John had developed the plan months before. Every fairground has buses that stop near it. All we had to do was make it to the bus stop and then ride it to the biggest nearby station, whatever the closest “downtown” was. From there we’d catch a bus to the capital of the next state over. We assumed we’d be harder to track across state lines. Then we would work some round about way to the West Coast where John could learn to surf and I could learn to investigate.

We had six sandwiches, \$128.00, a six-pack of Coke, and as many clothes as we could fit in our backpacks. We pushed through the gap in the fence and ran hard. But we weren’t athletes, and our eating, well, if you’ve been paying attention, fair people aren’t very healthy. We were out of breath before we made it a hundred yards. John could have easily outdistanced me but made sure to stay by my side. The bus stop we’d found online was only just past the galaxy of parking lots, but by the time we got there we had slowed to a weak, gasping jog.

If we seemed underprepared in our provisions, we were way more underprepared to get on a bus. We leaned panting against the wall of the covered stop, ignoring a homeless guy who was sitting on the bench, and assuming a bus would just appear. The homeless guy was in his 50s with his grey hair pulled back in a ponytail. He had a large army-green canvas bag stuffed under the bench and his once blue, now grey blanket folded on his lap with a book on top. He was unperturbed by two wheezing adolescents running for their lives. After our panting turned to breath he spoke up.

“If you two need some water, I’ve got plenty,” he pointed to a mostly full gallon jug sitting against the wall. After a moment he continued, “Are you trying to catch a bus, or running from something?”

He seemed harmless enough, and we were used to talking to strangers. Plus, we knew we needed more information, and this guy seemed nice enough to give it, so as he continued to ask questions we explained to him the story of our escape.

“Between 11 PM and 6 AM no buses come through. This is my bedroom!” He laughed at his own joke. “Even if you wait till mornin’, you’ll have to take more than one bus to get to a big hub station like what you’d find in a ‘downtown.’ And,” he looked at us as though he didn’t want to embarrass us, and continued quietly, “to get to the next state over . . . it’ll cost most of what you have.” We were sitting on the bench with him by then, John’s long hair messy from the jog, the first hairs of puberty across my legs tipped with salt from the running.

The homeless guy continued. “You two seem like nice kids. Even if it’s bad there . . . a lot of people out here were runaways once. Running away isn’t as easy as it seems. I don’t know why you’re leaving, and I don’t want to pry, but if you don’t really have to get away . . . maybe you should go back, at least until you plan a little better. You could learn more about the buses, and find somewhere to stay in advance.”

We knew how to read people. On the Midway reading people was part of the job. Seeing how to push them to buy another go, knowing if you should use guilt, or ego, or play them against each other, knowing who had quit already so you didn’t waste your time. Seeing inside people and manipulating them was part of our culture. John’s eyes, dilated in the bug covered florescent lights of the bus stop, looked like a local who’d lost his last dollar and didn’t have a prize to show for it. I knew what I saw there, even though I’d never seen it in him before. I recognized it, but I, who was used to being afraid of things and to being unsure, didn’t know what to do with it in him.

I knew my eyes would have changed, too, but not like John’s. This man was from outside. He knew the outside in ways we didn’t, and he was telling us how to get out. Better planning. More money. We could do that. My eyes must have been alive with plans.

The homeless guy looked at us with pity. “I’ll walk back to the gate with you to make sure you get there okay.”

“No, that’s fine.” I said. “We’ll sneak in the way we got out.” John and I looked at each other, neither prepared for this, neither knowing

what to say. “Thank you, for helping us.”

“Didn’t do much. Stay safe now.”

We walked back with our heads down and backpacks heavy even though we left the sandwiches and Coke with the guy. This was John’s plan. He said this would work! I was so furious I was going to punch him until I saw that he wasn’t smiling.

On our long walk back I started to replan.

“This was like a test run, like how all the rides run their first ride of the day empty. We can plan this better. I’ll help more this time.”

John said, “We’ll have to keep scouting the fence,” but there was no excitement in it. I could tell.

I’d known John Iverton my whole life, had let him speak for me as long as we’d been talking. My plans had always revolved around him. This time, his words weren’t our meanings. I still had hope, but his smile was gone, and his eyes were down. John had wanted to be a surfer. Surfers have the confidence to take a wave, but also to be taken. They don’t quit because of a few near-drownings. John had fallen off and wasn’t going to get back up. He would never be a surfer.

I think that even before our attempt he was more scared than he could deal with, and that us waiting for an opening in the fence instead of just jumping it or sneaking out was stalling, was him not admitting to himself that our fantasy of escape had gotten out of hand and that he didn’t really want to go. I think this failed attempt was just a setback for me but was the final straw for him. I must have known, and not known how to admit it.

As seasons passed we still went to school, though eventually we were the ones teaching. Instead of running errands afterwards, I formally apprenticed as a mechanic under Leroy. Many were surprised he took me on “even though I was a girl,” but the two of us had always gotten along, and if Michelle Rodríguez could work on engines in movies, I could in real life. Besides, I liked the work. It was solitary – just me and Leroy and engines and machines. I didn’t have to deal with my parents, who wanted me to work in the hot dog booth. We didn’t have to deal with anyone.

Also, he knew I was on my way out the door and didn’t mind, which made things simpler. Leroy showed few signs of slowing down. “I need an apprentice like I need a working set of nipples” he said when I first started with him. “Not planning on dying anytime soon. But you ain’t learning nothing useful for real life in school. At least I can teach you things you’ll be able to use when you get out of here.”

At first I just carried his tools or fetched oil or water and watched him while he explained to me what he was fixing. It wasn't that different from what I'd always done with him. After the first few weeks he had me do all the work while he told me what to do and why. Later I would explain to him what I was doing while he watched and smoked and took an occasional pull on his flask. When I did especially well he'd offer me a swig from the flask to me and say, "You're doing great!" I spent a lot of nights after the fair closed when the engines cooled off tightening nuts and greasing pistons, trying to stop weird vibrations that seemed to come from everywhere in the rides at once. We worked constantly on the Zipper, which was the most dangerous ride and needed the most maintenance. It was always my favorite.

Jon and I were still close. That night had been the first night we snuck out, but only the first of many. We'd go over the fence or just right out the front gate. We went to city centers, movie theaters, liquor store parking lots, tattoo parlors (my first was the outlined silhouette of a bus stop on my shoulder; his was barbed wire wrapped around his lean bicep). We were always still together. I planned and saved. He did too, at first, but less and less so. We were holding out for a chance when we knew we would make it, and in the meantime I tried to think that having someone to complain about a shitty place with can be almost as good as not being there, and that eventually we'd meet a local who'd offer us a place to crash or we'd finally have enough money.

But wintering in Florida when he was 18 and I was 16, John arranged to take over management of the Tilt-A-Whirl from the couple who owned it. It was a smart decision – it was easier work than the Midway, and paid better – but I couldn't imagine John Iverton spending the rest of his life playing it safe and jockeying a vomit ride, and I was ashamed for him. I didn't know if I understood his reasons for staying. I probably never will know for sure.

We could have fucking made it. So many times we could have just left, and taken the risk. And here John was legally able to leave, but he was committing, staying on permanent. There was nothing left for me to wait for. I was on my own.

Early that season, in Tempe Arizona, I took my chance. We had been through Tempe every year I could remember. John and I had even been out into the city the last two years, had gotten drunk bumming around on Mill Avenue. I had used their buses and everything. I'd been Craigslisting a guy in Palm Desert who agreed to sell me his V.W. Microbus. It was the camping model with a pop-up top and a kitchenette, just a smaller

version of the trailer I'd lived my whole life in. I could afford it, and thanks to Leroy I could maintain it. It was a start. So it was in Tempe that I saw John for the last time. His hair was still long and beautiful, his skin tan, his peach fuzz grown out into a beard. John was a man.

I found him manning the Tilt-A-Whirl line. "I'm going," I said, not needing to elaborate. "I'm really going."

He looked at me, my body grown but compact and wiry and already lined with weariness and maybe ferocity, the lines of living on the road and working with machines, my dyed black hair in a "don't fuck with me" bang cut, and for just a quick moment, just long enough to take someone's ticket, those beautiful eyes of his had shame in them. He knew he hadn't been the person I had waited for him to be, that he was going to spend the rest of his life here.

"Do you have a plan?"

"Better than last time. I've been saving, but I could use more. All you can give me." I waited while he took another ticket. I looked at the Tilt-a-Whirl, freshly painted under John's management, bright and clean on the surface but oily and mechanized underneath, ready to spin people into oblivion forever.

He didn't question me. We went to his family's trailer and he got together all the money he had. He handed it over silently and waited while I stuffed it into my sock. It was more than I expected. We didn't have much else to say. We just stood in the same space, avoiding eye contact.

"Good luck," he said, finally looking up, and hugged me for the last time.

"Thanks. You, too," I said, hoping there was no animosity in it, because I didn't want there to be, and I wanted to remember him as the person who hugged me, not as the person who abandoned me with a hug.

I slipped out of my parent's trailer that night after the final sweeps and wound my way through the darkness of the empty fair to the side of the Midway closest to the Mirror Maze. The only note I left was "Elena Was Here" in black sharpie on the mechanical panel of the Zipper where Leroy would find it. John knew I was going and would tell people. He understood that I was willing to risk safety and comfort to be free. My parents wouldn't understand my choice, but they wouldn't be surprised either. I threw my bag over the fence. I climbed over quickly. I knew by then that I wouldn't be a forensic investigator, but I knew how to get on a bus, how to get downtown, and to the next state over.

# Sarah Blackman

## Voyeurism

If there is not a love like your only love. If the blue jay stammers in your tree. If, unhinged jaw, you gullet the snake's new eggs. If bounty in the woodpile, bounty in the unanswerable spaces. If I haven't yet asked you a question. If I don't believe your greyhounds are rescue dogs. If I put a sign in my yard that asks 'what is the grass?' If 100 years of women looking into the white ceiling corner at night. Under the quilt at night. Beside his body at night. Warm at night and dozing against the alarm of the child who frets her own white ceiling. If they rose and looked out the windows at you. In your kitchen. What are you drinking? Who is standing inside you in the dark?

## Stephen Gibson

### **Frida Kahlo's Painting** *Remembrance of the Open Wound*

She joked to a friend she was masturbating  
which is why her right hand is hidden.  
The unhealed wound in her thigh, men.  
She joked to a friend she was masturbating.  
But pleasure, she admitted, had to sting—  
so what she regretted she would do again.  
She joked to a friend she was masturbating  
which is why her right hand is hidden.

## Mick Powell

### my student makes a video of herself lighting the flag on fire

she says the red of it blooms  
a sour bruise in her mouth,

reminds her of her mother's hands,  
how they tilled rocked earth  
into fields of flora, godetias,  
and brought bowls of mashed guava,  
sliced mango, pitted pomegranate,  
at first from their own backyard,  
and later, in the States,  
from the bodega on the corner  
where they also sold loose cigarettes  
and *chancletas*, condoms, and clean  
needles. her mother's hands, she says,  
how the undertaker wiped the blood  
from them, from underneath her fingernails,  
how the hands folded over her chest  
at the funeral, knotted,  
how they looked so brown and so clean.

she says the white of it rakes  
a dirty violence between her teeth,

reminds her of the white men in suits  
at the bodega, their proper English,  
their heavy-handed hunger, their red  
baseball caps, their pale and flat lips  
wrapped around the word *mami*,  
how the m's curled in their mouths  
like dying small things, how one man  
with big hands pulled her hair,  
and another grabbed her growing ass,  
and another screamed something  
about getting her to lie on her back;



how she lied on her back beneath  
a bleached light and his pulsing body,  
how she cursed three Hail Mary's,  
prayed for the hour of her death.

she says the blue of it plants  
an ocean in her throat,

reminds her of the dress she wore  
in the courtroom, its floral pattern,  
her body and how it became both  
cause and effect, both the nourishment  
and the starvation, the color of the eyes  
of both men who said *not guilty*,  
who ignored the blood she swore  
was pouring from between her legs  
in that moment, in that courtroom,  
in that dress, which she tore from herself  
that night before she stood naked  
in her backyard, the stars a sharp invitation  
to remember a midnight when the sky,  
bright in its vengeance,  
folded against itself, cut open  
her closing wound, and poured into it  
relentlessly.

Eric Orosco

**thinking about my uncle during a concert, November 9th**

*For Richard Monnier*

in the close quarters of rickshaw's  
between hickory and fell

queer bodies rolled  
like chesapeake tides  
east coast queercore  
reveleries, shouting

*no man will ever love me like I need him to  
while back home*

your photos stir under six feet of clutter  
newspaper clippings, leather harnessed you

tramping up california's capitol  
shouting

to die a closeted man  
is to die a closeted man

years before you  
and your friends

found a House In Virginia <sup>1</sup>  
with cocktails and a month-to-month lease.

---

1 House in Virginia is a polite, dinner table way of saying somebody has HIV/AIDS.

## Brian Batchelor

**from** *Disfigured Hours*

Cue the slow-sung prison spiritual,  
call these shackled hours  
a chain gang stoop-shouldered,  
ditch-deep.

Heads hangdog low,  
calloused hands arc sledgehammers  
into labor again and again, break  
rock into sixty jagged fractures  
of itself: muted, grey, just rocks.

# Loretta Oleck

## Rima

Red hands. Restless hands. Blood painted along the ridges  
of my ribs, down the ladder of my spine-

rigid in the teasing, tight light, under the cover of night.

