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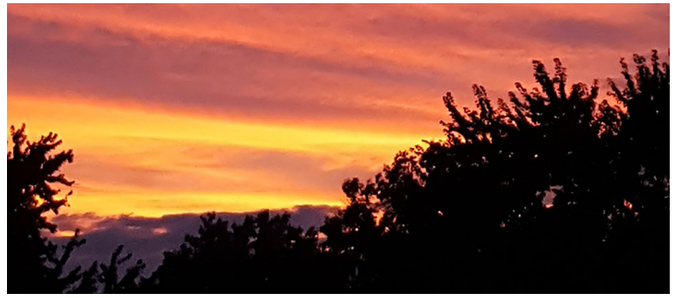
The photographs are of several areas in and near Carbondale, Illinois, including some of Grand Tower, Illinois.



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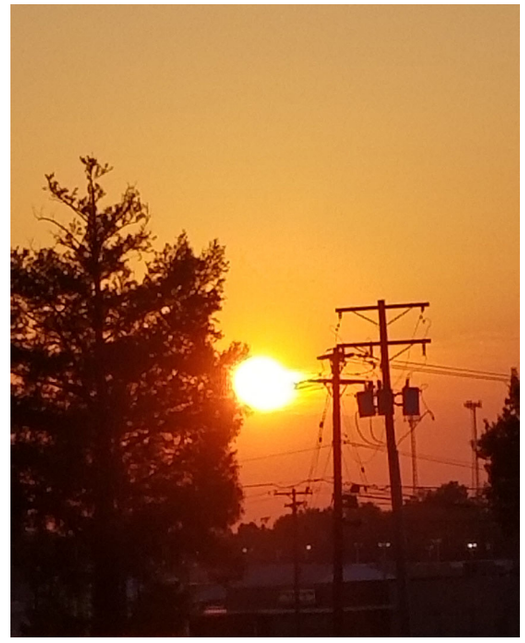

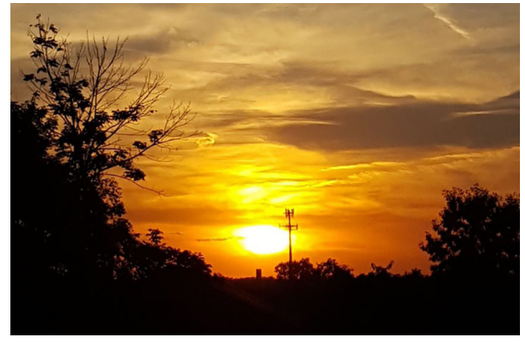

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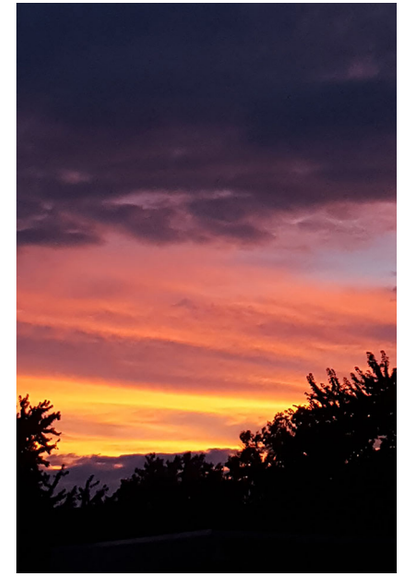

CRAB ORCHARD REVIEW

CRAB ORCHARD REVIEW

A Journal of Creative Works Vols. 23 No. 2

"Hidden everywhere, a myriad
leather seed-cases lie in wait…"
—"Crab Orchard Sanctuary: Late October"
Thomas Kinsella

2018
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Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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CRAB ORCHARD REVIEW

General issue Volume 23, Number 2

Fiction

Nonfiction Prose

Poetry

A Note on Our Cover

This cover features six photographs by Jon Tribble of several areas in and near Carbondale, Illinois, including some of Grand Tower, Illinois.

The 2018 Richard Peterson Poetry Prize, Jack Dyer Fiction Prize, and John Guyon Literary Nonfiction Prize

We are pleased to announce the winners and finalists for the 2018 Richard Peterson Poetry Prize, Jack Dyer Fiction Prize, and John Guyon Literary Nonfiction Prize.

In poetry, the winning entry is "Cholera Is What My Grandfather Did During the War" by Esther Lin of Jackson Heights, New York. The judge, Allison Joseph, selected two finalists in poetry, and they are "Elegy or When Daughters Drown Their Fathers" by Lauren Alleyne of Harrisonburg, Virginia, and "In Times Such as These, We Find We Must Make Do" by Josephine Yu, of Tallahassee, Florida.

In fiction, the winning entry is "Fish Boy" by May-lee Chai of San Francisco, California. The judge, Allison Joseph, selected two finalists in fiction, and they are "Out of Sofya" by Amanda P. Hartzell of Seattle, Washington, and "Between the Waves" by Emory Noakes of Columbus, Ohio.

In literary nonfiction, the winning entry is "Teaching the N-Word in Georgia" by Kerry Neville of Milledgeville, Georgia. The judge, Allison Joseph, selected two finalists in literary nonfiction, and they are "The Fabric of Peace" by Jennifer Lang of Raanana, Israel, and "Present Progressive" by Catherine Mauk of Higgins, Australia Capital Territory, Australia.

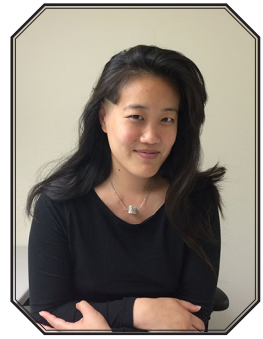
All three winners received $1,250.00 and their works are published in this issue. All of the finalists also chose to have their works published in this issue and each received $200.00. Congratulations to the winners and finalists, and thanks to all the entrants for their interest in *Crab Orchard Review.*

The Winners of the 2018 Richard Peterson Poetry Prize, Jack Dyer Fiction Prize, and John Guyon Literary Nonfiction Prize

2018 Richard Peterson Poetry Prize Winner

"Cholera Is What My Grandfather Did During the War"
by Esther Lin

(Jackson Heights, New York)



2018 Jack Dyer Fiction Prize Winner

"Fish Boy"
by May-lee Chai

(San Francisco, California)

2018 John Guyon Literary Nonfiction Prize Winner

"Teaching the N-Word in Georgia"
by Kerry Neville

(Milledgeville, Georgia)

May-lee Chai

Fish Boy

"HEY, KID, YOU JUST GONNA SIT THERE?" THE BOSS WAS STANDING IN FRONT of Xiao Yu. Xiao Yu recognized the man's polished leather shoes, the cuffs of his expensive pants, his complicated watch, the clean white cuffs of his shirt. Out of politeness he'd never stared the man in the face. Now Xiao Yu stood up and stared at the man's shoes.

"No, Uncle," he said politely as his grandfather had instructed him to say. "I can work, too."

"Work?" The Boss laughed. The men in the kitchen laughed. "The squirt wants to work, did you hear that?" The Boss put his hand on top of Xiao Yu's head. He could feel the sweat of the man's palms dripping through his hair to his scalp. "And what can you do, Squirt?"

"I can scale fish. I know how to kill chickens. I can—"

"Whoa, whoa, listen to this! The Squirt really does want to work!" The Boss laughed. He pulled a pack of cigarettes out of the pocket of his crisp white shirt and tapped one out for himself. "Fine, fine, glad to hear you can be useful. Country kids, much better than a city brat," the Boss said. "A kid who's willing to work." He tapped one of the men with the cleavers between the shoulder blades. "You! Show the kid how it works with the fish. Kid wants to scale fish, let him."

Xiao Yu's heart jumped inside his ribcage. *To earn real money!*

The Boss headed toward the door. He turned, jabbing his cigarette in the air at Xiao Yu's nose. "Show me what you're worth, kid, and maybe I'll hire you, too." Then he opened the door—the sound of a woman singing a Hong Kong pop song momentarily flooded the kitchen along with a thousand dots of colored light from the mirrored disco balls—then the Boss was gone and the door swung shut.

"Fuck his mother! What am I supposed to? Babysit?" the man with the cleaver spat on the kitchen floor.

"I know how to scale—"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know everything. I heard you. But this is the city. Things are different here." The man sighed. "Come with me."

He led Xiao Yu to a little room just to the side of the kitchen where the walls were lined with fish tanks. Just then one of the waitresses dressed in a shiny red qipao slit to her thigh hurried in. "Give me a grouper, quick! Make it a big one."

The man grabbed a net and fished a grouper out of one of the tanks and slipped it quickly into a yellow plastic box, where it flipped and flopped, gasping for breath.

"That good enough, Little Sister?"

"Watch your mouth. I'm not your sister," she said, and picked up the box and took it outside.

"All right, kid, now do you remember what that fish looked like?"

"Yes. It's a gray fish with dark spots—"

"Yeah, yeah. I mean, the size? You think you could find its twin?"

"All groupers look like that."

"Fuck. This kid is straight off the farm." The man shook his head, but he took Xiao Yu by the shoulder and led him down the line of tanks, past crabs and lobsters, past lively colored fish that shone like gemstones, to a row of tanks packed so full of fish they could barely move. Many were ill, gray-white fungus growing from their gills, floating listlessly on their sides, their fins beating the dingy water futilely. "Find the grouper in this tank that looks exactly like the one we put in the box, and be quick."

"But none of these fish look like that one. These fish are sick—"

"They're okay, they're going to die soon anyway. Consider it a blessing to kill them. Do you believe in the Buddha's teachings?"

"The Buddha?"

The man shook his head. "Never mind. Just find the fish. Hurry up."

Xiao Yu scanned the filthy tank. The sides were covered with algae, even the light bulb under the lid was covered with a greenish growth. "That one's the same size."

"Get it then." The man handed a net hanging from a nail on the wall to Xiao Yu.

Xiao Yu lifted the lid gingerly and peered into the densely packed tank. He stuck the net in, trying not to accidentally scoop up the wrong fish, but it proved harder to net the large grouper that was floating on its side slowly up and down towards the back of the tank. Other fish kept bumping it away or swam into the net. Xiao Yu had never seen such sick fish. Finally, he dropped the net onto the floor and rolled up the sleeve of his good sweater, the one his grandfather had insisted he wear to their first week of work, and stuck his right hand into the brine. He was able to grab the sick grouper by the gills and pulled it up.

"Hey, that's a useful trick." The man nodded approvingly. "Here, put it in this bag." The man grabbed a plastic bag from a pile on the shelf under the tank and held it open so Xiao Yu could slip the grouper inside. It barely flopped at all. The only sign that it hadn't died yet was the way the plastic was sucked into the fish's gills as it tried to breathe, suffocating slowly in the dry air.

Suddenly the waitress reappeared and set the yellow plastic box on the

ground next to the tank of healthy fish. "They want it steamed with garlic, ginger and chives. No hot sauce this time." She ran out again.

The man lifted the box and quickly dumped the lively grouper back into the clean tank, where it flipped once, twice, and then began to swim rapidly back and forth, as though it thought it might be able to swim away and escape.

"You heard her. Show me how you kill a fish now, clean it, and then I'll show you which cook to give it to."

"Won't the customers get angry?"

"They'll be too drunk by the time they get to the fish course to even notice." Then the man winked at Xiao Yu in a way that made him feel older, a part of things. Clever like these men, not like city kids who didn't know how to work, like the Boss had said. Not like a kid at all really. And Xiao Yu squared his shoulders and stood a little taller.

After he'd been cleaning fish for four hours, Xiao Yu's shoulders ached from hunching over the bucket where he was told to dump the scales and the guts. The smoke from the woks and the men's cigarettes made his throat burn. Fatigued, the men had stopped yelling jokes and obscenities at each other. It was as if the night were flipping on its belly like the fish in the filthy tank. Trapped amongst the other men, Xiao Yu felt the kitchen growing smaller, closing in on him, too. He imagined stretching out on his bunkbed in the dormitory. It would feel good to be able to stretch at all.

"Hey, kid, time to empty the buckets. We've got to get rid of this smell. Smells like a toilet in here. From now on, don't wait so long. Throw the guts out back in the trash before we've got piles building up. This isn't some farm."

Xiao Yu bristled at the man's insult, his cheeks burning hot, hot. He wanted to take his fish knife and hook the man who'd insulted him.

But he thought about his grandfather, and the money they'd be making, and maybe they'd be able to hire a real lawyer for his father—he wasn't supposed to have heard about that, but he'd overheard his grandparents talking when they thought he was asleep on the train. If they could hire a city lawyer, his father would be all right. They just needed more money.

Xiao Yu would show these men then. He'd expose their corrupt restaurant to the police. With their rotten food and their dirty tricks. He'd show them a country boy wasn't so stupid after all.

But for now he picked up four of the buckets of guts, two in each hand, and carried them to the back door. He wasn't afraid to work. He'd make his family proud.

The night air was cool against Xiao Yu's flushed cheeks. When they'd first arrived in Zhengzhou, he'd found the air gritty, strange, with a smell so different from the village air that he had pretended in his head that he was a taikonaut, the first Chinese on the moon, and he was walking in a heavy white suit with a fishbowl helmet over his head. The air he was forced to breathe, recycled and

coming from tanks on his back, smelled like Zhengzhou's air. Like air that had already been breathed in and exhaled by nine million people. But after four hours in the smoky kitchen squatting over the buckets of fish guts, he found the night air no longer smelled so bad. It wasn't country air, but it wasn't kitchen air either.

He put the buckets down for a second and allowed his weary lungs to breathe deeply before he set off for the dumpsters. He closed his eyes, listening to the distant sounds of traffic, horns honking, voices of invisible people arguing and laughing, a bus rumbling by on the street beyond the alleyway. Then it was time to get back to work.

Xiao Yu was gingerly pouring the first bucket's bloody contents into the dumpster in the dark alley behind the restaurant, when a *ping!* like the shot from an air rifle ricocheted off the dumpster's metal side. He turned around immediately. There was a group of boys on bicycles, fancy bikes, the kind he'd seen on TV, the kind you could do tricks with: wide tires, low handlebars, bright colors. City bikes.

"Hey, Little Rabbit, what's up?"

Xiao Yu eyed the four boys arrayed between him and the door of the restaurant. They were older, high school students, he guessed. And there were four of them.

He didn't want to speak, afraid his accent would give him away.

"What's the matter? You a mute?"

The tallest boy approached. The others circled closer. Xiao Yu put the bucket down and wiped his slick hands on the sides of his pants, even though they were his best pants and he wasn't supposed to get them dirty. He'd been very careful in the kitchen actually, leaning far over the buckets so the guts wouldn't splatter. Finally, one of the cooks had given him an apron and he'd spread it carefully over his pants, purchased by his father from the city just for this trip, so that he'd blend in with the other city kids. He'd been proud. Proud to have new clothes, even if they'd been purchased to make it easier to hide, so police wouldn't spot them on the streets, the way they imagined, and send them back to the village. They hadn't realized how little anyone in the city would care about their appearance. "You look like a young man now," his grandfather had said proudly, seeing Xiao Yu in his new clothes. "No one will know you haven't grown up your whole life in a city." All these thoughts circled through Xiao Yu's mind as he eyed the boys.

"What're you doing here?" A boy with a round face and flat nose pointed his chin at Xiao Yu. He had extremely small eyes, making his face seem more pig-like than a normal human's. The tall boy stood back now. Xiao Yu figured he was the leader. The other two boys were thinner, acne dotting their cheeks. As they approached, Xiao Yu could see they chewed their lips. They were cowards. They would be the ones he should attack first if it came to that. It was going to come to that. He felt the hair on his neck rise. He could feel the sweat pouring from his armpits.

"This is our alley. What are *you* doing here, Little Rabbit?"

"I work for the restaurant. The boss told me to—"

The boys charged. They were faster than he thought. The two skinny ones grabbed him from behind, twisting his arms up into the air behind his back, the pig-eyed boy punched him in the stomach.

Xiao Yu thought he might throw up. The alley turned completely black.

Now the boys were kicking him. He couldn't even call out. The nausea was overwhelming. He retched. He hadn't eaten all night, there was nothing to throw up, but he retched again.

The tall boy came over and he felt hands going through the pockets of his pants. "No money. This *tu baozi* is as poor as he looks." He felt the boy's spit land on his face.

Then the boys were kicking him, he curled into a ball. "Hey, hey, watch this! Watch me!" Pig boy's voice.

Suddenly Xiao Yu felt wet slimy entrails raining down upon his head.

Laughter.

The blood made him want to retch again. But something about the cold fish guts revived him. His vision was returning.

The city boys were bent over laughing. They were turning away, going to their bicycles.

Xiao Yu felt along the ground searching for a rock. He had good aim. He could make a stone skip thirteen times atop a fish pond. He wouldn't miss, even now. But he could find no rocks.

The boys were retreating.

Then Xiao Yu's fingers felt the beer bottle. It was broken, empty, rolled beneath the dumpster. He gripped it tightly.

He staggered to his feet, and with the adrenaline and anger just enough to make him dangerous, he found he could run. He ran towards the city boys and lobbed the bottle as hard as he could at the back of the tall boy's head. It struck, shattering against the tall boy's skull.

The tall boy dropped his bicycle and clutched his head with both hands.

"That mother fuck!" The pig-eyed boy turned towards Xiao Yu.

"Beat his balls off!" the tall boy gasped. Blood, black in the dim light, gushed from between his fingers.

"Fuck your mother, Rabbit Boy!" The skinny boys rushed him.

Xiao Yu retreated to the dumpster and one of the boys slipped on the spilled fish guts. Xiao Yu managed to punch the other skinny boy in the face, but then Pig Eyes grabbed him tightly, wrapped his arms around his chest, squeezing so that Xiao Yu couldn't breathe. He thought his back would break.

He shouted now. He howled.

"I'll fuck your mother and your grandmother!" Pig Eyes slammed Xiao Yu against the dumpster.

Xiao Yu's head struck the metal with a loud thunk.

"Cut his face." The tall boy approached, his left hand still holding the back of his head. In his right hand he held a piece of broken glass. "Hold him still and I'll cut the fucking eyes out of this bumpkin's head."

Xiao Yu felt the boys' hands around his arms and legs, around his neck, as he tried to squirm free, but Pig Eyes was big. He leaned his weight into Xiao Yu, setting a knee on his chest.

Then all at once a triangle of light flooded from the open kitchen door.

"Hey, you little bastards, get the hell away from here!"

One of the cooks had come out to see what was taking Xiao Yu so long. He was carrying a cleaver. The light behind him, he appeared in silhouette, as black as the sky.

"My father will put you in jail. Do you know who I am?" the tall boy shouted back.

"You're going to be tonight's main course if you don't get your junior high ass off the Boss's property! Do you know who owns this restaurant?"

"My father will have this restaurant closed down! My father will have all of you thrown back to the countryside where you belong! My father—"

"Your father's going to bury his son in a paper bag."

The cook turned back and shouted something into the restaurant. A burly man with a bald head and a large tattoo on the side of his neck, spiraling up the side of his check, appeared.

"You have no idea who you're talking to. You're just workers." The tall boy tried to laugh, but even to Xiao Yu's ringing ears, his voice sounded less confident.

The burly man didn't stop to talk, he approached the boys rapidly. They backed away from Xiao Yu, standing away from the tall boy, too. Xiao Yu watched the world from the asphalt, through his one eye that wasn't swollen shut yet.

The burly man went right up to the tall boy and pulled out something shiny. Xiao Yu thought it might be a knife. He pointed it at the boy's face.

"You wouldn't dare. My father will—"

The man pointed the shiny object at the brick wall beside the restaurant and fired his gun. It was louder than any gun Xiao Yu had ever heard. In the countryside, when men hunted, the sound of gunfire was absorbed by the huge open sky, not like the sky here, which was small and distant, trapped between buildings. Lights turned on from the windows at the tops of several buildings. But more lights went out.

The man pointed the gun at the tall boy's face and pulled the trigger. Even Xiao Yu could hear the click. Unmistakable. But there was no bullet. The man cocked the gun once more.

The man said, "Do you think I have another bullet or not, little shit?"

The boys took off running. They ran to their bikes, jumped on them, and rode off into the night.

The burly man re-entered the restaurant. Now two of the cooks returned. Xiao Yu recognized them from the smell of the garlic and cigarette smoke on their skin. His vision wasn't so good anymore. The world was a blur of light and shadow and more shadow.

"Look what those little hoodlums did to the fish boy," he heard one say.

"He's fresh from the countryside, this one. Has no idea how the city operates."

"Hard worker though."

"All right, help me pick him up."

Xiao Yu felt the men grab him under his arms and drag him towards the light coming from the open kitchen door. He recognized the smell of smoke billowing into the night air.

The two men stopped to inspect him. "He doesn't look that bad. He's just beat up a bit. Still got all his parts."

"Hey, you're lucky," one of the men shouted into his ear.

"My shoes. They took my shoes."

"What? What was that?"

"Don't try to talk, kid. Not tonight. Give it a few days."

"My good shoes," Xiao Yu tried again, but the men couldn't understand him.

That night he didn't have to gut any more fish. The Boss came in briefly; he could tell from the man's voice and the way the kitchen grew quiet when he entered. Someone gave Xiao Yu a glass of hot water and some pills to take. Then one of the cooks helped him to wash in the kitchen staff's toilet. It was a filthy room, the toilet was stopped up, and the whole room smelled of urine. Xiao Yu barely moved as the young cook washed Xiao Yu's face, splashing water from the sink on him, over and over. The water was cold. It hurt and it didn't hurt. Everything hurt and nothing hurt. His body was throbbing, beating along with his heart. He was floating. He was watching this shadow self covered in blood and fish guts slumped against the wall in his underwear, this boy being doused with water from the rusty pipes.

Xiao Yu thought of how clean his grandmother had kept their indoor toilet back home. She would never let any room in their house become this filthy. They lived like civilized people. Xiao Yu remembered his father supervising as the men had put in the pipes, then the sit-down toilet, even the shower, with the water heater so they could have both hot and cold water inside their home. Their house was clean. He would never walk into anyone's home with his shoes on. Here, people wore their shoes on indoors all the time. In the dormitory, he'd seen men sleeping in their shoes even.

Xiao Yu had never imagined that city people would be so unclean.

"Hurry up, kid. There's blood everywhere. Don't just sit on your ass all night."

Xiao Yu jumped up from his stool beside the bucket over which he gutted

the fish and grabbed the mop from the storeroom beside the smelly, bubbling, overpacked fish tanks. Seven months in the city and the filth no longer fazed him at work or in the streets or in the dormitory.

Xiao Yu grabbed the metal bucket, filled it with water from the concrete sink there, and mopped up the entrails spilling onto the kitchen floor. Chicken guts, duck guts, goose guts, fish guts, snake guts, even lizard guts. (Lizard was the week's special. Xiao Yu had never imagined the prices city people would pay to eat food a farmer would eat only in times of great famine. The cooks laughed about it and then shrugged.)

Life in the restaurant had taken on a kind of sameness: filth and shouting, the same jokes, the same insults. The Boss barked orders at the cooks, the busboys, even a couple of the waitresses in their shiny, too-tight qipaos. The Boss's cigarette butt dangled perilously over a dish of *ma po doufu* he inspected, before satisfied with his power, he pulled his pants up a bit—they tended to slip down beneath his bulging gut, *like a pregnant woman's*, Xiao Yu thought—and rushed back out into the dining room to banter obsequiously with the drunken customers.

"*Ta ma de*," one of the cooks swore, tossing a heavy iron wok full of shrimp. The flames leaped up, following the oily wok, licking its round bottom. Nonchalantly, the cook tossed in a dash of spiced oil, steam emerging in a cloud, and set the wok back down over the possessive fire. The room soon filled with the smell of hot Sichuan peppers.

"Whad'ya do that for?" Another cook coughed and spat on the floor. "Hey, kid, open the back door. We'll all suffocate in here. That rabbit's daughter is trying to kill us." He coughed some more.

"Ha! This is how you make Sichuan shrimp. You people can't handle a little spice."

Xiao Yu set the mop in the concrete sink then carried the bucket of bloody water in one hand, the bucket of miscellaneous entrails in the other. He headed toward the back door, stopping only once to set the heavy buckets down for a moment, wipe his hands on his cotton pants, slip a knife from the counter into his pocket, a pack of cigarettes up his right sleeve, and then picked up the buckets again and headed out the back.

He left the door propped open with a stone, just wide enough to let in fresh air—and so that he could hear the cooks arguing—but not so wide that they could see him make his way through the alley to the dumpster behind the restaurant.

Four boys were waiting for him.

"What took you so long? It's cold out here."

"I could have taken a shit if I'd known you were gonna be so late tonight."

"What's stopping you now? Wanna shit, go shit," Xiao Yu shot back. Then he pulled out the knife and the pack of cigarettes.

"That's nothing," one of the older boys sneered. "Tiny knife like that."

"Oh yeah?" Xiao Yu scratched the tip across the metal of the dumpster. It left an impressive scar.

"Chef's knife. Nothing sharper."

"Shit! How'd you get that?" one of the boys gasped.

"Never mind. What have you got?"

One of the boys pulled out a crumpled pack of Panda brand cigarettes and a whistle. The other boys including Xiao Yu groaned. "That's nothing. Send that home to your grandma for Tomb Sweeping Day. She can leave it on the graves she sweeps."

"What about you?"

The others brought out knives, a rusted cleaver, a set of tools—screwdrivers with different size heads and a few hammers, and a bottle of clear white rice wine.

"That's as small as your penis!" one of the boys sneered.

"What are you looking at his penis for!"

They boys laughed. The angry boy threatened to kick the mouthy one. They got over it.

"Hurry up. I can't stay out here forever."

"I'll trade you my knife for the *bai jiu*." Xiao Yu nodded at the wine.

"No way. That's genuine Maotai. Know how much that costs?"

"Let's drink it," someone suggested.

"Don't be stupid. I could sell this for money."

"My knife and the cigarettes. They're foreign. American brand. Smoother than Chinese. I've smoked them."

"They wouldn't give you one."

"Sure did."

"Okay." The boy handed the expensive, tiny bottle of liquor to Xiao Yu. He tucked it into his pants pocket. Then thinking better, tucked it into the hidden pocket his grandmother had sewn into the interior of his tee-shirt, just in case there was some emergency and a hidden pocket might come in handy. At the time, Xiao Yu had had no idea what she was thinking. Now he appreciated her guile.

Before anyone could object or try to negotiate a better trade, Xiao Yu dumped his buckets into the dumpster and ran back toward the kitchen, leaving the other boys, all restaurant workers from the neighborhood, to bargain over the remaining loot.

The next morning, Xiao Yu woke early as usual. His grandfather was snoring, exhausted from his night job. He slept like the dead, unmoving, his body stretched out straight and stiff across his bunkbed, dressed in his clothes. He'd been too tired to remove them after he got back to the dormitory. As usual. If not for the potent snorts and hoots that emerged from his nose, his grandfather could truly have been mistaken for dead, Xiao Yu thought. It

was a good thing the other men sleeping here were just as exhausted or they might have complained. But in the dormitory they were all migrants, none of them with a legal work permit; no one complained about noise.

Xiao Yu zipped his jacket and grabbed his shoes from under the bed, then ran out of the dormitory quietly. He didn't stop running even as he slipped his feet into his sneakers, sprinting down the hallway that led to the toilets. The light was dim from the tiny windows. Not yet dawn but soon. The night shift workers had come to bed at four. The day shift workers would begin rising at five. He had the hallway to himself, the air reverberating around him with snores.

The window opposite the toilets didn't close properly. The men kept jacking it open, to mitigate the smell. It was the only window in the entire dormitory that wasn't sealed and locked. Xiao Yu hiked it up easily, wincing at its squeak, but no one came from the factory or the toilet or the dormitory. He squeezed through the opening and dropped to the ground some six, seven feet below. The window was unsteady. It would squeak its way down soon enough, as Xiao Yu had discovered. Now he ran, as fast he could, but quiet-quiet, too, so as not to wake the guard dogs in the cages on the sides of the courtyard where the morning shift workers were required to gather for morning exercises or pep talks or simply to stand while being shouted at by the bosses through loudspeakers. Sometimes if a worker tried to leave his shift early, they'd stick him in the dog cages or make him kneel on the concrete in the sun as punishment, the dogs barking behind him. The bosses threatened to release the dogs if the man didn't obey. The men always obeyed, however. Xiao Yu kept scraps from the restaurant in his pockets. If the dogs woke, he threw them the meat through the bars of their iron cages. They knew him by now. They wouldn't bark long. The dogs were like men. They only worked because they were hungry.

Xiao Yu made it to the end of the courtyard. The sky was lightening. Dawn was coming. Soon the drunk who sat in the gatehouse, checking the identification cards of everyone who entered or left the factory compound, would wake. Then there'd be problems. But now as Xiao Yu crept to the gatehouse and peered in its window he could see the man slumped over his desk, snoring into the crook of his arm. Xiao Yu slipped past him to the front gate, which was easier to climb over than the stone walls that had broken glass embedded in the cement on top, plus strands of barbed wire. Not that he hadn't learned to scale those walls, but he preferred not to. Didn't want to risk a tear in his city jeans, the pair he'd bought with his own money. Now he climbed the metal bars of the front gate, and hauled himself to the top where the bars turned to sharp spikes. He balanced on the horizontal metal beam, careful to fit his feet between the spikes. This was the tricky part. If he lost his balance, he'd fall twelve feet to the concrete below. Or worse, if he slipped just a bit, he'd fall upon a spike. But Xiao Yu didn't slip. He never even worried

that he would. It was too exciting to escape the dark, snore-filled, fart-filled, old-man-smell-filled dormitory and roam the city streets and alleys. He was almost fourteen. There was nothing he felt he couldn't do.

Xiao Yu ran through the streets. There was already traffic. There was always traffic in the city. People working, getting off work, going to work, stumbling from bars, stumbling into bars, lurching about the sidewalks, strolling with friends, running from enemies, sidewalk vendors, small shop owners, big club owners, farmers in tattered clothes selling fruit from baskets, beggars, pickpockets, gamblers, hookers, foreigners, buses, trucks, taxis, cars, even a few bicycles. He met up with his new city friends in the alley behind the department store with the giant billboard of some Korean movie star smiling in front. The boys were already well into their game. A pile of crumpled bills, bartered weapons—knives, cleavers, rusted pointed things—foreign candy, favorite snacks, and a watch lay in the middle of the circle of boys as they tossed their cards down, grabbed others.

Then the boys compared hands. Much groaning, and one boy swept up the pile into his knapsack.

Another boy began dealing a new round. He flipped the cards expertly. Big Ears' skill was a thing of beauty. His hands, normally thick and stubby-fingered, dirt under his nails, became as graceful as a Wushu artist's, as fast as Jet Li, when he shot the cards through the air.

"Are you in?" one of the boys asked without looking up. He rearranged his cards.

Xiao Yu threw down a few of the bills he was paid by the boss for gutting fish and other animals all night.

"Of course I'm in. Prepare to lose."

"Ha! You don't have the money. You'll fold before we get to the third round."

They laughed, they swore, they shared some stolen cigarettes and a can of Coca-Cola mixed with a bottle of cheap *bai jiu*. Xiao Yu was never more aware of how useless his schooling had been, all those years memorizing all those worthless characters, reading those old boring essays, when the real world was out here, on the street, made up of money and fast hands, faster feet. This life was an education. His old life was like a long dream, one only his grandfather still believed in. The dream of school and his father returning from prison and the family together in the village. If Xiao Yu thought of such things at all, it seemed to him his entire family was living in a coma. Only he was awake.

When Xiao Yu returned in the afternoon, after shoplifting with his friends, extorting money from younger kids on their way to and from school, or fighting with rival gangs, he never told his grandfather about his real life, about the real world that Xiao Yu had discovered and now inhabited and intended to learn how to survive in. No, how to *thrive* in. He was a good student after all. He'd just been studying the wrong material.

When he returned to the dormitory, brazenly walking through the front gate this time, bribing the afternoon gatekeeper with some of his day's earnings, Xiao Yu would tell his grandfather that he'd been to school. It was only half-day because he was a migrant in the city, no residence permit, so he had to go to a charity school run by some do-gooders but at least some schooling was better than none. And his grandfather would smile, the folds around his eyes deepening, the happiness on his face evident. He would pat Xiao Yu on the head, "Study hard. Be sure to study hard for your father. He's worked all these years just for you." And Xiao Yu would nod and pretend to be both astonished and thrilled by the crumpled ten yuan note his grandfather would slip into his hand, with a wink. "Be sure to buy yourself a snack after school tomorrow. Something the city kids like. You might as well get used to this lifestyle. Learn what it's like. No point acting like an old man before your time."

Xiao Yu nodded. "Thank you, Ye-Ye," he said.

"You're my grandson," Ye-Ye replied. "I want you to have the best. Remember you're just as good as these spoiled city kids. Better. You know how to work harder." Then he quoted the proverb about fish and birds: a fish is bound only by the sea, a bird by the sky. It was supposed to mean Xiao Yu could go far in the world if he put his mind to it.

Xiao Yu would hang his head, stare at his sneakers, feigning modesty. But truly he thought his grandfather was correct. This was the one point where they indeed saw eye to eye. Xiao Yu knew that he was as good as these city boys, better even, because he saw more clearly than they. They were fish in a bowl, only he had leapt into the sea.

Lauren K. Alleyne

Ugly

I hate the thing in me
that hates the dog—
her dumb stare, vacant,
or else filled with some
unknowable doggish
emotion. I recognize
some looks— shame's
slink and slide; joy's
wide roll, the squint
of obstinate pursuit—
at odds with the furred
canvas of her face. I hate
how I relish the potent
drug of mastery, the high
of her unquestioned
obedience, her quickening
at my barked commands
—*Come! Sit! Go to bed!*
I hate when she forgets
which of us is boss, which
dog, hate how I bring
the whole power of me to bear
upon her small rebellion,
her helplessness at the odds
so stacked against her
when I lift her whole body up,
put it where she will not
go. I hate her cower
at my descending hand,
but relish the measured
thud of justice against her
backside for fouled carpets,
the labor of laundry. I hate
the old pantomime of it all
—the shackles of need,

the thin leash of duty,
the humiliations we bear
and burden each other with
in the name of some hunger
we call love.

Elegy or When Daughters Drown Their Fathers

You do not do, you do not do anymore/black shoe
—"Daddy," Sylvia Plath

after Patricia Smith and Tiana Clark

You cannot ask a pond to be an ocean,
an anthill to be a mountain, or rather

you can, but you will be disappointed
— resent the pond's visible shoreline,

crush the un-awesomeness of the anthill
beneath your tantruming feet. You cannot

ask a man to be more than the sum
of his history and desires, more than

his silences filled with a dead father
& six siblings & the breakback work

that crushed all dreams of high school
or dreaming. You, daughter, want skyscrapers

& degrees & nothing his hands understand
& hate him when he offers in his slow, black

drawl the song of *why* and *wait*. You
purge him like a poison, cut your eyes

at his face in yours—you, daddy-in-drag,
wearing his small-toothed smile, his dark face.

You stomp *no* on any anchor, refuse
any limit but the horizon, rename yourself

endless, and him, *outgrown*; you bury him
with the bright blue mists of your future,

set sail and never look back.

She who wears horns and weeps

(A lament in two voices)

1. Hera

They call him thunder, but he falls
like rain at the sight of any female
flesh—any rouged lip, curve of hip,
any flash of nipple, pink of tongue.
I would incinerate his immortal cock,
harvest his balls like ripe figs,
but my eternity is bound to his
by the fat lashes of heat and heart:
I am cursed to love the thirst of him.

2. Io

For love of me, he held me
face down in the grass. He summoned
a cloud to pillow my head
as he pushed himself between my legs.
I said I was a virgin, sworn
to serve his jealous wife, Hera, and he
came, a burst of god seed.
For my safety, he changed me again,
made a new beast of me.

3. Hera

If they are his meat, I will carve
them to bone and shadow
before him. If they are water,
I will dam them, poison their wells.
If they are the pleasure of his eyes
I will monster them. What is luminous
I will gutter; what is peaceful
I will ache, as I ache: to madness.

4. Io

A gadfly, Hera? Buzz and bother?
I can no longer walk upright.
I have no arms to hide my shame.
I lost laughter and human tears;
I grieve in a foreign skin. I cannot wash
his slick from my body, his grunts and moans
as he fucked me, wild with his lone passion—;
wings and sting to punish me, Hera? As if.

Idris Anderson

Sugar House

After November's slaughter
of animals, what all wouldn't we do
for a little sugar?

The mule named Lucky walks round and round
the big mechanical contraption. Harnessed, leather
collar and straps, he carries the long boom
at his heels. No one forcing him to go or stop.
Uncle Eddie feeds stalks of purple-green
cane to the mouth, the teeth of the machine,
not too much, not too little. He remembers
each time to duck under the boom. Cane juice
pours green from the gears. The boom moves
steady like the hand of a clock. Grinding, grinding,
the hard breaking press and crack of the cane.
Barrel filling. The heavy hooves of the mule
are digging a furrow.
It takes three men to pour
easy from the barrel, the great iron basin
wide and shallow. No dripping. No splashing.
The basin's round bricked-up square, an opening
in the back for fire underneath. A furnace. Stoked.
Chimney smoke.
Moon disks forged to long handles,
big perforated ladles for stirring, for checking the thickness
of simmering juice. Ladles lift, held dripping, sunk again,
stirred and lifted. Women's arms up and down,
up and down, black, white, and brown,
sleeves pushed up. Not yet syrup, not yet,
though juice steams. Elijah, an old dark man,
rakes out some coals to keep the fire from roiling.

I was one of the children ready with strips
of cane, like knives, like spoons, waiting for candy
to gum and crystal on the edges.

Decades later
I stand small in the nave of a grand cathedral
reading a stained glass window of martyred saints:
a man—or is it a woman?—sits calm in a cauldron,
arms lifted, flames or tendrils of steam arc
higher as flesh boils, lights shooting red and blue
through her, and I understand the fiery furnace
of hell's mouth, the heat of the cauldron, the sweetness
of her suffering.
Fire licked shadows on our faces
as we knelt around the rim of the sugar cauldron.
We were told to be patient, not yet to touch, to listen—
the deep voice of the old Negro with white whiskers
singing as he fed oak logs to the fire:
Lordy, won't you come by here.
Angel locked the lion's jaw.
As ladles dripped sugar thicker and thicker, the singing
settled us and made us feel something like worship or shame.

José Angel Araguz

Selena: a study of recurrence/worry

Somebody died and it's okay to be Mexican.
No, really, this is good. I was worried
nobody would understand what it means to come
from a city named after the recurring body

of a martyr. No, really, this is good.
I worried a whole generation of young women
from a city named for wounds and resurrection
would suffer themselves to be stilled and lost. Now

I worry a whole generation of friends close
their fists around empty beer cans and walk
out the door to become lost, distilled memories.
You would think no one would sing here

again. That with beer cans in their fists
mothers would tell stories about a ghost
appearing should you sing here in this city,
should you ever go onstage, a whole generation

of mothers telling stories where not a ghost
but a microphone vanishes directly below a spotlight
that burns anyone who walks onstage, different moon
in a different sky where it is always night.

See, a whole city vanishes below the spotlight
of my erratic memory. Corpus Christi, my imagination
paints you as an indifferent sky where night
after night we tell stories about who we were.

You are more than my erratic memory and imagination,
more than the name of a wounded, returned body.
When at night I tell stories about Selena,
I know that it is more complicated than

the name on a statue, more complicated than
somebody died, and it's okay to be Mexican.
I know life is more complicated than
anyone can understand or hope to become.

St. Peter to Joseph

St. Peter to the painter Joseph:
Make an image of our Lord so that
others upon seeing may believe.
And later: *Make an image of me*
so others can say this is the one
who preached His word.

I imagine Joseph before his
materials, a uselessness felt
keenly in his hands. Not knowing much
about faith, only how to follow
through in the way of all such stories
that mix up acts

of creation with the slight, airy
fortune of creatures, I hear him ask
inside himself how to proceed, ask,
as I've asked, and, hearing no answer,
have to ask again, until questions
begin to blur

as heat at the far end of a road
makes the horizon appear water,
water one would drink, pooled and shifting
the closer one gets – ask and remain
only able to take what he has
into himself.

Sentence

When the piper leads the children off,
the sounds of music and laughter die,
and the parents are left with silence

germinating in the open fields,
land there is now too few hands to work.
Silence sets a place for itself, sits

at the table, waits as grace is said.
Silence leaves nothing to scrape clean from
its plate. Silence, true to itself, lets

parents speak, unhindered. When silence
overgrows, they kneel, same as praying,
to weed it out, but leave in the root.

Silence, their fear to slip and break, hurt,
and not get up. Silence, they broom, stir,
whisk through an open door in clouds, then

later find again. Silence, they drink
against. Silence, they lie awake, shift,
every night, from darkness to darkness,

ears, dehiscent, open to a far
corner, where a scrap of onion skin
turns in the small, clean hands of a rat.

Jacob Boyd

One Looks at Two

"…Across the wall, as near the wall as they.
She saw them in their field, they her in hers."
--Robert Frost, "Two Look at Two"

It is not for me to imagine what passes
Between a cow and a Pekinese noticing each other
In the spring snow, across an electric fence;
Their paths of thought,
As one advances and the other shies away,
Diverge along a shared animal plane—the same
Field of impulses in which my brain
Arranges symbols into words I can't use.

Their thoughts are lost to me, who thinks
More abstractly and, if not faster, farther
Down causation's fuse—concentrate, I say,
Do not leap, but see each way you turn
A thousand paths of song and choose
One; the only way
To praise what I saw in these two creatures
Is to say what can be verified: they met

And very soon moved on, not barking
Or mooing, though the Peke glanced back
As she went bounding down the stubble rows,
And the cow kept her shield-shaped face
Aimed at the dog's wake. No dialogue
Intervened—none but our three
Sets of prints, which the snow seemed
To compose for us, carried away as we were.

Anne Champion

I Want to Marry a Communist

Over Cuba Libres, in outdoor bars pulsing
with Latin music, I fall in love with revolution

and with my tour guide, his country's myths
weaving images of green fatigues and rifles,

men who don't bathe, whose sweat smells
like a storm brewing. I have sex dreams of Karl Marx,

lust knotting in my bones and unhinging my joints,
so when my guide takes me in his arms and sways

me like wind, I nearly collapse—
Salsa's easy, my dear, but you've got to let everything go.

Everywhere I travel, I'm told I'm lucky
to be American, and yet I feel stiff, shackled

to this identity, coughing up the toxins
of all the true histories and the false ones

I had to unlearn. My tax dollars, blood money.
My privilege, a pedestal that towers

over racism, slavery, wars. My guide
gives me a cigar and I know not to inhale,

just let my tongue lick the smoke, taste
the rich fragrance of death but don't let it take root

in my body just yet. I wish I could believe
in love as liberation, trust it to buoy

this weight, the way children fling themselves at waves,
secure that the salted sea will lift their bodies,

brazenly rebellious against threats
of undertows, the way the young women in Havana,

propped on the ledge of the Malecón, wrap
their legs around their lovers' torsos, knowing

a wave might hit, willing to test their luck
like gambling addicts, betting the house, taunting

the sea as they fling their hair like dice, ready
to march home drenched in defiance,

peeling off each other's wet clothes
and drying them for the next day on the ledge,

even if the waves have swiped their purses and hats,
even if they've lost everything before.

Martha Christina

Closed

He stands in the middle aisle
of his family's shuttered
three-aisle department store,
where the two Marias
crowded each other, eager
to spend their Christmas bonuses;
where Isabel from the bakery
lingered over the lace handkerchiefs,
her curls springing up again after
a morning's constraint in a hair net.

Angela, his mother's second
cousin's wife, paid cash
for everything and loved blue
sweaters, any shade. Her sister,
Trina, more selective, didn't like
to be hurried. *Don't rush Trina,*
he says, aloud.

◆◆◆

Days when St. Rocco's students
were measured for their uniforms,
he needed extra help. That's how
Virginia came to clerk for him,
just helping out, temporarily.

He watches her box children's
anklets. *You're a good worker,*
he calls to her, *maybe my father*
will give you a raise.

◆◆◆

Virginia watches him straighten

a sweater on the shoulders
of the nearest mannequin. She
remembers the strength of his hands,
how he held her against the wall
in the stockroom, sixty years ago.

◆◆◆

He moves up the aisle
to the locked door, turns
the cardboard "Closed" sign
to "Open," turns to her and
smiles. *Ready?* he asks.

◆◆◆

She'll have to tell him, again.

Renee Evans

Absentia

Annie closes the door to her daughter's tiny and neat room, the one that looks immediately out onto the train when it flashes by. Stephanie is supposed to be in her room right now, but she is not. Annie swallows and swallows again to be rid of the panic and understands Stephanie's absence as her own fault: since the divorce, Annie has acted unpredictably—maybe even irrationally—and immature. Stephanie, not Annie, chose this apartment because it was the only one within their budget (she established a budget for the two of them when they first moved to Chicago eight months ago, and it didn't include any more shopping sprees for Annie or for herself—she could be so much like her father sometimes); Stephanie scolded Annie for shoplifting fingernail polishes from the Walgreens down the street (she didn't make her take them back, thank God) and told her to knock it off; Stephanie mandated they eat together at least five days a week, and she created and enforced the no-television-during-dinner rule. It's just too much to ask a twelve-year-old to be the adult, Annie should know. And no matter how much she wants to be Steph's friend—her *best* friend—and keep her as constant and as close as skin, she's only going to screw it up. And now Stephanie is gone. Annie has failed. Of course she failed, they will say. No discipline. No authority. What kind of mother is that?

"Steph? Honey?" She calls back down the alcove that would be a dim hallway if this were a real apartment and not a rough collection of a half-stove, a bathroom-ette, a pocket for couch-space, and three walls and a door meant to serve as the "one-bedroom"—enough space for Stephanie's twin bed and bookshelf. Annie calls again. Not even she is convinced by her attempt to keep the terror out of her voice. She just stepped out, not even two blocks down, for cigarettes. Tom's going to kill her. This is what Annie gets for lingering so long in front of the liquor store. But she didn't buy anything this time; she kept walking, eventually. When she left, Steph wasn't supposed to be abandoning her mother to a cold and unfamiliar city that didn't turn out to be the adventure she originally thought it would be; she was supposed to be finishing the dishes, not running away.

Dear God, what if she's running back to her father? Tom and Steph get along well enough; they're both so stingy. But Stephanie's got something her father doesn't. There's a maturity to her, a sense of moral awareness that Tom (Annie, too, if she'd admit it) doesn't have. And doesn't Steph know that Annie needs her? Even if it's just to get her to sit down and share a meal.

It was a nice dinner: some tuna thing out of a box they spruced up by adding frozen peas and parmesan cheese. Stephanie stood over the sink, frowning as she drained the can of tuna. She said, "You know who this rust stain in the sink looks like?"

Annie stopped stirring the boiling noodles and peeked into the basin. "Abe Lincoln?"

"I was going to say Barbra Streisand, but now that you mention it… maybe if you're old and unimaginative and can't see very well. It might be him. In the right light."

"Smart-ass," Annie said, and swatted her daughter lovingly on the behind.

"Dumb bunny."

One more thing I've screwed up, Annie thinks, as she races back down the four flights of stairs and to the car. *First Tom and now Steph.* And once she gets down to the car, then what? Where does a woman search for her runaway daughter? She doesn't know, doesn't buckle up as she almost simultaneously starts the car and throws it into reverse.

The train whistle sounds overhead. Fucking train. She hasn't had a decent night's sleep since they moved here. She turns right out of the parking lot and heads toward downtown. She sighs. She might have fought harder to keep Tom. He simply handed her the papers one day and said he'd had enough. He said that she used her childhood as a crutch (so her mother neglected her, her brother abused her; he didn't see why she couldn't get over it), that she was addicted to pitying herself. That she was selfish. He'd said it before, and Annie had learned to hate that about him, but she trusted he would be there always; that was one of the things she counted on him for: his steadiness, even if he did turn out to be less steady than she thought. She was so stunned she just let it happen. She hadn't meant to be so impossible to live with. Maybe if he'd talk to her once in a while, tell her what he was thinking. Then she might know what he didn't like about her and could change it. Then she wouldn't have gone so divorce-crazy and lost too much weight, or lost her job, or had to move, or had to find an apartment next to the fucking train tracks.

It's about nine-thirty, and the streets in this part of town aren't well-lit. Annie squints into the dark parts of the sidewalk, up into alleyways—God forbid (Steph knows better than to go there, right?)—where all she can see is more darkness. Closer to downtown, the sidewalks are brighter, and there are more people on them, but none of them have Stephanie's shiny curtain of dark hair flowing down their backs.

This is pointless. It's ridiculous. How the hell does she expect to find one girl in a city of millions? Annie knows from watching prime-time television that the police won't even do anything unless she's been missing for twenty-four hours. At this thought, she begins to cry. She turns on her blinker and heads home. *Can't even search properly for her own daughter.*

She hates this city. She hates the way the car always bottoms out when she pulls into the parking lot. She hates the way the hallway to her building always smells like burnt pizza crust. She hates the flickering green light outside their door. She hates the way their patchy brown Berber carpet is faintly reminiscent of cat piss. She closes the door behind her and locks it, slumps onto the couch and sobs into her hands, and there is Stephanie, peeking around from in the kitchen.

"Mom, you okay?" She holds a towel in her hand. She is intact.

"Oh my God, Stephanie, where have you been?" Annie hugs her daughter, who feels like she didn't expect the hug and stands there with her own arms pinned awkwardly between the two of them.

"To take out the trash."

Annie squeezes even tighter and feels Stephanie's spine pop a little.

"Just the trash; I took out the trash. Mom, you're hurting me."

"Jesus Christ, I thought you'd run away."

"Was I supposed to?"

"No, goddamnit."

"All right; don't get all pissy."

"Don't say pissy."

"Sorry." Stephanie holds Annie away from her and looks into her eyes. "Mom, chill out." She walks her mother over to the well-worn couch that serves as Annie's bed and they sit together for a moment. When Steph speaks, her voice is quiet, and it has a slight calming effect on Annie. "What would you have done if I had run away?"

"I don't know, ground you? Make you write a report about it?"

"And where would you go to look up all the vocabulary words I use?"

Annie returns her daughter's smile. "Oh, ye of little faith." Annie likes to think Steph gets her intelligence from her mother; but these moments of tenderness in her, that's most likely Tom.

"You gonna be okay?"

"Yes. I'm fine. I'll be fine. Go finish your homework."

"You don't want to bake or something? Spend some *quality time*?"

Annie's smile feels more like a wince. "Not tonight. I think I'll just take a shower and go to bed."

"Let me know if you need anything." Stephanie looks for a long moment at her mother before she closes her door.

Annie waits until she hears Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* from Steph's room before she goes to the bathroom. She locks the door behind her, turns on the shower, sits on the toilet lid, and weeps.

At work, a call center where employees compete to see how many cheesy and overpriced vacation packages they can sell, Annie sits and spins her chair around in her tiny cubicle. This is the fourth job she's had since

they moved. The carwash where she was supposed to be a car dryer was filled with dropouts who thought they knew everything and (she suspected) crack heads who couldn't be counted on to show up for work. The pizza bar was too noisy and overcrowded. And chopping all those vegetables for the salad bar made her hands tingle at night, when she washed her one of two uniforms and never quite got the pizza smell out of them. The insurance place was a step up as far as she was concerned, but that woman and her ten o'clock boiled egg-white breaks and the way she dragged her feet around the office, flaunting those breasts that were just a little too high and tight for the mother of a twenty-something—God she was glad to be out of there.

And now, even though they have to do that embarrassing cheer every morning, and Sam, her supervisor, with his too-perfect salt-and-pepper hair and too-white smile, has put little smiley-face stickers on her phone console to remind her to "smile into the sale," at least she has her own space. She has decorated it with a string of purple Mardi-Gras beads (to let the single men know she's spunky), a tiny bamboo plant in a clay pot (to add some life and contrasting color to this hellhole), and what Sam has referred to as her "Stephanie shrine."

The bulletin board on the wall in front of her, which is supposed to be tacked with the company's weekly inspirational memos or sales checklists or copies of the different vacation packages, is plastered with a collage of All Things Stephanie. There are pictures, of course: of Steph's fifth Halloween, when she was Minnie Mouse, of her laughing on the merry-go-round, her hair a dark flash, like a bird in flight behind her, standing in a float ring and watching the water on the rocky beach where she grew up (Tom has been cut out of this one), several Christmases, and her last two school pictures—the first with glasses, braces, and frizzy hair, and the second (only a year later!) with clear eyes (contacts) and straight teeth, a fresh, glossy haircut, and if she looks just hard enough, a bit of mascara and a dab of lip gloss. Just beautiful.

And all of it serves as a distraction—some people pin up posters of the sorts of vistas they're supposed to be pitching, but Annie suspects they become fantasy spots and the salespeople stop describing the white sand and bluer-than-blue water in the cove and keep those sorts of thoughts to themselves, because, really, telemarketers deserve vacations, too.

She and Tom used to pack up their little pop-up camper and spend a week at a time roaming the countryside. They'd been all the way out to Maine, where they purchased lobsters for a dollar apiece right off the boats and had them boiled at a little roadside stand there. They went to the Gulf of Mexico, where Annie got stung by a jellyfish and Tom refused to pee on her because Stephanie was right there and screaming even louder than Annie. And when Annie remembers the Redwood forest, the thing she remembers the most is how surprisingly quiet it was there. She and Steph both took

vows of silence for the car ride home, but Stephanie broke hers when Tom made her giggle by singing that song about a lion in the jungle. But now Annie's vacation is Stephanie. Always Stephanie.

The next time Annie whisks the two of them away, it will be to somewhere better than Chicago, and they won't have to worry about responsibilities, just about relaxing and having fun.

When Annie's phone rings, the sound is unfamiliar to her at first, and it takes her a second to figure out what it is. It's her supervisor.

"Annie, you planning on making phone calls today, or am I paying you to sit there and play around in your chair?"

She peeks over the top of her cubicle and toward the phone on the wall where she knows Sam will be standing. He's such a douche bag, he can't even walk down the aisle to do his job. Can't taint himself by mingling with the untouchables. Annie smiles into the phone and puts a positive spin on her words, just like she's been taught—she really was paying attention, she couldn't help it—during all those continual training seminars they have every other Friday of the month. "I was just picking up my phone to make another call when you rang, Sam. Taking some time to regroup, so I can hit it with an extra burst of energy, thanks!" Asshole.

She switches the line and dials a number she knows by heart. A woman with a nasal voice Annie recognizes answers and announces the school's name. "This is Joyce, how may I help you?"

"Yes, Joyce, this is Annie Steinhauer, mother of Stephanie Steinhauer. I don't suppose you could pull her out of class so I could talk to her for a moment, could you?"

"Is it an emergency, Ms. Steinhauer?"

"Well, not really."

"Then I can't pull her out of class." Annie can almost see her lick the tip of a pencil before she holds it to a piece of paper. "Would you like to leave a message?"

"Then it's an emergency."

"And what's the nature of the emergency?" Joyce sounds skeptical.

"I think there's been a death in the family."

"You think?"

"Yes."

There is a pause in which Joyce does something on the other end to regain her composure—there's a whole list of things Annie's been taught to do in a situation like this: punch the squishy back of her chair, squeeze a stress ball, bite her knuckle/tongue/pencil, roll her eyes, hold her breath and count, flip off the phone (though, Joyce seems to be a little more professionally composed than to flip off a phone in a public school), and Annie has used each and every one of them on her own job; she thinks it's almost funny how this is a battle of in-the-phone-business people. But Joyce

comes back on, firm, but collected: "There is no family emergency, is there, Ms. Steinhauer?"

Shit. "There might be."

"Listen, if you want to come down here to speak to your daughter, that's your business. But I'm not going to pull her out of class to chit-chat." There is another pause. "You've called here before, haven't you?"

Annie hangs up. It's all right. She wasn't planning to work any more today, anyway. She watches for Sam to appear and hover on the perimeter of the floor of cubicles as she shuts down her work station and gathers her purse. He is nowhere she can see. She makes it all the way out to the car without being spotted and thinks maybe this will be her lucky day. It's only half-past one, and the sun's brightness seems to be shining out from inside a jar: the edges of everything—the low brick building, the parking lot, the row of beat-up cars, her own hand in front of her holding the car keys—have softened and begun to blur into one another.

This is one of those moments. There is a clarity in the way she paces one foot in front of the other. It reassures her that yes, whatever she is doing (at this point she hasn't exactly made up her mind what that is) is right. The pace of her step, the angle of her shoulders, the way the seat belt buckle clicks definitively, how she remembers to check her mirrors and adjust the radio station before she puts the car in reverse and slowly press the accelerator: the sign of order. And if she continues at this pace, in this direction, then what? All the good she has deserved will step forward, come bubbling up to greet her, as if to say, yes, this is all for you. You are a fine woman, a fantastic mother who should be proud of her daughter. Continue doing what you have been doing, and you will be pleasantly surprised. And yes, she will go to Stephanie's school, pull the girl from class, and take her somewhere—she'll have to decide where later—special, where Steph will know she is loved.

Maybe they could go to the salon, get matching pedicures—with the leg sugar scrub and everything—or get their hair shampooed, or go try on prom dresses, or maybe they'll pig out on hot dogs and custard. Except Stephanie will say that's all frivolous, and that it serves no one but themselves (again with that sense of moral superiority from Tom), and she'll want to go to an art museum. That might not be so bad.

Annie is so caught up in her reverie, she misses a turn and becomes disoriented for a moment. She is embarrassed, though she realizes there is no reason to be: no one knows it's a mistake but her. Still, now her rhythm is off; she has to turn around, and she won't recognize the street from the opposite angle. Plus, she'll have to make an unexpected left turn, which always freaks her out a little.

She drives the proper route without any further mishap, but she's lost that sense of confidence. She pulls into one of the guest parking spaces at

the middle school, a low building with a new-looking façade of light brown bricks. A sign out front spells out the school's name and cheers on their mascot, then announces the final day of school—so much later in the summer than Annie thinks it should be. She may pull Stephanie out of school earlier than that for some other undetermined family emergency.

As a visitor inside the building, Annie is directed to the office, where she'll have to sign in or out or maybe both. While she was hoping to not run into Joyce, she isn't surprised, really, when the woman with short, dark hair and severe-looking glasses scowls up at her from behind a nameplate that reads "Joyce Francks."

"May I help you?" Joyce's voice is even more piercing in person.

Annie draws herself up in an attempt to regain her poise. "I've come to pick up Stephanie Steinhauer," she says. "My daughter."

Joyce's eyebrow twitches almost imperceptibly, but she maintains the professionalism it has probably taken her years, decades maybe, to fine-tune. "Do you know what class she's in?"

"Uh, no."

"I'll have to look her up, then," Joyce says, then turns to her computer and starts typing and clicking. "S-t-e-i-n?"

"Yes. She's in seventh grade."

Joyce nods, as if she already knew this. "Looks like she's in Mrs. Roberts' class. One moment, I'll see if I can't send her." Joyce picks up a telephone, dials a number, then waits. "Mrs. Roberts?" A pause. "Could you please send Stephanie Steinhauer to the office? Her mother's here to pick her up." Another pause. Joyce seems to be listening intently. "Oh, okay. Thank you." Joyce hangs up the phone then looks up at Annie. "Mrs. Roberts says Stephanie isn't in her class—hasn't been all hour."

"What?"

"Was she in her classes this morning?"

Annie's fingers have begun to tingle. Her face feels cold. "I don't know. Should be."

Joyce turns back to her computer. She types and clicks to a different screen. "Wonder if she's been absent all day. Are you sure she came to school this morning," Joyce looks over the rim of her glasses at Annie, "or did you go to work and leave her at home to get to school on her own?"

Of course she left Stephanie at home this morning. She does that every morning, and she gets to and from school just fine. There's never been any trouble. "No, it's not like that," Annie tries to explain.

"It looks like she's been absent a lot this year," Joyce says, squinting at the screen in front of her. "Fourteen times since the beginning of the term. Daughter been sick a lot?" Joyce looks doubtfully over at Annie.