There are no answers living inside the hush and hum of shadows.  
I've stopped asking *why*. Stopped wondering if I should crawl  
out of tent # 104, or if I should stay inside and doze all day.

Nowhere to go. Seven months of nothingness.

My blood tastes sweetest washing through the heart  
of another, but now it has a bitter bite as I toss and turn,  
alone, for another day, lying on hard ground,  
tangled in a single sheet.

It's as if I am the only one alive at this camp, at dawn,  
holding back the urge to come, to run, to scream, to pray-

surging urges smudged like war paint across my cheeks and lips-  
erasing my features from my face.

I am living a life, now, where only camouflage can save me.

## Suzanne Roszack

### THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE WITH COURAGE

The town had been stockpiling apples.  
Apples in silos, apples in baskets,  
under tables and in corners, apples

bursting out of children's clothes. If  
we didn't have them, it would be  
someone else who did.

In the street there was talk  
of tumbling, a great series of falls. First

the lights of the school would darken,  
then grocery doors would seal  
themselves. Soon we would learn

the meaning of hermitage, or  
worse. A tall fist clenching  
above our heads.

It was easy to see the wolves  
descending from the hills at night

to steal our young. There was bitterness  
in the water; we melted bucketfuls  
from snow. We said there are people

out there with courage. Knowing  
and nameless, protection  
we can taste.

# Claire Bateman

## The Ordinary Course of Things

1.

All streams flow into the sea,  
yet the sea, that spacious wound,  
is never full,

just as thirst rarely answers  
the simplest star: blue flame  
projecting distance, a bell  
of darkness, known.

How small the creation!  
Hurried through many changes naked,  
finally compelled to crawl,  
it does not wake,

I wish--I cannot think—  
a sort of vague feeling comes over me,  
glimpse of lamp burning low—  
that I have asked all this before.

2.

The mind is its own place,  
a far-off hazy multitudinous assemblage  
of bells, and wheels, and flowers  
at a high pitch of velocity;  
little craters all burning, lava flowing uphill;  
gigantic ruins and the strange bright constellations;  
shadows of clouds feeding on each other—  
a moving curtain of the earth and sky  
that has been already in the ages before us—  
*Was it person? Was it thing?*  
*was it touch or whispering?*

It comes without meaning  
a knot on a piece of string,  
minute in its distinctness,  
beautiful in its time,  
as it threads the darkness.

3.

When thunder and lightning were first found  
to be due to secondary causes,  
some regretted to give up the idea  
that each flash was caused by  
the direct hand of God,  
their regal gold-inwoven tatters,  
the shadow passed from between us  
through the dark Areal Hall,  
a double consciousness,  
that crooked tree, its roots full of caves  
that had grown as the world grew  
in the changing light of heaven and of eyes.  
Let it glide where it will,  
like wings of flaws and holes:  
time will do wonders.

# Rita Chapman

## Taking Account after Divorce

I have turned my back and cannot see  
what is behind me

I have numbered the countable things  
the things I have poured  
from palm to palm  
each failed hymn that did  
not rise from my throat

I have measured god and time and gold  
The kisses that thumbed me in the eye

What waits behind me taps my shoulder and runs away  
It is a river that grows smaller under my burning touch

I will not spin around  
I can't help spinning around  
The spinning is killing me

The room is stuffy and my lungs won't fill  
I open a window and the rain comes in  
and no one can live that way either

Rust imposes itself in the night.

What is red in me grows like cash in the bank



## Dear Syria

I was talking to the sky,

and we were speaking in blue

about how to wear birds

draped like a scarf, low and fringed and

how to wear bombs like drop pearls

each falling from the silver breast of a plane and

about how to wear oil fires like pendants

each finger reaching up to

skirt along the edges of an orange evening

This is how I learned to wear your ghosts like buttons

and drink your fear like hot tea and

this is how I learned to dream of eating

my own future.

Kelly Egan

**to my mirror**

from Natatorium

if those dreams of being kidnapped were  
not so taboo, then I wanted

drapily, the chloroform  
portage, to be left for dark

in a webbed  
spiderless cache  
wherein to ravel

the knots,  
to  
be not  
home—

as though you would know nudity if  
it stood before you, or because  
you won't,

I am ready to admit  
the lozenge of that dream:

escape was

a wash that forest, the exponents  
of lips giving way

to the only option  
was a leap  
into sun,

swan dive

out over the gorge the way  
arms will spread like rays

if only compressed,  
if only resist—

involuntary wilderness,

how candidly it exists  
behind it— blindfold:

alteration of *blindfeld*,  
vestige of an obsolete verb.

The boreal hum of train,  
    all there is to know:  
    the window filth smudging dusk

into a tundra that all but  
    imbibes, the lust for  
    exile that harbors  
                    the port town—

Deep into night we arrive.

It is an outpost it is an orphanage it is  
    the closest one can come to home,  
    going north.

It is an inverse thing, negative  
space, domain of the silhouette,  
    as though

    all my friends live here in  
lofts but they are sleeping now,  
    and I can sense it can  
sense there oh where           and  
why                   I've come

    the warehouse,  
    cavity by the water's edge—

Casement and dark  
brick enclose the dark blank  
    of abandonment.

\*  
\*

That a void can be a muse is  
something on which we must all agree,  
    for here is the welcome party,

here are the true kindreds—  
    cutouts of  
bodies in the only  
dive open—



Brian Satrom

**Viewing Reagan's Casket**

*Simi Valley, California, 2004*

I want to believe in America. I've always  
wanted to believe

completely, without doubt. But what I keep

returning to, what I've experienced,  
thought, felt, ends up

sounding less like belief, more like loss,  
desire. Even in your coffin  
(strange, my disappointment

that it's closed) I'm sure you're looking at me

sternly, disapprovingly.  
I don't know why I've come.

# *Chapbook Finalist Folio*

*RECOVERY*, J.L. Conrad

*A Little History of the Panorma*, Matthew Cooperman'

*Natatorium*, Kelly Egan

*photo album*, Gary Jackson

*K/Not Theory*, Jen Karetnick

*Estrangia*, C Kubasta

*Border Crossings: Immigration advice  
for those attempting to cross borders*,  
Natalie D-Napoleon

*White Sky*, Carter Smith



C. Kubasta

## Annie Makes an Offer

from *Estrangia*

Bones of a house that thin & flare like cabriolet legs

Bait & switch list sheets littered with euphemism

the pictures never line up with the actual  
all optimistic angles & impossible contouring

Sleep, when it stays, covers. A skin, a skim, a tension membrane that must be broken to escape. As if surface is only a pricking of light or air and the limbs drag down beneath, shot in tunnels of runnels mote that may catch stray sparking.

a foreclosure come-hither

The falling back into it from whatever has woken you is the simplest of motions, a reverse of infant urge to raise the head or begin a crab-crawl toward desire.

whether chemical or the result of a withdrawn offer

Thinking about the body, about vulnerability, about the architecture of anatomy. A vestibule is an antechamber next to the outer door of a building; a chamber or channel communicating with or opening into another, in particular. Whether exterior or interior. What it means to carry this around with you, on you, in you, to save and shield this, to use it as a tool, a weapon, a gift, a message.

all bubbles burst, interest low & bottoming out  
language bought, borrowed, or fabricated for whatever purpose



imaginary places serve multiple purposes : in fiction, a simple disengagement from the actual that allows the reader to both inhabit & separate : in speculative works, a hinge between the world we occupy & some construction : a re-positioning of variables : a false memory : an impossible present : an unlikely future

Any imagined present, cast in past tense with details from a shared actual, those mute tethers, could be a counter-factual history

# The Auricle

distress rings the pinna; when crushed, immobile  
the feelings don't register, register as pain, but

as she switches from her side, lifts the head crushed  
into the pillow, waves of pain surface, almost enough  
to rouse a cry, but finally, she is alone. the making of  
sound suggests an audience: why utter if no auditor?

grief pins and folds itself with curved edges

she recalls dolls whose limbs could snap off & on, wishes to unsnap the right  
arm at the shoulder, to sink into the unforgiving

mattress, its lumps & springs, its coiled memory of  
another. in middle age comes the middle night call  
of paresthesia, fingers hands and arms to the shoulder.  
once she woke to the absence of her heart beating,

thought: this is it. some final deficiency. some heralding.

pain that is physical has its names, as does pain that is mental: both called "dis-  
tress," both called "suffering." both wake her in the night, the circular heartache  
located in her right ear, the absence of circulation along the right side of her  
body. she doesn't know why

she still sleeps in this position – some long-learned posture of coupling.

Folly or follies (various understandings of the word) : Time, the metaphor of baffle,  
n. an artificial obstruction for checking or deflecting the flow of gases (as in a  
boiler), sounds (as in the loudspeaker system of a radio or hi-fi set), light (as in a  
darkroom), etc. : Place, the metaphor of imagined country : some Prester John with  
too many traces to ever disappear : recurring metaphors, cicadas, hawk, whole  
rabbit & component parts : transformation from one state to another : Character,  
a double-inversion, named for a character created elsewhere, loosely fictionalized  
on an alter-ego; the self immortalized through a cage of mirrors, however framed

I'm  
a lotta people  
your last year  
a  
woulda been

the right age

a dark woman  
I can't think. I know



what about

reunion

lord

come

and

change

picture.  
my

make

us

like that again.

*That ain't our house*

Yeah, that's our house. We put that thing on the couch.

That's the waterbed.

*That damn bed.*

I was pregnant with Gina then.

You didn't want to get again, did you?

Uh-uh

*I don't blame you.*



there's you and grandma

*She's holding me.*

there's your grandma Beverly.

*That's Easter or something, you got that hat on!*

Yeah. Mm-hm.

*Look like you stylin'.*

It was slick.

*Yeah.*

I had Gina in May, that was April  
I was getting ready to have her

There's you and Gina  
*yeah,*

before she got her lip fixed

*with her wild hair*

*She look fat like a butterball.*

look at her

*Look at you*

*Why does that happen?*

Cleft lip. They say that happens a lot in Korea

they didn't tell us she was gonna be handicapped they said she got a cleft  
pallette they could fix but see you could tell something else was wrong

*How come they didn't*

soft spot Grandma knew could feel she didn't have a

we went to Kansas City, KU medical center

they said she got severe handicaps.

*They was afraid.*

she was always gonna be a baby you could see it.





# Michael Chitwood

## Eve

The young minister, this his first church, stared in reverie out his office window which had a view of the white pine woods at the back of the church. He sometimes walked there when trying to work out the intricacies of a sermon. There was no underbrush and the floor of fallen pine needles was a carpet. Clean, straight trunks stretched to where the boughs began far overhead. It was a dappled chapel of sorts. Those were his thoughts.

Suddenly, from the right, a naked woman strolled into view. In the crook of one arm, she carried a bundle that looked to be clothes and, perhaps, a towel and a spiral notebook. A pair of sandals dangled from her other hand. Her pace was slow and stately, her gaze scanned the canopy. Her blonde hair was cut short, close to her head, like a man's cut, but she was most definitely female. Slender and toned, perhaps an athlete. Her breasts were not large but firm and her buttocks shifted smoothly as she proceeded. For a moment, it crossed the minister's mind that he was having a vision.

Though the church blocked the view of the woods from the road, surely she knew she could be seen from the church. The minister felt himself stirring. He looked away, back to his desk, to his open computer with the first few paragraphs of his next sermon drafted on it.

But his gaze returned to the woods and the woman now disappearing into its farther reaches.

Perhaps, he thought, she was in some kind of mental distress, that she was acting out to relieve an anguish. Should he check on her? He regularly visited the sick. It was in his job description. If this woman was suffering from some torment, he was obligated to offer assistance. He slipped through the office door, walking gingerly down the hallway in case custodians or the church secretary were about.

The woods were inviting, the soft duff of the years of pine straw with its pleasantly tangy aroma. And, save for an occasional note of bird song, it was silent. The bulk of the church building buffered the woods from the noise of the road that ran in front of the building.

The minister followed the course he had seen the woman take. He considered what he would say when, maybe it should be if, he found her. The woods were a goodly number of acres on the back of a large dairy farm. The owners of the farm were members of his congregation.

Then, just ahead, he saw her. She had arranged her towel in a spot where the canopy allowed a single shaft of sunlight to reach the forest floor. Again, he considered that this might be a vision. The scene had a painterly quality, but it could be fraught with peril if another sort of man were approaching.

The woman saw him nearing but made no move to cover her nakedness. Her notebook was open on the towel in front of her and occasionally she leaned up to write. When she did, her breasts swayed forward gently. The minister was short of breath, from the brisk walk no doubt, he thought.

He stopped about ten yards from the towel. He didn't want her to feel as if he were rushing at her. She still had made no move to cover herself though a pile of clothing was in easy reach.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he began, but then wasn't sure what came next. Finally, he tried, "Are you OK?"

"Perfectly," the woman said and leaned forward again to jot a few words in her notebook. Her casualness and confidence were infectious. The minister, though he shifted from foot to foot to hide his erection, tried to follow suit.

"Do you mind if I ask why you are out here in the woods with no clothes on?" The minister surprised himself with his directness and the sudden outburst of language. He sometimes ad-libbed sentences into his sermons and found it thrilling.

"It's part of my practice," the woman said, looking at him directly for the first time.

"Your practice?"

"Yes, my writing. I don't want anything between me and the world when I'm writing. I want the air to be alive on all of me."

"I see," the minister said, immediately regretting his word choice. Then he moved to recover with, "Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid of what?" The woman seemed genuinely puzzled.

"That someone, like me, would see you."

"You don't seem dangerous," she said.

"I'm not the only person, man, in the world."

"No? You are right now."

The minister felt the presence of the trees all around him as if they had commenced to breathe. He heard the easy movement of their boughs overhead. He looked around, as if for the first time.

Amy Newman Translations of La Vita Sagnota by Antonia Pozzi

## The Dreamed Life

Whoever speaks to me doesn't know  
that I have lived another life –  
like one who tells  
a fairy tale  
or a holy parable.

Because you were  
my purity  
you for whom a white wave  
of sadness would fall on your face  
if I called you with impure lips,  
you whose sweet tears  
flowed deep in your eyes  
if we looked up –  
and so I seemed to you more beautiful.

O veil  
you – of my youth  
my bright dress ,  
vanished truth –  
or bright knot –  
of a whole life  
that was dreamed of – perhaps –

oh, to have dreamed you,  
my dear life,  
I bless the days that remain –  
the dead branch of all the days that remain,  
that serve  
to mourn you.



## The Lark

After the kiss – from the shadow of the elms  
we'd come out on the road  
to return:  
we were smiling at tomorrow  
like tranquil children.  
Our hands  
joined  
in a tenacious  
shell  
that protected  
the peace.  
And I was quiet  
you were nearly a saint  
that calms the useless  
storm  
and walks on the lake.  
I was an immense  
summer sky  
at dawn  
on boundless  
expanses of grain.  
And my heart  
a trilling lark  
measuring  
the serenity.

## Joy

I was asking with eyes closed  
- *what*  
*will the sweetheart be tomorrow?*

So I made you repeat  
in a smile the sweet words  
- *the bride,*  
*the mom-*

Fable  
of the time of love  
deep sip – life  
fulfilled –

joy firm in the heart  
like a knife in bread.

## Reunion

If I understood  
what he wants to say  
- to not see you anymore -  
I believe that my life  
here – would end.

But for me the earth  
is only the soil I trample  
and the other  
that you trample:  
the rest  
is air  
in which – rafts unmoored – we sail  
to meet each other.

In the clear sky indeed  
sometimes small clouds rise  
strands of wool  
or feathers – remote –  
and who looks to them in a few moments  
sees a single cloud  
that goes away.

## Beginning of Death

When I gave you  
my baby pictures  
you were grateful: you said it was  
as if I wanted  
to start life again  
to give it all to you.

Now no one  
brings from the shadow  
the small slight  
person who was  
in a brief  
dawn - the sweet baby

now no one bends  
over the edge  
of my forgotten cradle -

Soul -  
and you've entered  
on the road to dying.

## Motherhood

I thought to hold him inside, before  
he was born,  
looking at the sky, the grass, the flight  
of light things,  
the sun -  
because all the sun  
would descend in him.

I thought to hold him inside, trying  
to be good -  
good -  
because every kindness  
would make him smile.

I thought to keep him in me, talking  
often with God -  
because God would watch him  
and we would be  
redeemed in him.

## You'd Have Been

Annunzio  
you'd have been  
of what we weren't,  
of what we were  
and that we aren't anymore.

In you  
the dead would have returned  
and the unborn would have lived,  
the buried waters flowed.

Poetry,  
loved by us and never loosened  
from the heart  
you'd have sung  
with the cries of a child.

The only stalk  
of two lost bits of earth  
was you –  
the stem  
of our innocence  
under the sun.

But you've stayed down there,  
with the dead,  
with the unborn,  
with the waters  
buried-  
dawn already faded in the light  
of the last stars:  
now it doesn't take up the earth  
but only  
heart  
your invisible  
coffin.

## The Child on the Path

From the moment I said – the baby  
will have the name of your dead brother –

it was an October evening, dark,  
under large trees, without  
seeing each other's faces –

he was alive. And when  
we stopped walking on the path  
he played quietly  
with the pebbles and the insects and the small  
fallen leaves.

That's why  
our steps were slow and sweet –  
so sweet – our eyes  
when on the grassy edge  
we glimpsed a daisy  
and we know that a child – barely  
stretching his small arms –  
could pluck it and not trample the grass.

## The Eyes of Dream

You'd tell me – I want  
the child to have eyes like yours –  
I'd touch my eyelids,  
stare at the sky  
to feel my gaze  
become more blue.  
You'd tell me – I want  
for this  
that you don't cry –

Oh, for respect  
of what was yours, for love  
of what you loved:  
look, I won't cry –  
look, my eyes – still  
pure and blue –  
still bear the rays of the dream,  
they speak still  
of him – with the sky.

## Vow

And it's so peaceful  
that I say:  
*- oh, may you meet the woman  
who would give back to you  
the child we dreamed of  
and who died –*  
I say:  
*- may the grave  
at least for you  
become a furrow  
and the rain from the sky mix  
with my tears:  
may it wash over your growth  
unnoticed –*

25 October 1933









## An Interview with Saleh Razzouk, University of Aleppo Scott Minar—2017

\*Interviewer's Note: Saleh Razzouk is a writer and translator currently teaching at the University of Aleppo in Syria. Because of the unusual and horrific circumstances of his life in the war zone Aleppo has become, I asked if Saleh if would consent to a brief interview with me regarding translation practices. For half a year now, Philip Terman, Razzouk, and I have been co-translating his fiction and some contemporary Syrian poetry from Arabic into English. Terman and Razzouk have been working together on translations for five years, publishing many of these in good journals in the US. Dr. Razzouk is also a prolific translator of American poetry into Arabic.

**SM:** Is it difficult to translate contemporary poetry or fiction from English into Arabic or from Arabic into English? What features of the Arabic language or the English language make translation difficult or challenging?

**SR:** No, it is not difficult. It seems to me it is an act of love. Once you feel the poems, translation becomes easy. But I have a view here. Thinking in English is the first step toward mastering the translation from Arabic, and vice versa. You have to think in terms of the target language. In other words, you have to forget the original, keeping in mind the meaning alone and not the words. Words are things. As Foucault said “Words are graves of the meaning.” As for difficulties? Oh, there are many difficulties. Certain tricky words play with the flow or the sound of words to denote something hidden behind graphemes, etc.

**SM:** Can you provide an example of a translation challenge or problem—a word or a line—that you solved in a way that you think was good or fortunate? What was your thinking that led to the translation solution or decision?

**SR:** I find Arabic classic poetry very hard to transform. Metric poetry in all languages needs special attention. My solution to this is to avoid it. On the other hand, sometimes you must manipulate the translation. Sometimes I use footnotes to explain a thing readers might miss otherwise. For example, once the nickname of a character in a piece I was working was Rasasy—because he always wears grey suits. I had then to explain that in Arabic *rasas* means *bullets*, and thus the reader could see the relationship between the colors from these two sides and understand where the name comes from.

**SM:** Why do you do your translating work? What does the work bring you or give back to you?

**SR:** Pleasure. I enjoy it, and I make friendships in this way.

**SM:** What is your personal approach to translation? Do you try to stay close to the original text or do you interpret and negotiate with the text in order to make the translation fluent and fluid?

**SR:** I negotiate. I do not like to scar the original with primitive and direct approaches. This type of scarring is to be avoided at all costs. We have to understand each other before the chemistry of two languages mingles nicely and mixes into one.

**SM:** Who are your favorite Arabic language poets? Why do you admire them?

**SR:** I use to like Mohammed Umran. He knew how to make himself inside-out. But of course I think Adonis is a message Syria sent to the world. I like among the Arabs Badr Shakir AlSayyab. He revolutionized Arabic poetry.

**SM:** What is your favorite American poem or who is your favorite American poet? Why?

**SR:** I like Whitman. I read him translated by Saadi Youssef in the 1980s. And read him again in English in 21st century. If you check my iPad today, you'll find *Leaves of Grass* in English first in my iBook files. Second will be John Ashberry. I think his vision is fascinating. His nostalgia for mother nature before its corruption by the smoke of industry is remarkable. Finally, I know he is not an American, but please allow me to express my love of every page D. H. Lawrence wrote—prose or verse. He is a tremendous writer, but he is a universal person. He made us see more of human passion in action. I studied for four years in his birth place, and my first ever report from my education there was on him.

**SM:** What would you like others to know about the work you do translating poetry and fiction in Aleppo today? What would you say to others outside your country about doing this work?

**SR:** I do it in response to necessity. To stay alive and connected. Any text gives me this grace—I translate only if I can.

\* Saleh Razzouk added these in follow-up emails:

**SR:** I thought you might like to know this as well. Poetry is the only literary art Arabs had ever known before the French and British broke the Ottoman Empire and drove it out of the Arab world. Modernization did not kill poetry, but reshape it. And from this point on, prose too flourished in many forms—novels, drama, stories.... So, poetry is a universal art to Arabs, but prose is bound to refer to our enlightenment and renaissance (both are in debt to romanticism and modernism—we have a slight modernization mixed and mingled with a heavy romantic vision). Afterward, independent prose and poetry became alike.

But in the 1970s, poets used modern styles to teach readers about Eastern wisdom, and the necessity to fight colonialism with its own tool: to negate it from within. Prose poetry and the *avant garde* began at this time. Poetry certainly followed the overwhelmed sensitivity of this time and chose to change its nature, from a modern prose style to a nostalgic style or monologic flow.

Currently, the state writers are blasphemous in many ways: they do not use their ears and eyes. They write mute literature by failing to knock with their hands on the doors of truth. Free writers, if they are honest, produce something real with insight and are conscious of trying to avoid disasters and conflicts. Abdel Nabi Higazi, Kheri Alzahabi, among others, may serve the state much more than the mercenary authors who invade the institution in order to follow the old standards without even thinking of renewing the art to answer the challenges of rising tide of history.

\*\*\*

E.A. Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher" was misunderstood by translators. They translated *Usher* as the *gatekeeper*—and did not realize it was the character's name. Also, in Graham Green's story "The Basement Room," they translated *Butler* as the *second to the priest*. In fact, it was a name—not a job.

\*\*\*

Another interesting mistake. The title of Marquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* was interpreted as The Autumn of the Penguin—since in Arabic we call penguins *petriks*: بطريق:



Seleh Razzouk

*Translations, Fiction, and an Interview with Saleh Razzouk*

*Riad Saleh Hussein (Translated by Saleh Razzouk with Philip Terman)*

**The Germ of the Water Spring**

And now come along to sip a little amount of surprises  
And now come down to tear up our hesitated steps  
Wrapping our pains with thin cigarette paper before we smoke it with content:

That the man and the woman,  
The desert, the sea and mallow trees,  
The tears, the cement factories and the animals—  
All these now are wrapped with hard papers and dancing African wood  
Waiting on a solid globed ship.

But after a while the tidy suit approaches:  
In it a bright man  
Gives the gift to a beast whose heads are  
As many as the continents, the cities and the villages.

A beast that has no Dracula traits.  
His fangs are very polite.  
He has a beautiful and nice woman  
Capable of eating the hearts of children like a good chess player  
But he likes whisky with ice  
And the cheeps of singing birds.  
But I—  
You know that I am like you,  
--So said a shallow poet from the country of big hats  
And quick guns.  
--I celebrate the tragedies,  
Having a tremendous capability to digest pains and routine hurts I receive every  
morning with the price  
Of oxygen I breathe in gardens.

I love a girl with eyes, teeth and two little  
Feet washed out with washing detergent.  
In a corner of my room a shirt, trousers and dance shoes  
I do not need.

My time is in increments.  
The areas of my age are with abstract topography.  
My body is a hole for rats.  
My body is a trap for escaped butterflies.

I wish that a day will come  
When the sandwich is free  
And the kiss is free  
And the grave is free

That when the water spring is ill  
And the flower of apricots poisons the morning coffee mug  
To kill the flower of oranges  
Night would fall upon us heavy  
The broken glass falls heavy  
The poor fall heavy  
The bullets fall heavy  
The cities fall heavy

And when we love each other,  
When the country says to me each year its tufts  
Of grass had been torn by the fever of happiness—

I'll plant before every house a doll for a sly child  
I'll give chains for the stupid neutron bomb  
And a bottle of perfume for my mother on her birthday.  
I'll give my body to my girlfriend  
With the little salary I earn  
After deliver elegies beside the graves of my friends.

Look... look—

I am the thief of mute alleys  
In my hands the keys of science  
The keys of deserted cinema theatres—  
Their dreamy audience  
Hated the look of the sheriff's gun and  
Kisses in air  
The keys of rich banks stuffed with documents, employees  
And policemen  
The keys of villages where women gather the animal dung  
From fields to bake  
Tasty pies of Zaater.  
The keys of weapon inventors who baked death  
Cakes for their relatives and dear children  
The white keys for peace  
The red keys for rebels  
The blue keys for lovers.

But- and I say it with sadness:  
The oily key which was under my pillow—  
On Thursday a mad man stole it,  
And here I am biting my fingernails thinking in distress:  
I cannot, on Saturday evening, sneak to  
The house of my girlfriend to play cards with her

I decided to die once  
Instead of dying seven times every week.  
And because I have no coffin, no hole, nor shrouds  
I decided to live for all of the dead,  
Preparing for a store to distribute love among you through this poem!



## No Doubt About It, O Descartes

I do not doubt it at all,  
at least when sad,  
that wood floats on the surface of water,  
that cats feed on rats,  
and trees flower in spring.

I do not doubt  
that the knife chops the meat,  
that the rains end the thirst,  
and Monday cuts my confidence into two halves.