"No. She's healthy. She does her homework. She's—she's responsible."

But Joyce is already referring her to the school's truancy officer. Joyce is

pointing down the hallway, farther into the building and handing Annie a slip of paper—a business card. Annie takes the card and leaves the office, but instead of heading deeper into the school, she turns and exits the building. The air, she realizes, is humid. It feels like tiny waves constantly breaking on the tip of her tongue. She must sit down. There, on the curb, her knees bend and she plops, heavily—in the way she has seen fit-throwing children do. What is this? Stephanie is missing. As a habit. She has been missing. She has always been missing.

What has Annie done? What has she been focusing on? Her hand, there, in front of her face, with the card in it. With the black letters printed on it. Someone's name. And grass beneath her. The walkway in front of her is free of cigarette butts and gum-spots, but the smell of rot wafts from somewhere. It means something.

She moves to her car, shuts the door. Sitting in the driver's seat used to frighten her, both in darkness and in daylight. In her mind, there was always someone waiting in the back seat to steal her away to commit God-knows-what with her before killing her. But at least then she wouldn't be alone. This may be worse.

A train whistle blows—always, this town and the trains bullet-ing through—and Annie thinks of wheels on a track, how they roll on and on. They flatten pennies, disregard newly-shined copper and anything else standing in their way. Steel crushes copper and bone and flesh and asks no questions.

Annie closes her eyes and leans her head against the cool window. When she gets home, she will find Stephanie lounging on the couch, reading a book. They will talk. They will discover Stephanie feels the need to rebel against being the adult, against all the responsibility, which will be yet another thing for the two of them to work on. But for now, Annie pictures the way Stephanie's hair hangs dark and straight and almost solid against her back, and Annie wants to roll through the rest, past the hurt of having her daughter leave, past Stephanie's own hurt of finally understanding Annie, on to the end, where they sit and laugh about the times when they were first on their own, two uneven wheels bumping along, before they found their own steel. But right now her head is filled with the image of Stephanie's hair, twisting and wrapping around her throat, pulling and holding steady, and no matter how hard she tries, Annie cannot pull the hair away from her daughter's neck; she cannot picture her face.

Amanda P. Hartzell

Out of Sofya

Even after Sergeant Kercher lost all his toes he stayed abroad for the stray dogs, the clink and chime of street vendors and white minarets of the Aya Sofya. By now the dark pull in him was a silent one, like a shadow on snow. After it had detained him in Istanbul for a decade, he went home to find his little brother Malcolm building explosives. Allegedly. It was hard to tell. Bed sheets slung from one corner of the room to the other, and parting them Kercher saw inside Malcolm had built a secret room of plywood, shoddy and hammered, with one entrance door unlocked but Malcolm made Kercher swear—as a brother, on his life, on Frida Guthrie's—that he would not, absolutely not, look inside until Malcolm was ready.

Kercher swore. He walked without shoes in his sleek pink prosthetic feet to try and appreciate the work. Explosives. Malcolm at twenty-seven had dropped out of community college twice and dealt pills. His face was broader, pale. He gleamed with a waxiness reserved for fifty-year-old women who looked thirty or for the religious. Minus the construction the apartment was the same, messier, had the cracked tile Kercher hated and the mock adobe fireplace. Old streaks glistened around the wall from Frida's hands.

Anyway hell maybe it's not explosives, Malcolm was saying. Motes of sawdust circled his head. Maybe it's a rocket ship, a time machine. Maybe it's an elevator to the end of the world.

In Turkey a man called Akif tattoos around Kercher's chest and back and shoulders the ceiling of the Aya Sofya. His arms spring with hair so that at a glance, Kercher imagined a black bear nosing up beside him, each pang of the needle, bear teeth attending to careful little bites. Akif has no tattoos himself. When asked, Kercher tells him he lost his toes to a childhood infection. The city is skeptical of Americans, especially American soldiers. Men rip him off, children pick-pocket, a woman in the market says it's a shame he only lost feet and not brothers. She is uncovered, a tourist maybe, another cause of trouble. On the street in above-ground days he learns to go without uniform and feed the stray dogs and could count his money in Turkish and tip well when he wants.

They share a coffee before each session. Akif speaks English like trying on clothes. "The cardamom, it is very good."

"It is." The flavor is just one part of the otherness keeping him abroad. All the strangeness keeps him from himself.

"You drink it," says Akif as he dips in ink the buzzing needle. "You agree."

Turkish to English comes out simple, factual, urgent. You must do this. You must see that. You must understand. His soldiers find it hostile and robotic but for Kercher it carries hypnotic insistent charm. At first Kercher was disturbed by his need for it, but soon like any other need it made even fear fall away. When he speaks Turkish he imagines having another face and that is okay. Back home people drifted so far from themselves they wound up unconvinced by anything.

Kercher requests the tattoo slowest on his upper ribs where the needle comes less like a sting and more like an excavation. Kercher considers his bones an inheritance—not of family, but of himself unknown, that deeper down his structure dove the more foreign it was and yet revealing to what was nearest his surface. Akif laughs when, grimacing, Kercher tries to articulate. "Whatever is inside you," says Akif, "be afraid but not surprised. It is only you."

Before the tattoo he and Malcolm were both as freckled as springer spaniels. In the dry cool evenings the brothers sat thin and shirtless on the rooftop of their apartment complex. They chucked stones at traffic below, watching expensive cars drag race down Menaul Boulevard, and never crash, sometimes pull into the drive-thru for burgers and limeades delivered by girls in yellow stripes and rollerskates.

From the roof they could spot Malcom's girlfriend Frida Guthrie leaving her shift. Her riot of dark hair zigzagged between crowd crush. She worked downtown in a television appliance store. She hated the chatter of boxed black-and-white faces and didn't even care for the moon landing. She was trying to get a friend, who had loaned her skates, for a recommendation at the drive-thru. Kercher tried not to stop in the television store often. It smelled like the mechanic's with its stripped cement floor and water-stained ceiling tiles. Frida drifted absently between heaps of curiously handled things. He went past hoping it was busy so she wouldn't notice him searching out her face.

Friday nights, Frida came over and rollerskated around the brothers' apartment, which wasn't very big and she wasn't very good. She stabilized herself with the wall and her hands left grease stains from the French fry boxes she brought over and Kercher loved her because it was much easier to love a thing he didn't know. She smelled like salt and agave. This was just before the army sent him to Turkey. On weekends he trained at Sam Houston but it didn't seem like a big deal. He was fanatic about kayaks, homebrews. Confusing ideas impressed.

The three sat drinking beer on the couch as the record player taught

them Turkish phrases. Frida said it was easier listening to a broadcast with a face but harder to remember what was said, so she preferred the record player for language over television. She promised to safeguard it when Kercher was gone. In a month he flew to a training base in San Antonio, then to Istanbul. He lived six months in an underground bunker guarding missile silos on the edge of poppy fields. They stash beer in the waste cans in case they ever need to see their job through. It is 1972. When the record turned scratchy Frida and Malcolm grew bored, started kissing. Badly, all head tilts. Kercher watched for a while then sulked around the apartment shirtless and stubbing his feet on the uneven tile. Looking for a glass he found instead the first pill containers, elegant and yellow, that Malcolm stashed in the rear of the cabinet. He put them back carefully as if finches in a cage. From the fridge he drank cranberry juice straight from the carton until all that remained was syrupy residue. He didn't want to take care of Frida but he wanted the crispness and distress of her. She was like those rare afternoons school had left out early for a rainstorm so the kids could squish between their toes red soil. She could swear in Spanish and Yiddish and her favorite word was this city, Albuquerque, because she told him, "If you stare at it long enough it looks upside-down." He glanced into the room at her, her head tilts, her legs weighted by skates, and wanted to replace all his organs with stones.

Three weeks later, Kercher walked Frida down to her car on a Friday night. She had gotten the drive-thru job and to celebrate stole a Porta-Color from the television store. Malcolm hooked it up, but Frida in her excitement barely let the brothers watch the news. She wanted to explain how the machine worked, more than what she got to say to ignorant customers—about the thin steel sheet with small holes, how it separates the colored phosphors, how it filters the rays from the electron guns, how it's called a Shadow Mask. Annoyed, Malcolm finally switched the set off and retrieved instead the expensive whiskey he'd bought from the increasingly quick cash from his deliveries. The three drank until Malcolm passed out and Frida, the night blue in her hair, said she should go. Out by her car Kercher swiped his mouth against hers quickly, couldn't help it, pushed a hand beneath the waistband of her shorts. Frida was a sort of cautious kisser with him, she kissed like she might arrange glass bottles on a ledge. A certain morning Kercher noses out of the bunker and sees a Turkish fleet of tanks pointing back at him, the nervous private who wraps Kercher's mangled feet in an hour pushes a phone at his ear and it's President Ford, who speaks like a sitcom father, who wants to express his appreciation and assurance that despite how things look it's all going to be all right. They'll send in planes. They'll fly low. They'll wave back and forth glimmering mean and playful at the tanks and the roar settles anxiously in Kercher's chest next to the

darkness, the dark in the shape of himself, and he closes his eyes and thinks of the Aya Sofya until it feels part of him, visible and blue and gold. The saints on the ceiling are staring down watching cars race. One on the ceiling is missing and it's Frida. Kercher imagines what Frida is doing right then at work or to his brother, if she's using the wax he mailed for her rollerskates, what dumb decorative shit she put in her windows. Later after the tanks recede he finds the stray dogs dead with bloated stomachs surrounded by vomit, and his soldiers laugh at him saying he must be feeding them poison. Hours later a dog returns alive. Kercher charges it, kicks and torments it, yells deep from the body inside himself. When the dog runs off and stupidly circles back he drinks a beer and loads his gun, undecided but deciding as it trots closer.

The apartment collapsed in small ways. Tools and bottles and bags of pills cluttered most counter space. A pile of VHS tapes rose in a faded stack by the decade old Porta-Color, now a paperweight for magazines when all the windows were open. In the kitchen clustered juice cartons, bolts and nails, empty beers with small dents, and Kercher saw the three old layers of them again—he and his brother and Frida—pinging pennies off the cans when they were through learning Turkish or kissing or wanted nothing to do with either if the night was especially hot and still. Plenty of times he and Malcolm tried to lure Frida to the rooftop just to see what might happen but she preferred the tug of gravity on her skates, which with pride she refused to take off, and said watching the car races gave her anxiety. It was hard enough surrounded by the nervous speed of men in the television store—their sweating faces, sunspotted hands fiddling with the dials and bunny ears and trying to sweet-talk her into reducing the installment plan.

While Malcolm hovered by the phone Kercher parted the bedsheet curtain and stared again at the indiscernible structure his brother built inside. Malcolm swatted him away. "You swore," he said.

"I swore." Kercher held up his hands. "But you can tell me, can't you?"

"You'd have to see it."

"How long did it take you?"

"You've been gone awhile." He glanced back to the phone expecting a delivery. "Also Frida wants to see you. She's coming over."

"Oh yeah?" Kercher quieted, listened for any ticking behind the structure but there was none. Bullshit explosives, he thought. "She's still around?"

"Just this weekend. Down from Taos. She wears all this breathing cotton now. Chopped her hair off. She has jade earrings shaped like ostriches." There was fleeting talk years ago, Frida wrote, of trying for a baby but then she sealed up inside herself and took off and Malcolm, preoccupied with business and jittery besides, eventually forgot he missed her.

She wrote to Kercher when Malcolm didn't. She said the sort of desperate things that made Kercher afraid to come home. He wadded up the letters in Istanbul wastebaskets with the beer, afraid to see them existing side by side with Frida herself. "Where are the records?" Kercher asked, but Malcolm hadn't seen them in years, and Kercher imagined Frida listening to the quiet crackling turn at night and thinking of him in his white stone city.

They microwaved freezer-burnt pizza rolls and talked about their plans now that Kercher was home. Malcolm was between landscaping jobs but looking was hard when he could wake up and drink cucumber water and build shit in the living room until someone called to get high. Kercher, for all his trouble, was honorably discharged. He had checks to give Malcolm but didn't want to let on the reason he'd come back, to pay his brother out of his hopelessness. It had nothing to do with Frida, nothing, who had become her own kind of mosque-turned-museum, a cold place to worship and then to remember with no feeling at all.

He and his brother drank. Malcolm wanted to see his mangled feet but Kercher refused. Circling in his mind lived the dog and the lowered gun and the methodical aim it took to hit every last one, and how the private wrapped his feet and found the medic chanting until it became true that it was an accident. Malcolm shrugged, laughed, wiped his mouth. "What? You don't trust me? So what if you're ugly? You've been gone so long you forget you're ugly?"

Kercher eyed him without speaking. Visible ugliness had never occurred to him. What he felt inside him was beyond a face.

"Whatever man. Hell. What is this shit?" Malcolm swung lightly at Kercher's arm where the color lived in part. Just to get Malcolm to shut up, Kercher removed his shirt and revealed the tattoo. In the city sandy light the dome's gold sunbursts glowed, sprawling out into mosaics on the tympanum, saints with long Byzantium noses, Arabic medallions.

"What is it?" asked Malcolm. The tattoo was peeling and beginning to crawl.

"It's where I lived with a stranger for years," he said.

Suddenly with a speed Kercher hadn't anticipated, Malcolm ripped the fistful of his shirt from his hand and threw it in his face. Then he grabbed Kercher. They struggled, hands to forearms. A small calm voice buried in Kercher sang Don't Swing Don't Swing as he swung. The first impact came like a mosaic breaking into smaller, more beautiful kaleidoscopes, and each time his fist hit jaw and neck came relief, growing with each grunt, snap, break. He was still swinging as a distant stranger over the hill closed in, not unkindly but stern with knowledge, and as Malcolm hit the floor and stilled the traveler looked up into Kercher's pale gasping face and smiled, as pleased and threatening as Turkish tanks, because finally it was just the two of them and they'd heard so much about each other.

Frida arrived in his headache. He looked around. He was on the couch with a bag of frozen vegetables so badly melted he must have been dazed a while. He wasn't sure how much time had passed. The dead seemed to have extra limbs, more weight. Frida stood over him talking clear and robotic in a way she hadn't written, and Kercher had the nervous riot in his stomach the way he did feeding stray dogs in Turkey. They ate out of his hand but always nipped his palm. Her face had lengthened and tanned like a pony. Yes, ostrich earrings. She told him ten years ago out by her car after wriggling away from his hands that she wasn't scared but bored. He remembered the floral tang of her on his fingers. The boredom frightened her, she said and, skating away from him, it made her want to see less of the world. A hazy nothing stared out at her from everywhere.

Frida sat on the couch unoffered to her. Kercher mumbled and tried to sit up.

"What happened?" she asked. She didn't mean his feet. She touched the frozen pack on his swollen head and paused. "Where's Malcolm?"

"Nothing. Never mind. You can imagine." If there was one thing he didn't mind about the accident in the bunker, it was that when people saw the missing parts he could remember what the whole was like. Now the world seemed bigger. He had been afraid of this second person, but the company gave him confidence. Frida wore thin ballet flats and her knees were dusted red. There wasn't soil like that in Istanbul. There was cobblestone and brick and white stone walls. He didn't want to talk, only touch. They sat on the sofa without doing either and stared at the bed sheet distorting the thing Malcolm built.

"That new?"

"Not sure," said Kercher. So Frida hadn't been over in some time. "No. Don't think so."

Frida studied him. "Are you new?" She rose and without a word he followed her to Malcolm's contraption.

She parted the bed sheet. Kercher pushed open the unlocked door and they stepped inside. It was dim. Frida hadn't yet noticed what the sheet covered in the corner. There were pulleys and columns and buttons colorful as the Turkish Delight candies in the market. A wicker chair. Smells of industrial glue, cedar, burnt sugar. Kercher still couldn't tell what it was, and Malcolm would never be able to explain.

Frida twirled in slow and deliberate circles like a wind-up toy. "Wow," she said over and over again, "oh wow."

Kercher stared at her dusty face, her breasts he could cup each with a hand. She didn't ask a single need of him. She never looked so necessary. He pressed his palm down on a row of buttons and they flashed through his skin in a way less like light, more like bells. A whirring began. He suspected this was a place to become more of what you were and find the ease of that burden. Frida's face chimed and when he saw her Kercher for the first time heard the ezan. It startled him. It trembled, soaring.

Justin Herrmann

The Rat, the Panther, and the Peacock

We aren't allowed to touch skuas or any other wildlife. Skuas look like dirt-colored seagulls, but are the size of chickens or infants and eat fish, trash, and smaller birds on the coast of Antarctica. As a janitor at McMurdo, the largest Antarctic research station, I can eat four times a day. Prime rib on Sundays. Lobster on holidays. My coworker Samantha McCallister introduced me to, among other things, Frosty Boy, the twenty-four hour soft serve machine. I gained twenty pounds my first season.

Early that season I sauntered toward my dorm holding a sprinkled sugar cookie. As I brought the cookie to my mouth, it was torn from my thick-gloved hand. The skua's beak or claw nicked my cheek. Samantha watched from the deck of her dorm.

"Hard way to learn that lesson," she said. Then, "You're bleeding." She insisted skuas carry disease and took me to her room, which smelled like wet socks and was shared with three galley workers, all on duty. She cleaned the cut on my face with Heaven Hill vodka. Then she poured vodka in blue plastic galley cups and handed me a stick of gum.

"Chewing gum while you drink this cheap stuff," she said, "makes it taste like you're drinking the fancy flavored kind."

The bar, Southern Exposure, opens three mornings a week for night shifters. There's three guys to every girl at McMurdo. Other men would buy Samantha drinks, Samantha who described her own face as a cloud with glasses. Because I'd leave with her when the bar closed most mornings, men called me fortunate. I was still married back then to a good woman in the Midwest, though with each weekly phone call, there was less to say.

Skuas congregate at food-waste bins behind the galley. My third season a skua stuck its head inside a no. 10 can that'd been knocked from a food-waste bin. It was going after dregs of tomato paste. A loader hauling a pallet of Amstel Light may or may not have known about the skua before he ran the can over. The equipment operator was terminated.

Samantha didn't return to McMurdo after her first season. I wrote a few letters early on to keep her informed about things down here. After a while

I stopped writing. Sea ice grows thinner each year, but human life changes little in the Antarctic.

My fourth season a Skua showed up at South Pole Station, some 800 miles from McMurdo. Nothing other than bacteria naturally lives at the very bottom of the world. The unfortunate bird likely followed the annual traverse that hauls over 100,000 gallons of fuel to South Pole. Too far to make it back to the sea, the bird was discovered in a heap near the summer dorms. Maybe a lost gamble, something in the bird's blood telling it creatures headed this direction become easy meals.

Waste at McMurdo is separated into more than a dozen categories including mixed paper, non-ferrous light metal, food waste, and so on. Most waste is shipped off the continent annually. There's a category known as skua. It's for useful reusable items like clothing, books, toiletries. Many nights after we'd clean Crary Lab bathrooms, me and Samantha would check the skua bins in all thirteen dorms. Once I found a Member's Only jacket. I gave it to Samantha for Christmas. She wore it the rest of the season. She gave me a beaded necklace with a thin, curved bone hanging from it that she found in skua.

"Surely," she said, "nothing promises a blessed life like a lucky raccoon dong."

Samantha once told me the skua is the rat, the panther, and the peacock of the Antarctic. Today I received an email that read, *Mike, everyone loved Samantha. She was special. It turns out she didn't love herself as much as we all did. I'm sorry.* I scavenged through skua. I was meticulous. I found that same Member's Only jacket. I dug through the pockets, hoping for a sign. Deep within the lining, through a small hole in the silky pocket, there was a piece of hard gum, wadded back in its Juicy Fruit foil. Of course I took the gum from that foil. I rubbed it between my thumb and forefinger. I left the dorm, walked through the galley pad and faced the congregation of skuas perched on the food waste bin. I offered, the gum on my open palm, waiting.

Jessica Cuello

If

If the father has no bread,
he is an empty pantry, the prank call
the child tries out on the mother,

a voice in the walls, the closet
with its unwashed smells.
If the father has no rent,

if his teeth are missing, he's the bum
next door, the phone off the hook,
idle in the devil's hands.

If he lives next door
with a woman not the mother,
he is the neighbor. If he shakes her

until the bruises and the black eye,
until the police in the foyer, he is the criminal.
The apartment is long and narrow,

a tunnel from end to end.
The front door is a portal to the back,
where a head the child saw last,

saw last. The last time. Then never again.
The back steps are a concrete plank
where he will walk, expelled.

If the father has a first name, is not called father,
if he's a reference to a weak time, if the father
can't be counted, can the child?

Melissa Cundieff

Ellipsis

> *The drowned boy was 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, from Syria, part of a group of 23 trying to reach the Greek island of Kos.*

In a lit, almost drained pool at night,
I once saw a snake swimming back and forth,

back and forth. He slid his head

up and against the yellow cement wall
to smell with his tongue the distance out.

His shadow was the only familiar word

from an otherwise estranged body.
We must stay calm, I told him, though

he was trapped and I was walking

away. Between fidelity and rescue,
the make-believe limitations of choice.

For the rest of my life, I will tack

the image of the snake to a boat
rowed slowly. The boy I'll never know

will dip his oar into the ocean,

recite his best wish, over
and over. Back and forth.

Trying to think of a next, selfish line,

I'll hear his breath like white noise.
(*Looking past the water's surface, pennies*

in blue sleep. Is it not built into our eyes

to be sorry?) But then, I will decide
to listen, much too late to adore

the boy. Whatever's left of him

will kiss an obscure shore—as if
the boy could ask: *Do we not all have*

some place more human to go?

Reilly Cundiff

58 bald eagles

and then we encounter our dead—
stiff feathered bodies, weighed down by their improbable
flight, laid rigid in rows, oily wingtips
touch, measure each other against this:
    one more dead, one more mouth crusted shut,
    one more pair of eyes to see no more,
    to be seen no more—

You've already seen it, the sign. Lead poisoning
registers in the neck flopping side to side, unable
to rise, eyes that glass over, a thought that glosses
over imminent danger—
you could almost say the creatures kill
themselves, the way they become roadside
targets, wingtips soiled by the surface, mouth full
of carrion, blue muscled meat, weighed down
by lead.

This is our new art of wreaking
symbols, to kill by accident and not give name
to our neglected intent—
to kill, to spell our mistakes out on every
dirty surface with a body that's stopped
beating, breathing, being.

The target you want to hit is red—
but yellow and orange will do. Why don't you shoot
more than once? Why don't you let the creatures
kill themselves?
    A lead bullet fired falls apart—as if it knows
    it doesn't belong in the body, shell fragments leak
    and perforate, looking for exit signs.

This year's symbol: the white becomes gray, the black
browns, the golden mouths pierce through blue

skies, and we
        don't have enough names for the dead
        we make do with counting
we line rows with rigid bodies,
our intent disguised by the sheer spectacle
        of body
        after body
        after body
all touching, mistakenly laid wingtip to wingtip
        as if to form
one broken body which should be enough
to rise up
to look for the exit sign.

Raphael Dagold

Night and a Morning and a Day

Later when the cops knock him down
to the broad walk under a mid-block streetlight
yellowing the Polish church which gongs the hour

and where is the car after the furtive note
slipped to the fast-food clerk at the first escape.

Later under a thin towel beneath horse-flies
on a scraggy beach beyond the campground
where in steep pits we catch overnight toads
shocked unmoving in our small hands at morning.

Later when her cheek is yellow not looking so bad.

Later when the young goat dies.
When the young black goat's blood drains
behind the farmhouse in the slaughter-shed
by the bay where crabs skitter in shallows
quieted by green reeds.
Later when our younger brother bawls.

Later at the strong aunt's house in a morning
and a day and a morning where we can't be found.
Later when we send the youngest in to wake her.

Lauren Davis

Pilgrimage to Saint Sara

Down in the crypt, you will lift her skirts.
I wait for you above, wandering
tight streets, spending our last coins.

I must give you appropriate time.
I will not rush you, as you did not rush me
when I entered her home beneath the church.

Feel it when you arrive—the heat
from the candles hits at the last step.
Her grotto holds another hemisphere

where even smoke makes shadows. At my visit,
I watched gypsies fingering the flamingo pink
and gold gowns drowning her small frame.

Three jeweled crowns on her head. She swelled
with silk. Grown men wept. Little girls kissed
her toes. I looked into her eyes and felt nothing.

I looked and looked. In hushed tones I tried
to call her forth. And then, when for a moment Sara
and I stood alone, I placed two fingers to my lips then hers.

If you do the same, you will see why I came
to you last night disrobing not only my clothes.
Touch her. Know her. Then to me, new, return.

Rebecca Dunham

The Fall of Manna

after the painting by Fabrizio Boschi (1594-1597)

I do not need to be told
how we are forced to gratitude

through famine and pain.
Forty years of loss: my woman's lot.

I cast my eyes down, clutching
this vacancy like a humble pewter

bowl holds its emptiness,
its doubt. I am a mouth

full of tamarisk, of dust,
faith's word mere silver lichen.

The heart stutters and stops.
Death is a shawl we stretch our limbs

beneath. Sunken ribs, no heart
or lungs to swell and contract,

nothing to break the quiet.
—Sand fans the emptied sky—

How much I would give for relief,
for love restored, for a gift that

comes before it is too late.
Tooth-white, this rain of old age.

How much I desire my hair
to whiten, not with labor, but with

the flowering drift of promise.
To hear manna fall

not in silence but in ash-song—
words woven into hymn,

gentling me like a mother's hand
skims her daughter's head.

To lower my bowl, scoop up
hope and then, greedy, to lift the hem

of my dress to cradle and catch
whatever else I may have missed.

Saddiq Dzukogi

Unseen

The landscape retracts into the night, a room large
enough to swallow all things endured;
a butterfly flirts with the flame creased into the butt

of a cigarette my father drops on the pavement.
I can go on, let my voice duplicate
every salted wound on your body—

until my stories become your bones—
go on until my body too becomes your body,
while each abides its own shadows. Please

be each stretched leaf, five fingered palm, a wet reflection.
Float with me on this long procession of silence, cigarette smoke
released from between open lips,

the night's transfiguration, an owl,
the landscape alive on its back, as if clinging to the place
it began. I can go on until my mouth dries of songs—

my tongue vinegar, my mouth opens to an olive O
as silent as a cemetery; be part water, this part
where the sun's rays can't trace a presence

heavier than water; my father as he enters,
and me waiting all day to be unseen;
my mother's palm ready to absorb my loneliness;

a house lead-footed in loneliness—
no one here can save me.
All of us at the dining room table

eating warm eggs dipped in vinegar
and no one can save me;
voices lost in airless fur, waterless air, you

drifting farther away and nothing left, nothing
but my father's stifling voice.

Devi S. Laskar

Stalks
(Excerpt from the Novel, *Shadow Gardens*)

Without fanfare or complaint of the number of days eating peanut butter and ramen noodles, old bread and leftovers of rice and lentils, Swapna's and Saras' mother had a single mission and her father obeyed. Once a year, they were to go home to India to visit the family. Six weeks. No exceptions or conditions. The first three weeks were expended on the father's side, his parents, his older brother and the cousins. They lived in the family's expansive apartment in a fashionable side of town, on an upper floor of a tall high-rise, a beautiful view of south Calcutta from the windows. There were late night parties and excessive Hindi movie watching, drinking *Limca* out of chilled bottles and sneaking off with the older cousins to eat samosas from a street vendor. Bonus moments when the aunties pressed the cousins to buy them spicy snacks from the shop two blocks away and everyone stopped to swoon over Amitabh Bachchan billboards that advertised his fatale role in a new film. The girls' father peeled off the colorful bills from a wad of money tucked in his wallet as he paid for every excursion, every snack, and each bauble from the stores, for all of the relatives and their children. Mr. Mazumdar's grin toothy and unrelenting.

The last three weeks of vacation were at their mother's childhood home, with their grandfather and grandmother, their uncle and his wife. Quieter and charming, it was a house with a yard. Swapna and Saras were left to entertain themselves, and fell in lock step with their grandparents' routine of worship and cooking, trips to the market, and of course, winding the old grandfather clock, an old relic from the time when the British Raj ruled India. Mr. Mazumdar visited a few of those days, but he didn't spend the night. He returned to his brother's residence before dark, begging off dinner with a thousand excuses readied at the lips, all of them distilled from the idea that if his wife could go home to her parents, then he could do the same and for a time return to his bachelor ways.

Even as a child, Swapna couldn't help but think that she wished her grandfather would reset her mother every day, like he did the clock. In India, Mrs. Mazumdar was a different person: well-dressed, gregarious, patient. It was the heat, the familiarity of the language and food. The way the entire landscape made her mother happy. In India, Swapna could look at the entire scene of her

life in America, and take stock from a safe distance. She knew her mother did not like living in the United States, had no interest in it, had no desire for it to continue. Mrs. Mazumdar was alone, abandoned, laughed at for her dress, her accent, an inability to really become American. Mrs. Mazumdar frequently wept, lived entirely in a blue terry-cloth robe and only managed to get out of bed when her husband was due home in an hour and expecting dinner. Swapna also knew her father wasn't going to change his plans because his wife was homesick. Her father didn't change his plans for the weather or for any person; he simply carried on oblivious to anyone else's wants or desires. He had his expectations, and Swapna knew that her mother did her very best to superficially maintain them around him, but on those rare occasions when her father had gone out of town, presumably for work, it was dreary for the girls. They ate leftovers, if there were any, or made a sandwich. They did their homework, started the laundry, washed the dishes, and ran off to take a bath and hop into bed. All the while, their mother stayed in her bedroom, sitting on the carpeted floor with her back against the wall next to the bathroom door, crying, or alternately sitting in bed, head propped up by all the pillows, watching TV in black and white on a tiny box that rested atop the dresser across the room. Mr. Mazumdar was employed but Swapna did not know what he did for work. Every time that she asked, the answer changed and her parents' moods grew bleaker, and the tension between them almost tangible.