I do not doubt at all  
as everybody knows  
that one plus one equals two,  
and a little of salt, chopped cucumbers, tomato, and parsley make salad.

But I doubt,  
oh, mad Descartes,  
that a lie and another lie,  
a building added to another building,  
and a swamp beside a river  
results in a revolution.

Simple like water, clear like a bullet in a gun.

## Qadisha Cave (Razzouk)

On the way, from Bsharri to Qadisha Cave, Janni, who drove the taxi, asked me: Do you have good clothes with you? The air inside is nearly freezing.

I nodded with a smile. But Paulin didn't want to think about what his question meant. We were both under the spell of these fascinating scenes, particularly the mountain where you can't move an inch without difficult climbing.

Paulin was a colleague for this ride only—she originally came to this country on a visit after an invitation from me. At first, things on her end didn't go well. Her father strongly rejected the whole idea, partly because he did not know me and because he had bitter memories of the East.

I am not sure about the nature of the rotten seed that grew inside his head about us. Better to say inside his distressed heart. But I am sure it has nothing to do with religion or tolerance. It was politics in this case. Paulin's father was originally from India, but he was forced to immigrate after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and he had no choice but to quit his job in the army. Much earlier than expected, he drew thick iron curtains down on his career, killing his future and its hopes. So he terminated his life in the East, from the sad side of it, since he had lived there half-heartedly. His daughter can't recall hearing him ever laugh. I asked her how she got him to agree in the end. She said: I told him I'm over eighteen, and I've never been a soldier in your barracks, Mr. General.

\*\*\*

In the middle of the road, when we passed an aluminum warehouse, Janni shook his head and hit the wheel with his hand in anger or sadness. Depression overwhelmed me. Had he realized we're on the wrong road? But he quickly explained—this warehouse was his, but he sold it a week ago for \$100,000. Now the price had climbed to \$300,000.

With a sigh, he added: I regret it, but nothing can be done now. I noticed how he fixed his sight on the little rearview mirror. Obviously, he felt that loss like an ardent lover.

To make it easy for him I asked: What you have done with the hundred thousand then?

He replied that he'd paid for his son's study at the university. What was left will

go for a supermarket he plans to build in Bsharri.

How miserable you are, o, Lebanon.

That this fascinating animus had entered in first place—the circle of violence and chaos—and slipped into a double abyss in which we suffer. Backwardness and corruption of the East on one hand, and the West’s selfishness on the other. The West caught in the ethics of the market and in the abuses of capitalism just to flood us with the same.

This thread of thoughts came to an end when I saw a giant picture of Samir Geagea, one of the war lords in Lebanon. I saw it all in a moment when we were climbing the cliffs. But the picture of his wife next to him touched me with soft, warm fingers. Her face was in fact angelic and soon her features vaporized all of the cruel memories of that savage war. I felt my soul drawn to the border of her beautiful nature. The grey and mystified nature that poured from all sides as if it were a sign of salvation.

I wondered if Paulin had this feeling, and if she would be able to transmit this message to her father—to calm him down and to open again the closed roads with dead ends in his mind.

\*\*\*

On approaching the cave, Janni stopped his car. He said we had to continue on foot. Then he pointed to an unpaved ascending road.

The road was too narrow—thin in fact, like a gossamer thread.

From here, you can see all of Bsharri, including the house of the famous writer and poet, Jibran Khalil Jibran. It was like a dot of ink on an open page. Farther out was Hasroun, and the house of acclaimed politician Michel Aflak. In other words, from the cliffs and these heights, you can see a compact and revealing map of all of Lebanon’s nature.

On the threshold of the cave, a sheer, cold breeze blew across our faces. I noticed from there how tiny the car looked. It was another dot on this marvelous and ambiguous page. But the details of Janni, the driver, were unclear—in fact they were absent. I failed to register his presence, or even to determine where he had gone on the screen of my sight.

## Exile

There are places we can return to only in our thoughts,  
Haifa, Jerusalem, Baghdad, Damascus, Tripoli, Aden,  
their ancient empires now a half-lit reflection  
shining from below the fields of their glories.

We rise from our longing to grasp at stars,  
take thousands of steps towards new languages,  
their sounds scraping across our throats,  
lilting against our tongues.

We teach ourselves eloquent speech,  
spread the roofs of our mouths  
with new tastes, endure less spices on our plates,  
new costumes against our bodies.

In countries with icy winds or scorching heat,  
we read the shapes of clouds for a sign  
that beyond them still trail our homes,  
our mountains, our turquoise rivers.

We read secrets in each others eyes about  
the time the ground shook beneath our feet,  
and the crescent moon became the hour to  
wander the passages of our recollections.

## المنفى

هناك أماكن يمكننا العودة لها فقط في أفكارنا،  
حيفا، القدس، بغداد، دمشق، طرابلس، عدن،  
إمبراطورياتهم الأزلية الآن انعكاس لنصف ضوء  
يشع من أسفل حقول أمجادهم.

نسمو من حنيننا لنقبض على النجوم،  
نأخذ آفاقاً من خطوات نحو لغات جديدة،  
أصواتهم تعارك حنجرتنا،  
تغرد عكس ألسنتنا.

نعلم أنفسنا الكلام الفصيح،  
ننثر سقوف أفواهنا مع  
مذاقات جديدة، نتحمل اقل توابل في أطباقنا،  
أزياء جديدة تلف أجسادنا

في بلاد ذات رياح جليدية أو حرارة حارقة  
نقرأ أشكال الغيوم لعلامة  
ذلك ما بعدهم ما زال أثر دورنا  
وتلانا وأنهارنا الفيروزية.

نقرأ أسراراً في عيون كل منا  
عن وقت أهتزت الأرض تحت أقدامنا  
وأصبح هلال القمر الساعة  
للتيه في ممر ذكرياتنا.

Abigail Carl-Klassen

**Si mueres lejos de mi...  
(un anuncio de Seguros Azteca sobre tus envíos)**

Me explicaron que en caso  
de que llegaras  
a fallecer, esperemos  
que no, ellos se encargan  
de regresarte a México y cubren  
el servicio funerario. Me voy  
a pellizcar un poco  
al dinerito que me mandas  
para que estemos  
protegidos. Me dijeron,  
—Garantizamos su regreso.

**If You Die Far from Me...  
(an announcement from Azteca Insurance concerning your  
remittances)**

They told me that if  
you were to die, we hope  
not, they would take care  
to return you to Mexico and cover  
the funeral service. I'm going  
to set aside a little  
money you send me  
so that we would be  
protected. They told me,  
“We guarantee his return.”

Ana Fores Tamayo

**Nada**

¿En que piensas?  
¿En Dios?  
¿Y porque?  
¿No ves que no hay nada,  
solo el laberinto  
vacío  
de la nada silenciosa?

Y entonces, ¿porque crees?  
La repetición no da verdad.

**Nothing**

What are you thinking?  
Pondering God?  
And why?  
Don't you see there is nothing,  
only the empty  
labyrinth  
in the voided silence of nothingness?

Then, why do you still believe?  
Repetition never renders truth.

## Palabras

Ni siquiera tengo cara para abrir  
esos párpados tan pálidos,  
esos incapaces besos de memoria  
que no dicen nada,  
de palabras o tinieblas que,  
desesperada, necesito oír.

Como esa magia que me exiges,  
no es bastante ese destinar  
con los anillos de un pincel,  
con las lluvias cayendo en una playa pálida,  
con las muñequitas inocentes del olvido.

Tú me quieres como piedra avergonzada del pesar,  
Tú me adoras como ojos negros visten su dolor.

Pero no tengo que decirte  
que en tu amarga alma atrapaste mis deseos,  
que en tu sueño desorientado se rompió  
ese vacío de cristales azulados,  
esa mirada llena de palabras falsas,  
de frases sin repetición  
de poesías no escritas,  
de almas sin morir.

Claro, todo terminado,  
recojo ahora esa contemplación —  
pues lágrimas siempre son de libros,  
y solo resolviendo esas palabras que no dije,  
las lloro al papel  
que deslumbra y se queda sin color.



## Words

I do not have the courage to open  
eyelids that seem pallid,  
kisses of forgotten memory unable  
to speak nothing,  
    neither words nor darkness,  
    which desperately, I need to hear.

As you demand that magic of me,  
It is not enough to earmark  
the rings of paint brush,  
the rains falling on the palest beach,  
the innocent wee dolls rendered to oblivion.

Your desire for me seems a disconcerted tombstone,  
Your passion appears to be your black eyes dressing pain.

But I have to tell you  
that in your bitter soul you trapped my yearning,  
in your disoriented dream you broke  
the void of cerulean blue crystals,  
a vision filled with falsified expressions,  
sentences without repeating,  
poetry unwritten,  
souls that never die.

Of course, when all is finished,  
I gather now that all was contemplation —  
because tears are always for the books,  
and only when solving words I did not say,  
I cry them onto paper  
that bedazzles, yet waxen will remain.

## Cuban Rhythm

The song dances with me.

The sound of its raspy voice,  
the intimate saxophone,  
the Creole guitar:

its cadences caress me.

And then I think of  
that Cuban rhythm I do not know.  
The one I abandoned  
without wanting  
without understanding  
without sensing its mellow sweetness.

And I scream,  
the tears  
scald me, burning me  
with the passion of its song.

I can return, I think.

But it's a lie.  
I will never be what I left behind.

Nostalgic then,  
I listen to melodic voices,  
to the poetry of the bohío, the broken shacks,  
the guajira peasant with her compadre —  
her Cuban man — seducing deceptive labyrinths.  
I unearth the drums that restrain me  
with sugar cane and molasses.

And I become lost in the sounds  
of the past,  
of the hills I never knew,  
of the rain that torments  
in gales past ancient homes  
with reddened shutters and  
fractured crevices  
of a chilled yet freshened air.

I walk past the hillside,  
bushes filled with taro leaves,  
with sweet potato, with malango,  
thickets of small fig,

and I walk through the harvest  
filled with bell flowers like snowdrops.

I pick up a pigeon, disguised chameleon,  
and next to a deep well  
I sit,  
admiring a caimito tree peeking through the sierra.

And then I return from the past  
to acknowledge  
that with my imagination,  
infertile  
yet always fruitful,

I can remember  
and recreate

for the very first time.

## Ritmo Cubano

La canción me baila.

El sonido de su áspera voz,  
del entrañable saxofón,  
de la guitarra criolla:

me acarician sus inflexiones.

Y entonces pienso en ese  
ritmo cubano que no conozco.  
Que abandoné sin querer  
sin poder conocer,  
sin saber de sus dulzuras suaves.

Y grito, las lagrimas  
ardientes me escaldan  
con la pasión del canto.

Puedo volver, pienso.

Pero mentira.  
Nunca seré lo que dejé.

Y nostálgica,  
oigo las voces melódicas,  
la poesía del bohío,  
de la guajira con su compadre  
seduciendo laberintos engañosos.  
Desentierro los tambores  
que me amarran  
con el guarapo  
y la melcocha.

Y me pierdo en los sonidos  
del pasado,  
de las lomas  
que nunca conocí,  
del aguacero que cae  
como un vendaval en las casas viejas  
con las contraventanas rojas  
y rendijas fracturadas,  
el aire refrescado y frío.

Me voy por los cerros  
llenos de matas con hojas de malanga,  
de boniato y ñame,  
con matorrales de higuillos,  
mientras camino a través de la cosecha  
llena de campanillas blancas.

Recojo un pichón de chipoyo,  
y al lado del pozo profundo  
me siento,  
admirando al caimito del monte.

Y entonces regreso del pasado  
y reconozco  
que con mi imaginación infértil  
aunque campesina,

igual puedo recordar  
y crear por primera vez.

## Refugiado

Mi alma en pedazos,  
Veo el alambre de púa  
rasguñando metal contra piel.  
Llorando lágrimas de sangre,  
Escucho disparos al vacío del silencio  
de la salva maratrucha.  
Lo empujo bajo la cerca  
pero llora mi hijo,  
aunque no importa;  
lo hago porque  
lo quiero.

Caminamos caminamos...  
horas por las vías podridas  
de los coyotes,  
días, semanas, un mes, mano en mano:  
vamos enfermos,  
sin comer,  
sin beber,  
sin hablar.  
O cuando hablamos es llorando,  
porque no hay energía para más.

¿Dónde se habrá ido la niñez de mi hijito?  
¿Cuándo la perdió?  
¿Será cuando vio a su tío caer por unas balas  
que le correspondían a su madre?

La eternidad del infierno  
ha pasado en frente,  
y cruzamos la frontera  
llegando al río.  
Atravesamos en balsas,  
yo muerta en vida  
con mi hijito en brazos.  
Nos damos por vencidos  
en esa tierra de tinieblas  
y nos tiramos a sus pies —  
esas patrullas sin cara, sin rostro.  
Les decimos, susurrando,  
“tengo miedo.”

II

Recuerdo los ojos negros  
de mi hermano,  
entreabiertos, glaseados,  
la sangre estallando sus entrañas,  
mi abuela gritando  
corre, niña, corre,  
eres tú la que quieren,  
es tu sexo,  
tu poder como mujer,  
tu manera de decirles no.

Oigo los disparos lejos todavía,  
y vuelvo a escuchar la voz de  
mi querida abuela:  
vete con tu niño antes  
que te maten, dice.

Y el presente rompe pesadillas  
que me trae aún más asaltos:  
percibo a un guerrero,  
llama en llamas...  
el choque me catapulta hasta la actualidad.

La policía fronteriza me pregunta,  
“¿Regresarás?”  
Y yo le digo, con sarcasmo,  
“Quiero ver mi patria,  
quiero oír los  
troteos tormentosos,  
quiero ver las maras  
asaltando uno al otro,  
mata mata.  
Quiero ver mi hermano muerto,  
quiero ser luceros de mi abuela  
llora llora.  
Quiero ver la sangre deslumbrar  
lo verde en las montañas,  
las piedras de mis calles,  
el agua de los ríos,  
pero todo rojo rojo  
Sangre sangre  
Llora llora.”

*“Corre, niña, corre:  
eres tú la salvación.”*

*Llévate a tu hijo,  
líbralo de este horror”.*

Así es que oigo esa voz tan asustada,  
las palabras apocadas de mi abuela,  
pero no me quiero recordar...

¿Qué te pasa, chica?  
Pregunta el agente de mal manera.

Tengo miedo, Policía.  
Tengo miedo.

Pero igual, no me quiere escuchar.

### III

Me agarra fuerte, recio,  
maltratándonos el hombre ICE.  
Nos tumba, belicoso.  
Se cae de mi protección mi hijito tembloroso.  
Nos arrastra, ese monstruo,  
forzándonos hacia deslumbrantes luces:  
refulgentes, cegadoras,  
dando vueltas sobre un carro.  
Nos encarcela en el perrero  
con sirenas estridentes,  
con barrotes enrejados,  
¿ese furgón no es hecho para perros?

Pero no.

Entre ropas empapadas por el río congelado  
y el crítico engaño de un hueco reducido  
en que los vigilantes nos encierran,  
llegamos a una celda fría,  
insensible,  
aséptica, estéril:  
desinfectada de piedad total,  
y así nos hielan a los dos,  
abrazados uno al otro,  
mi hijito y yo.

El calor entre madre e hijo  
siempre es suficiente para quitar  
el frío inhumano de agresores asaltantes,



pero *no* es suficiente para desarmar  
espíritus perversos,  
para darle miedo al más malvado.  
Me acurruco con mi hijo,  
y lloro lloro...

#### IV

Llegamos a nuestra celda  
con otras madres, otros hijos indefensos.

Oh, las luces fluorescentes chillan  
día y noche.  
Las comidas recuerdan asco.  
No hay vida  
más allá.  
Los guardias nos desprecian,  
tratan de humillarme  
como si fuera yo  
la que hubiera hecho el crimen,  
como si fuera yo  
la que hubiera herido  
a mi hermano  
en vez de la que corre  
por su vida...

Y presiento a mi hermano  
todo un hombre,  
un recuerdo  
con corbata de cielo azul,  
cerúleos susurros quietos  
vestido con traje de lino blanco,  
mientras camina él, despacio, inocente,  
con piernas de un roble eterno.

¿Pero será ésta  
la memoria de mi hijo,  
o es la de mi hermano vuelto en vida?

¿Será éste un sueño  
de aquí o de más allá?

#### V

Pasan meses en un sinfín  
de agonías,  
una monotonía de días rutinarios  
donde nada pasa,  
porque todo es mentira,  
todo es artificial,  
todo es locura.  
Por fin nos toca hablar  
frente a un tipo comisario,  
oficial del maquiavélico ICE  
para explicar mi miedo.  
Este nos mira indiferente,  
me dice sin creermelo,  
¿Porque estás aquí, chiquilla?  
¿Vienes a robarnos la comida?

Y yo pienso en mi hermano,  
muerto sangre fría,  
un batallón de drogas  
despojando mis bellas tierras  
para llegar a este espacio libre,  
y yo pienso en la vegetación  
que ellos devastaron  
para hacer lo que arrasa  
hoy en día  
a mi país sagrado.  
Pienso en las tierras,  
en las vidas,  
en la sangre que me roban...  
en mi hijito,  
en mi hermano muerto,  
en las mujeres que nos violan,  
en mi pueblo amado,  
en mi patria destruida.

Y entonces veo a la migra,  
miro al funcionario,  
ese hombre que trabaja para ICE,  
preguntándome con desdén  
si los pienso atracar,  
y les contesto, fría:  
Sí, ya que ustedes están aquí  
burlándose de mí,  
vengo justo para vindicarme  
yo de ustedes.

Vengo a que sufran admirando  
mi criminalidad,  
soportando esa culpa de comprender  
todo, todo mi dolor.

Fíjense:  
la mujer violada, su hermano muerto.  
Contemplan estas transgresiones,  
las amenazas, la miseria,  
las matanzas, la muerte en vida:  
ésto es mi país querido.

Y entonces, recuérdense de mí —  
detalle por detalle;  
reflexionen en lo que represento,  
y memoricen estas lágrimas de sangre  
cuando se rían de todo refugiado.

David Rock

**ADÁN EN EL UMBRAL, ESCUCHANDO**

*Manzana de oro . . .  
es la palabra dicha como conviene.  
(Proverbios 25:11)*

Estoy bastante desnudo  
para ponerles nombre a las fieras.

Ella sabe mi nombre—  
urgente sílaba

frescamente caída  
del vacío, similar al sonido

del perdón inminente,  
con regusto de trueno

deshaciéndose  
en la lengua,

primera exploradora  
de esferas.

**ADAM AT THE THRESHOLD, LISTENING**

*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold . . .  
(Proverbs 25:11)*

I'm naked enough  
to name some animals.

She knows my name—  
an urgent syllable

fresh from the void,  
not unlike the sound

of imminent forgiveness,  
the taste of thunder

crumbling  
on her tongue,

that early explorer  
of spheres.

## OTRA VEZ EL MAR, COMO SIEMPRE

¿Qué nombre le daremos al mar?  
¿Gabriel, por lo que anuncia? ¿O Miguel,  
por su fluyente cabellera?

¿Y para qué sirven los nombres  
sino para evocar cosas ausentes?  
El mar nunca está ausente en los ojos que lloran.  
Las aguas hierven como siempre  
desde la primera semana del génesis.

La luna nace del mar. El sol muere  
en el mar. Las olas se despiden del firmamento,  
le dicen adiós al vacío del que subieron,  
del que suben, y nunca dejan de recordar  
lo que se ha borrado para siempre.

Así que hay figuras, silmulacros,  
presagios en un eterno vaivén  
de esperanzas.

A veces

el mar traga un ejército.  
A veces el mar vomita un tesoro.

El mar arruga la piel de los dedos de los niños,  
ofrece la rama muerta de paz por si acaso,  
pero ya es tarde para los inocentes—víctimas  
arrulladas en un lecho de algas y caracoles,

y el sol se esconde en complicidad con la marea,  
riendo como un amigo travieso, o un asesino  
listo para asustarnos mañana otra vez,  
como siempre.

## THE SEA ONCE AGAIN, LIKE ALWAYS

What name shall we give the sea?  
Gabriel, for what it announces? Or Michael,  
for its unfurled hair?

And what good

are names  
if not for evoking things in their absence?  
The sea is never absent in eyes that weep.  
The water seethes as always since  
the first week of creation.

The moon emerges from the sea. The sun dies  
in the sea. Waves take leave of the firmament,  
bid farewell to the void from which they arose,  
and arise, and remember always that  
which is lost forever.

And there are

shapes,  
similitudes,  
predictions in the eternal ebb and flow  
of expectations.

Some-

times  
the sea swallows an army.  
Sometimes the sea disgorges a treasure.

The ocean wrinkles the skin on children's toes,  
proffers the dead branch of peace, but it's too  
late  
to save so many who have drowned: victims  
lulled on a bed of algae and shells while the  
sun  
conceals itself in collusion with the swell,

laughing like a coy friend or assassin  
ready to leap out and startle us

★

**secular diaspora**

**in parts**

i.

when someone meets you  
and thinks you are a jewish bitch  
there's no changing their mind.

ii.

when a man says  
*oh, she's trying to be all sexy*  
referring to you  
you are embarrassed  
because you are not trying  
to be all sexy

iii.

when a couple meets you and they think you're irish and don't believe you  
and laugh when you say you're jewish, it's kind of a relief they like you

iv.

when some  
jewish person finds out you're  
and thinks you're "jewish like them"  
it's worse than skinheads

v.

when people tell you jewish stories to  
prove they are  
not anti-semitic, like you give a fuck,  
you taste the bitter tinniness of token

vi.

when your friend sees you roll your eyes or laugh, talk trash, bitching  
about a jew, they feel comfortable enough to do it, too

vii.

when you drink tea you like it  
hot  
and you blow on it  
you wave your hand over the steam of your tea  
cup and you could be anywhere.

**wish i were here**

inside our ours our hours are ours  
those theys kept at these bays

take a look around dear me  
press nose to kisser if you miss her

hot meal breathes best  
today all I have to do is digest

when matters matter  
daughters also rise

when did confidence become raining glass

fuck yes we are ready  
must you even ask  
turpentine clean mug from memory

the present is female  
here humankind

and my people can cool our heels  
there will be no more ovens

in this version america  
she leads

Fern G. Z. Carr

**Noche tras noche**

Noche tras noche  
en el silencio  
de mi cama,  
cuando las paredes  
reflejan las sombras  
de los árboles bailando  
sensualmente  
en la luz de la luna,  
pienso en las almas  
que susurran sus secretos  
tratando de explicar  
su existencia espectral,  
frustrados –  
los muertos  
sin palabras.

**Night After Night**

Night after night  
in the silence  
of my bed,  
when the walls  
reflect the shadows  
of trees dancing  
sensuously  
in the moonlight,  
I think of the souls  
who whisper their secrets  
trying to explain  
their spectral existence,  
frustrated –  
the dead  
without words.





## How to Embalm a Body

After 'Death and the Miser' (1494) by Hieronymus Bosch

### I

[Undress the body, place it on an embalming slab]

*He was carried by a mouse-headed black and yellow butterfly,  
a little frog covering his small penis, blood spilling underneath.  
His hands tied up behind him. Purple clots on his cheek.  
I heard him saying something before a gasp. A name?  
A place we've been together?*

### II

[Shave, set the facial features. Pack the oral cavity, eyes with cotton, fill up sunken areas of the face, balancing the nose to achieve a pleasant facial appearance prior to the embalming process.]

*Hollowed kiss. Hollowed temple. Empty hands.  
A bird perched on a white party wall watches him.*

*He looks asleep. He dreams of little insects-  
wasps, bees, weevils on lemons. Nearby,*

*a speckled salamander with a round red hat,  
counts leaves from a fallen peach tree. He is missing  
two eyes. After death, his face turned nasty.*

### III

[Raise the carotid or brachial artery. Cut the body, finding the artery and securing it for injecting formaldehyde. Depending on the case (or preference of embalmer) any of these arteries may be used for injecting the embalming fluid].

*He was in pain, nobody noticed it.  
His legs grew thinner by the day.  
Bone-deer antlers tucked in at an angle.*

*No smooth surfaces, just blotches, little roads  
on skin, stagnated lakes. He wanted to be led  
inside a round tower. But couldn't say it.*

*His icy voice  
Salamander suggested a niche high in the 4th floor.*

### IV

[Inject the embalming fluid into the artery, drain from the jugular, femoral or brachial veins, using an embalming machine. This machine injects formaldehyde into the body while forcing the blood out].

*By the time I left he was almost gone. His fingers*

*didn't move as they should. A last touch.*

*Droplets of dried blood beneath his nails.  
Will you hear us talking about you?*

*A whisper to. The little radio still on:  
Olinda Bozán singing, slowly, 'Saludo y se fue'.*

## V

[Puncture, aspirate all of the major organs in the torso by using a trocar-a long needle attached to a hydro-aspirator that is inserted two inches to the left and two inches above the umbilicus or belly button. Next the cavity is filled with a highly concentrated formaldehyde solution].

*Inside the bedroom everything was calm. No light  
could enter from the living room. It rained. Stopped raining.  
Rained again. A Sunday newspaper neatly folded.*

*A pillow for the night nurse. Your walker,  
a prehistoric creature no longer used.  
A small dish with food you wouldn't swallow.*

*Piles of medicine card-boxes in different bright colours.  
Your handkerchief beneath stained bedsheets.  
Will you hear the rain clogging the patio?*

*A low voice of bubbling  
next to the oxygen tank,  
distilled water to humidify a last sentence*

## VI

[Wash the body. Use special germicidal soap to disinfect the body while it is being embalmed].

*It was too late for grapes (uva chinche),  
yet blackbirds arrived, one by one.*

*Dust gathering under your favourite sofa.  
I was leaving that day, you knew by heart.*

*I told you I would plant a citrus tree in your honour.*

## VII

[Seal the incisions by stitching, apply liquid adhesive to the area. Once the body has been sealed, the incision sites may be wrapped with elastic to further prevent leakage].

*As statues holding hands,  
a secret told at noon, sealed lips.*

*Cells decomposing fast  
against slight thumping of heart.*

*Not yours. In the kitchen  
they waited for me to leave.*

*I can't lift my bags.*

## VIII

[Dress the body in preparation for viewing].