Still, in India, the Mazumdars were different. Swapna and her sister were lavished with new clothes, sleek styles with tiny mirrors stitched on the hems and the wrists; sweet treats, trips to the Victoria Memorial, taxi rides, trips to the zoo and picnics at the botanical gardens. There were servants, some of them hardly as old as the girls, who knew how to cook and clean, who could expertly mend a pair of pants or negotiate with the vendor for a bushel of pygmy bananas or a drink from a green coconut. Swapna and Saras marveled at them, but even in Calcutta, there were no friendships to be had outside of the cousins. It was strictly forbidden to play with the help, or even to distract them from their chores and unending responsibilities. Still, Swapna had a favorite, little Neela in her grandparents' house, who had a great big laugh for such a lithe body, and whose smile remained constant, no matter who was berating her for an incomplete or shoddy job of washing clothes in a cold bucket of water or dicing vegetables that were to be added to the lentil soup and should have remained whole. Swapna always remembered Neela's face when she came back to her home in the States, a home that felt especially empty after the bustle of her grandfather's house. Neela's smile was a beacon and Swapna adopted that smile.

Mrs. Mazumdar was determined to take a piece of her homeland back to America each time she was forced to leave Calcutta and return to

her sleepy Georgia hamlet. It was her way to maintain the picture of India she'd created in her mind, an India that was still her home, and one she did not have to routinely abandon. She was the kind of woman, it turned out, who was intimate with the changing faces of time in only the way that bedraggled travelers could be. She knew when she flew toward Asia, she was losing the hours somewhere over the Atlantic and then Eastern Europe. She would land and an entire day would be lost, and it would be night, and she wouldn't be able to sleep. She knew as she was flying back to the mall-like quality that was America she would gain back those hours, and there would be the shoppers at the mall, in the concourses and in the terminals, poised with their shiny bags and shinier credit cards. She frequented different airports and knew them as well as housewives in America knew their favorite grocers, their favorite tailors, the best butcher. She possessed this information the way others possessed a second language. But she didn't want this knowledge. Instead she wanted to turn back the hands of her father's clock. One year she gathered all of her mother's worn, tattered saris and took them to a blanket-making shop several miles away. Mrs. Mazumdar paid for a taxi that day, one way toward the shop. She had a large suitcase full of these saris, and the day before the family returned to America she traveled again via taxi—one way coming home—with the suitcase bulging at its seams.

Mrs. Mazumdar wouldn't open the suitcase in India, but once they reached the airport, cleared customs and entered their home, she cut the beige rope, and like a magician appearing out of cake everything burst open—silk saris, refurbished and stuffed with quilt material, made into beautiful throw blankets that Mrs. Mazumdar did indeed throw around the house that year, covering the sofas and the beds, covering the backs of the chairs in the kitchen. One of the smaller ones, frayed along almost every edge, was quite undersized and their mother covered the front seat of the car with it. Swapna's and Saras's father just rolled his eyes toward heaven but said not one word. He had abandoned smiling years before, and his daughters could not remember a time when they had heard him laugh outside of India.

The next year, Mrs. Mazumdar came home with a suitcase full of stainless steel plates, bowls, cups, and glasses. Beautiful latticework ornamented the plates; tiny engraving that created a floral pattern and shimmered in the lights of the kitchen. Their father rolled his eyes again and grumbled that these dishes did not mesh with the modern conveniences of America, that the microwave he bought three years after everyone else had them in their kitchens could not be put to use with this tableware from the past.

One year, Mrs. Mazumdar brought back buffalo carp, deeply fried and packed in several layers of plastic. Mr. Mazumdar should have said

something but he didn't. He was quite partial to the fish and knew his wife would make a pungent curry when they returned to America. The luggage was lost, of course. The parents concluded they had not tipped the porter enough at the Calcutta customs checkpoint, and blamed one another for their own inherent stinginess. And the suitcase spent three days traveling in the underbelly of various airplanes across three continents.

The luggage finally did arrive and the Mazumdars were almost too frightened to open it, to find the remains of old, fried fish smelling up every inch of the suitcase, and then, when opened, their house. Surprisingly, there was nothing to report. The fish was tightly packed in plastic and resting comfortably between two packets of hand towels, the other clothes were unsoiled and merely smelled like Calcutta, its air, its salt, its dust, its people breathing in and breathing out its dust and air and salt. The Mazumdars hugged each other with joy. Soon after, the family was at the table eating the curried fish and hot rice. At the end of the meal, Mr. Mazumdar smiled genuinely for the first time in years and emitted a grand belch. Everyone laughed, even Saras who found bodily noises and functions to be most disgusting.

The fish incident led Mrs. Mazumdar more boldness in the coming trips: milk-based sweets, and pomegranates, pygmy bananas, some guavas from an orchard of a distant cousin's.

One summer, Mrs. Mazumdar stood next to a cluster of hibiscus trees that were almost as old as she was and said, "Oh, if I could have my own garden, descending from the flowers in this perfect garden."

Swapna overheard the tone of her mother's voice, and knew that what her mother wanted to do was smuggle. Mrs. Mazumdar wanted to take away from her parents' home the very thing that made it her parents' home and her hometown in India: not just the memories, and the familial and the strangers' use of Bengali, the colorful sari's, the sweets and the pungent curries but the grander things, the clouds, the melancholy of the sun as it hit the laden laundry lines on the flat rooftops midday, the unrelenting beat of the monsoon season, the leaves on the neem trees and the fragrances of the family garden; the beautiful movement of the flowers like a symphony, all of the hibiscus and jasmine and lilacs, and lotus like instruments, the garden an opera house, and all of the congruent music that played together and stood apart too like all cacophonies do, to drown out the silence that was her America. Then and there sprouted the idea for taking home several sets of cuttings from several different flowers, excluding the lilacs because Saras was allergic. Swapna and Neela were instructed to put the stalks and pollen-covered stems of the two different colors of hibiscus, the red and the yellow, as well as several cuttings of the jasmine, into wet plastic sheets and then gently wrap towels over them to keep them insulated.

"The belly of the plane is very cold, the stalks will survive," Mrs. Mazumdar said, confidently.

Four suitcases were going home, one for each member of the Mazumdar family. Swapna's suitcase had the red hibiscus in hers, Saras's luggage had the yellow hibiscus, while her mother's and father's each had one of the jasmine cuttings. On the plane, Mr. and Mrs. Mazumdar whispered conspiratorially during the time they had to fill out the customs declarations forms. There in bold red letters it specifically warned travelers not to bring in food or live animals or plants. Mr. Mazumdar wanted to lie and check off the boxes that declared they had nothing, but Mrs. Mazumdar did not want to be caught in the lie, and possibly pay a severe fine, maybe even spend a night or two in jail. So the couple checked no to the food and live animals boxes and left the plant box blank and unchecked.

From the air, the city below looked like one giant mall. Boxy white buildings, and a steady stream of blue and green and gray and black cars crawling on the roads single or double file, like ants. From the window seat, Mr. Mazumdar beamed with relief. The girls were torn, wanting to go back to their grandparents, but excited at seeing again their school, their streets, and the rooms of their house. Even once the plane landed and taxied to the gate, and she stepped onto the concourse, Mrs. Mazumdar felt she should be armed with a credit card and a shopping cart, that she wouldn't be welcomed back until she'd bought something. During the walk through the concourse she saw people on the other side of the glass walls buzzing around, purchasing gum and candy and sandwiches, hot and cold drinks; there was a group in a darkened room, smoking, and watching TV but she hurried by them, not wanting to be seen somehow. She found herself wanting to stop and buy anything, everything as she walked to the customs area, an expensive pink leather purse, jelly beans that had the flavor of apple martinis, scarves that sported the no doubt genuine spots of a leopard, something to mark the moment that she'd allowed herself to return here, to this life on Sycamore Street, marked by time spent in front of a small black and white TV in her bedroom. Instead, she stood in the back of a long line of "permanent residents," and sighed.

Swapna and her sister were Americans, by birth, so they stood with their American passports in the line for returning citizens during customs. Their parents were Indian citizens with green cards, so they stood in a separate line. Typically, Mr. Mazumdar would saunter through customs, and threaten to leave the rest of the family at the airport and rush home. But on this occasion, it was his daughters' turn. The two girls vaguely pointed in the direction of the green card line when the customs officer saw two American minors traveling unaccompanied. Their bags were not searched and they were merely welcomed home and told they could go. The parents

craned their necks above the tall Sikh family ahead of them, looked past the colorful turbans to watch their daughters exit and disappear from view. Fortune didn't smile upon the parents. They were randomly selected to have their bags searched and the customs agents and the customs dogs became apoplectic when they noticed the still-living jasmine plants in the couple's suitcases.

"How can you break the law?" one fat American agent asked, waving her fat arms the color of sugar cookie dough into the air, her face a mask of moral superiority.

"I didn't realize," Mrs. Mazumdar murmured twice and again, running one hand through her hair. "I didn't understand."

When she wanted to look helpless, Mrs. Mazumdar was the consummate actress, and both men and women would take pity on her and release her from the rules that everyone else had to follow. The agent searched thoroughly Mrs. Mazumdar's bag and confiscated the flowers, some hibiscus oil used for controlling dandruff and a box of flaky sweetmeats that her parents had snuck in at the final hour of packing, knowing how much their granddaughters were crazed for them.

Mr. Mazumdar was not so lucky: they led him and his luggage away and questioned him in a small room with no windows for two hours. They finally released him but stripped his luggage of anything deemed remotely controversial: the plant cuttings, of course, some shaving cream and toothpaste, two mini-bottles of Scotch that he'd helped himself to when the flight attendant had to assist a woman who had thrown up in her seat in the forward cabin during their duty-free sale, leaving behind a cart of goodies such as liquor and perfume, scarves and jewelry that were still expensive despite the lack of tax. The irony was that Mr. Mazumdar didn't drink, but he had a friend in the Indian community who did and Mr. Mazumdar had thought to present him with a gift.

In the meantime, Mrs. Mazumdar could not attend to her children or to the cargo they were carrying. In the first half-hour, she thought she saw Saras walking alone to the women's restroom, and then Swapna lingering by the bathroom doorway until her sister emerged. Some customs agents asked her, and someone had brought her first a bottle of water and then a murky cup of tea, if there were other people she was traveling with, if she wanted to track them down. But Mrs. Mazumdar was afraid that their bags would be searched and she didn't want to get her husband into more trouble, since no doubt he was telling several lies in order to get out of the mess her best-laid plans had put them in. She kept the two customs agents entertained with small stories about growing up in and around Calcutta, living in a joint family with tens of cousins and never a moment of silence or peace. She noticed an hour after Mr. Mazumdar had been detained,

there was no more sign of her American daughters, no sign of their luggage and their pieces of her mother's garden. After another half hour waiting game, Mrs. Mazumdar's throat ran dry and the words stopped flowing out of her, and she began to cough. More Styrofoam cups of tea and milk and juice appeared, and more bottles of water. This had little impact on Mrs. Mazumdar's cough but it did cause her to look around in search of a restroom. The customs agent understood immediately, and pointed her in the direction of the women's bathroom. Mrs. Mazumdar took her purse but made a small joke of it by leaving her suitcase at the table where she was sitting. "I trust no one else will go through this," she said. Everyone's laugh around her was polite.

She walked briskly to the toilet, eyes searching for her children, and after using the restroom, she faced herself in the mirror under the flickering fluorescent beams. Her desire to create a new world out of the familiar world of her parents' was to be the death of them. She knew she shouldn't have done it, but it was hard to avoid the lure and tug of the old world. Mrs. Mazumdar knew she should be more concerned about her girls, but she couldn't leave her husband behind. She washed her hands and then dried them with a rough paper towel. She was still beautiful, she with high cheekbones and big eyes, the long hair, the decent figure unmarred by her laborious birthing. Mrs. Mazumdar sighed and left the bathroom.

Another hour, and Mrs. Mazumdar saw her husband emerge, bedraggled and unfocused. He found his wife among her new friends, the customs agents, and smiled warily.

"Goodbye," Mrs. Mazumdar said, rising.

The customs agents bid their farewells dutifully, and the couple each picked up their own suitcases and trudged out the door.

They stepped outside and Mrs. Mazumdar groaned at the sight of the skyline, the feel of the sun against her skin, the hordes of people walking in and out of the sliding glass doors. She didn't want to continue to her house. She merely wanted to return home to her parents. But Mr. Mazumdar surveyed the horizon as if it were the near boundary of his fiefdom, deeply inhaling the air and beaming in the afternoon sun. "Where did you tell the girls to wait for us?"

"I didn't," Mrs. Mazumdar's voice was weak, distant.

"Well, you must have seen them," he said. "You have had to wait for hours. You drank so many cups of tea."

"I saw them an hour ago," Mrs. Mazumdar said. "They were waiting near the bathrooms."

Mr. Mazumdar looked east and then looked west, and saw no one that even remotely resembled his daughters. "You lost them? Here? At the airport?"

"You only gave them $10 each. They won't get far." Mrs. Mazumdar's

voice was sanguine although she herself was becoming quite worried. She bit the edges of her fingernails, starting at the pinky and moving all the way around both hands.

They were supposed to have called their Indian friends, Mr. and Mrs. Goswami, when they cleared customs and they were to get a ride home from them. But the flight had been delayed several hours when the family switched airplanes in Amsterdam. Then the debacle during customs. They could still call Mr. Goswami, but then they would have to explain that they didn't know where their daughters were. The couple was forced to dig through their purses and wallets and find another ten or fifteen dollars and step onto the city bus that would take them into town, and from the central station transfer to another bus to take them home. The ride was especially long in light of the missing members of the family, and Swapna's and Saras's parents muttered and bickered quietly in a steady stream of insults in Bengali as every passing mile brought them closer and closer to their house.

"Your daughters are the most stubborn, obstinate, girls in the world," Mrs. Mazumdar said. "No one will marry them."

"Your daughters learned every irresponsible lackadaisical action from watching you," Mr. Mazumdar replied. "Do you think that I don't know how much television you watch? How you sit around in your nightgown all day?"

Mrs. Mazumdar looked out the window at the streets and cars and people whizzing by, and wished she were among them, anywhere, with anyone, doing anything at all, cooking over an open flame, cleaning toilets, singing on corners for money, rather than sitting in the stiff seat listening to her husband's unceasing rebuke.

They exited the bus, carrying their largely depleted suitcases feebly, one foot in front of the other, their luggage bumping against their thighs and knees, the handle awkward in their sweaty palms wondering what lay ahead. They turned the corner and their pace grew faster as they inched closer to their lawn, their car parked in the driveway, their front door wide open but the screen door in front of it shut, their daughters and their daughters' suitcases nowhere to be seen.

Mrs. Mazumdar dropped her suitcase on the sidewalk and practically ran across the front lawn toward the front door. "Someone broke in!"

In Bengali, he yelled, "Hey, what are you doing?" and then stopped where the bag had been flung and picked up his wife's suitcase. "What am I, your coolie?"

Opening the screen door just a crack, Mrs. Mazumdar wasted no energy slipping through to the foyer.

Her husband continued to yell: "No one broke in! Your foolish daughters came home without telling us!" He marched with two suitcases on the sidewalk and then up the driveway.

Mr. Mazumdar pulled at the doorknob, and barreled his way through the door, dropping the bags in the foyer next to his wife's shoes and marching into the kitchen. He glanced into the den and saw his daughters' suitcases open and the contents strewn about the floor. He saw no one when he entered the kitchen but then looked through the sliding glass doors to the backyard. Mr. Mazumdar's daughters, still dressed in the matching pink salwar kameezes they'd worn on the plane, stood next to their mother, who was cradling the cut flowers in her arms like a baby.

Mr. Mazumdar looked at his reflection in the glass and saw a disheveled man with angry eyes and for a long moment, did not recognize himself or the faded-green wallpaper in the kitchen or the white face of the cheap clock above his head. He heard the sound of his own breath and the ticking of the second hand, and stuffy silence of his house. He opened the sliding glass doors, and yelled, "I told you so!" He slammed shut the door and waited for a response but his wife and daughters appeared not to have heard.

Adam McOmber

Plumed and Armored, We Came

Calcutta, 1859

Father took me to the hot country. The air was full of flies. Rows of poppies grew in fields like faces in a portrait gallery. I walked with Father along a sunbaked road. He was dressed in a suit of white linen. He looked, to me, like some bright spirit or a figure of the upper air. Mother and Thomas had been dead for almost a year. I missed them each day. Father missed them too. He did not tell me so, but I knew his feelings well enough.

As we walked, I remembered Mother's face on the morning of her death. She lay in her bed: eyes open, mouth open. She had a startled look. She held little Thomas in her arms. His eyes, the lids of which had the most delicate of blonde lashes, were closed. I'd wanted to touch the lashes one last time. Father would not allow me do so. He said I must let Thomas rest.

A tall servant with an umbrella followed Father and me along the hot road. The servant attempted to provide shade. When he lagged, Father spoke to him unkindly. "I cannot see the fields in all this dreadful light," Father said. "And if I cannot see the fields—if I cannot count the poppies—do you know what will happen then?"

The tall servant did not reply. Perhaps, he spoke no English. Or perhaps he did not know the answer to Father's question.

I knew the answer well enough. If Father did not accurately assess the fields, his employers at the East India Company would be upset with him. Mr. Watts and Mr. Brandt would send Father a letter. Father would read it. He would grow angry. And then he would toss the letter into the fire. This had happened once before, shortly after the death of Mother and Thomas.

In the heat of the afternoon, milk leaked from the poppy flowers. It seemed to me the flowers were crying. I asked Father the reason for this.

He looked up from the leather journal where he made notes and said: "It's because they recognize us, Victoria."

"The flowers recognize us?" I said.

He nodded absently. "They see through time," he said. "They know the splendor of the Empire. 'Plumed and armored, we came. Plumed and armored—'"

I did not understand his meaning. But this was not unusual. Father often quoted from old poems he'd memorized at school. Mother used to laugh cheerfully at his pretenses. She'd attempt to pull at his mustache. And then Father would laugh too.

That evening, Father went to his study to write a letter to Mr. Watts and Mr. Brandt. I lay down and closed my eyes in my hot little bedroom. Soon, I fell into a state of fitful dreaming. In my dream, I wandered in the shadow of a golden cliff. At the base of the cliff, I found a city made of bronze and stone. I walked the empty streets of the city until I came to a large, pillared house. It was clearly the home of a gentleman. I knocked on the door. I felt a strong urge to tell the owner of this house that I was lost. I wanted to ask for his help. But when the door opened, there was no gentleman to greet me. Instead, I saw what I, at first, took to be a large poppy flower. The flower grew in the shadows of the foyer. Its meaty green stalk rose from a crack in the marble floor. Its variegated leaves were as large as human hands. The flower had silky red petals and rings of black stamen. A yellow pistil extended from its center. I stepped into the foyer of the house. The closer I drew to the flower, the more I began to believe it was no flower at all. It was far too large. It towered over me. And it made a soft humming sound, as if it was singing quietly to itself. I came to stand beneath its leaves. Then the flower shifted. It lowered its silky head and looked down at me. It had blue eyes. Blue like mother's eyes. And its mouth hung open like mother's mouth when she was dead.

When I awoke, I was crying. I found I could not stop crying.

Father came to the doorway of my bedroom and peered in at me. His dark hair was disheveled. His eyes were red-rimmed. He held the tincture bottle, the "health remedy," made from the milk of the poppy flowers. He had given the health remedy to Mother before she died. She had a nervous cough. Mother, in turn, gave the health remedy to Thomas for his crying.

"Are you unwell, Victoria?" Father asked.

"I am," I said, putting my face in my hands. "I am unwell." And it was true. The tears would not stop flowing.

Father came to sit on the edge of my bed. "You must take some of this," he said, indicating the small brown bottle. "But we must not give you too much, Victoria."

"Not as much as Mother took," I said.

Father nodded.

"And not as much as Thomas took either."

He nodded again.

"Be careful when you put it on the spoon," I said.

"I will be careful," he replied.

Father produced the spoon from the pocket of his suit coat. He poured out a small amount of dark liquid. I knew it would taste good, like sweet treacle.

The next day, Father and I attended a party in a grand garden. Father said the garden belonged to a prince. Many poppies grew in the

prince's garden. Their red petals looked so fine in the bright afternoon sun. White peacocks roamed the stony paths. Father ventured off to speak to another Englishman, someone he said he recognized. While he was gone, an old woman came to stand beside me. She wore a yellow scarf. I imagined she might be the mother of the prince. She showed me a set of tattered embroideries. At first, I did not understand what was depicted in their beadwork. Greenish bodies stood upright in what appeared to be open stone graves. Several of the figures were men. There was a woman too. And there was even a little child wrapped tightly in a winding-sheet. All of the figures were corpses, and all were awake, wide eyed. The woman in the yellow scarf touched the jewels in her embroidery. I recognized some of the jewels: pearl and moonstone, topaz and carbuncle.

"What is its meaning?" I said. "Please—"

The woman continued to stroke the jewels.

Father appeared beside us then, brow furrowed. "What is this?" he asked the old woman.

She looked at him. She did not appear startled or afraid.

"Why would you invite a child to look at such things?" Father said.

The woman folded her tapestries carefully. She walked away, leaving us alone.

"Was that not the mother of the prince?" I asked Father.

"It was not," he said. "Most certainly, it was not."

He took my hand and said he had learned we were to be introduced to the prince's chief advisor. It was an important meeting, according to Father. He and the advisor were to discuss the status of the fields. "Such introductions, they rattle me," he said. "Nerves—not good at all, Victoria." He took the health remedy from the pocket of his suit, unscrewed the cap and put the bottle to his lips.

I watched him drink. After he was done, I reached up, fingers splayed.

Father started to take the spoon from his jacket, but I shook my head. He put the bottle in my hand. "Careful now," he said. "Not too much."

I lifted the dark bottle to my own lips. I thought of my dream. I thought of how cruel dreams could be. I drank some of the health remedy. I thought of the old woman's tapestries. I drank more. The sweet tincture was so delicious in the summer heat.

Father's eyes had turned dark and glassy. He squeezed my hand as we walked. "'Off they set, those fine and flowered guards,'" he whispered keenly, "'across the emerald plane.'" We moved together toward a stone house where the prince's advisor waited. "We will show these men, Victoria," Father said. "We will show them how fine—"

I slowed then. My face felt hot. And my chest was suddenly too warm. I tugged at Father's hand. He paused. I stumbled.

Father tried to catch me, but I slipped through his grasp.

A white peacock opened the fan of its feathers.

I lay in the grass of the garden and found I could not cause myself to breathe. All around us, the red flowers were turning their heads to look at Father and me. They had no tears in their eyes today. As far as I could tell, these flowers had no eyes at all.

Orlando Ricardo Menes

La Luz School

Without the large plastic sign above the weathered front door, no one driving through Little Havana would have thought this two-story house was actually a school. Its flat roof had clay rain spouts like broken incisors. A faux chimney (typical of 1920's homes), and stucco smeared on like frosting on a Duncan Hines cake. The jalousie windows had been wired shut and duct-taped; wall-unit AC's had been jammed through sledge-hammered masonry. A small cottage, hidden under foliage, was home to Don Paco, a *guajiro,* or Cuban peasant, part-groundskeeper, part-janitor, who wore a straw hat with little bells and steel-tipped construction boots for protection against that stray machete swing. He liked to show off his prize rooster and give us mangoes he'd plucked around the neighborhood. Fewer than two hundred children attended La Luz between the fifth and eighth grades, spending their day listening to their teachers talk about the light of God, the light of reason, etc., but mostly just pinched one another, threw paper wads, or put their heads down. *Los loquitos*, or the crazy ones, would run off to a ficus tree in whose shade they French kissed or toked on roaches that the neighborhood cruisers had tossed onto the grass. To prevent these escapades, Dr. Gil, the owner and the principal, had hung fly strips on the tree, like birthday-party streamers, but they didn't care, so it was a common sight to see a boy or a girl entangled in sticky shame.

The neighborhood had just a few *americano* hold-outs who'd put up chain-link fences with Keep Out Signs wired every few feet and German shepherds that barked furiously at the ice cream truck, the *churro* vendor, or even at the slightest rustle of leaves on a mango tree. One of the survivors of this Cuban invasion was a red-headed woman who always wore shorts despite her legs having melted away with cellulite. She'd spend hours each day watering her St. Augustine lawn and tending to her many trees (poinsettias, octopus, sausage, etc.). She never spoke to us as we walked by on the sidewalk on our way to school, her dog lunging at us and smashing into the fence, but just stared at us with the hose spraying in our direction. One thing we learned right away was the sacredness of private property, unlike in Cuba where you could walk into anyone's home by just saying "Buenas." "Get close in any way to an *americano*'s house," our parents warned us, "and you'll get gunned down." Stories got around of *cubanitos* being hurled grenades or shot with cannons. *Don't you know their homes are armories?*

If many Cubans were suspicious, many *americanos* were resentful. Some stayed, but most left for the "real" Florida, the Dixie Florida, which was north of Wildwood where the Florida Turnpike ended. Traitorous politicians, they'd fume, had allowed us to invade with our language, food, and customs. *How loud you are, how you eat so much garlic, how you can't drive*. Worse still was how we had defaced those houses we'd taken over, perverting their simplicity and sense of order. Gone were their cherished open porches, now transmogrified with terracotta-tiled roofs on pink Doric columns. Their rose beds taken over by scurrilous yuca and malanga bushes. Their immaculate lawns torn up for gravel and cement niches large enough to house three-foot statues of St. Lazarus and Our Lady of Charity. Families would leave their *promesas*, or ex-votos, by the saints' feet, which to the *americanos* was either idolatrous or plain hocus-pocus.

Hundreds of Cubans were arriving each day on the Freedom Flights to be processed at El Refugio, the Refuge, at one time an elegant Mediterranean-style building on Biscayne Boulevard but now a warehouse of offices and depots where the refugees would be processed by the INS and its doctors, then receive boxes of surplus American cheese, peanut butter, luncheon meat, etc., which they had never eaten in Cuba and would store away as good-luck charms in their cupboards right next to the sacks of Mahatma rice, slabs of *tasajo* (dry-cured horse meat), and dark bottles of sweet Malta Hatuey they drank with condensed milk.

Then there was my own family who had arrived from Lima, Perú, where my Cuban mother and father had immigrated to in the late 1950's. All three Menes children (two boys and a girl) were born there and thus we had a vague idea of our Cubanness until we moved to Miami in 1968, after a leftist general's coup d'etat, and we began to live with our aunts, grandmother, and one uncle whose turbulence would have been shocking to the well-to-do Peruvians we socialized with who were rather quiet, genteel, and deferential, at least in public. It was in *la sagüesera* (Cuban pronunciation of southwest), where I was transformed into a Cuban-American in that duplex with terrazzo floors my father had bought for his family after they'd escaped communism on one of the last regularly scheduled flights out of Rancho Boyeros. By this point my father's furniture factory had already been expropriated, but he still had managed to take out a substantial sum, which he had unfortunately depleted through dumb investments. We would be moving soon to Madrid to start anew, which meant saving through a strict budget. My mother stopped going every week to the beauty salon in Coral Gables, and we had to wear last year's clothes. "People are more civilized in Europe," he'd say. Attending expensive Ransom Everglades or Gulliver Academy would've been out of the question for us, but La Luz was inexpensive, and we'd be safe among the other Cuban children.

Despite having founded such a modest school, an *escuelita* that would have belonged in the cow pastures of Camagüey, Dr. Gil saw himself as a messiah for the exile community, his sacred role of protecting children from the corrupt influences of American culture, so rampant in the public schools, in particular free sex, which terrified our parents like nothing else, even more than smoking marihuana. Girls had to go out with a chaperone, usually an aunt or a grandmother, who was responsible for guarding the girl's virginity, but would usually pretend to be sleeping as they smooched (done discreetly, of course) in the movie theater. The boy was usually older (by five or six years), so that if things went amiss and the girl got pregnant, he would be in a position to marry her with a steady job and a modicum of maturity.

With a PhD in who knows what from the University of Havana, Dr. Gil was quite an odd fellow with the face of an owl, checkered polyester suits, and dark eyeglasses. He never smiled and always talked about how great Cuba was before Fidel Castro and how we, the new generation, should never forget our homeland, and, in fact, make it our mission to get on a boat with the guys from Brigada 2506 (who trained in the Everglades for the invasion of invasions) and with the blessing of Our Lady of Charity kill the dictator with a gun, a knife, even our own hands. He liked to prattle about his original La Luz in Havana, which he claimed was so good that the French Ministry of Education wanted to use it as a model of pedagogical excellence.

To get to the classrooms on the second floor, we had to walk through a concrete path with plastic Santas inside terracotta planters filled with pebbles. Hung around the santas' necks were messages that Dr. Gil had penned in his Palmer script to inculcate us into civilization, as he liked to say, such as Be Polite, Show Good Manners, and Say Excuse Me. Then after having passed through this gauntlet of decency, we would walk up a tile stairway without any cover, which meant getting drenched in those frequent downpours. The yard had no grass, only a carpet of cement full of cracks and weeds. There was a basketball court with one hoop, the pole somewhat twisted, the plywood backboard cracked and pitted.

There was no official cafeteria, just a screened-in addition next to the kitchen that had at most two picnic benches, so most students had to sit outside on milk crates. Each grade had its own half-hour, and students either brought food from home (medianoche sandwiches, papas rellenas, ham croquetas, etc.) or ate the hot lunches (some kind of meat with rice, whether white, yellow, or with beans) prepared by las señoras who called us *mi corazón*.

It was in that make-shift cafeteria that we had our dances, we boys usually dancing by ourselves because the girls thought we were too young, too *fofos*, or doughy soft, while they preferred hombres, which meant guys eighteen or older, with beefy bodies, muscle cars, and thick gold chains

with saints' medals that seemed to weigh down their necks. Nonetheless, I excelled at spinning (way before break dancing) to 45s by the Jackson Five, my classmates clapping in a circle around me as the ever-vigilant Dr. Gil scowled by the kitchen door.