*Cracking voice: 'Como quien va  
Para no volver, me miró al pasar  
Saludó y se fue. ¡No lo he visto más!'*

*At 18.20 he was gone. The trees near  
the runway golden ocre, red in parts.*

*Sycamore. Eucalyptus of the pampas.  
His flight departed, a day nurse rushed out with the news.*

*'Como quien va, Para no volver,  
Me miró al pasar, saludó y se fue. ¡No lo he visto más!'*

## **Cómo embalsamar un cuerpo**

Basado en 'La muerte y el avaro' (1494) de Jerónimo El Bosco

## I

[Desvestir el cuerpo, dejarlo sobre la mesa de embalsamamiento]

*Fue llevado por una mariposa blanca y negra con cabeza de ratón,  
una rana cubría su pequeño pene, por debajo le brotaba sangre.  
Sus manos estaban atadas por la espalda. Tenía manchas púrpuras en la cara.  
Le escuché decir algo antes de jadear. ¿Un nombre?  
¿Un lugar en el que estuvimos juntos alguna vez?*

## II

[Afeitarse el rostro, limpiar las expresiones faciales. Llenar la cavidad oral,  
los ojos con algodón, las zonas hundidas de la cara, balancear la nariz para lograr una  
aparición facial placentera antes de iniciar el proceso de embalsamamiento]

*Beso hueco. Sien hundida. Manos vacías.  
Un pájaro encaramado en la medianera lo mira.*

*Parece dormido. Sueña con pequeños insectos:  
avispas, abejas, gorgojos en limones. Muy cerca,*

*una salamandra moteada con un sombrero rojo  
cuenta las hojas caídas de un duraznero. Le faltan  
dos ojos. Después de muerto, su cara se volvió repugnante.*

## III

[Levantarse la carótida o la arteria braquial. Cortar el cuerpo, buscando la  
arteria para inyectarle formol. Dependiendo del caso o preferencia del embalsamador,  
cualquiera de estas arterias puede ser utilizada para inyectarse el fluido embalsamador].

*Estaba dolorido, nadie lo notaba.  
Con los días sus piernas cada vez más flacas.  
Huesos como astas de ciervo arrojadas en ángulo.*

*No había superficies suaves, sólo manchas, pequeños caminos  
sobre la piel, lagos estancados. Quería que lo llevaran  
a una torre circular. Pero no podía decirlo.*

*Su voz de hielo  
La salamandra sugirió un nicho arriba, en el 4to piso.*

## IV

[Inyectar el fluido embalsamador en la arteria, drenar las venas jugular, femoral o braquial, utilizando una máquina embalsamadora. Esta máquina inyecta formol en el cuerpo, mientras fuerza la salida de sangre].

*Para cuando me fui a él le quedaba muy poco. Sus dedos no se movían como debían. Una última caricia.*

*Gotas de sangre seca en sus uñas.  
¿Nos escuchás hablando de vos?*

*Un suspiro, otro jadeo. La radio aún prendida:  
Olinda Bozán cantando 'Saludo y se fue'.*

## V

[Punzar, aspirar todos los órganos principales del torso utilizando una aguja trocar recta o curva para perforar la pared del tórax, conectada a un hidro-aspirador. Luego, la cavidad se rellena con una solución altamente concentrada de formol].

*Dentro de la habitación todo era calma. Ninguna luz podía entrar desde el living. Llovió. Paró.  
Volvió a llover. El diario del domingo doblado cuidadosamente.*

*Una almohada para la enfermera. Tu andador, criatura prehistórica ya sin uso.  
Un platito con comida que no podías tragar.*

*Cajas apiladas de medicamentos de todos colores.  
Tu pañuelo escondido debajo de las sábanas manchadas.  
¿Escuchás la lluvia inundando el patio de atrás?*

*Una voz baja burbujeando  
junto al tanque de oxígeno,  
agua destilada para humedecer la última frase.*

## VI

[Lavar bien el cuerpo. Usar un jabón especial germicida para desinfectar el cuerpo embalsamado].

*Era demasiado tarde para las uvas,  
sin embargo vinieron los mirlos, uno por uno.*

*Se fue juntando polvo debajo de tu sillón favorito.  
Yo me iba ese día, vos lo sabías de memoria.*

*Te prometí que plantaría un limonero en tu honor.*

## VII

[Sellar las incisiones con costura, aplicar líquido adhesivo en la zona. Una vez que el cuerpo queda sellado, las incisiones deben ser cubiertas con plástico para evitar derrames].

*Como estatuas tomadas de la mano,  
un secreto al mediodía, los labios se sellaron.*

*Las células comenzaron a descomponerse rápido  
a medida que el corazón se detenía.*

*El tuyo no. En la cocina  
esperaron que me fuera.*

*Yo no podía levantar mis valijas.*

## VIII

[Vestir al cuerpo, prepararlo para su exposición].

*Una voz entrecortada: 'Como quien va  
Para no volver, me miró al pasar  
Saludó y se fue. ¡No lo he visto más!'*

*Todo ocurrió a las 18.20. Los árboles al costado  
de la pista de despegue se volvieron ocre, colorados.*

*Sicómoros. Eucalipto de las pampas.  
Su vuelo ascendía. La enfermera corría para dar la noticia.*

*'Como quien va, Para no volver,  
Me miró al pasar, saludó y se fue. ¡No lo he visto más!'*

## Melanie Márquez Adams

### El color de los lagos

—No, ¿cuál es tu verdadero nombre? —pregunta sin una pizca de asombro, como si dar un nombre falso fuera parte de la rutina.

—Este...no entiendo bien lo que quieres decir —El pánico acecha: a lo mejor, desde mi última época de estudiante, se han inventado nuevas reglas para conquistar la vida universitaria en América.

—Lo que pasa es que los estudiantes internacionales suelen escoger un nombre americano porque...bueno ya sabes, los de ellos son difíciles de pronunciar —Sonríe y una fila de lechosos dientes rectos casi se pierde en la piel vampiresa.

Sonríe de vuelta. No es la primera vez que insinúan que no tengo cara de Melanie.

Tampoco será la última.

—Claro, es verdad, tiene sentido —digo sacudiendo mi cabeza, quizás demasiado enfática—. Pero en mi caso, ese es mi verdadero nombre.

Señalo la tarjeta que está por despegarse de la puerta de mi dormitorio: un torbellino de mariposas magenta anuncia mi nombre.

—En realidad, cuando era pequeña, algunas personas en mi país no sabían cómo pronunciarlo.

—¡Wow! ¿En serio? —. Cubre su boca con la mano derecha mientras se ríe despacito, los hombros moviéndose de arriba hacia abajo. Una barbilla puntiaguda completa la imagen de villano de caricatura.

Al escucharme rumear alrededor de la cocina, exhausta y hambrienta luego de mis clases nocturnas, Cindy sale de su habitación, lista para ofrecerme galletas y dulces, provisiones indispensables en el bol de plástico que hace también de centro de mesa.

Tiene toda clase de preguntas acerca del lugar de donde vengo. Quiere saber sobre el clima, la comida, la música. Siente curiosidad más que nada de las personas que habitan aquel rincón distante del mundo: su apariencia, lo que hacen. “Seguro que la vida debe ser más emocionante allá”. El brillo en sus ojos mientras le cuento sobre Ecuador, es la de un niño que acaba de descubrir una nueva serie animada en la tele.

Cindy nunca ha estado fuera de su país. En realidad, nunca ha viajado más allá de un par de estados vecinos a Tennessee. Su fascinación por las personas de otros lados comenzó en una escuela rural en la que entabló amistad con estudiantes de intercambio que venían de Asia y África. Quedó enganchada desde entonces.

Siempre que conversa acerca de los chicos de intercambio, sus ojos se enturbian: nubes rosas salpican cielos azules perfectos. La primera vez que esto sucede, pregunto apenada si acaso alguno de ellos murió.

—No, no es eso —limpia sus ojos con las yemas de los dedos—. Es solo que me entristece hablar de ellos. ¡Eran *tan* dulces!



Me recuerda a la niña pequeña de una película que vi alguna vez; lloraba inconsolable por una camada de cachorritos a los cuales quería tener para siempre. Lástima que le fueron arrebatados demasiado pronto, cuando apenas había comenzado a amarlos.

No conozco todavía a mucha gente así es que paso la mayor parte de mi tiempo libre junto a Cindy. Vamos de compras al único centro comercial de esta ciudad o a Walmart. Algunas veces damos vueltas en el coche, sondeando las montañas en búsqueda de un buen sitio para caminar.

Una tarde fresca de primavera, paseamos bajo pinos y arces que se entrelazan a nuestro alrededor como viejos amigos. Encantada con las ardillas que brincan y brincan por todos lados, le pido a Cindy imaginar que estamos en el medio de un acto de magia: enérgicas ardillas se transforman en largas y hermosas iguanas que prefieren estirarse bajo el sol antes que correr como maníacas.

—¿Puedes verlo Cindy? —mientras asienta puedo anticipar una ovación de pie—.

Pues ahora estás en mi ciudad: ¡Guayaquil!

Sus pupilas se expanden hasta convertirse en dos perfectos globos azules. Nunca ha sido tan fácil emocionar a alguien con mis historias. Me invita a la iglesia un miércoles. Canalizando mi lado más amable, le explico que reservo mi tolerancia hacia los sermones para el día domingo. Bueno, *algunos* domingos. Me abstengo de confesarle una ligera preocupación: que imagino los dulces pastelitos y donas rellenas de jalea, esos que abundan en su iglesia bautista, escondiendo en sus pliegues esponjosos aparatos que detectan a católicos intrusos; que en el preciso momento en que cruce la puerta, una alarma comenzará a chillar, luces brillantes me apuntarán y un pastor bajará del púlpito para acompañarme fuera del edificio; que una vez me haya expulsado, procederá a informarme que mi alma adoradora de imágenes nunca llegará al cielo.

“Pero, ¡el miércoles es noche universitaria!” insiste. “No habrá sermones. Prometo que te vas a divertir.” Encuentro difícil concebir algo relacionado a la iglesia como divertido, pero cómo decir no a la cara de gatito compungido.

Atravesamos un auditorio amplio rebosante de adolescentes y veinteañeros. Arriba en el escenario, unos muchachos no mucho mayores a su audiencia, luchan con toda clase de equipos y cables. Antes de alcanzar a preguntar si estamos en una iglesia o en un concierto, la oscuridad descende sobre nosotras: el escenario cobra vida en tonos de neón que rasgan el aire con las notas estridentes del bajo y la guitarra eléctrica.

Con los brazos levantados y sus ojos cerrados, el cuerpo de Cindy se mece suavemente al ritmo de *Cómo nos ama del coro*. La melodía es pegajosa y la letra de la canción es fácil de seguir: me rindo ante las tiernas voces exaltadas. Poseídas por el espíritu embriagante, mis caderas se menean contentas.

Pasando un día almorzamos juntas en la cafetería del centro estudiantil. Mientras llenamos las bandejas de grasos potingues sureños que probablemente no debería estar comiendo, nos entretenemos espiando alrededor de las mesas en búsqueda de apuestas estudiantiles internacionales. Entre los candidatos, un muchacho en particular - piel canela, cabello oscuro y, claro que sí, ojos oscuros también - roba el corazón de Cindy.

Antes del receso de primavera, le doy una sorpresa. Acabo de conversar con un nuevo amor en un evento para practicar inglés. Su nombre es Javier y es de México.

—¡Yo sabía que era latino! —chilla—. ¡Tienes que presentármelo, por favor!

Parece que tiene dificultad en decidir qué hacer con las manos. Se resigna a una secuencia frenética de aplaudir y esconder su rostro mientras me cuenta que siempre ha querido tener un novio latino.

—¿Por qué un novio latino, Cindy? —pregunto, un poco por curiosidad, otro tanto por entretenimiento.

—Me parecen *tan sensuales, tan románticos...* —*muerde sus delgados labios pensando* qué más decir—. Es que no sé... los chicos blancos son *tan aburridos*. Yo quiero algo diferente, ¿me entiendes? Quiero pasión.

Las olas turquesas en sus ojos resplandecen llenas de posibilidades.

Curioseando en su página de *Facebook* siete años después, encuentro a Cindy comprometida con un chico que podría pasar por su hermano.

Supongo que la fantasía del novio latino no incluía un feliz para siempre.

Tampoco así nuestra amistad, la cual no sobrevivió las fricciones de compartir un apartamento. A lo mejor fue la diferencia de edad. O quizás algunas amistades están destinadas a terminar con el último día de clases. De vez en cuando pienso en aquellos días simples de primavera que pasé junto a Cindy, deleitándome entre bosques y montañas en el descubrimiento de mi nuevo entorno.

Me gusta imaginar que conversa con sus nuevas amigas sobre la compañera de apartamento extranjera que tuvo alguna vez: una que venía de un lugar lejano y exótico. Sus ojos, destellando con el color de los lagos que habitan estas silenciosas colinas a las que ahora llamo hogar, llenándose de repente con un ocaso de oro rosa: evocando recuerdos de iguanas, ardillas y novios latinos.

## The Color of Lakes

“No. What’s your *real* name?” she asks without a trace of surprise, as though giving out a fake name is part of the routine.

“Umm... I am not sure I understand.” Panic sets in: perhaps, since my last time as a student, new rules have been established to conquer college life in *America*.

“It’s just that... International students usually pick an *American* name, because... Well, you know, their names are kind of hard to pronounce.” She smiles and a row of straight milky teeth is almost lost in her vampire-like skin.

I smile back. Not my first time around having someone imply that I don’t look like a *Melanie*. It won’t be the last time either.

“Of course! That makes a lot of sense”. I shake my head in agreement, perhaps a bit too emphatic. “But in my case, *that* is my real name.” I point to the card on the verge of falling from my bedroom door: a whirlwind of magenta butterflies announces my name.

“As a matter of fact, when I was younger, some people in my home country did not know how to pronounce it.”