Each grade had one main teacher, and for the eighth grade it was Señora Salas, whom we just called *maestra* even when speaking English. She was a small, thin woman with prim brown hair and a face scarred by acne, which she said was a sign of being a noble person. She was patient, kind-hearted, and soft spoken. I wanted to please her as I would my own mother, so I memorized with the kind of reverence we give to the catechism, the capitals of every country in Latin America, including those miniscule West Indian islands, and the three Guianas we studied in our *geografía* book printed in Argentina. Be proud of your Spanish heritage, she'd say, "be proud of your language. Don't say tuna when you could use *atún*, or cloro when you could say *lejía*." Tuna meant prickly pear in Cuba, so eating that would be really dumb, she joked. Señora Salas would even stay after school, without extra pay, to tutor me in algebra whose abstract equations tormented me, as opposed to her lessons on Cuban history which I found delightful, mostly because they were delivered in her maternal voice. Those lessons would have been torture no doubt if delivered by the stern Dr. Gil.

All my classmates had been born in Cuba, mostly in the big city of Havana, or so they said. Beatriz had long wavy brown hair and a pimpled face, though her voluptuous figure made the skinny girls envious. Sarita always smiled despite being too poor to have her teeth straightened. Inés had a large nose but boasted of having eyes greener than the sea off Varadero Beach. Jaime came from a family of lawyers who were now delivering milk and orange juice for MacArthur Dairy. He hated every food except for his mother's skirt steak fried with onions and pounded so flat that it was a just a rag of meat. Jaime hated rock and roll, so he sold me his copy of Alice Cooper's *School's Out*, including the white panties that covered the LP. He'd bought it by my mistake at Zayre's thinking it was pop music in the style of Three Dog Night. Our newest classmate, a transfer from up north, was María Jesús—Jersey Girl we called her—who refused to wear the white waitress-style uniform and so endured constant detentions for coming to school with leather pants and pump boots. Jersey Girl didn't like to speak Spanish, listened to Janis Joplin and the Jefferson Starship, and wore a hippy headband around her shaggy hair bleached to a spectral white.

Above all the others was the irrepressible Moya: fat, big-headed, with an Errol Flynn peach-fuzz moustache, who was nonetheless a baby, so pampered by his mother (who took him by the hand to school in his uniform ironed with so much starch he could hardly walk) that we joked he was still breastfeeding. "*Mamón*" (sucker) we'd yell at him, and he would, in a fit, throw his perfumed shoes at our heads. He wouldn't stop laughing and

giggling, especially when he heard words like *tubérculo* and *urano* during science class (*culo*, ass; *ano*, anus). He'd continue snickering and sticking his tongue out even as Señora Ríos escorted him to Dr. Gil's office to get wacked by a mahogany ruler he'd brought from Cuba, the same one those Dominican friars had used on him to great result, Dr. Gil would say as he wielded it in front us like St. Michael waving his flaming sword.

Moya almost got kicked out when he made fun of our English teacher, Mrs. Williams, calling her The Hanging Gardens of Babylon because of her large breasts which she failed to constrain with a wire-rimmed brassiere, something that a Cuban señora would always wear as a sign of her *pudor*, her Christian modesty, in a world rife with temptations of the flesh. Perhaps because of her faith in simplicity, Mrs. Williams never wore make-up nor did she dye away those ashen streaks in her waist-length hair. Cubans considered this unfeminine, or, worse, slovenly. Her blouse was also rumpled and frayed. Her bell-shaped skirt looked as if it had been sewn from a tablecloth.

Mrs. Williams was so white (not like my aunt's milky skin, which tanned) that without a parasol her arms and face would burn and crackle like rice paper. But she was gentle and kind, laughing at Mora's jokes and not once sending him to Dr. Gil's dungeon. Every day she told us how patience was the greatest virtue for Quakers like her, a religion that believed in the goodness of people, though the word itself made some of us laugh since *cuaquer* was the oatmeal that our mothers made with evaporated milk and loads of sugar on Sundays when breakfast was supposed to be American, unlike the usual buttered toast with *café con leche*.

Mrs. Williams would gather us outside into a circle, which she called the wheel of life, then talk to us about the virtues of democracy, how we should love those with whom we disagree, to reject violence of any kind, to love animals as well, even more so when they bit us. One morning we discovered that Dr. Gil had put small windows in the doors, but Mrs. Williams chastised him in front us for violating our privacy, trampling our liberty, and right then he fired her and told her to leave the premises right away or else he would call the police, and we (some in tears, others in silence) watched her from the window drive away in a dented Dodge Dart.

In the back of the schoolyard along a fence of corrugated steel, Dr. Gil had built a concrete platform where, in-between the Cuban and American flags, he would scold us for our trespasses then make us sing the anthems of both nations. Afterward we'd recite the Ave Maria to Our Lady of Charity, Cuba's patron saint, her statue inside a glass cage, which in turn was inside a niche not unlike those of the Roman catacombs. And it was on her feast day, May 4th, just eight days before my birthday, that I committed my first crime in the eyes of God and Dr. Gil. The entire school body—uniforms pressed and starched, black shoes buffed, hair combed and lacquered—stood in

formation carrying bouquets of lilies neatly cut and bow-tied. We moved in straight lines toward her statue, whose glass we'd touch and kiss, then drop the flowers and quickly walk back to our classrooms to continue our lessons.

However, I did not drop my bouquet reverently but instead tossed it into the air, laughing loudly and dancing to unheard music. I was swerving around the students who called me names as they pushed against my chest. Dr. Gil was in an uproar: how outrageous, how sacrilegious, how unpatriotic. In his Cuba I would have been shot by a firing squad against a wall. In Old Spain I would have been burned at the stake by the Holy Inquisition. In the Roman Empire I would have been crucified on the Appian Way.

I had just swallowed a bunch of pills Jersey Girl had brought to school, and I was stoned for the first time in my life. Red ones, green ones, yellow ones, some round and hard, others soft and oval. "Hippie candy," Jersey Girl called them, a birthday gift from her drug-dealing cousin who lived in a commune in Coconut Grove. We had taken the pills right before class. I was in love with her, but she wouldn't kiss me, said I wasn't a man. Jersey Girl was used to twenty-somethings who knew how to touch her, she said, knew what jewelry to buy so she would skinny dip with them in South Beach and make love in the warm waves. I was a virgin without any money, so I had no chance with Jersey Girl. But I wouldn't give up, wouldn't listen to reason, so I thought that getting high together would improve my chances at becoming a real man. How I hated being young and a virgin too. It was okay for Our Lady, her son Jesus, and all the saints, but not for me.

Dr. Gil shouted, "Menes go to my office," but I fell several times on the concrete, scraping my right knee, which made Moya (of all people since I'd teased him so much) take me by the arm, patting my back, all the way to the dungeon. It felt like hours as I sat on a wrought-iron chair. My feet tapped or twisted on the floor as I stared at Dr. Gil's diplomas and awards nailed to a wall of cheap paneling. My pants felt wet, so I have must have peed on myself without knowing. The blood on my knee had already hardened.

Dr. Gil ambled inside with a silver-handled cane like some English lord, something new, I thought, which he said was for punishing bad children, though I was too old at fourteen to be redeemed. How he'd found out I'd taken pills, I didn't know. Perhaps Jersey Girl had confessed in another room. Dr. Gil called my mother, telling her to come right away: "Your son has committed a grave crime. He's a drug fiend, more perverse than Satan himself." His phone was a heavy rotary-type I'd seen in movies from the 1940's. As we waited for my mother to arrive, he said I was a boy more shameful than those sinners who killed Christ, a boy more wicked than those communists who raped our island, a boy destined for ignominious failure from the time he wakes up to the time he fell asleep.

Then he said, "*Eres carne de prisión*" (you're prison meat), four words

that his lips, his tongue pressed on me like a branding iron. I cried and howled, while he said nothing. My mother walked in crying and tapping her heart: "Es mi culpa, es mi culpa." I could not stop weeping either as Dr. Gil repeated what he had told me, repeating "*carne de prisión*" like some curse not even the Virgin's intercession can take away.

"I should expel him right now, banish him from this sacred school, this refuge of decency," he said. Mamá composed herself enough to make a deal with Dr. Gil, and she wrote him a check for $300 so I would finish the school year at home: no expulsion or suspension, no record anywhere to taint her firstborn. "We're moving to Spain anyway, so my son will have a new beginning there," she told him, and we drove back still in tears in her silver Grand Prix.

We would be moving to Madrid in a couple of weeks, and my mother was selling all our furniture and household goods. My father was already there preparing our apartment with new furniture from the store he'd just bought from a Spaniard who had owned several upholstery shops in Cuba and was lucky to have left with all his money before the communists had taken it away. My sister and my brother continued going to La Luz since, according to Dr. Gil, my crime had not tainted them.

My punishment was to be grounded in my room for those few weeks. My mother would bring my food on a tray, and I had to eat on the floor. I did not want to upset her anymore so I complied, enduring the lack of a phone, television, or my bicycle. She made me swear with my lips on the Virgin Mary that I would be a good boy from now on, that I would not dishonor my ancestors, especially her Catalan father who had died when I was a toddler but his soul was still alive, "a brilliant math teacher," she said, "a Mason and a seer of spirits, an intellectual of the highest order. "He was a serious man, like you," she said, "but now I am not so sure." And she gave me a photo of him when he was young to think about my fate, to think about virtue. Carry his image everywhere you go, she said, so he can bless you from heaven. She didn't slap my face nor continue scolding me. We sat on my bed, small and weak-springed, then she clenched my hand, so strongly she seemed to be another woman, and we prayed together to Abuelo for blessing, her face tortured in the way I imaged Mary's was as she looked at her only begotten son on Calvary.

Kerry James Evans

Whataburger Is an Allegory for Everything

Mostly, I'm discussing Egyptian hieroglyphics
and how they pertain to the Hummer
double-parked beneath the orange
and white-striped awning—the A-frame
housing high school students stooped
over deep fryers. Their left eyes
obscured by locks of hair display their innocence—
their lack of initiation into adulthood,
where a snake dangles a fig at the opening
of a cave, enticing the initiate forward,
or so a *very credible* YouTube video
instructed me last night, while I pounded
half a bag of molten pizza bites.
Forgive me. My tongue is still healing,
and our country's in a crisis.
The flag tells me so, slumped and faded
like an old pair of jeans. Meanwhile,
our grease-stained youth saves tens of dollars
for the movies, where Harrison Ford
will undoubtedly portray his best version
of Harrison Ford befriending bigfoot,
only this time, bigfoot is another
middle-aged white man evading taxes—
who agreed to play the role of "Randy,"
because he "really liked the *flow* of the plot,"
but the kids buying tickets aren't dissecting
a bad version of *Cowboys and Aliens,*
they're dumping *Raisinets* into tubs
of popcorn, and poor Cal is worried
about where to put his hands
when he finally sits down, and whose advice
to take when Bev leans in, hoping that
he'll smell her appropriately-named perfume,
Juicy. He doesn't, but he does take her hand
while they embrace the awkward dark.

Later, Cal rolls the Hummer
in front of Bev's house ten minutes
before curfew, the latest pop masterpiece
dropping a baseline that buzzes the rearview
like a widow's vibrator. This flings us
fifty years into the future, where
women still live longer than men, and
children abandon the family estate
for the suburban pageant, where we find a silvered
Beverly masturbating, underwear left on,
and I can't help but wonder who
she thinks of when she arches her back
and moans. Her dead Cal
or the church deacon she sits behind
every Sunday? I'm a bit of a romantic.
Why not both? That'd make a great scene
for a wall mural—all three, alive
and made young by a painter's forgiveness.
Her indifference to ecstasy blooms
like a lotus beside the Nile, and
like ourselves returning to ourselves,
Beverly remembers when she was Bev
and Cal said childish things like
I love your hair pulled away from your face.
She wants to picture him alive, holding a door
that opens onto their youth, but she only
hears faint strands of his voice whistling
through a hearing aid—what she endures each morning,
looking in a convex mirror, applying rouge.

Allison Funk

The House Woman's Double

after the Femmes Maisons of Louise Bourgeois

I may as well have a head
which is no head, but a house instead,

though my arms like anyone else's
point north or south. Below, I'm naked

as all the unfledged.
When I extend a hand,

it may be hard to say
whether I extend it in peace,

peace or treachery.
Some see it as a call for help

when I'm waving goodbye.
You ask

what it's like inside,
if I live like a bird hooded at night,

all the day through
cooing *coo coo.*

I'll let you in on a secret—
tiny as my windows are

I can see out. See you,
while, as we both know,

you can't see in. So
let me tell you about my rooms.

Come close.
Are you picturing miniature

chairs and canopied beds,
a dollhouse stove and sink?

Mine
is more like a funhouse

with undulating floors,
trap doors and dark corridors—

most of the time I can't tell
whether I'm moving uphill

or down. And worst
are the mirrors

filled with strangers
I know I should recognize

as myself. But there are
so many of me!

You try
getting out of your head.

Colette Anderson Gill

Ghazal for Akhmatova & Petersburg, 2008

> *"Your lynx eyes, Asia.*
> *They lure into the light*
> *My buried self."*
>
> *--Anna Akhmatova*

Roofs turn to bluish dunes beside the Neva.
White Nights, we murmur, *June beside the Neva.*

Anna's sorrowful eyes and Tatar beauty
made painters swoon beside the Neva.

Mariinsky Theatre has toe shoe evenings.
Hairpins are tiny harpoons beside the Neva.

Didn't Silver Age poets rock The Stray Dog?
We haunt their cellar saloon beside the Neva.

"Motherhood, I was unworthy of it…" Her
mirrors probed, impugned beside the Neva.

Benches are missing slats. Maple leaves tremble
like veterans hawking spoons beside the Neva.

Symbolism spurned. The paradigm shifted.
Poets revolted á la Kuhn beside the Neva.

Oh, the Cyrillic! Swallow *Thanks,* say *Spasiba.*
Still, a reed warbler croons beside the Neva.

She wrote a stanza and had to char the paper.
Our limits are picayune beside the Neva.

A teen strums "Hey Jude" near a boat slip
and hoodlums stroll immune beside the Neva.

Anna's fame grew. Stalin barked, *Reel in her son.*
Envy, foul as fish guts, strewn beside the Neva.

Women waited here outside Kresty Prison.
Shared worry found its tune beside the Neva.

Surrender self-pity—that red cowberry bush
Russians don't water or prune beside the Neva.

Tonight, tycoons slurp caviar, granite shimmers.
Sailors raise a gill net, cocoon beside the Neva.

Rachael Hägglund

Mother Tongue

My grandmother talking
in the other room: I imagine

spondees flicking off the tongue
as blossoming gossip—the neighbor

is leaving her husband. Or a cousin
needs money for a surgery.

She cut *sampugita* and lilies
for my bedside and will bring me

the newborn when he cries.
Later she will pack up my old clothing

to mail to her province. And I wonder
why we choose to give worn out jeans

to people so far away. I know it is selfish
to even ask. Then I think of Elijah's mother

holed up in the guestroom of our old
house, having nearly nothing. Her child

born with holes in his lungs and heart.
Months later, his nurse would lose

her own son—freak accident
at sixteen with a rope swing by the river.

I want to ask my grandmother
of her children never born.

I think of seeing the first stillborn
and how sometimes when driving

I look in the rearview
mirror at my sleeping son—he looks

so much like the other—how is it possible
to mistake the living for the dead.

Lois Marie Harrod

The Hinged Heart

Something ramshackle
about the way the heart

opens and shuts,
its edgy little joint

flipping this way and that,
finger-fit-flopping

like a sciatic nerve.
Six am, time to feed

the hungry, but the heart is slow.
She wants to sleep.

Nothing to offer today,
no pancakes with maple syrup,

no coffee in the thermos.
Remember that motel

that was renovating its lobby,
no entrance from the front,

the breakfast room relocated
in a back suite, mirror

still hanging where beds
used to be but here's the heart

offering to fix your eggs
harder than you want.

It's the way she is.
You've seen her tumble,

kattywampus hub spring,
the panicky heart of Mother Teresa,

grimy around the edges,
better straighten up

before inspection.
Open or shut,

she expects you
to eat.

Amanda Hawkins

Plainspeak

after Camille Dungy

I wanted to be there when she died.
There is no sheltered way to say this. Today,
I watched a storm cloud hulk its way across the valley.
It took all day. A week ago the weather forecast said rain,
so I watched and waited. The sky was the deep
color of distant waves. The air
was a net with holes. The ravens
rolled off updrafts from the hills—as if swimming
and flight were, after all this millennia,
the same. I watched, and I listened. All day
the bees found the rosemary. The dark-eyed juncos
pitched their shrills under the eaves. The Tabaquillo
that creeps over the side of the cement slab porch
probably grew new cells. All day long the storm
came near, and the miraculous,
sparse tufts of grass whipped about in the wind.
The legs of the kit fox twitched.
I asked the man at the ranger station, what is this
soil's name? And he spoke like an old world prophet: Call it
sandy loam. Call it fine sandy loam. Call it unweathered
bedrock. The name, he said, and the earth's composition
depends on the area.
When finally the rains came it was late.
I heard a splash on the window pane. The wind was tossing
water at the side of the house. The bees were gone.
The juncos gone. The raven
was not in my line of sight. The cloud, once at such a
distance, hung so close it looked like fog.
I tell you this so that you will know
how much I wanted to be there when she died.
How long a body can wait.
There was the phone call the night before—
a mention of a rattle at the windows of her lungs,

but I had not the least perception of the codes you spoke.
The time is close you could have said,
come soon. The time is close, meaning, it could take all day,
come anyway.

Driving Home the Ashes

I.

A while back, a sign
of incantation: *Scenic Route Begin*. This
is the dark side of the mountains. Turn
your back on ocean—what do you see?
I see desert, rock,

another salted body.

For a stretch west—
the saw tooth fang Mount Whitney.
For a time I believed
I would scatter them in a place like this—

thought they would fit in—all sand and grit.
I told my beloved and he laughed.
Why would I want the ashes
piled up,

preserved in their likeness?

Driving this way was a detour,
something I needed to see.
Days before I decided my route: Joshua Trees,
arms stretched
like the prophet
for the people to keep on.

In the Mojave they appeared quite suddenly,
a congregation spread
at a distance
over the grassless ground.
Days before the drive I dreamed: Inland sea.

Whales, alive and writhing.
Towers knobbed at the knee.

Bone city.

II.

As a child I was afraid of desert.
Sun bleached skulls,
rain shadow,
beige broken land.
The exposed sand and rock
made me nervous.
No matter the desert was dry
not for any lack, and death a mirage—
fear is
often a fine grind.

III.

I confessed out loud: some need
to go into the heart of darkness,
the belly of the whale,
the far side
of the mountains—far enough past the teeth and over the tongue,
and then some.

IV.

The flavor of desperation
is much like chalk: What
is the flavor of ash?
What
is this
combination of salts?

When I hike the volcano I shudder the whole way.
I have just seen Mono Lake—
the south shore tufa towers of bubbled up
settled down—

calcium carbonate.
Limestone rock. Fragile,
but I still find myself
longing to touch,
pass my fingers over that white
crusted surface.

The boulders of black
obsidian, a slice
of revelation,
formation seems an end.
I heave a healing in salt tears and put my hand on its shine—
sun warm igneous rock—
it is not unlike a hard sharp wave.

V.

Something about driving the eastern Sierras makes me understand.
I am not saying I feel foundation—it is more
like the waters caught
in still shot,
the eyes adjusted to movement. Lack of nausea
rather than stomach of steel.
I think buoyancy—
the Dead Sea, my own body.

VI.

I kept the picture of a group of us leaning back as if against
a surface—floating in the brine
like pieces of pumice.

VII.

They say two things can return a lapsed believer
(or return the grieving to life):
unbearable pain
and unbearable beauty.
After I nerve-wracked my car through the needle-sharp
hairpin turns

up the road west
I saw the mountains I was in.

And instead of crying out
god damn, why the fuck,
I cried and said oh
my god,
oh my holy god—

as if in chorus.

Jenni Moody

Wingspan

It is a detail Laura realized she should have understood, but truthfully, she did not think that all of the dinosaurs would be dead.

Well, of course they would be dead, but she had not anticipated so many bones and how it would make her feel to stand among them. Laura wanted to look at the dinosaurs with her father, but one of the strollers got caught on the ramp.

"Go on, I'll be right there," he said before bending down to work at the wheels.

Laura stood in front of a stegosaurus, its head lowered as if to munch on some prehistoric grass. She closed her eyes and imagined the stegosaurus in her backyard at home, beneath the dogwoods. He snorted like the horse she rode once at a distant cousin's farm. He stamped his foot on the ground and then rubbed his side against a tree. The nameless beast was gentle like the puppy she would beg her parents for when they return home, like the dog she would rescue many years later at the end of a long relationship. Standing across from the skeleton of the stegosaurus in the cold museum, Laura was sad for all of the dinosaurs all at once. At everything they lost—not just their lives, but each other.

Her mother took a photograph of her staring at the large herbivore, and it is a photograph Laura returns to again and again as she grows up. It is in a plastic photo album her mother keeps in the hollow piano bench. In the photograph, Laura seems like a normal kid looking at the dinosaurs. Maybe a little more zoned out than others. But there is nothing in her posture, her arms slung over the rails, that reflects the sadness of the dinosaurs. And in particular, the pterodactyls.

Perhaps in an effort to give a sense of flight to the remains, one giant pterosaur remained half-encased in stone. And somehow this was worse than all of the bare skeletons.

"Laura, stand in front of the dinosaur," her mother called to her, waving her into place.

There was no barrier between her and the pterodactyl. If she leaned a little, she could reach out and touch it. Yesterday, she would have thought this was the opportunity of a lifetime. But instead she took a step forward, away from the sad skeleton, and only managed a bit of a smile when her mother prompted her.

In the gift shop, Laura found a plush pterodactyl with blue wings, a tiny smile stitched on his face. He wore a white and blue medallion around his neck with the word "Smithsonian Museum" arcing around the circle. She hugged him, and his soft wings felt like they hugged her back, comforting her about the death of the dinosaurs. At night when she could not fall asleep she placed him at the bottom of her bed, and made the bed covers bounce in gentle blue waves, imagined the sheets were the sky and he soared above the trees. She watched him with her flashlight until the fighting across the hall ended.

When they left the gift shop, it was dusk outside, and her parents decided to take the subway back to the hotel.

She does not remember why, but there was a festive atmosphere on the train. Maybe it wasn't spring after all, but summer. Perhaps it was the fourth of July, and that is why her father had several days in a row off from work. She does not remember fireworks or hot dogs or whether the car seats were so hot that her skin stuck to them when she sweated. To her the rest of the visit to DC was the flat skeleton of experience—the dinosaur poster her mother would hang in her new bedroom, in an apartment building, a year later. Only the dinosaurs survive in her memory. The dinosaurs, and the train.

Someone played music on a keyboard, a song her parents knew but she did not, and they sang along with the other grownups. Then the door between the carriages opened, and a man dressed in a suit and a top hat walked in. He did not have gloves on like the magicians on television, and he swayed a bit too much with the train, so that Laura wondered if he was drunk—and if he was to be trusted at all.

Then his hands began moving, and she realized the swaying of the train helped with the magic tricks. (Later, from her husband, she will understand about misdirection, on a level so deep she will feel it has been carved into her bones. But on the train she just felt the greatness of the magic. The extension beyond easy tricks.)

"Sir, would you mind assisting me in this next act?" The man motioned to her father to step forward.

He placed a thin hardcover book in her father's hands.

Then the magician took out a small rectangle of origami paper. He began to fold a shape, using the book to steady the paper as he creased the folds.

"You will confirm, sir, that this is an ordinary piece of paper?"

"And that this book that you hold in your hands is an ordinary book?"

Her father nodded.

With one final crease, the shape was done. He held the small animal figure up in the air for the passengers to see. It was a simple crane. The first origami everyone learns.

The magician placed the origami bird in her father's hand.

"Now in order for this magic to work, I must reveal to you, sir, a very old secret. You must promise never to reveal it to anyone. Do I have your word?"

Laura's father nodded. "I promise."

The magician leaned over to her father and whispered in his ear, and something on her father's face changed for just a second, then he smiled again. Laura hoped her father would use this knowledge to keep her family safe, even if faced with an extinction-level event.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen!" The magician spread his arms out in a grand flourish. "Let us see the crane in flight."

Laura's father raised his hand up ever so slightly, so that the crane was visible to the people further back in the train car. Then the magician placed his hands on either side of the crane, as if he held a ball between his fingertips. He pulsed his fingers against an invisible air barrier.

The crane shook a little.

Laura breathed through her nose, afraid of knocking the crane over with her breath.

The magician closed his eyes and pulled his fingers together, turned his palms up to the ceiling.

The paper crane lifted from her father's hands. Its wings flapped slowly.

Then all of a sudden they were at the next stop, and it was theirs, and they scrambled to get off the train.

She does not remember the rest of the trip to D.C. What else they saw, or even how long they stayed. In the long car ride back to Alabama, she remembers her mother reaching from the front seat, angling her arm back to hold her young cousin's foot in her hand. Then even though Laura was too old, her mother held her foot for a moment as well. Her mother's hands were always scratchy, in need of more care, and never as warm as Laura expected them to be. But her mother laughed to show Laura it was ok to be sentimental, gave a squeeze to Laura's foot, and then let go and turned to watch the road.

For years she wondered about the secret the magician told her father, but she had read enough stories to know what happens when you break a contract of secrecy. So it was only after her own first marriage fell apart that she reminded her father of the magician on the train, and asked him what had been the secret.

They sat in a restaurant, her father eating a bowl of soup that was on the ok list from his doctor. He was living in Dubai and had never remarried. She didn't get to see him so much anymore. After Laura had gone off to college, he couldn't stay in the same town as her mother. He'd skipped through Asia teaching English, seeing the sights, and then followed a friend to the United Arab Emirates where the pay was better. He had gone there to get away from old memories, but the desert had done something to his heart. More than the steak ever could.

Laura's husband had moved out of their apartment a month ago. Gone on his own expedition of forgetting down to Mexico. He already had someone else with him to make new memories.

Laura didn't tell her father this. She was still hoping that there was a way to bring things back together.

"Do you remember that magician on the train?" Laura asked.

"Yeah," her father laughed. "I'd forgotten about that guy."

Her mother had remarried and gone back to school for a nursing degree. She worked in the baby ward at the hospital, wrapping newborns tightly in blankets and pulling pastel socks over their tiny feet. It was as if she had taken all of the happiness with her when the family fell apart. Her life seemed set in stone, immutable, safe.

Laura took a long sip of her water, then put her fingers over her lips for a moment.

"Do you remember he told you a secret?" she asked.

"Yeah, that's right," her father looked out the window.

"What was the secret?"

Her father looked at her and smiled. "I forgot."

"But I remember the dinosaurs," her father added. "And how much you loved them. You kept talking about wishing you could go back in time and warn them."

And in one of those weird flashes of memory that comes when you've shared a time of your life with someone else, Laura remembered hearing her parents in the hotel room that night. The plush pterodactyl lay on her chest as she tried to sleep on the pullout sofa, the covers wrapped around her aunt, leaving Laura's feet exposed and cold. But this time her parents weren't fighting. They spoke softly to each other, aware of the thin hotel wall and the hollow door that separated the bedroom and living room. Her mother laughed, then gave a light-hearted plea.

The phrase: "Tell me."

And the soft, muffled deepness of her father's voice, responding with an answer that only her mother would hear.

In the restaurant across from her father, Laura looked at her empty hands in her lap. Palms up, pinky fingers touching. Her skin was rough, and small jagged pieces of dry skin caught on the threads of her clothing. Her hands made a kind of inverse pair of wings, incapable of flying. Now the days and the years made sense to Laura. The space that wedged between them, the wingspan of emptiness in each of their hearts.

Wendy Oleson

In Extremity

The puppy hunkered in the far corner of the cage, his body curled in a knot. A paper tag on the metal gate read: *Carl, Shepard/Mix, Male, 8 months*. The tag's orange sticker marked the puppy unsuitable for adoption. Gordon Anderson, 63, a Tuesday/Thursday volunteer at the Des Moines-area animal shelter who'd made the pragmatic acceptance of euthanasia a condition of his volunteering, touched the orange sticker, felt its edges with a freshly-clipped nail. The sticker was new. Last Thursday, Gordon had walked Carl. The puppy's 80-plus pounds had strained against the leash; he'd barked at wind-whipped branches and growled weakly at a memorial bench. It was an ugly bench. Even Gordon's wife, fellow volunteer Nancy, who preferred small dogs with hair (Nancy frequently enlightened strangers about the hypoallergenic, non-shedding benefits of hair over fur), had said the gray, wired-haired puppy, Carl, wasn't bad.

But that had changed. On Tuesday, Carl had knocked Nancy over. Not on purpose but because the puppy spent 23 hours and 40 minutes daily in a three-by-four-foot cement enclosure. He'd blindsided Nancy, barreled into the backs of her knees at full speed, and was easily twenty yards downfield by the time she hit the ground. It had been one of those almost-warm winter days, Gordon remembered, the early sun white in the sky.

Nancy had lain prostrate and silent on the frozen grass, hand outstretched, clutching an invisible lead. Dottie, the Rottweiler Gordon was walking, promptly assessed Nancy's condition with a generous lick to the mouth. Nancy remained still, however, through several more kisses. She let her hand drop to the ground, and Dottie stood over her, sniffing the buttons on her navy coat.

"You've gotten the wind knocked out of you?" Gordon said.

Eyes shut, Nancy's mouth opened and closed like a fish's.

"Come on, Nancy. You're okay."

She opened her eyes suddenly and very wide, though it appeared to take a moment for her to focus on his face. He offered a hand. Dottie licked his thumb.

"I don't know what happened," she said, unmoving.

"You fell."

Carl galloped by, smiling, tongue-lolling in the cold. Dottie sniffed the stirred-up air, cried, and pulled; she wanted to run with Carl.

"No, Dottie," Gordon bellowed.

"I didn't fall," his wife said.

"Alright, but you're going to have to get up." Gordon again offered his hand. "We can't have Carl running loose."

"My glasses?" Nancy turned her head to the side, quietly moaning.

Gordon scanned the ground.

"My tailbone hurts. Something's poking. I think it's my glasses."

"Nancy, you need to hold Dottie while I wrangle Carl." He sighed. Nancy wasn't moving. "Listen, it's going to be a hell of a lot easier to hold Dottie if you're standing."

Eventually, the glasses turned up, blades of grass inexplicably woven through the frames. One of the arms, however, had bent terribly, such that even if Nancy hadn't hobbled and groaned, shelter employees would have noticed something amiss, the lenses diagonal across her face. Herman, the shelter's groundskeeper, had seen it a mile away. Herman rushed to Nancy in his white overalls and offered his arm. Herman. Playing up the whole damsel-in-distress thing. Always smiling under that mustache. What the hell did Herman have to smile about? Gordon wanted to know.

To her credit, Nancy hadn't blamed Carl for the fall. She had, however, apologized to a fawning Herman for her tear-streaked mascara. "You're still very beautiful," Herman said, refusing to meet Gordon's eyes. Herman flirted and flirted and claimed to hold multiple jobs—said he worked 70 hours a week—which surely impressed Nancy. Her unworthy husband had jumped at an early retirement.

After Tuesday's fall, things remained tense between them. Forty-eight hours of near silence. It wasn't just that—the fucking holidays—every scratch became a wound. Nancy already said she'd buy her own gifts this year. Gordon *shouldn't bother.* Their only child, Megan, wouldn't commit to coming home for Christmas, and Gordon detested Nancy's family. He was glad he didn't have any. While Gordon brushed his teeth that morning, Nancy languished in bed, eyes fixed on the black-and-white Santa film on TV. Her tailbone *still hurt*—she'd finally spoken! He'd suggested ibuprofen—even offered to bring it to her in bed—because the volunteering had been her idea all along, something they could do together now that he'd taken retirement. *No thanks.* She sank deeper into the pillows—she'd added his orthopedic pillow to her pile. *Just go.*

Perhaps they should have stuck with gardening, Nancy's first suggestion, but the dog volunteering was also supposed to take Nancy's mind off Penny, the miniature, apricot poodle they'd lost in August. Though they'd enjoyed almost sixteen good years with Penny, her death had gone all wrong. Gordon had been prepared to shepherd Penny when the time came to Dr. Warner's office and hold her paw. It hadn't happened that way. She was still a healthy-enough dog—decent liver and kidney function, reasonably-strong

heart—when Nancy forgot to replace the baby gate at the top of the stairs. The poorly-sighted Penny had become disoriented. She'd tumbled down the steps in a choreographed awfulness involving paws over ears over tail.

Too late to help, Gordon had seen it. He supposed he was glad Nancy hadn't. He was grateful their daughter, Megan, Penny's person before leaving for college almost a decade earlier, hadn't heard those sounds.

Penny deserved a dignified death. All dogs did. And Carl, whose back rose and fell softly with breath, was just a puppy. Carl remained at the back of the cage, sleeping. As far as Gordon knew, euthanasia took place on Fridays. Tomorrow. He would take Carl out last. He'd spend more time with him that way. But why the orange sticker? It couldn't have been because of Nancy—puppies had terrible depth perception and limb control. Barreling into a wobbly sixty-year-old woman was a puppy's birthright! Tana, the shelter behavioralist who personally oversaw the animals' transition from intake to adoption, surely knew it better than anyone. Gordon would have to talk to her about that orange sticker. This wasn't a sadistic or authoritarian operation. He wouldn't volunteer if it were! A haggard Dalmatian barked twice, startling Gordon into focus.

Alone, Gordon pledged to walk as many dogs as he and Nancy normally did together. They tended older dogs first. Tana had taught that when desperate, puppies and young adult dogs relieved themselves in their kennels. Older dogs, on the other hand, bore the pain of a full bladder or bowel; they'd rather suffer physically than soil their homes.

Gordon unlatched the kennel of an elderly malamute mix, Scout, just in time. She sang to him as he fastened the lead. Upon stepping outside, Scout did her business immediately, followed it with wagging and prancing. It was December but it hadn't snowed, which now seemed a shame given Scout's sumptuous coat. She was all coffee-and-cream-colored fur with a piercing blue eye. God he hoped someone would adopt her. But with Christmas next week people were adopting puppies. Not Scouts. As if he needed another reason to dislike Christmas! Even the dog biscuits had taken on seasonal shapes. Gordon fished one out of his pocket as they headed inside. "Scout, you get the tree-shaped biscuit. It's bigger than the stocking, candy cane, and package." He sniffed it and guessed: "Chicken-liver flavored." He latched her kennel as she crunched the treat. This was the hardest part—moving to the next dog.

Tana saluted him while rounding the corner. "Hello, Gordon."

He followed her short ponytail until she slipped into her office and closed the door. Before Gordon could decide whether to pursue, two part-time employees, Nate and the guy who looked like Megan's heavily-pierced childhood friend—who perhaps *was* the friend—approached from the other direction. Gordon reversed course swiftly.

Apart from Tana, the shelter employees were misfits with tattoos,

bizarre haircuts, and obesity concerns. They needed animals, Gordon imagined, because they were short on human affection. Still, to see the shelter workers caring for the dogs and cats—day after day hosing down concrete and gathering up poop—was beautiful.

Gordon pushed up his sleeve. Already quarter of eight and he'd only walked four dogs. To remedy this, he leashed a trio of overweight spaniels. Within seconds they'd tangled themselves so profoundly their only choice was to walk, obediently, shoulder-to-shoulder. He kept them like this, walking together on lead, for a full lap inside the run. They accommodated one another's bathroom breaks patiently. They'd arrived at the shelter together, and with any luck they'd together find a forever home. Cocker Spaniel people were intense—Gordon knew one—somebody would want all twelve paws. He bent to retrieve a turd and imagined an empty-nest couple snapping the dogs right up. Next year the Cockers, clad in hand-knitted sweaters, would pose on a Christmas card.

He reassured the trio as they lapped the building: "Maybe one week, two? It won't be long before you're home." Their ears hung like nuns' habits and framed earnest, watery eyes. He'd already forgotten their names. "Mildred," he said. "You're all Mildreds." Inside again, Gordon learned they were Paige, Shelly, and a Butterscotch. He latched their kennel and left them crunching biscuits.

On Tuesday, a friendly adult Beagle—Socks?—had occupied the kennel adjoining the Cockers, but today he was gone. Tana must have moved him to adoption. That plucky fellow would find a home. As boys, Gordon and Billy had a Beagle named Ranger, though Billy refused to believe Snoopy was also a Beagle. "How can they both be Beagles?" Billy whined at the breakfast table, funny pages in hand, glancing between the *Peanuts* comic strip and a wagging Ranger.

"It's called artistic license," Gordon said, pushing Ranger away from the table with his knee.

"I don't believe it." Billy smiled at the comic. "Snoopy's nose looks like a licorice jellybean."

Ranger's nose was crusty but active, and Gordon saw his brother slip him a strip of Sunday bacon. Gordon shook his head. He was almost two years younger than Billy, but the boys were the same size, and, more importantly, Gordon knew things—many things—Billy didn't. Gordon read ravenously. Billy couldn't get past the first chapter of *Treasure Island*. Again and again, Gordon told his brother he'd better focus: "If you don't study," he'd said famously, "you're destined for custodial work."

That bullshit war was tailor-made for guys like Bill. Most of the boys in their Northern Iowa town had fathers, uncles, and grandfathers who'd served in a World War; they'd wanted to make those men proud. But it was all wrong. Billy had jumped at the chance to go.

Gordon walked an adult pit bull named Daisy, then a pit mix with a goopy eye. Both dogs were good—better than the mellow Labrador even. Dottie the Rottie, as shelter employees had dubbed her, wiggled and jumped when she saw Gordon approach her kennel. A deep play bow accentuated the otherwise-sleek Rottweiler's cloth diaper. A hole in the diaper allowed for Dottie's whipping tail. "What have they done to you, Dottie?"

She barked, joyfully.

"If you say so." He couldn't help smiling back. "Today, you're my penultimate pup," he told her as they exited the building.

Dottie didn't pull. She knew the routine: walk nice for a distance and get rewarded with a little freedom in the vast run. He removed the lead. "You're a pretty girl." She took off before doubling back. She slowed to a trot then circled him, so close he could pat her flank. She liked this and sat down before him, gazed at him. That look, the white crescents of her eyes exposed, there were no words for it. "Good girl," he said. Gordon used to sing to Penny—Mancini or Gershwin—and before she went deaf, he swore she enjoyed it. Even after the deafness because she surely felt his full focus on her.

He hadn't much sung to the shelter dogs. Because dogs responded better to high pitches, his bass might frighten. Still, Gordon cooed and scratched Dottie's ears, took her face in his hands. She snorted prolifically. He let go, and she ran bigger circles, barked at him to join. When he didn't, she took a long lap, hugging the periphery of the enclosure. He knew why poets wrote about horses—the sinewy movements of muscle under skin. Big dogs like Dottie weren't much different: their gallop pure flying and pounding heartbeat. The pounding of Dottie's paws against dirt, however, was significant enough to upset the fit of her underwear. The white cloth shimmied and cleared her body completely, launching twenty-odd feet before falling, ballooned, to the ground. By the time Dottie had twice trampled her underwear, Gordon's ears ached from smiling.

He was attempting to reattach the garment, negotiating its blood-flecked crotch and the opening for the tail, when the sound of handyman Herman's pick-up reached him. What had appeared to be basic underpants was an inscrutable swaddling device with too many holes and perplexing proportions, and Gordon did not want Herman to see him struggling. He didn't want to see Herman at all, but beyond the fence was Herman's Ford pick-up, its dirty body blending into the sky.

Christ. He just needed to get her tail through the hole. "I'm sorry, Dottie," he whispered. He fed her another broken biscuit, and she knew to stay still. He wasn't a stupid man—this was certainly giving him a deeper appreciation for fashion designers. That was something Megan had wanted to do, designing clothes, another one of her poorly-compensated dreams. They were all poorly-compensated—like the museum-educator crap she

was doing up in the Twin Cities. He was supposed to be proud of her, he knew, but God! The cost of her undergraduate education alone—at least six years of museum educating. The underwear sagged around Dottie's tail. "I know," he said. "But guys don't do dress-up." Dottie stared at him flatly.

With the diaper semi-fastened, they'd take the long way back to Dottie's kennel. It meant going through the breakroom, a garage-type enclosure in which shelter employees had set up a card table, folding chairs, and a threadbare recliner. He wouldn't see Herman there because industrious Herman never took breaks! Herman claimed to work three jobs! The man was tendon and bone. He talked so loudly, his ejaculations blended together like hideous music. Nancy yelled at Gordon when she thought he was talking too loudly, but Herman's volume was surely an aphrodisiac! He could hear it, Herman's terrible shouting—something out of a dream—and Gordon managed to ignore it, to ignore Dottie stopping, straining back toward Herman's voice for many yards. Life wasn't meant to be easy.

When he reached the outside door to the breakroom, Gordon closed it again quickly.

"Is that Herman yelling?" a short-haired woman asked. A full-timer. Her name was hard and monosyllabic, like a comic book *POW!* Bic? Gib?

"What?" he said. Kip. It was Kip.

"Someone's calling your name, Gordon. Can't you hear?" She rose from her seat, a cheap deck lounger with woven plastic tubing, and stuck her head outside. "Hey!"

She closed the door again. "Cold," she said. "But not for December."

Gordon walked past the ash trays, soda cans, and orange snack foods. Dottie scrounged along the cement floor for edibles. The room was colorful as the daycare where Megan had worked during high school. The shelter employees had plastered the walls with NFL team pennants. Back in the day Gordon and Billy had been Vikings fans. Threw the ball back and forth pretending to be Fran Tarkenton. By fifteen he'd been better than Billy—bigger and quicker—and still liked it less. Somebody at the shelter was a Vikings fan. Nancy told him that each employee had a favorite team—even those who hadn't previously cared for football. The reluctant fans picked teams for their colors; one woman chose the Seattle Seahawks for the navy blue and green.

"That was Herman," Kip said. "I think he wanted your attention."

"Oh."

"Hey." She approached him, swiping a handful of cheese curls from a card table on the way. "Something's wrong with Dottie," she crunched.

The dog's underwear swept the concrete, tethered by a rear paw. Gordon had seen his father like that once, the morning of his stepmother's funeral, dragging a pair of white cotton briefs down the hallway like a clubfoot.

Squatting, Kip regarded Gordon with a raised eyebrow. "Want me to fix that?"

He nodded.

She looped and folded the fabric around Dottie's rear. "Such a good girl." Then, Kip began to explain wholly unprovoked that although Dottie wasn't actually pregnant, bitches went into false pregnancies. "Their abdomens distend." She gestured correspondingly. "They eventually try to give birth and find something—a balled up sock or a stuffed toy if they're lucky—to mother."

Megan had told him more than once never to interrupt a woman. *Men are always interrupting women*, she'd said, glaring.

"It's a painful process," Kip said.

Gordon nodded.

"She's had litters before, just look at her nipples."

"Yes," Gordon said.

Kip squeezed a nipple. "Feel how soft they are."

He checked his watch.

"The uterus can get infected in a false pregnancy." Kip again ran her hand down Dottie's back. "A real danger." She patted the diaper-clad rear. "You'll get spayed, Dottie girl, just as soon as you're out of heat."

Gordon would certainly *not* ask Kip about Carl's fate. He and Dottie made for the kennels.

"Wait," Kip called. "Herman wants to know if Nancy's hurt." Before Gordon could answer, she added, "We like Nancy."

He returned Dottie to her kennel. She took the candy-cane-shaped biscuit gently, as if with her lips, when he held it through the bars. "Good girl." Except for Ranger, he'd only had girl dogs, and he thought he preferred girl dogs to boys. He said this once to Megan, though, and she lectured him on *gender constructions* and *projecting human behaviors onto animals*. Megan said female dogs were generally more aggressive than males.

"Come on, Carl. Time to go outside." Gordon patted his thigh twice to beckon. Judiciously, Carl rose, stepped toward the front of his cage, and let Gordon fasten the leash to his collar.

Carl raised his snout to the wind and wagged. He pulled hard, forcing Gordon to shift his weight to his heels. After twenty yards of pulling, Carl found a patch of ground to sniff. He sniffed in circles. He looked like a fuzzy cloud and reminded Gordon of the Winnie-the-Pooh story he used to read to Megan, silly Pooh dressing up like a raincloud to trick the honeybees.

"Let's hope we can avoid Herman," Gordon said. "That's how you know I like you." He scratched Carl's chin. "I'm willing to risk an encounter with that dickhead."

From the right angle, Carl cut an impressive figure. Gordon imagined himself in the living room, his feet resting on the plaid hassock, a crossword puzzle in hand, and single-malt Scotch to sip. The fireplace crackling. Carl lying at his feet, ready to snag a fallen pretzel. Meg and Nan in the kitchen baking his mother's sugar cookies. He hadn't eaten those in decades—they

dissolved in your mouth, all sweetness and comfort. Hell, it could even snow, and he'd pay the neighbor kid to shovel. His mood would be that good.

Carl was ready for the run. Gordon removed the leash. Occasionally, Carl's hind legs got out of synch with his front, and he tumbled before regaining control. That happened to puppies. He was a puppy for Christ's sake! When he stopped running, his nose dripped, and when he panted, he appeared to smile. Gordon put his hand to his sternum. Acid reflux. He curled his fingers into a fist and pressed. Carl found a stick, clamped it between his jaws, and shook his head madly.

"The branches are covered in ice," Herman yelled. The fucker was jogging toward them. He gestured at Carl's stick. "They're breaking off, and that's a hazard."

Gordon clenched his teeth. This scrawny, stupid guy didn't know which end was up.

Herman held out his hand, first for Gordon, then Carl. Carl kept with his stick.

"Where's Nancy," Herman said finally. "Some of us are worried."

Gordon coughed against the acid in his throat. "No need. She's baking sugar cookies."

"Tell her to bring some here," Herman said.

Carl dropped his stick and sniffed Herman's sneakers.

"We'd enjoy anything from her," Herman said.

Gordon watched Carl sniff. Herman had probably stepped in shit. "I'll let her know."

Herman nattered on: about work slowing at the high school for Christmas break. About buying toys for his ungodly number of children and grandchildren, and the *three most dangerous words* he knew: *some assembly required*.

"Be sure to wish Nancy a very merry Christmas for me," Herman said. "I hope Santa brings her something special," he called, already walking away.

"Bullshit," Gordon hissed. He coughed into a handkerchief before blowing his nose hard. The noise startled Carl. "What the hell kind of guard dog are you?" Gordon asked. He threw the stick, but it broke midair. Carl gave chase. "Merry fucking Christmas, Herman," Gordon yelled. But in the distance, the man disappeared into the shelter.

The first week they'd volunteered, Nancy told him on the ride home that Herman had guarded Da Nang air base in 1965. Called himself a Jarhead. Why the hell would Herman bring up something like that in casual conversation? "You didn't say anything about Bill," Gordon had warned, his fingers clenched around the steering wheel. "Nancy, I hope to God you didn't tell that man about Bill." The September rain blurred the lines on the road like a lullaby.

Carl picked up a piece of the stick. It crumbled in his mouth.

"Goddamn it, Carl." Gordon couldn't bring the puppy home without Nancy's approval, and he couldn't ask. Just after Nancy was toppled, he had laughed, deeply, fully, and resonantly. So richly it had stirred his chest, warmed the sharp air in his lungs and felt good. He hadn't meant to be cruel, but she'd cried. He and Nancy had wanted lots of children. A home bubbling with laughter and song—like Julie Andrews with those Von Trapps. They'd wanted half a dozen kids. Maybe more. But what good would it have done?

The earth and sky had the same dingy opacity. Carl's tail stuck up, his snout raised, and he lifted a front paw. "You're majestic," Gordon said. It wasn't fair, no, but he hated himself for even thinking about aiding Carl's escape. No responsible adult would let a dog run free near a highway. Ranger had deserved better. And the wind that invigorated Carl would soon freeze him.

Carl yawned and sat. If he was unsafe around children, find him a couple without any. Acute separation anxiety? Get him an owner with time and money for training. Gordon shook his head. The shelter—Tana made decisions with the information she had. If she didn't think Carl was adoptable, that the other dogs were better candidates, Gordon had to reconcile that. If he did something for Carl, he'd lose his opportunity to help the other dogs. There was a greater good to be maintained. He held Carl's scruff and hooked the leash. They walked back to the shelter. Gordon slipped into the treat room and gathered as many as his fists could hold. He fed Carl through the bars, watching him eat one, two, even three biscuits at a time. Crunching, crunching, crumbs raining down, a moment of plenty. Carl swallowed the last and burped. Looked at Gordon. Waited for something else. Gordon went back to the treat room, emptied the box into his pocket, and took the biscuits to Carl. He left with Carl still eating.

The dogs—Gordon loved every one because they were true. Dogs didn't send men to war. Dogs didn't lie, exploit, or cut services to maximize profit. They didn't fly to Manila to meet a child bride, something one of his former colleagues had done—what the fuck was that about? Dogs barked and cried and growled, and in the hallway of the shelter, their raised voices embraced him. How they wagged! Asleep, they whimpered, paws twitching. They dreamed. Their strong jaws and sharp teeth could be counted on. And was anything truer than a dog's bite? Anything keener than a dog's nose? It was no small thing to experience the world through smells; the nose didn't play tricks. No air freshener could hide a foul scent from a dog's alert snout.

It was a vale of tears, and if you were lucky, you walked through with a dog.

Gordon found Tana in her office, paw prints adorning her light-blue shirt—actual prints alongside the shelter's paw logo. "Gordon." She closed a file folder and stood up from the metal desk. She extended her hand.

He took her hand. "I'm not here to bother you," he said.

"You know I'm always happy to get feedback from volunteers. It's

essential." She lifted a green plastic water bottle—also marked with the shelter logo—and took a mouthful.

"I didn't see Nancy this morning," Tana said. "Should I be worried?"

One could only hope for the best and prepare for the worst. The worst in this case being—he didn't know.

"She put on a brave face Tuesday—"

"—She's resting," he said. "Still a little sore."

Tana nodded. She was terrifically nice. Probably a life-long Midwesterner.

"Well," he began, "I'm in the doghouse."

She laughed, which pleased him tremendously.

"I could have been more compassionate. The other day," he said. Tana's office smelled more like wet dog than the intake kennels. Though not as pungent as the bathing area, which was a nose-first dive into a St. Bernard's groin.

"We aren't getting any younger," he said. He brushed a clump of fur from his pants. "Nancy wanted to know about Carl."

Tana nodded.

"She wouldn't want to feel responsible for his—" The only phrase that came to mind was *impending doom*.

"—Euthanasia," Tana said. "I understand. But it has nothing to do with Nancy. During sterilization pre-op, Dr. Sterling became suspicious of a bump on Carl's abdomen. She postponed the surgery and ordered some imaging." Tana pushed a wisp of hair behind her ear. "It wasn't good."

Gordon swallowed and nodded. He couldn't do what Tana or Dr. Sterling did. The office calendar—something SPCA—featured a tiny poodle in a wooden sled pulled by a larger poodle.

"You know the Rottweiler?" Tana said. "Female—"

"—Dottie?"

"There's already interest. A friend of another volunteer. As soon as she's spayed, they want to take her home."

"Wonderful," he said. "She's a good dog." He smiled. Dottie's underpants had flown impossibly high.

"Thanks for your help today, Gordon. Please give my best to Nancy." She pulled out a ceramic mug from her desk and used her T-shirt to wipe the inside. "Run it through the dishwasher," she said, handing it to him.

Live, Love, & Rescue Dogs. And a paw print. "Thank you," he said slowly.

"Nancy likes it. She told me once. I've been looking for another."

"You don't have to give your mug—"

"—I want to," she said. "See you next week."

He knew the poem by heart—*Hope is the thing with feathers - / That perches in the soul*—but here hope had furry ears and a wet nose. A twitching, thrumming promise to be alive. Just that morning he'd heard a story about

a man losing his wedding ring, then finding it years later growing on a carrot in his garden. A carrot in December. A bit of good news.

J.J. Hernandez

The Tangerine Packing House

Two forklifts kiss,
four tongues sliding
against each other,
while exchanging
a pallet of packaged
tangerines. The two
drivers make eye
contact, & nod their
heads. Upstairs in an office,
I watch with the white
supervisors as I
install desks and
cabinets. I hear,
Look at her, or *she's*
slacking off. The
whir and crank of my
impact drill drowns
out their conversation. I
feel trapped in
the tiny town of Cutler,
California. But
every once in a while,
after the forklifts kiss, I
look down into the
abyss of tangerines and
heavy machinery, where
women struggle to keep
up with conveyor
belts, & watch as one
of the forklift drivers
smiles and whispers at
a production line girl,

whose shoulders slump
in shyness, and I see a face
not faceless for a minute
and I keep on working.

for Andrés Montoya

Death Drive

Summer in Colorado, I beg
my aunt to let
me drive her red, beat
up Pontiac to my grandma's
house. She resists
at first, but then relents, &
as soon as I get
behind the wheel,
I notice her long T-shirt
like a sundress riding
up her legs. She's not
wearing underwear.
Behind the wheel,
I immediately floor
the gas pedal, & wait
for the engine to
realize. The red car
careens around the
corner and violently hits
the railroad tracks. My aunt
is screaming, and simultaneously
reaching across the divided
seats for the steering
wheel. I notice how
flabby her arm is, & how
afraid her face looks. I slow
onto a side street,
where we get out
laughing. I've always
wondered why, as
humans, we have a death
drive, but at that
moment as a 12-year
old boy, I risked both
of our lives, just

to see what would
happen, just to become
a part of the dirt
again, like God, or
maybe my natural
instincts were
calling me into
the ground, into
inorganic chemistry.

Looking

My nephew and I
both stand at urinals
and pee at Castillo's,
a local Mexican
restaurant. He gets
done first, then
somehow decides
to walk around
and look at my
penis. You're
big, he tells me.
I think of
my own father—
we're both peeing
into the same toilet
bowl in our small
Colorado home.
I remember looking
at my father's penis,
and to my childhood
self, it was huge, but now
in Fresno, my nephew's
eyes are unknowing,
and his father,
recently deported,
is somewhere
in Mexico, married
to another woman,
raising another family.

Alisha Erin Hillam

The Circus

September 5, 1917, Frankfort, Clinton County, Indiana

And then, butter and receipt in hand, Joseph heard the cajole
of the calliope, lusty and merry, and he saw the high
prancing ponies parading along Walnut Avenue,
the show banns swirling at their feet and the bandwagon
rolling along, carved with trumpets and angels and pipes,
and he decided there wasn't any harm in stopping to see Buffalo
Bill's show as it marched down Jackson Street, no harm
in stopping for a moment to see the cowboys and broncos
bucking by when it was only five miles back to Jefferson
and the wedding wasn't till four, and how those sharpshooters
swaggered, pistols glinting. And then the Mexicans
and the Sioux and the lady trick shooters strutted
down to the fairgrounds, tossing their hats like bouquets
of bright flowers, and Joseph followed and he watched
as they set up the show, with bison and roping and racing
and cure-alls, and he decided to stay, just for a few minutes
longer, because his wife only sent him to town to get him out
of her hair, because Hobart's bride was just that Fickle girl,
because this was the last of his fourteen children,
because Jess Willard was out now in his decorated saddle,
and Jess was going to save the women in the burning cabin,
and Custer was about to make his last stand in this final gasp
of Wild Westing, and the sunset was blazing behind them,
and if you were going to witness the pomp and commotion
of something that was only going to end in ruin and collapse,
then what did it matter which one you went to anyway?

Cynthia Hughes

Riding the Canadian Central

For my brother Charlie

He kept a small notebook in his bucket loader
to record the world—snow that fell in the night,
an argument in the yard, a joke to tell his wife.

Inside the cab it was quiet, a private life where dreams
could be quarried from piles of sand and river stone,
discouragement loaded up with a few tons of crushed gravel.

He wanted to ride the Canadian Central west
beneath mountains of granite and shale, through
the tunnels and ravines of Manitoba on out to Vancouver.

But he pulled six shifts a week at the pit mine
manning the crusher, sorting aggregate and cobble,
making sense of the separate forms.

So when he looked up at the sky that day
I think it wasn't regret or fear he saw,
or the belt roller falling forty feet, but everything

in its place, the guys doing what they always did,
and he among them getting the work done. Light
glancing off the stone, train moving through a tunnel.

Lizzie Hutton

Marriage: The Factory

1.

Each morning a stray and greenish cat arrived with small hard eyes.
I couldn't draw it watching from that huge yard full of gravel.
But its image made me think of the Durer with the women
waving from the shore, they'd shed their clothes as they tripped
through the black etched firs down to the river.

Scrap static in the corners. I looked at that a while.
I was too scared to touch it in the morning, make a start. But its image made
me think
about their friend, who was leaving,
who was naked too except
for a fine chain at her waist, and that elaborate headdress in her hair.

I wore his technical pen.
Dressed in old cuffed jeans, a hardened shirt
I'd washed with our one shared cracked slip of soap.
But its image made me think the way she posed as if already gone, shot-up,
louche on one elbow, looking back but nonetheless

a waist-nipped odalisque
extended on the bearded sailing man
whose serpent body parted easily the curling waves
till the wake he made and left became a parted froth
opened onto un-inked paper like a marriage bed.

Some Cleopatra I could hear my old art teacher saying
as her voice trailed off to think on her own failures, but ironic.
That teacher wore a silk orange scarf around her own hair
every day, a little can-do knot in front, two soft antennae
full of runs that showed its fineness

and her hard-won sans souci. Its image made me think
about the river's scalloped ripples that he pulls her on
and into. Like a story all conspiring: sun-tipped clouds;
the castle on the hilltop. Women's waves on shore
and voices caught in needle-grooves turned thin and done, then gone.

2.

Why don't you try some of the shit lying around here?
the ovoid with the curved cork floating free inside it
There were miles of string to hold things. That string really got her going
the two wound-up flat circles, centers stimulated
Her drawings were fantastic. She could draw like a sonofabitch.
twelve loose buttons stamped with signs, piled with no gravity
Or course, she always dug the funky stuff… I was very
remember when I saw and took the Dresden's platter's gilded edge
happy she was getting into something. Miles of string
I crenelated it so far that someone called it "cruel and bland"
to hold things smiling with
my "painted plastic ball on Masonite"

with lines from Tom Doyle

Vacation: Berlin

Five years on, looking back,
you remember the palace
astride its own terraced park,
summer-house slender,
all rustled with yellow
and scattered with grinning
stone putti, worn rococo
shimmies. I know
how you saw it. Old leisure was trying
to softly resolve. And it felt, so you said,
like its love-hustle moved,
like its want made its own tree,
its own light-fringed leaves,
and it moved us; it loosened
our guilt-knot; it moved us
until we woke up
in the loft bed. Remember?
That friend's borrowed flat,
its dim view of a courtyard, the night city's
lavender sky. Except, looking back,
I remember beside me
how you're locked up too
for my lack of carefree. I could not
sans souci, could not join you in laughing
or loosing, or loosening
those cherubs' blank grins,
boy-lust so aimless
and homeless, their peeing
so freely in fountains, their drives
to dissolve…you remember we climbed up
to lie down as if some arched
heaven were coming in reach,
so you said. I remember we climbed
to a bed not our own, thinking
we only want what we want.

Lindsay Illich

Aubade

O morning earthsmell like small
bent basil, a child blinking open

wet with thanksgiving a
sky we lay under talking over

birdchatter we spoke the bee
tumble gradually an understanding our

lungs became pockets
handing out the days

saying here take it just take it
in your hand who knew you would

be so good at ax throwing what
aim I love the arc of arm

the fog of morning with my teeth
on your ear, the morning come

through the windows like children
awake now It's Christmas

all the lights your hand couldn't
we be opening each other

Joanna Pearson

The Field Glasses

For weeks, my sister Clara had been warning me that there was something in the woods that wanted to eat the children.

"Hush, Clara," I said when I found her staring off, trying to discern whatever shape lurked out in the pines and lindens beyond our back porch. "Come inside."

She startled and turned, and I saw she'd been using the field glasses. They were lovely, unusual—hand-carved from smooth, blonde wood. I hadn't seen them in years.

"Here," she said, almost sheepishly, handing the field glasses to me. They were mine. I would put them back, tucking them away in the drawer where they belonged.

A deer emerged, eyeing us warily before bolting back into the foliage. Clara tensed beside me. She was, of course, frightened of deer. She was frightened of everything.