“Oh, wow! Really?” She covers her mouth with her right hand as she giggles, shoulders moving up and down, a pointy chin completing her cartoon villain look.

As I roam around our tiny kitchen, exhausted and hungry after my evening classes, Cindy comes out of her bedroom ready to offer me cookies and candy, essential provisions in the plastic bowl that doubles as our centerpiece. She asks all kinds of questions about the place where I come from. She wants to know about the weather, the food, and the music. More than anything, she is curious about the people in that distant corner of the world: what they look like, what they do. “Surely life must be more exciting over *there*”. The glint in her eyes as I tell her about Ecuador, is that of a child who has just discovered a new animated television series.

Cindy has never been outside her country. She has not even made it beyond Tennessee’s neighboring states. Her fascination with foreign people began in a tiny rural school, where she became friends with exchange students from Asia and Africa. She was hooked ever since.

Whenever she talks about the *exchange kids*, a mist glazes over her eyes, rose clouds peppering perfect blue skies. The first time that I see this happen, moved by her pain I ask if one of them died.

“No. It isn’t that”. She wipes the inner corners of her eyes with rosy fingertips. “I just get really sad when I talk about them. They were *so* sweet!”

She reminds me of the little girl in a movie I once saw, crying inconsolable over a litter of cute puppies she wanted to keep forever. What a pity they were taken away from her too soon, when she barely had started loving them.

I haven't met a lot of people yet, so I spend most of my free time with Cindy. We go shopping at the only mall in town or at Walmart. Sometimes we just drive around, probing the mountains in search of a good hiking spot.

On a cool spring afternoon, we stroll beneath pines and maple trees intertwined around us like old friends. Ticked by the squirrels jumping and jumping all over, I ask Cindy to imagine we are in the middle of a magic act: feisty squirrels turn into long beautiful iguanas that prefer to stretch out in the sun rather than run around like maniacs.

"Can you picture it Cindy?" As she nods I anticipate a standing ovation. "Well then, now you are in my hometown: Guayaquil!"

Her pupils expand into perfectly taut deep-blue balloons. It has never been so easy to get someone this excited with my stories.

She invites me to church on Wednesday. Channeling my polite self, I explain that my tolerance for sermons is reserved for Sundays. Well, *some* Sundays. I abstain from telling her about a slight fear of mine: that I picture the sweet blueberry muffins and jelly-filled doughnuts in her Baptist church, concealing within their fluffy wombs powerful devices meant to detect Catholic intruders; that in the precise moment I walk through the door, an alarm will start bawling, bright lights will point at me, and a pastor will come down from the pulpit to escort me out of the building; that once we are out there, he will proceed to inform me that my image-adoring soul, will never make it to heaven.

"But it's college night at my church!" she insists, "there won't be any sermons. I promise you will have fun." I find it difficult to conceive anything related to church as fun, but how can I say no to her sad kitten face.

We walk through a large auditorium, brimming with teenagers and twenty-somethings. Up on the stage, a couple of guys not much older than their audience, battle with all sorts of equipment and wires. Before I can ask if we are at church or a concert, darkness descends upon us: the stage comes alive in neon colors that rip the air with high notes of bass and electric guitars.

Handsrisedandeyesclosed,Cindy'sbodyswaysgentlytothebeatof"How he loves us". The melody is catchy and the lyrics are easy to follow: I surrender to the young enraptured voices. Possessed by the intoxicating spirit, my hips gladly wiggle.

We meet for lunch every other day at the student center, filling our trays with greasy southern concoctions I probably should not be eating as we lurk around the tables in search of cute international students. Amongst the candidates, one guy in particular - olive skin, dark hair, and yes, dark eyes too! - steals Cindy's heart.

Right before Spring Break, I give her a surprise. I talked to her dark handsome crush at an English Conversation Table. His name is Javier and he is from Mexico.

"I knew he was *Latin!*" she squeals. "I need to meet him, please!" She seems to have trouble deciding what to do with her

hands. She settles into a hectic sequence of clapping and hiding her face telling me how she has always wanted to have a *Latin* boyfriend.

“Why is that Cindy?” I ask, half curious, half amused.

“They are just *so* sexy, *so* romantic...” She bites her thin lips, pausing to think what to say next. “It’s just that, I don’t know... white guys are so boring! I want something different, you know? I want passion!”

The turquoise waves in her eyes glow full of possibilities.

As I peep into her Facebook photos seven years later, I find that Cindy is engaged to a guy who could easily double as her brother. I suppose the Latin-boyfriend fantasy did not include a happily ever after. Neither did our friendship, which didn’t survive the frictions of sharing an apartment. Maybe it was the age difference. Or perhaps some friendships are meant to end with the last day of class.

Every so often I think of those simple spring days spent with Cindy, reveling amongst mountains and wooded areas in the discovery of my new surroundings. I like to imagine that she tells her new friends about a foreign roommate she once had: one that came from a far exotic place. Her eyes, glimmering with the color of the lakes that inhabit these quiet hills I now call home, suddenly filling with a rose gold sunset: reminiscing of squirrels, iguanas, and Latin boyfriends.

## Ruba Abughaida

*Translated from Arabic by Ruba Abughaida and Yahya Abughaida*

### 36 Abbas Street

The deeds still have his name,  
decades after the house was stolen.  
The orders came to leave.  
Two uncles pulled off the wicker-wood  
chairs they sat on each evening,  
at the front stoop of the house,  
in observation, in contemplation  
of the scores of armies clearing  
out the creatures, the flowers,  
the orchards, to seize  
and settle on their offerings.

It had all been arranged,  
foretold by prophets,  
from the Helmand to the Euphrates,  
the rulers went to work.  
Take nothing but clothes they told them,  
but she packed a heap of photos  
pulled from the walls.  
The house closes in on us still.  
We hang on its stories like fruit  
from the lemon trees outside its stones.

الكواشين لا تزال تحمل إسمه،  
عقوداً بعد سرقة المنزل،  
جئت الاوامر بالنزوح،  
إثنان من الاعمام انسلا من كراسي الخيزران  
كانا يجلسان عليها كل مساء  
أمام عتبة البيت  
للملاحظة، للتأمل،  
للعديد من القوات الذين  
يزيلوا المخلوقات،  
والورود والبساتين  
لقضيمها وليحسموا طرهم.

كان قد تم ترتيبها،  
تنبأ بها الانبياء،  
من هلمند الى الفرات،  
ذهب الحكام للشغل،  
لا تأخذوا شيئاً سوى الملابس قالوا لهم  
لكنها كدست كومة من صور أنزلوا من الجدران  
المنزل يغلق علينا لا يزال،  
نتعلق بحكاياته كالفواكه كأشجار الليمون خارج أحجاره.

## **Borders**

History seduces with its cobbled shadows,  
rippling our hearts, revising sources.  
Sermons evoke the restless ghosts of poets:  
Things will be different this time.

But the past has roots which uncoil  
themselves to move like water,  
soft footed, evasive, until it sweeps  
and swells from the deep sea,  
where submarines circle  
the gentle whale sharks,  
the flying sting rays.

Among the homes, the schools,  
along hyphenated borders, old men  
hand passports to boy-soldiers,  
taut from the stripes across their uniforms.

In the camps tents are in a stand off with the rain,  
those inside them lunging at sleep  
that will not stay, listening out  
for sounds enlarged by the night,  
cloudy mirrors distorting their bodies,  
preparing them for new broken identities,  
as refugees waiting for another life.



## حدود

التاريخ يغوي مع ظلاله المرصوفة  
يسبر أغوارنا، ينقح المراجع.  
خطب تستحضر القلق عند أشباح الشعراء:  
سوف تكون الأشياء هذه المرة مختلفة.

لكن الماضي له جذور التي  
تُفكّكهم لينسابوا كالماء،  
رخوة القدمين، مُتملّصة،  
حتى تندفع وتنتفخ من أعماق البحر  
حيث الغواصات تلتف  
حول أسماك القرش الودودة  
والري الطائرة الالاسعة.

بينَ المنازل والمدارس،  
على طول الحدود الغير مُتصلة، خريفو العمر  
يعطون جوازات سفر لمجندين أولاد  
مشدودين من الشارات عبر زيهم الموحد.

في المخيمات شوادر في مواجهة مع المطر،  
من هم في الداخل يندفعون لنوم لا يدوم،  
يسمعون أصواتاً تتسع أثناء الليل،  
مرايا مُبهمة تلوي أجسادهم  
لاعدادهم لمقيمين ناقصي الهوية  
كلاجئين ينتظرون حياة أخرى.

Kate Kingston

translated by Luisa Govela

¿Qué posee Lorca?

Un jardín de ojos de mandarina, un desfile  
de consonantes fluyendo del balcón,  
una ciudad bajo construcción, todas las vocales  
de la historia envueltas en un limpio pañuelo blanco.

Cuando cierra los ojos la Guardia Civil  
toca a la puerta, el jardín desaparece,  
y las palomas recuerdan una ciudad de caballos.

Lorca posee una habitación llena de asonancia apaciguando  
sus pluma con *ohs* y *ahs*. Empieza a flotar,  
y la habitación se convierte en río, corriente y resaca.

Cuando cierra sus ojos ve a los obreros  
de la construcción, sus manos llenas de martillos; la Guardia Civil,  
sus cintos destellan luz solar; mujeres con zapatos negros,

sus brazos plenos de vocales. Veintiséis botas cruzan  
la plaza, tacones desgastados le traen hombres  
repletos de balas y lima. Cuando cierra los ojos

contempla al perro sin dueño acercarse a su rodilla,  
el perro callejero olfatea su entrepierna, el perro lame su cara.  
Sus dedos aprietan la pluma.

Lorca posee la palabra *Verde*.

Cuando cierra los ojos, dos cielos  
Convergen en un brillante chartreuse,  
Entra el verde jade como una ráfaga de luz solar

Su palabra favorita, *Gangrena*.  
*Gangrena*.

## Contributor Notes

**Eric Henry Sanders** is a playwright and screenwriter, and has recently completed his first novel. His short fiction has appeared in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Reject Pile*, and *Higgs Weldon*, among others, and his many plays have been produced in New York, London, and Berlin.

**Chris Burns** is a librarian and writer living in San Francisco. He loves museums and art galleries, watching plays, and going to concerts. He's currently completing an MFA in Creative Writing (Fiction) at Mills College in Oakland CA.

**Michael Chitwood** has published in *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and numerous other journals. His ninth book of poetry was published in 2018 by LSU Press.

**Sarah Anne Strickley** is the author of *Fall Together* (Gold Wake Press, 2018). She's a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing fellowship, an Ohio Arts grant, a Glenn Schaeffer Award from the International Institute of Modern Letters

**Wendy Bilen** is the award-winning author of *Finding Josie*. She is an assistant professor of English at the women's college of Trinity Washington University in the nation's capital.

**Adrienne Asher** was born in San Francisco, California, and is at work on a book of poetry, *Echoes and Anthems*. Her poetry has appeared in publications including *VoiceCatcher*, *Typishly*, and *The Passed Note*.

**Adam Clay's** most recent book is *Stranger* (Milkweed Editions, 2016). He is editor of *Mississippi Review* and teaches at the University of Southern Mississippi.

**Al Nyhart** received his MFA from the University of Montana and lives in White Sulphur Springs, Montana.

**Carol Durak** is originally from Michigan, and has been living in Maine for many years. As well as writing, she works at the Bowdoin College Library. She also runs her own book restoration and fine binding business.

**Darrell Dela Cruz's** work has appeared in or is forthcoming in *Saw Palm*, *The Minetta Review*, *Rathalla Review*, and *Studio One*. He has a blog where he analyzes poems, and he graduated with an MFA in Poetry from San Jose State University.

**Bruce Bond** is the author of fifteen books including, most recently, *For the Lost Cathedral* (LSU Press, 2015), *The Other Sky* (Etruscan Press, 2015), and *Immanent Distance: Poetry and the Metaphysics of the Near at Hand* (University of Michigan Press, 2015).

**Jackleen Holton's** poems have been published in the anthologies *The Giant Book of Poetry*, and *Steve Kowitz: This Unspeakably Marvelous Life*, and have appeared or are forthcoming in *American Literary Review*, *Bellingham Review*, and *North American Review*.

**Emily Pittinos** is the 2017-18 Senior Fellow in Poetry at Washington University St. Louis, the winner of several Avery Hopwood awards from the University of Michigan, a former fellow at the Bucknell Seminar for Undergraduate Poets, and a 2017 resident of the CrossHatch Hill House program.

**Margaux Griffith** won the 2012 Anderbo Poetry Prize for her poem “Apple Galette” as well as the 2015 Blue Bonnet Poetry Prize for her poem “Routine.” She has publications in *The Boiler Journal*, *The Citron Review*, *Bacopa Literary Review*, *The Cossack Review*, *Hot Metal Bridge*, and others.

**Janet Reed** is a 2017 and 2016 Pushcart Prize nominee. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Nassau Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Avalon Review*, *I-70 Review*, and others. She teaches writing and literature for Crowder College in Missouri.

**Ceridwen Hall** is pursuing a PhD in creative writing at the University of Utah. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *SLANT*, *Grist*, *elsewhere*, *Salmander*, *Tar River Poetry*, and other journals.

**Kristina Marie Darling** is the author of over twenty books of poetry. Her awards include two Yaddo residencies, a Hawthornden Castle Fellowship, and a Visiting Artist Fellowship from the American Academy in Rome, and grants from the Whiting Foundation and Harvard University’s Kittredge Fund.