"The deer won't hurt anyone," I reminded her, touching her hand, but she wouldn't look at me.

From the time we'd been young girls, Clara had possessed what teachers and doctors had at first called simply an overactive imagination. As children, this had been both magnificent and terrifying—Clara calling me over to whisper secrets she'd heard from the ants scurrying to and fro on their mound, Clara, big-eyed at the portentousness of how a late summer shadow quivered, Clara, interpreting the voices she heard murmuring within the grumble of our dryer. Everything, for Clara, was too acute, too vivid—always a mystery to be unpacked. She became a medium for messages I was too dull to discern.

I was boring by comparison. Eleanor, the grounded twin. Clara, the creative, sensitive one. Throughout our childhood, our mother dressed us like matching dolls in ruffled pinafores with big pink ribbons in our hair. We sang sister-sister duets together at the county fair, stepping daintily over sawdust and woodchips in our patent leather shoes. We sang like songbirds, our mother said. Like something celestial. A pair of angels, the old judges remarked. Always, as children, we were reminded of our exalted twin-ness. On the porch, Clara tightened her grip on the railings as if she were on a roller coaster preparing for a sudden plummet. I watched her face, a hundred different emotions flickering over it in quick succession, something I'd only

otherwise seen on the face of a sleeping baby. In such moments, she was lost to me, attuned to another plane entirely. She blinked rapidly then, and turned toward me.

"I don't know, Ellie," she said, slowly, carefully, as if waking from a curious dream. "I just don't know."

I led her back inside, and we sat together for a hot cup of our favorite rooibos. Like our mother, I believed in the power of a cup of tea to soothe, but Clara was sensitive to caffeine. I'd also put out the little jam cookies Clara was partial to. We were two proper ladies in this way—frugal in our habits yet still prone to small indulgences. *Old maids*. I imagined the neighbors, with their Priuses and laughing broods in soccer cleats, referring to us as such. Two nice, old-fashioned storybook spinsters who just happened to live in this wooded neighborhood filled now with young families.

"Oliver shouldn't bring Peter," Clara finally said. "Now isn't the time. He wouldn't be safe here. Not with that thing in the woods."

I coughed on my cookie. Oliver was our cousin, Peter his young son, whom we adored. Peter came to stay with us every summer while Oliver traveled for work. His visit had been planned for months.

"There are plenty of children in the neighborhood, and they're all doing just fine," I said. "You're overwrought."

Overwrought was a word our mother had taken to using in speaking about Clara, her sudden fits and preferences, her cloudbursts of emotion. She shook her head, the cup of tea trembling in her lap.

"I'm not," she said. "I promise. I'm not."

She appeared so fragile sitting there, my sister, my other half. Even now in her late sixties, my sister had kept her long, smooth legs, her knees still knobby and coltish, giving her an almost girlish look. Her hair was still ash blonde, like my own. She had a long nose and pale lashes and watery blue eyes: my mirror self. We were, are, identical, except for the pale, jagged scar on my sister's arm that I do not share. There is also the faint but persistent tremor in my sister's hands, whereas mine are firm and steady.

"Shh, shh."

I took my sister's cup from her and placed it gently on the table, wrapping my arms around her. This, I thought, is a sensation that few others get to experience: the sensation of comforting one's self, her body both utterly familiar and yet foreign, both known and unknown, like hearing your own voice on a recording. She sank against me, her head dropping against my chest, and once again, it occurred to me that we shared, as sisters, the physical dailiness of spouses. She shivered in my arms, and I wondered if she needed one of her pills.

Outside, I heard the caw of birds, the chirp of frogs calling from the creek, and suddenly felt aware of all the other living creatures outside.

She looked up at me with worried eyes, tracing the seam of her scar

up the length of her arm. This was her habit whenever she was troubled, rubbing as if she might massage her arm back to its former smoothness.

"There's something hungry out there," she whispered again. "Something that would eat a child."

Likely, I would have forgotten these words soon enough. There would always be another fear, another premonition, that ebbed and flowed with passing months. This one too would have melted into the haze of unretrieved memory had it not happened that only a few days later, the first child was bitten.

Where one ends up begins to feel inevitable, and so now I can say that it feels like I was always meant to end up here with my sister, two peas shriveling in their pod. But there was a time when things looked otherwise. There was a time when I was young and bold and in love.

At eighteen, I went off to the state teacher's college, and Clara stayed home with our mother. She was too delicate, our mother said, to take on such demands. Not so for me, practical Eleanor. Stalwart, sturdy Eleanor, who loaded up a borrowed truck with suitcases and drove three hours away to the mountain town where I would be free. I wore my face like one undertaking a great and solemn duty, but in my heart, I exalted.

The secret is that it feels good to cut loose one's twin after having bourn her for so long, like discarding a garment grown too small. No longer was I Eleanor, twin of Clara; I was simply Eleanor. I missed her, certainly. I missed our mother. But I read wonderful books and stayed up late laughing with my dormmates and drank too-strong drinks until I was giddy and graceful in the arms of boys from the neighboring college. I wore lipstick. I was kissed. The world opened swiftly and gently with its offerings. Sometimes, only rarely, did I think of Clara, warbling at the piano for our mother, alone.

It was there I met Preston. He was handsome like a young senator, with his dark hair arranged in a swoop above his forehead, his square jaw and generous smile. He was studying biology, a naturalist at heart who favored long tromps through mud and weedy creek beds. We fell in love, Preston and I. By the time I returned home to complete my student teaching, we were engaged. We were to marry within a year, after he completed his Master's degree.

But then, my mother got sick, and Clara and I quarreled. Preston and I broke our engagement. Mother died. I've stayed here ever since.

Still, a part of me believes that Preston is a good man, even now, after we haven't spoken in years. He remains, a faceless presence hovering just above me, in all my best and worst dreams.

Clara and I were working in our garden that morning before it got hot—she, trimming the rosebushes, while I pulled at the weeds that sprouted around our perennials. Our garden is the pride of the neighborhood. I

like to think of it as part of our effort to live up to our role as two maiden ladies—maintaining our beautiful garden, offering lovely Halloween treats for the trick-or-treaters, delivering homemade shortbread to our neighbors whenever they bring home a new baby, ordering more wrapping paper from school fundraisers than we could ever possibly need. We are overlooked and yet integral to the workings of our little woodland grove. The children wave to us shyly, as if we are ancillary characters in their fairy tale.

"I need a drink of water," Clara told me, wiping her brow. She is sensitive to heat, and her medicines are dehydrating. I nodded, still clawing at a stubborn hunk of dandelion, and Clara vanished inside.

Minutes passed, and I was absorbed in the satisfaction of weeding. Clara did not return, but this was typical. Often, she became waylaid in the course of a simple task, and I would only find her later, thumbing through a magazine, staring out the window at an ordinary squirrel, or fast asleep on a couch.

Then, I heard a child's yelp.

I paused. Often the sounds of children playing sound to me like howls of terror. It was probably a shriek of delight. But then, the child screamed. I shucked my gardening gloves and ran toward the sound, around the back of our house.

There, I found a dark-eyed girl of about four crying, holding her arm. I recognized her—the child of our neighbors two houses down, although I couldn't remember her name.

"It bit me," she said, holding out her chubby arm for me to behold. There, unmistakably in the plump flesh, were teeth marks and a faint beading of blood. The child's eyes filled with tears, and I knelt to encircle her at the waist, to offer comfort. There are some instincts that still have not left me.

"Shh, shh," I whispered. "Let's go wash this and find your mother."

The screen door clanged then, and there was my sister, bearing cotton swabs and a bottle of hydrogen peroxide.

"Coming, coming!" Clara shouted, holding the bottle aloft, her cheeks flushed.

The child flinched almost imperceptibly, drawing herself closer to me. I witnessed something primitive, an animal terror, in her eyes.

"It will only sting a minute," I said. "She needs to clean it out."

Clara smiled reassuringly, extending a cotton ball toward the little girl, but the girl twisted and pulled away.

"No!" she yelped, stomping Clara's foot.

She ran from us and was gone. Clara took in a quick breath, splotches of pink rising up her neck.

"She was scared," I offered quickly. "We should go let her parents know."

Clara nodded.

I looked out to the woods that stretched behind our house. The heat

of the day was rising, swelling from the sunbaked ground. A distant bird cawed, but all else was quiet. In the trees, nothing rustled. Nothing moved.

"I told you," Clara whispered. Her voice was so quiet I could barely make out her words. "Peter shouldn't come."

I brushed a strand of hair from her forehead and led her inside before walking down the street to speak with the neighbors myself.

Soon afterward there were signs posted. "Beware of rabid animal." No one knew for sure if that was actually the animal in question—perhaps it was a raccoon, or a fox, or a feral dog. What but a rabid creature would demonstrate such unprovoked aggression?

The affected children—there were three of them now—were all receiving post-exposure prophylaxis just in case. Their descriptions of the animal varied—short, tall, hairy, fast, eyes like a rabbit, razor sharp teeth—and weren't tremendously helpful. The children were all young enough to be unreliable.

"I'd like to catch it," my sister told me one morning, turning from our kitchen window. Toast crumbs trembled at the corner of her mouth, and I could see a faint smear of raspberry jam on her cheek, giving her a carnivorous look. "I really would." Her eyes gleamed like a bounty hunter, this sister of mine, alternatingly quaking and ferocious. "I'd catch it and bring back its hide. Problem solved."

"Someone will take care of it," I told her. "Animal control is searching. Everything will be fine by the time Peter arrives."

She looked away from me then.

"Clara? What is it?"

I heard her exhale, and then she was looking at me again, her jaw tightening.

"I already called Oliver. I told him not to bring Peter."

A muscle in my arm twitched, and I realized I was fighting the impulse to grab her.

"But, Clara. They already had tickets. It would have been fine."

I'd imagined the picnic we would take by the river walk, the bubbles we would blow on the porch. There was a little train for children two towns over, and I thought we might drive there one day, for a train ride and ice cream. I'd already imagined the sweet solidness of Peter's hand in my own, the two of us drinking lemonade on the back porch at the end of a day filled with laughter.

"Oliver was able to cancel the tickets and still get a refund."

I could have cried. But no, not in front of her. Not in front of Clara. I wouldn't. Even though Peter would already be so much bigger than the last time we'd seen him. Even though if we waited until next year, I could only imagine the coolness with which he would regard us. Children forget.

They lose their comfort with you, like trained birds reverting to wildness. I thought of last summer—how he'd found his ease with me, how by the end he had run into my room every morning, jumping into my bed to wake me, his little body like warm bread, the sweet stickiness of his grubby hands. *I love you, Cousin Eleanor. I love visiting you*, he'd said, the heat of his face glowing at me like a small sun.

Clara studied me with an appraising look.

"Besides, you spoil him," she said, her mouth twisting, the words sour to the taste.

I turned to pour myself a cup of coffee so as to hide the shaking in my hands. Clara had a different way with Peter, a different way with children in general. She spoke to them like tiny, obstreperous adults. They looked up at her, quizzically, fascinated but nervous. I knew she loved Peter, but she possessed none of the natural ways of bonding with a child, of calming him. I had a flash of memory then: last summer, Clara standing at the doorway to my room, her lips a hard line, Peter jumping on my bed. *You woke me. You two woke me.* She'd said this and walked away. Peter had looked at me, large-eyed, before we dissolved into giggles.

For not the first time, I thought that Clara was capable of a certain jealousy.

She touched my shoulder then, gently. I sloshed a bit of coffee on the counter.

"I'm sorry, Eleanor," she said. "But I didn't want anyone to get hurt."

My mother believed that Clara is prescient. It was Clara, of course, who told my mother she was sick, that something grew within her, a grotesque fruit on a knotted vine, and that this thing would kill her. She foretold this long before the doctors found anything on her scans—before, even, my mother had developed real symptoms. Something was growing, wrapping its gnarled tendrils around my mother from the inside and strangling her.

It was Clara who called me, summoning me home just before my final college papers were due. I was able to make arrangements, turn my assignments in early, and be at the hospital for the meeting when the doctors finally told my mother what they'd found.

After my mother was discharged to spend her final months at home and we were leaving the hospital, it was Clara who crumpled. It was Clara who fell against a hamper of dirty linens, batting wildly at the air as if fighting off an invisible swarm of bees.

"You can't leave," she'd cried. "You can't, Ellie. You can't leave me all alone."

My mother and I had had to call another nurse to help us calm Clara, to give her one of her pills and push her in a wheelchair, head lolling, to the car.

It was also Clara who had warned me about Preston. He'd been so kind, I thought, to come to us as soon as we heard my mother's diagnosis. He offered

to start his summer research late, to stay for several weeks and help.

Clara shook her head to me one evening, pulling me into the den while a late summer storm broke outside.

"He isn't good, Ellie," she said. I remembered her pulling me aside with similar warnings in childhood—a witch was loose, there was a dark spirit trapped in our attic, yellow eyes peering at her from outside the playroom window—her voice always the voice of a true believer. Her eyes flashed with the heat lightning outside the bay windows. "I don't trust him."

"Why would you say that, Clara?" There was nothing but kindness in Preston. He was gentle and considerate, the sort of man who noticed a person's little preferences and remembered them. His hands were large and chapped even now that he was a graduate student—a lifetime working on his parents' farm outside Lenoir, he told me—and I loved those hands both for their strength as well as their restraint. He was a person you could imagine being a father to someone small and vulnerable.

"He looks at me, Ellie," she whispered, her voice a hiss. "He looks at me in a way he shouldn't."

A high-pitched sound escaped me. I grasped her by the shoulders, pleading, wanting her to unsay these things, begging as I might beg a prophet to revise a prophecy.

"Impossible," I said. "You're imagining it."

"He's brushed against me when we're alone," she continued. "Touched me. More than once. He acted like it was an accident. But I felt him." She shook her head. "And he's watched me in the shower. Through those glasses you got him. I see him standing outside under the fig tree."

Something hot and sour rose up inside of me, but I swallowed it down. Preston was an avid birder. I'd gotten him those field glasses, specially made for him, carved out of basswood and engraved with his initials, for our one-year anniversary, just before he'd proposed. He'd loved my gift. He'd told me it was the sort of gift that could only come from someone who truly knew him.

"Liar," I hissed. "You sick, jealous liar."

Her eyes grew bright then. I was not one to challenge my sister so directly.

"I can't wait to leave here when all this is done," I added, words I knew would hit her with a specific cruelty.

She shrugged then, a smirk growing on her lips.

"Fine," she said. "You'll see."

And we didn't speak for long weeks after this, maneuvering like distant roommates during the time that my mother wasted and died.

That summer of the rabid animal, Clara began taking long walks again, returning only when the sun dipped low in the sky. She'd reappear in the backyard covered in beggar's lice and burrs, her hair frazzled with twigs and leaves. This was a thing she'd done at times in the past, and so it

was less troubling than it might have been. She brought back special pine cones or fern fronds, bluish rocks the smooth shape of eggs, items marked by no particular magic I could discern, but clearly valuable by some system of her own devising.

I'd wake in the mornings to find her already gone, a dirty mug in the sink the only sign she'd been there.

"She's eccentric, your sister," my mother had always said, as if this were an allowance we made for her, a special dispensation exempting her from any task at hand.

I carried on without her. I tended the vegetables in our plot. I took my part-time shifts at the county library, lovingly tending the broken-spined books, taping back together pages torn by greedy toddlers. I purchased our groceries in the evening and fixed our dinner, saving a plate for her beneath plastic wrap.

Finally, after several weeks, I asked her, "What do you do out there all day, Clara?"

She sighed, gathering her thoughts, it seemed, to offer me a thoughtful response. But then she turned to me, blinking slowly, a dazed expression on her face.

"What?"

"Never mind," I said, because it was impossible to talk to Clara in certain modes. It always had been.

I went upstairs to brush my teeth and get ready for bed. More children had been bitten by then—a five-year-old boy and his six-year-old sister looking for blackberries, a three-year-old who'd been playing in his sandbox. They'd said the animal leaped at them so quickly it seemed to come out of nowhere. Parents were no longer letting their children play outside.

I brushed my teeth until my gums bled, an old, bad habit. I have beautiful teeth, neat and well-shaped and smooth, perfectly even from the time they grew in. I smiled a bloody smile at myself in the mirror, only it was not a smile, not really, but rather a baring of teeth. A growl. Clara's face, I thought for just a moment. Clara's face snarling back at me.

I thought then of the last night I'd seen Preston, before my sister's words had proven true.

My mother had been very ill then, the hospice nurse visiting regularly. I had been late at a library meeting and had stopped at the bakery on the way home. My mother was eating very little at that point, her mouth and throat ulcerated and raw. She only had a taste for one thing: frangipane tart. She would take one bite, her eyes rolling back in her head blissfully, until she broke into hoarse coughing. I'd picked up a slice on my way back. I was humming to myself.

The truth is I was not as unhappy as I should have been. I had Preston, a man who cared for me. My mother was sick and dying, but even in this I saw

the promise of peace, the promise of being freed of something at long last, the prospect of her death rising before me like a set of great, black wings. Even my sister's stony silence was bearable—almost a blessing, really.

But when I pushed open the door to the house, I knew something was wrong. There was a strange quiet. No music playing, no sound of Clara clattering through the kitchen cupboards.

"Clara?" I called. "Preston? Mother?"

I moved through the kitchen, the dining room, the living room, then the upstairs. There was silence: only the steady tick of my mother's old grandfather clock following me up the staircase.

Then, there were voices, speaking quietly at first, but growing louder, more urgent. I heard a shout, the sound of something toppling, and then my sister appeared, rushing from her room, holding her arm aloft as it streamed blood. A bright, steady trail followed her on the beige carpet.

Preston followed her, his face stricken.

"Clara!"

Preston and I said it simultaneously. He caught my eyes, his face bewildered.

Clara stumbled into my arms, whimpering, her arm staining my shirt with blood. She was wearing, I noticed, a dress of mine, one of my favorites, navy with a bright repeating pattern of cherries.

"My God," I whispered. "We have to get this stitched up."

"I told you," Clara said, her eyes flashing accusation. Preston shook his head.

"Eleanor, no, I can explain," he said. "It wasn't—"

"Leave now. Leave us alone," Clara said.

I could not speak a word.

By the time we'd gotten back from the hospital, Clara's arm stitched up, Preston and his belongings were gone—everything except for the field glasses. These he'd left on the kitchen counter—a sign of contrition or guilt? Or simply a sign that he'd given up, that we were finished? I've never known. I tucked those beautiful field glasses deep into the back of a kitchen drawer, unable to give them away, but unable to bear seeing them.

For months after, years, I wondered what had happened. Could I have been so blind? Had Preston had another side all along, a shadow self? And my sister, holding her streaming arm. My cherry dress ruined with blood. She said nothing else about it afterwards, and the dress disappeared.

I WAS WAITING THE FOLLOWING EVENING FOR MY SISTER TO COME HOME. I sat on the back porch of our house, watching as dark oranges and lavenders flooded the sky. The high-pitched chirring of crickets grew into a sound so persistent it was easy to forget. I sipped a bit of my mother's sherry, an appropriately old-ladyish drink, something I allowed myself now and then.

I'd brought the field glasses. Their weight was strange and satisfying in my hands, and I touched them gently, as one might touch a relic for fear of it crumbling. I looked through them, and the blur of green sharped to individual leaf and stem.

My phone rang, and it was my cousin Oliver. I put down the glasses and answered his call.

He told me about Peter, how he missed me, how sad he was that the trip had been canceled. He asked about the rabid animal in our neighborhood.

"They haven't caught it yet," I said. "No one knows. It may be a feral dog. An opossum. A raccoon."

He sighed.

"Well, there's no reason I can't just ask you now," he said. "Peter and Sally and I, we were planning to invite you back with us, if you were interested. We've got the guest house out back, and it's a perfect little apartment, now that Sally redid it. And you're just so great with Peter. It could be like a live-in nanny arrangement. We would pay you, of course. We could try it for six months to see, no pressure."

He paused. My hands had grown so sweaty the phone slipped in my grip.

"What about Clara?" I asked.

"There'd be room for her too, of course," my cousin said. "If you wanted. Although the guesthouse is small. It's up to you."

"She's doing very well here. She's used to it. And she's never loved children like I have," I said, my heart already juddering in my chest. The sherry had gone straight to my head, and I felt a little dizzy. "You and I both know that Mother always babied her. There's an agency that checks in. Besides, it might be good for her to have time apart from me. To be more independent."

I heard the call of something deep in the woods behind our house—it was a stark, lonely sound, wolfish, although there were no wolves as far as I knew in this area. Someone had once claimed to see a mountain lion. I'd heard weird stories of mountain lions making off with toddlers, owls swooping down on napping babies, coyotes snatching sleeping children from sleeping bags, stories so far-fetched they could only be true.

"Oh, good," Oliver said. "Clara was so certain you'd say no."

After we said our goodbyes, I poured a second glass of sherry. The conversation with my cousin, the sherry—it was all giving me an overwhelming feeling of clarity. The clarity was warm and soft and relaxed me at my shoulders. I felt I understood things, at last. The sun had sunk behind the tree line now, a mere ember.

I knew then that I would leave. I would leave for good one morning soon, and I would say nothing. Clara would return from her strange ramblings in the woods and find me gone, the field glasses resting quietly on the kitchen table. She could have them. They were hers.

There was another call, a different animal this time, joining in mournfully with the first, their voices rising in strange duet, and I determined it must be two dogs, something wounded and wild in their voices. Through the darkened trees, I imagined or heard the crack of branches. Something hungry out there. I waited for a figure—my sister, a deer, some other animal—to emerge.

Madison P. Jones

Pastoral

I knew a field named Eurydice,
which every field resembles after dark,
where we would walk in dawning days,
another way of saying *youth*. That arrow
we let fly without a thought, towards blurred
significance, had missed the mark. Not to say
that our years have a point but are more akin
to a bullet hole. The first one I ever saw was
in a coyote my grandfather shot. Point of entry,
of exit, of no return. A little blood flecked
on the fieldgrass. The marks we see are all
that's left behind as evening takes everything,
another way of saying *night*. When I turned
to look, she was dust. The field, that is.
The field that *was*. A salt-lick dropped
in the dirt behind the little truck. The truck
my father got after they took his old man's keys.
He would drive those distant miles to the farm
to feed his father's cows and give them water,
the springtime ruins of Alabama filling
the cab, bringing the poverty he felt
for that field into view. They sold the cows
before my grandfather bought the farm,
another way of saying *died*. The grass
grew long as the hayrick filled with wasps
and then collapsed from rot and gravity,
another way for entropy to show its heft,
but only with what we leave behind
and glance back at as frost stiffens and crumbles
beneath the thick-hooved weight of time.

Elisa Karbin

Summer Squall

Here summer's salt and swelter hastens
the divide—this milky pith between sky
and sea is a wound cauled by crow-call,
packed in the soot of memory's residue.
The brain stalls in the blue-black
scatter of fragmented moments: Sleep's
rough touch is a rope knotted by night,
pulling each lighted moment of before,
after, and the after.
Quietly, the body rebels.
Muscles strain against the slippage, this
strange falling back. Muscles strain. Remember
the starched certainty of surrender. Remember
the storm-wrecked harbor this body is now.

Dear Interrupted Echo, my tessellate twin:
This is the intersection of living and the ghost-
crept ache to stop. Atomic certainty's already
grown its mountain in your gut.
The best way
to die is to be still among the riot. Be waveless
kneeling in the raw white of swirling surf. Lay.
Find comfort in the spitting ire of the current,
in the snare and coil of forgetting.

David M. Katz

Money

One Sunday, when my sober dad unscrolled
A dollar for the week's apportionment,
He slowly stretched it out across my palm
Like a giant navigation map
That could be used to trek the Amazon
Or the hills of Africa. "Don't spend it all
In one place," my father said. I bought
A chocolate ice cream sugar cone, a pink
Spalding rubber ball, and a Sgt. Rock
Comic book, the hero's jaw consuming
Three quarters of the cover, clamping down
On the pin of a grenade. But if I'd saved
My money for the five school days ahead,
I could have bought a yo-yo and a pack
Of bubblegum and baseball cards and still
Have in my palm a silver coin left over
To show Elaine, the girl who sat across
From me, the girl I *knew* I'd love forever.

Kara Krewer

Last Name

Not even the internet knows
what it means,
best research saying
it's a bastardization

of Gruber, miner's name,
child of the pit,

pig's snout turning
up the skirt of loam.

Even this name gnarled,
black halo
under thumbnail.

It has its pick,
it has its squares of limestone
ready for the rails.

And so this body hewn,
this brick shithouse
for stooping.

You stocky thing, you
bone broth and potatoes,
you frame of holy earth.

My mother born a Rivers,
and so she was:
blond eddies, slender girl,
what curves downhill.

Ah, a dress of hers
I found, light silk
of teenhood I hoped I might

be blessed into,
wanted so much that

I became strong enough
to swim across the lake.
Water where I searched
for the drowned in summer.

Arms sweeping milfoil—
where I wished to loosen
gravity and sex,
might emerge amphibious.

But the world sang *no*
and the preacher pulled me aside
to say *you are too worldly.*

So what do you do
but dig into the marl,
hurl yourself like a clod
with a stone hidden inside.

Oh? How did they meet
each other, man who worked
the earth, woman with
her dappled pony in the stream—

it was when he came to diagnose
the sickly tree
with its small and mealy fruits.

Han-Jae Lee

Wasted Tire

In the corner of the sequestered village lies an abandoned tire.
Partially covered with once red, now blackened fallen leaves.
While the faint beams of sunset are lazing among the dropped leaves
the breeze blows in and more dried leaves descend.

An old man waiting for a bus looks at this scene for some time.
His forehead is lined with deep furrows
as he thinks dearly of the days gone by.

Now he runs with all his might toward the road ahead.
Like a slave who was kept well under the speed
in order not to be overtaken with the need to dash and scurry
like waves on the shore.

All his life he did his best, with these impediments.
But he couldn't keep the balance
of the time and tide.

That wasted tire might be thinking about speed it had known.
Remembering that speed is all of life.
Or it might be thinking for once in its life about resting awhile.

This day with its freedom from the snare,
it is comfortable with the leaves and breeze,
and its furrows are made smooth by the sunset's beams,
the way the old man's face is made serene with memories of long ago.

Emily Leithauser

The Cliffs of Moher

Before thought, before I was
a daughter. Before the cliff, the odds,
the precipice, the deaths each year.
Before my mother switched places

with me, so she'd be nearer the edge.
With me now on these same cliffs
she walked with my father more than thirty
years ago. Before I was.

Before I thought. Before the cliff,
the sea, the edge. When I was not.
Thirty years ago: I see them together
(she tells me she was afraid)—

he was reckless, liked the dizzy
risk of the edge; she was afraid
he would fall. They were so young
they could tempt all accidents.

Every year tourists are giddy and then
they are not. Then police rope off
pieces of air. Someone slips
and falls and the mud sucks a shoe.

Before I was born, my father
slept with others, some of whom
were not my mother. But he
returned to her, and I was born.

I'm the error, but I'm here. I like
the brine and the edge and the cold.
I come from fear of what is wild.
And maybe I am good.

I am the guilty thought before the child.

Karen Babine

Bones

At Hackenmueller's Meats in Robbinsdale, the smell of smoking meat seeps through the brick into the street. The door to the butcher shop is old wood, the kind that makes you believe in your bones that the small shop has been in business for more than a hundred years. There's something here that rings of the 1960s, like the old photograph we have of my grandfather with his feet propped on his desk, horn-rimmed glasses on his nose. I imagine that man might have frequented a place like this, perhaps with my grandmother in a calf-length skirt holding my toddler mother by the hand. It is a satisfying image. The staff in their white aprons is energetic and knowledgeable enough that when I say "I want bones for stock," they tell me I have choices. As a vegetarian in a butcher shop I trust their expertise, because until today, I didn't know the difference between stock and broth, and I walk out with $17 worth of soup bones and marrow bones.

Bones are not cheap. Maybe they shouldn't be.

After we learned that *embryonal rhabdomyosarcoma* is a soft tissue cancer, one whose cells appear like the skeletal muscles of developing embryos, which is ironic considering the tumor developed inside her uterus, after the hysterectomy, after her first chemo treatment, after the failure of her anti-nausea medications under the doctor's terse orders *don't let her throw up,* after several days passed before she could be convinced to eat anything, we wondered: *feed a fever, starve a cold, but what do we do for cancer?* There is a desperation involved in feeding someone undergoing such treatments, not only because of the horror of it, not only because those chemicals change taste perceptions, but the failure to care for the most basic needs of someone you love so deeply is unacceptable.

My mother's palliative doctor tells her that *dysguesia* is the technical term for *food tastes like shit,* but this information does not help much, so he prescribes Ritalin to stimulate her appetite. We laugh, knowing how many of her fourth-grade students were also on Ritalin. We learn that our friend M. survived chemo on mashed potatoes and ice cream; F. couldn't tolerate sugar. My mother has trouble swallowing, complicated by a feeling she calls *dead belly*, like her entire midsection has filled with concrete, exacerbated by incessant belching, so my days are spent in her kitchen with the press of chicken under my fingers, the heft of beef bones, the slice and chop of carrots, onion, and celery, in pursuit of bone broth and a miracle.

The yellow of my vintage 4 qt. Le Creuset Dutch oven named Estelle is the faded sunshine of summer lemonade, as viewed through a screen door from the distance of November. She is the first Dutch oven I found, the second of my cast iron collection, vintage Le Creuset like my skillet named Agnes I could never afford in real life, sunny on a thrift store shelf for $4.99. I don't know why I felt like she needed a name or why I thought she had a Count Basie vibe, a blues personality with a sassy grin, the weight of her so spectacularly solid and comforting, but she was perfect to attempt bone broth for my mother at a point in my culinary experience where I knew nothing about such things. I hadn't made a soup from scratch, ever.
The idea of a bone broth is to simmer a stock long enough—even up to twenty-four hours—to pull all the nutrients from the bones, the gelatin and collagen that are only the product of time. Some sectors consider bone broth the cure for everything and I was willing to try. If I knew then what I know now, I would have roasted the bones first. If I knew then what I know now, I would have started early in the morning, so the stock could build itself over the course of the short daylight hours. If I knew then what I know now, I would have had Estelle sauté the aromatics first, then I would have added the beef bones to the pot, covered with water, brought it to a boil, then reduced to a simmer with the cheerful yellow lid offset just a bit. I would have watched for how the stock changed from clear to dark. I would have noticed more specifically how my mother's hands gripped the mug, how she hoped I wouldn't notice her grimace, even as she smiled weakly and told me it was delicious.