**Carlos Reyes** has been a Yaddo Fellow and was honored with a Heinrich Boll Fellowship at Achill Island, Ireland, and at the Fundación Valparaíso (2012) in Mojácar, Spain. He has published nine volumes of verse.

**Walter Bargaen** has published 21 books of poetry. Recent books include: *Perishable Kingdoms* (Grito del Lobo Press, 2017) and *Too Quick for the Living* (Moon City Press, 2017). His awards include: a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and the William Rockhill Nelson Award. He was appointed the first poet laureate of Missouri (2008-2009).

**Cedric Rudolph** currently lives in Pittsburgh, PA. He teaches writing to jail inmates through Chatham University’s Words Without Walls program, the same school at which he studies poetry and pedagogy.

**Madelyn Gardner** is the author of *Hum of Our Blood* (3:A Taos Press, 2017), selected for publication by Tupelo Press/3: A Taos Press in the July Open, and co-editor of the anthology *Collecting Life: Poets on Objects Known and Imagined*.

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *Almost Rain*, published by River Otter Press (2013).

**Mark DeFoe** has work out recently or coming out soon in *Allegro*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *The Cafe Review*, and three anthologies--*Forgotten Women*, *Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods* and *Anthology of Appalachian Writers--Vol. IX*.

**Ryler Dustin’s** poetry appears in *The Southern Review*, *Iron Horse*, and *Red Sky: Poetry on the Global Epidemic of Violence Against Women*. He has performed on the final stage of the Individual World Poetry Slam and his book, *Heavy Lead Birdsong*, is available from Write Bloody Publishing.

**Jannicane Shane** is an education professional currently residing in Boston, Massachusetts. Through feminism, grace, and the unpacking of her lived experiences, she strives to nurture poetry that is ruthless, unyielding, and undone.

**Tracy Zeman's** poems have appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Chicago Review*, *jubilat*, *TYPO* and other journals. Her manuscript *Empire* has been a finalist in numerous book contests. Currently, Zeman is a freelance writer and editor for a number of conservation organizations.

**Diane Wald's** latest book is *Wonderbender*, from 1913 Press. Previous books include *The Yellow Hotel* and *Lucid Suitcase*. She has received the Green Lake Chapbook Award, Grolier Poetry Prize, Denny Award, Open Voice Award, and Anne Halley Award.

**Annie Diamond's** poems have appeared in *The Columbia Review*, *The Lyric*, *Cargoes*, *Misadventures*, and other publications. Her writing has been supported by The MacDowell Colony, Lighthouse Works, and Boston University, where she completed her MFA in 2017.

**Sarah Blackman** is the director of creative writing at the Fine Arts Center in Greenville, South Carolina. She is also the co-fiction editor at *DIAGRAM* and the founding editor of *Crashtest*. Her story collection, *Mother Box*, and novel, *Hex*, were published by FC2 Press

**Stephen Gibson's** *Self-Portrait in a Door-Length Mirror* won the 2017 Miller Williams Prize, selected by Billy Collins, University of Arkansas Press. Earlier collections include *The Garden of Earthly Delights Book of Ghazals* and *Rorschach Art Too*.

**Mick Powell** (she/her) is a queer black Cape Verdean femme feminist poet who likes revolutionary acts of resistance. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Apogee Journal*, *Winter Tangerine*, *The Feminist Wire*, and others.

**Eric Orosco's** fiction has appeared in *American River Review*. He is former editor-in-chief of *American River Review*.

**Brian Batchelor's** work has appeared in the *Missouri Review*, *Cream City Review*, and *Duende*. He won the 2015 First Prize in poetry from PEN American Center's annual prison writing contest.

**Loretta Oleck** is the author of two chapbook poetry collections, *Songs from the Black Hole* (FinishingLine Press), and *Persephone Dreaming of Cherries* (Hurricane Press). Her short stint volunteering on a Syrian Refugee Camp inspired her to write her impressions of the people she met.!

**Claire Bateman's** books include *Scape* (New Issues Poetry & Prose); *Locals* (Serving House Books), *The Bicycle Slow Race* (Wesleyan University Press), and *Friction* (Eighth Mountain Poetry Prize). She has been awarded Individual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as two Pushcart Prizes and the New Millennium Writings 40th Anniversary Poetry Prize.

**Suzanne Roszack's** poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Third Coast*. She received her MFA from The University of California, Irvine and teaches writing and literature in the Inland Empire.

**Rita Chapman's** poetry has appeared most recently in *Red Earth Review*, *Rat's Ass Review*, and *Bellingham Review*. She is a student in the MFA program at the University of Missouri - St. Louis, and teaches high school English.

**Jake Bailey** is a first-year graduate student in Antioch University's MFA in Creative Writing program. In his poetry, he has primarily focused on the intersections between nature, philosophy, religion, consciousness, and mental health.

**Brian Satrom's** poetry has appeared in journals like *Knockout*, *Poetry Northwest*, *MAYDAY Magazine*, and *TAB*, the latter nominating his work for a Pushcart Prize. His book reviews have appeared in *MAYDAY* and on the Colorado Review's Center for Literary Publishing website.

**Jamie Wendt's** poetry has been published in various literary journals, including *Lilith*, *Raleigh Review*, *Minerva Rising*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Saranac Review*. Her essays on Jewish writing have been published in *Green Mountains Review* and *The Forward*.

**Michael McLane** is an editor with both saltfront and Sugar House Review. He is the author of the chapbook *Trace Elements* and his work has appeared in numerous journals, including *Dark Mountain*, *High Country News*, *Colorado Review*, *Interim*, and *Pilgrimage*.

**John Hyland** completed a PhD at SUNY Buffalo and currently teaches at Germantown Academy.

**Kelsea Habecker's** first book of poetry, *Hollow Out*, was selected by Charles Simic as winner of the Many Voices Award and published through New Rivers Press. She was a teacher in a remote Inupiaq Eskimo village in the Arctic region of Alaska for five years.

**Isaac Pressnell's** poems have appeared in *Hotel Amerika*, *Indiana Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and many other journals. He also recently completed a collaborative poetry manuscript with the poet, Maggie Glover.

**Mary Leader** began writing poems in the midst of a career as Referee for the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Her second career, in teaching, has culminated in appointment as Professor Emerita at Purdue University. Her newest book, *She Lives There Still*, is forthcoming from Shearsman Books.

**Natalie Homer's** poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *The Journal*, *Blue Earth Review*, *The Pinch*, *The Lascaux Review*, *Ruminate*, *Salamander*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, and others. She received an honorable mention for poetry in the 2017 AWP Intro Awards

**Amelia Martens** is the author of *The Spoons in the Grass are There To Dig a Moat* (Sarabande Books, 2016), a chapbook, *Ursa Minor* (Elsewhere Magazine, forthcoming 2018), and three previous chapbooks.

**Andrés Rodríguez** is the author of *Night Song* (Tia Chucha Press), *Book of the Heart* (Lindisfarne Press), and a forthcoming new collection of poems (Woodley Press). In 2007 he won Poets & Writers' Maureen Egan Award for Poetry.

**Bray McDonald** has been published in many journals recently, including *Black Scat Review*, *Big Muddy*, *Blue Collar Review*, *The Cape Rock*, and others.

**Christopher Rubio-Goldsmith** was born in Merida, Yucatan. He taught English at Tucson High Magnet School for 27 years. He has published work in the *Bohemian Press*, *Sand Script*, and the local community radio, KXCI's A Poet's Corner.

**E.B. Schnepf** is a poet hailing from rural Mid-Michigan who currently finds herself stranded in the flatlands of Ohio. Her work can also be found in *QU*, *Glass*, and *Atticus*, among others.

**Esteban Rodríguez's** poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Gettysburg Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *New England Review*, *Washington Square Review*, and *Puerto del Sol*.

**Nancy Goldberg** lives with her husband and 14-year old daughter in Freeport, Maine where she works as a high school writing tutor and enjoys cross-country skiing, knitting and reading.

**Jessica Lieberman's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Kenyon Review Online*, *Bennington Review*, *Horsethief*, *inter/rupture*, *Salamander* and other journals. She serves as poetry editor for *The Journal*.

**Kara Knickerbocker** is an internationally published writer and world traveler from Saegertown, Pennsylvania and the author of *Next to Everything that is Breakable* (2017). She works at Carnegie Mellon University and writes with the Madwomen in the Attic at Carlow University.

**Melissa Andres** is a poet. Originally born in Holguin, Cuba, she was raised in Sarasota, Florida. She received her BA in International Studies from the University of South Florida.

**Miranda Beeson** is the 2017 recipient of the Jody Donohue Poetry Prize from Stony Brook University. Her chapbook *Ode to the Unexpected* is available from Shrinking Violet Press.

**Stephen Massimilla's** multi-genre volume *Cooking with the Muse* (Tupelo, 2016) won the Eric Hoffer Book Award, the National Indie Excellence Award, the Independent Author Network Book of the Year Award, and several others.

**Taffeta Chime** enjoys writing fiction and poetry, with two self-published novels (*Stoodie*, 2007, and *The Last*, 2011) and several short stories and poems published across a myriad of literary journals.

**Tara Orzolek** is a writer living in Northampton, Massachusetts.

**Virginia Sutton's** chapbook, *Down River*, was recently released. Her second book, *What Brings You to Del Amo*, past winner of the Morse Poetry Prize, will be re-published this year by Doubleback Books. *Embellishments* was her first book and *Of a Transient Nature* was her third.

**Zoe Canner** is a writer, director, choreographer, performer, and teacher. She is an alumna of CalArts, Directors Lab West, and The Home School. She lives in Los Angeles.

**David Koehn** has published *Coil* (a chapbook of poems), *Tunic* (a letterpress chapbook of translations of Catullus) and *Twine* (a full length collection of poems). His next full-length book of poems, *Scatterplot*, is due for release in 2020.

**Xavier Abril** (1905-1990) was a Peruvian poet and essayist who helped bring surrealism to Peru and the rest of Latin America.

**Will Carter** is a writer and translator. He enjoys plants, free jazz, graphic novels, and Stanley Kubrick films.

**Julio Martinez Masanza** is among the most prominent of a generation of Spanish poets who came of age after the death of Franco. His work includes four editions of a single, expanding collection called *Europa* from 1983 to 1990; two other books of poetry; and a volume of selected poems.

**Stuart Silverman** has published nearly 600 poems and translations in 100+ journals and anthologies here and abroad. Hawk Publishing Group published his *The Complete Lost Poems: A Selection*.

**Ricardo Güiraldes** (1886-1927) was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and is best known today for his novel set amongst the gauchos of his home country, *Don Segundo Sombra*.

**Christopher Ringrose** co-edits the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* and the book series Studies in World Literature. His poetry has won the UK's Peterloo Prize, Canada's Other Voices Prize and Australia's Poetica Christi Prize.

**Lope de Vega** (1562-1635) was a Spanish playwright, poet, and novelist. He was one of the key figures in the Spanish Golden Century of Baroque literature.

**Dan MacIsaac's** translations of Lorca, Dario, de Ibarbourou, Mistral, Aleixandre and others have appeared in a wide variety of literary magazines. Brick Books published his debut poetry collection.

**Pablo de Rokha** (1894-1968) won the Chilean Premio Nacional de Literatura (National Literature Prize) in 1965 and is counted among the four greats of Chilean poetry.

**Alani Rosa Hicks-Bartlett** is a writer and translator who lives in the SF Bay Area. She has won awards for her creative work, such as the Emily Chamberlain Cook Prize and The Dorothy Rosenberg Memorial Prize in Lyric Poetry.

**Julio Cortázar** (1914-1984) was a novelist, short story writer, and essayist from Argentina. Known as one of the founders of the Latin American Boom, Cortázar influenced an entire generation of Spanish-speaking readers and writers in the Americas and Europe.

**Carolina A. Herrera's** first novel, *#Mujer que piensa* (El Beisman Press), was published in 2016. She is part of *Ni Barbaras, Ni Malinches*, an anthology of Latino female writers in the US (Ars Communis Editorial, 2017).

**Roberto Azcorra Cámara's** publications include a book of short stories *Disparados a la luna, Ficticia, México* (2009) and stories in the anthologies; *Memorias del Congreso Internacional de Literatura* (2012-2013), *La casa ciega vol. 5, EDAF, Madrid, España* (2006), *La Otriedad, ICY, Yucatán, México* (2006), *Nuevas voces en el laberinto, ICY, México* (2005).

**Pennell Somson's** translations of stories and essays by Nadia Villafuerte and Roberto Azcorra Cámara have appeared in the *Rio Grande Review*, *Latin American Literature Today*, *Delos Journal*, *Midway Journal*, *InTranslation (Brooklyn Rail)* and *Reunion: The Dallas Review*.

**Ricardo Nicolayevsky** is an award winning filmmaker, writer, composer and performance artist based in Mexico City.

**Diego Gerard** is a writer, editor and translator based in Mexico City. He is the co-founding editor of *diSONARE Magazine*.

**Kate Kingston** has published *History of Grey*, a runner-up in the 2013 Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award and *Shaking the Kaleidoscope*, a finalist in the 2011 Idaho Prize for Poetry.

**Luisa Goveia's** book publications include *Tiempo de Palabras*, *Península del Viento*, *Claraboya*, *El Enemigo Entrañable*, and *Cruce de Cebra*. Her stories, essays, and poems have been published in numerous anthologies and literary magazines.