The stories of consuming the thing we want to become are ancient, old as folktales of Hansel and Gretel, the Christian Eucharist, warriors consuming defeated enemies. My pursuit of bone broth became the literal one-to-one equivalency of *if my mother eats bones, her bones will be strong*, because her chemotherapy makes her neutropenic and without those white blood cells born in her bone marrow, she cannot fight infection. And yet, consumption is code for the scourge of tuberculosis. Consumption spun metaphors of weakness as virtue as Susan Sontag famously questioned the war metaphors of cancer as ones of strength—"*The bromides of the American cancer establishment, tirelessly hailing the imminent victory over cancer; the professional pessimism of a large number of cancer specialists, talking like battle-weary officers mired down in an interminable colonial war—these are twin distortions in this military rhetoric about cancer*"—but in the first six weeks of my mother's chemotherapy, the food metaphors became my own reality: the *recipe* for her three-week regimens, the drug *cocktail* they pumped through her *port* every week. What is the purpose of metaphor except to understand what we absolutely cannot, to compare something we do not know to something we do? *It tastes like chicken*, after all. In those

first six weeks, my mother was hospitalized twice with those 100.4 fevers, confined to rooms specifically designed for the immunocompromised. We eventually learned of Neulasta to stimulate those baby white blood cells, though the incredible bone pain the drug created was worse, she said, than three natural childbirths. I wonder why bone pain is so much worse than other kinds of pain.

In these early December days where my mother's bones malfunction, where we come to understand that *embryonal rhabdomyosarcoma* is incredibly rare in anyone over the age of ten, my elfin nephew shows me that his shoes light up when he runs, when he stomps, double-footed, around the kitchen to make them pulse. He is three years old. His shoes contain tiny blue orthotics which are the same color as the glasses he wears that turn dark in the sun. He has finally been diagnosed with a growth hormone deficiency that has kept him in the single-digit percentiles of growth and he begins daily injections he will need until he turns eighteen. There will come a point where this is normal, that H. will not need both of his parents to hold him still while the plunger pierces his tiny leg. The growth hormones will catch him up to his genetics, to help his bones grow to the height he was always destined to be. At some point, we expect that adult bodies will break down; there is something specifically awful about a child's body that should be perfect in its newness malfunctioning.

The majority of research on my mother's cancer is on children, not adults. There have only been five studies of adults with *embryonal rhabdomyosarcoma* in the last thirty years which put the number of adults with this cancer at four hundred, total. I look at my nephew, still small enough that I can perch him on the red stool on the kitchen counter so he can watch the earthmovers tear up the street in front of our house while my father takes my mother to chemo, and I just watch H. and wonder. The shots are working; he is growing. But he is still so small.

We consider the betrayal of bone the worst kind, a fracture of things we cannot fully accept. Eighteen years ago, the week before my middle sister moved to college, my father took my younger sisters rollerblading. He fell and broke his hip. He was fifty years old, six-foot-five, two hundred and twenty-five pounds: when he falls, something will give. But the statistics of death within a year of hip fractures in the elderly are truly astounding. It is nearly a death sentence. We *work ourselves to the bones*, we *know things in our bones*, we consider the perfection of *bone structure*, that *sticks and stones may break our bones*, but have we never lost the ancient philosophical idea that there are things we know intuitively, below the level of consciousness? Is it that we attribute a certain kind of knowing to our bones, a kind of discernment and wisdom that cannot be gained otherwise, medieval ideas

of where wisdom and understanding were physically located in the body? I know that the animals in the Ashfall Fossil Beds in Nebraska are unique in that they were fossilized in three dimensions. Most fossils collapse once the flesh has decomposed and if they collapse into a way that keeps the order of bones intact, we say that the skeleton is articulated, as if the order of bones allows us to speak of them. What is missing when we cannot articulate the bones, when they are telling us something other than what we expect them to say? What does it do to us when our bones betray us, when children do not grow, when mothers develop childhood cancers, when the bones we trust do not hold us? How do we articulate our lives, then?

Molly Bashaw

Arctic Ground Squirrels

When my mother is not feeling well she goes to a part of the field where nothing has been planted and digs a hole the size of her body. She climbs in and pulls the dirt to her chest. From here she can see the whole farm at once: the silo bracing itself against the red barn with the tin roof, the shed decorated with sheep skulls, the clothesline, the back porch, the currant bushes and poison rhubarb leaves, her bee hives, the skeleton of a car my older brother is fixing, and the rooster. She can see me on the wooden swing by the porch, looking out to the elm tree, wondering where she has gone. In her toes she can feel the heat of everything that has ever died, and when she waits there until after I have gone into the house again and the screen door on the back porch has swung shut, she can remember the movements of ground squirrels in Christmas Bay, Kluane Base Camp, and Kaskawulsh Knoll.

In 1966 she moved from her apartment in Mill Lane, Yarmouth Port, Massachusetts, to Alaska's Yukon Territory in order to research Arctic ground squirrels, *Citellus parryi plesius*. In the remaining photograph from then she is wearing a green and black chequered wool jacket, octagonal glasses, gaiters, and old-fashioned, tear-shaped snowshoes. At Kaskawulsh Knoll she wrote in her notebook:

This site was the juncture of two arms of the Kaskawulsh glacier. Therefore, the population is relatively isolated; it is surrounded by a width of at least two miles of crevassed ice, and to travel down the moraine would require a journey of at least 20 miles. Either journey would be a rigorous one for a squirrel.

The most important mythical figure is Sisyphus, she tells me one afternoon as peas roll out of her hands into a wicker basket, and I wonder if Sisyphus is from one of those northern places. She says he is a farmer, which must mean he can build a stone wall and can roll a swarm of bees out of a tree back into its hive. He must be able to kill a sheep with a hammer and a knife, as my mother can.

At the furthest edge of our farm toward the north, boulders jut out of the ground, which means this part of the field is not tilled or sown. The ewes like the stones because they are warm in winter and cool in summer. The ram, when he is set into the pasture in the spring, comes to the birch trees by

the stones and rubs his horns on them, the sack between his legs swinging heavily like a cheese. I come here to write stories about the girl who wears a long rope of beads with her turtleneck sweater, and is clean. In place of *The Small Farmer's Journal*, she reads books in French, and is a musician in a concert hall with her name moving magically in circles across the marquee in the middle of the city. She lives in a yellow apartment and doesn't have any pets except a Japanese fighting fish in a bowl on her counter. There is no room for sheep. Even when her parents call her and she can hear Bernie meowing on the stoop, she never comes home.

In the evening my mother asks me to help dock the lambs' tails, and I do not eagerly go with her to the barn. They are wrapped at birth in a tight rubber band that gradually stops the circulation of blood. After a week they are severed, protecting the sheep from infections, blowflies, and the stench that gets trapped under the tail wool. I hold the lambs' bodies while my mother cuts through the dead portions of their tails, the insides of which are blue. When we are finished and the lambs have run back into the stalls, there is a pile of dead tails on the floor. I carry them to the compost heap and throw them into the dark, listening for their dull landings. My classmates are at the roller rink, I think, running down the driveway past our farm museum toward the house, where curried squash soup is steaming up the windows. In bed, I can still feel the hipbones of the lambs in my palms. Tomorrow I will go back to the compost and collect their tails for the farm museum my brother and I have been making. We will call it a history museum.

Our schoolmates have spoken of getting tan. They spend afternoons with their foreign au pairs at the Wenham country club, learning tennis and backstroke, polo. My younger brother and I also want to get tan, so we lie in the edge of the pig field for the afternoon, in our underwear. *How long do we have to stay here*, asks Jonas, rotating, wiping mud from his thighs. The pigs do not notice the small piles of clothes we have set in the grass with the graham crackers. Only the piglets run to hide among the sows' teats. When it is dark we walk to the barn, where our father is rubbing linseed oil into the harnesses in the tack room, then down the driveway to the house. At dinner our skin begins to burn, but our mother does not say anything. She comes upstairs later to tuck us in, which usually means she sings. Tonight she tells the story of a boy who can fly, called Icarus. I ask her why he wanted to go to the sun anyways and why he couldn't just have flown to the top of the barn. *He didn't like the smell of the pigs or the idea of cutting lambs tails or removing piglets' testes. He wanted to see the world from so high above that he would not smell it,* she says, and then kisses me, and Jonas, who has already fallen asleep with his red face crushed into the grooves of the

corduroy pillow. I stay awake longer, looking out the window, wondering what it was like to be Icarus. Why did he not fly to the moon? He could have landed there, shaken out his wings, made an angel in the dust, had a look back at earth, and then flown home to his father and mother, who would have been waiting for him in the hayfield with their pitch forks. He could have given them back his wings and helped them turn the rest of the alfalfa. It would smell sweet to him for the first time. He would go with them back to the porch, where they would all sit in rocking chairs, drinking his mother's spearmint tea until the moon came out. Icarus wouldn't tell them about it, the cool surface, so clean the only things he could smell were the beeswax and his own skin. He would drink tea, rocking only slightly, and then get up and walk to bed, saying, *Good night, mother. Good night, father.* The candles in his room that he would blow out one at a time would remind him of his two wings and his two landings. He would hold them.

In Christmas Bay at the research camp, my mother went in the mornings to observe the burrows. She made sketches of the squirrels in each of the four postures she identified, and wrote short descriptions like this:

Voice: The Arctic ground squirrel is a vocal animal, having several expressive sounds. Most commonly heard was the alarm call—a loud, carrying chitter, usually of three syllables, sometimes made at precisely regular intervals. In making this call, the mouth is wide open and the teeth bared. A second call, appearing to express anger, is uttered by an alarmed squirrel diving into a burrow, or by a squirrel forcibly held.

At dusk now, she often takes out her 'squeeze box' and plays the four songs she learned from the locals in the Yukon Territory. Because it doesn't have clear sections like "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain," but repeats until one of the thumb keys on the accordion sticks or she becomes tired, "Hard Times" is my favorite. The breaths it takes between her arms, the voice of the accordion, is the voice of the young Betsy who squatted on the Yukon tundra to pee, who sketched squirrel burrows by day and then went to eat whale meat and drink beer with the locals in their one turquoise and pink bar, her cheeks smelling of winter.

I am twenty-six years old now, and the thing that worries me most is that my mother is disappearing. I am the only person who reads her squirrel paper with the scat measurements. She has gotten thin and forgetful and often at night she drinks gin and tonics until she falls asleep on the couch. I want her to stay the mother I see when I read her research from the tundra, the only evidence I have of her life before mine. I imagine her writing: *total length, 320mm; tail, 92mm; hind foot, 50mm; ear, 5mm,* and feeling the kind of happiness that goes unrecognized as she holds the papery squirrel ear between her index finger and thumb.

At a restaurant in Saratoga Springs, she talks about her new boyfriend from Round Lake, and I watch the wrinkles around her mouth instead of listening to her words. I watch her mouth and her bra-less breasts, the way she worries her hair with whichever hand is not putting food into her lips and then drops the hairs that have come loose onto the floor. *You are not old,* I say in my head, and wonder what was the point at which she began to wane.

She begins reading every morning at six-thirty because, according to her, it is the only quiet time. Then her feet move around the kitchen stove. She puts on rubber boots and goes out toward the barn in her nightgown, kisses the goats on their noses, checks her hives and sets down the pail so she can untangle some twine that is caught around the rooster's claw. I tell myself stories about her as a girl my age at home, or the girl up North looking for squirrels so she will not disappear. I want to repeat all the mistakes that made her.

It is August in Ware, Massachusetts. The frogs and crickets are screaming. Everyone in the house is asleep except my sixteen-year-old mother, who is listening for noises: the water pipes, her older brothers. She wraps herself in a towel and tiptoes slowly out the back screen door, holding it until it is completely shut so it will not make a noise, then walks down the grass hill, over the wooden bridge—where she folds and places her towel—and into the cold pond water until it embraces her entire body. Underwater, her hair reaches around her like seaweed, and when she spins fast enough the lights in the sky and the one flood light on the house look like a time lapse photograph.

Inside again, her hair drying in a towel, she lies on the bed and looks at her collection of youth hostel brochures, from England, Scotland and Appalachia, places she has never been. She imagines coming upon them with her backpack and her walking shoes, talking with that bearded man at the registration, who in the picture is wearing a red T-shirt; then going up to her room with the key, setting her things on a bottom bunk. She would talk with some Norwegian girls who had all gathered to look out the window at a hawk landing on a pole.

The location of the audition for bass trombone in the Radio Wind Ensemble is at a *Schützenverein,* a shooting club, on the edge of the Rosenthal Park in Leipzig, Germany, where the wind orchestra has held its rehearsals since funding for the concert hall in the city center was withdrawn. Arriving, I hear gunshots in the woods. I walk past the musicians who have just finished their rehearsal and are now smoking in a group in front of the entrance, and the first thing I notice in the building is a picture of *The Kentucky Long Rifle,* framed and decorated with a hand-drawn border of wild game. Next to this are other pictures of the rifle club in uniform, at their annual Christmas party with their weapons and families.

After the first and second rounds, and after the third, before Thomas Stähr comes to announce I have won the intern position and must arrive at a decision by Christmas, I return to the hallway with the linoleum floor and stare at the long rifle print on the left wall, the calligraphy *K* particularly well turned, the *F* that looks like an *S*.

In the days following my audition, on train rides, staring out the windows at the harvested *Raps* fields, I cannot erase the image of this weapon from my mind. If I join the orchestra, I will move to Leipzig. It will be my first real job in a professional ensemble. I will have a salary of 800 Euros per month, an apartment of my own. I will rehearse in a gun club, with a framed rifle on its wall, and stand outside during the breaks to talk with the smokers.

I have brought a lexicon with me from America. *The actual name 'Kentucky Long rifle' was first used in an 1812 song 'The Hunters of Kentucky.'* I say the lines *…None wished it to be greater, / For every man was half a horse, / And half an alligator.*…out loud, and choose the back-half-alligator-front-half-horse variant in my mind because it is the obviously weaker species, with short legs and a long, heavy head with useless teeth. *We'll protect ye ladies,* I sing, marching up the cobbles from the station toward my apartment. I have taken off my shoes and rubbed my toes and am lying in bed now, thinking of the Kentucky long rifle in Leipzig, on the wall in the dark, where outside the lit commuter trains still pull by every thirteen minutes. The last commuters, I imagine, look down at their magazines or out into the night woods where bullets have fallen, and many of them don't know where they are going.

After moving to Leipzig, I go for sushi with some of the men from the orchestra every Monday night. They bring their girlfriends and wives, which means they do not flirt with me or tell me I should wear an undershirt to prevent kidney problems, or sit close to me and tell me about their troubled sex lives in the dark as they often do on tour. I watch the boats of wrapped rice and tied stacks of tofu with red eggs on top propelling past my nose. I watch the chef dipping raw fatty tuna in boiling water, measuring rice with his index fingers, and I smile at him, whom everyone is calling *Der Japaner*, but who is more likely Chinese. He and his colleagues manage to work without saying anything to each other: they nod and touch in a kind of choreographed movement that is elegant and wise. My fellow musicians tell their jokes loudly enough for everyone to hear—the one about the bull and the one about the *Kellnerin,* the waitress. I laugh because that is expected. We all laugh and something with batter on it comes by on a yellow plate, which is the cheapest kind. I imagine I am a cormorant watching the sea when it is dark and you can't see her, or the goats at our farm, opening and shutting their eyes to the night, and I know why my mother was looking for the squirrels in the quiet tundra, measuring their pickled ginger ears.

At the end of the summer I go with my mother to swim in the river,

walking there barefoot along the cornfield. She stops to open an ear. The sight of the galls, the great mass of black, greasy, powdery spores enclosed by the smooth white covering of corn tissue is shocking. *Smut,* she says, and checks the surrounding ears for infection before we walk onwards to the swimming hole, where we float in circles in the eddy, and she laughs at her old bathing suit. At night, still chilled from the river, I dream I am infected with smut; there are purple toes growing from my thighs and calves, a cluster sprouts from my left ear. The word *smut* rolls through my mouth like a moldy grape and my mother tries to cut away at it with her paring knife. Later I hear pornography referred to as *smut* and I don't understand; to me, smut will always mean the trip to the river, and smut will come out, strung like fat purple beetles on a spider's web, from the bell of my trombone when I play it in the empty grain silo.

In general the burrows seemed to be shallow. One factor affecting burrow depth may be the permafrost underlying the ground throughout most of the research area. Each burrow area was surrounded by a mound of earth, or, if the entrance was protected on one side, the mound was built up on the other. These mounds served both as a protection and as a lookout seat for the squirrels.

At the fall picnic the person who finds the ear of Indian corn in the bushels of yellow corn wins a turn at driving the team of Clydesdale horses. I have found an ear infected with smut, and it is no longer shocking to me. It is not ugly, and I stop shucking, knowing myself to be the true winner of this game. In Mexico, my mother told me after my dream, immature smut galls are consumed as an edible delicacy called *cuitlacoche*. I take this ear out of the barn, away from the noise of the children who are visiting their first farm, and put it in the back of the shed where my brother and I have been working on our museum. I sit on the corner of the old bench, running my finger over the wood. A crow watches me from outside as I imagine I am roasting cuitlacoche above a fire pit. The sparks run upwards and disappear.

We tell our younger brother he was born dead. *You came out dead, the wrong way up and much too small,* we say to him*, the umbilical cord was wrapped around your neck and you were blue because you could not breathe. So we threw you onto the compost pile with all the other dead animals*. He refutes that he was dead, then doesn't say anything, worries the fringe on the blanket my mother calls a *throw*. Eventually, he begins to cry. Not because we can convince him he was actually dead, but because it is clear we are working as a team against him. *After several days on the compost, we found you moving, next to the gourds. You came back to life and crawled into the house and we decided to keep you.*

When our mother begins working in Boston, he is in kindergarten. We come home together on the school bus every day and I feed the lamb orphans we are keeping in a wooden pen by the stove until they are old enough to eat hay and grain. Jonas sits on the lawn underneath the larch tree with Bernie and cries for our mother to come home. We tell him to stop or we will have to put him back onto the compost, the compost of tails and entrails, feces and straw and silage, leaves, bones, goat skin, food scrapings, chicken heads, worms and dirt, a cold blue sheep's eye, pecked through to the socket. Pea flowers come up there every year on their own, wild and strong.

The average volume of the contents of the ten stomachs examined was 15.35cc. Parts of insects, small seeds, and berry skins were found in the stomachs. When in captivity and in the area of the research camps, the squirrel was observed to eat a wide variety of food items. A young captive was offered rolled oats, cooked cream of wheat, dried apples, crackers, raisins, and peanut butter, and refused nothing. It would eat small bits of meat, and liked lettuce. This adaptability is probably one reason why the species can live at different altitudes, since the gradation of vegetation with altitude would restrict the range of a more specialized animal.

In the fall each year my father hosts a horse-logging workshop. Men in boots, plaid flannel shirts and beards arrive from all around the world to learn how to pull logs with a team of Clydesdales. This year, Björn and Olaf from Norway give us kroner for standing on our heads in the yard. My mother serves breakfast to fifteen men, and a stand with tea and sugar and coffee is erected in the entryway for them—which means my brothers and I can eat sugar cubes all day long. At night we watch slide shows in the barn, of Finnish crosscut-sawing techniques and the making of skidders in Sweden. In one of the pictures I imagine I see my mother in the snow of Alaska, holding her camera, pushing her fogged octagonal glasses up her nose, squinting. In another I see ground squirrels under the snow where the loggers are discussing the tongue length of the horse-drawn sledge. One squirrel says to the other, *tsik tsik*, and my mother bends toward the ground, pushes her long hair over her ear and holds it to the snow. The loggers do not seem to notice her, even though the manual winding of her camera is loud and the tundra is quiet. They cannot hear the squirrels, either. My brothers and I think we are at the movies and fall asleep on the loggers' laps.

Some nights my mother makes popcorn and pie and my father and Peter take out their banjo and guitar and sing "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain" and "The Garden Song" and "You Can't Make a Turtle Come Out." I fall asleep at the table and dream my mother is running through the tundra and the squirrels are chasing after her, so many of them she cannot step without crushing their skulls, which in the dream are pieces of

popcorn. She falls through the ice and sinks to the bottom. Only after she has taken off her snowshoes and her camera is she able to swim upwards again; but when she comes to the top she cannot find the hole she has fallen through. She yells for my father, who is busy talking with his logging students and does not hear her.

In her research she divides the food of the squirrels into three categories: *preferred food, staple food, and emergency food.*

Don't you carrot all for me? Peas, lettuce be Valentines. My heart is beeting for you. These are the sayings in the cards my mother helps me make for my classmates, in which I glue pictures from her old Fedco seed catalogues. *I bean thinking about you* is written above a picture of pinto beans on the inside. We work all afternoon with pink construction paper and Elmer's glue. I think my mother is very clever, and write on the back of each card "Sisyphus," which is what I would call our card company if we ever had one. When I arrive in school, most of the other children have already put their cards in the heart shaped envelopes at the front of the room with our names on them and are waiting at their desks. Brian Lund is unpacking cards from his bag. They have been made on a computer: I can see the cursive font and the perforated edges he has torn free. I tell my teacher I have forgotten today is Valentine's Day and some of the students begin whispering. As soon as we are allowed to open the envelopes though, they quickly forget me: There are Strawberry Shortcake cards that smell of fruit; there are chocolates hidden in cards, cards with Transformers on them, signed by the boys. I don't eat anything because I imagine they will think it unfair.

At home, in our farm museum, I take the cards out of my bag and look through them, remembering the afternoon we made them, how my mother laughed about the Golden Beets. I tie them together with a piece of baling twine and put them next to the pig's tooth by the lambs' tails and smut. They are like old letters, I think. A future being will find them and know only this about humans: *Dear Brian Lund, don't you carrot all for me?* Bernie is rubbing her chin on my arm and purring. Her black fur is still warm from the sun. I sit there for a long time holding her, entertaining the idea that she is very lucky.

When my mother goes to Christmas Bay to look for ground squirrels in the tundra, does she know what she is really looking for? Does a meta-Betsy ever stand above her on the snow in the afternoon when the sky is orange and purple and her thumbs numb from cocking her camera, and say to her, loud enough that the squirrels run into their myriad tunnels: *You are the squirrel*? Do I join an all-male wind ensemble in East Germany in the same way my mother goes to the Yukon? To find out how animals survive under certain conditions? To work on being treated badly? To learn how not to freeze?

Some indications of nesting material were observed. One squirrel was seen filling its pouches and its mouth with moss and carrying it off, and another was seen taking cloth handkerchiefs into its burrow. At higher altitudes, the pika and hoary marmot offered some competition. Chief predators are the larger birds of prey, wolves, bears, and wolverine. Burrows that had been dug out by a large predator were frequently seen.

When my mother returns from the hospital the year my father leaves her, we spend the day closing up the farm for what seems like winter and ends up being forever. She kills the nine chickens, putting a broom handle over their necks, standing on it and pulling upwards until the movement stops, then chopping their heads at a block. She does not bring their bloody bodies into the house and pluck feathers from their breasts as she often has done, but piles them into a wheelbarrow and brings them to an unused portion of the garden, where I help her dig holes in the November dirt. *Over there?* I ask. *Yeah, by the end of the bean row. Is this deep enough? Maybe a little further, otherwise the foxes will dig them all back up.* My mother buries them with her hands, patting down the dirt, and at dusk her pants are stained; her face is sweaty and dirt-smeared. We begin to dig the last potatoes. I try not to watch her, folded above her shovel, a glow from the evening sun catching wrinkles in her cheeks. The potatoes seem to fall upwards, easily, into our hands.

The words that come out of my trombone are still of the farm. They are *lichen, mastitis, compost, cattle egret, brood hen, coop, molting, snapping turtle, vetch, elm,* and *paring knife*. No matter what I try to play, these are the words that come out. At my final recital at the State Conservatory, where cookies and punch have been placed on a table and programs folded with the names of the pieces on the left and the composers on the right, I begin to play after the piano introduction and the words that come out are *breach birth, Indian corn, wattle, thresher, disk harrow, colostrum, udder, ewe*. I am in a silo, not a recital hall. I am in the silo attached to the barn, with the missing roof that blew off in a tornado. I am in the silo with the salamanders that appeared out of nowhere when the environment under the ferns was exactly right for them. I am in the silo with the bats, looking up at the disk of sky, the handle attached to the ladle I know is there, too. The bats must also sense what has been lost. Back then, at night, the warm breaths of the pigs and sheep and cows rose like music into the eves of the barn.

I want someday to return, sit on my rocks by the sheep, and write that something has become of me, even if it only means winning first prize in the crosscut-sawing contest at the Hardwick Fair or getting a little poem called "Maelstrom" published in *Prairie Schooner*, even if it means travelling to darker, colder, quieter places and noticing small things, like

my mother's handwriting. Standing by the compost pile under the bare crab-apple tree where once a swing hung, I can hear only the *silver dollars* near the chamomile bed, jingling in the pocket of wind that comes up from the marsh. Salamanders turn up a fern frond in the silo, and my mother breathes in her sleep.

Jonas, I would say, if he were here, we all have been born dead. We are all dead and must be put onto the compost. We must find a compost to put turnip and goldenrod back into us. Now, this compost pile is only sod, but when I stand above it I hear the words coming up: *ash tree, smut, abscess, testes, sap. Tack room, shod, gander, wrought iron, slack tub, chaff. Carrot. Larch. Beet.* I say them out loud.

Esther Lin

Cholera Is What My Grandfather Did During The War

In the summer of twenty sixteen, cholera was nowhere to be found
in the great prairie of Saskatchewan, where my husband and I

rode the sleeper from Toronto all the way west. Something
about the train's knock and sway over a plane's uncommon speed,

its declining grandeur: dining car framed in brass Art Deco,
windows replaced in the seventies, office carpet in the nineties,

and the polyester napkins older only than the teenagers who
warmed our meals on their summer job. Can I say we were happy?

Our first night, we dined with Paul and Charlotte, translators
from the north of England. Also, Morris dancers. We leaned in

to see what Morris dancing looked like on Charlotte's phone—
expecting girls ribboning a Maypole and a stray Titania

winging by. Morris dancing has uncertain origins, Paul explained.
Perhaps Moorish, from which the word *Morris* is probably derived,

like the Italian *moresca*. So lingering an immigrant in the English
countryside this dance had become evidence of one's Englishness.

Chilled winearrived, then bisque. We turned the conversation
to Austen's ten-pound note, the Brontës' parsonage, lately replicated.

They fielded our questions about that and the Queen, hooligans
and high tea. Then—two Brits, two Americans, what more

would we speak of? "The war," of course, as if it were not
seventy years ago but ten and we were tasting peace and wealth

as we recounted our hunger, our rations. Our lost boys.
As if a camera were gazing on us, Hitchcock frowning hugely

as we read our lines, the train pounding inexorably to Munich
or Paris. We might have been double agents, testing each other

with small talk and winks. But Paul and Charlotte were earnest
in a way we could not be, not me, Brazilian-born, of Chinese descent,

enjoyer of spy novels. Not my husband, a Catholic whose family
left Belfast two generations back, whose stock had dissolved

to "American" or "white." No, for our friends, it was simple. Familiar.
Like so many London children, Paul's father was sent abroad

to escape the Blitz, sheltered by a New Hampshire family.
Years later they sent lavish editions of the *Little House on the Prairie*

series to young Paul, to say, *Hello. This is America.* Here I stopped
to praise that plain staple of my own childhood: tomes on how

to tap maples, clean a rifle—and so crowded with songs and maxims
that surely Wilder, at the turn of the century, saw their passing and called

them back. Perhaps American can-do fed Paul the way it fed me.
And Charlotte, her lineage was still more impressive.

Her grandfather studied the beaches of Normandy in advance of D-Day—
"O the wild charge they made!" "Though they sink through the sea

they shall rise again…" How else to sing the day that made a generation
greatest, when the Allies surged like a warming sea against the icy

continent, the war turned. Something of those Norman beaches
breached must have heartened an old Saxon. Or so I imagined, knowing

only to list other histories to compare. Hastings. Marathon. Waterloo.
Of the great triumphing over the great. This time, fascists.

Their gleaming boots and black uniforms so smart Hollywood
would dress its stars up to reenact this war for decades to come

and perhaps find America falling in love. How strange that in the year
of this conversation, over arugula and tri-tip steak, as we rolled

between the vast farms of its largest commonwealth, England finally,
finally left that continent. But before Brexit or this train ride,

before *Saving Private Ryan* or *Where Eagles Dare,*
before the first landing craft struck shore, Charlotte's grandfather

tested sample after sample of French sands, which beach most capable
of supporting vehicles and footfalls, mortar and body-falls.

No doubt he was a man who did not hold himself in high esteem
but worked quietly, celebrated peacetime, was tender to his grandchildren

and forgot his own heroism, though it was not to be forgotten…
We listened with all the pleasure of a familiar story,

and then I said, My grandfather died of cholera.
He was in China during the war. He died of cholera.

Here in the Art Deco dining car, with pink lamps lit and the yellow-
blooming canola beyond, it sounded like a punch line. So we laughed.

Brynn Martin

My Mother's Nipples

after Robert Hass

When I undress
in our hotel room,
I turn my body
away from her.
She laughs,
says she's seen my body
my whole life.
With my back to her,
I don't admit I hide
my naked from everyone,
how I cinch my body in a towel
or blanket after sex.
I don't confess.
We pretend
I'm a virgin at 24.

When I tell her
I broke my promise
made after Sunday School,
she stands with her arms
crossed.
She doesn't want me
to feel judged.

I saw my mother naked
first when she changed,
probably. Her breasts
were like mine now,
full and heavy
in a way that leads
to drooping,
nipples like raisins
but flushed
as lips, surrounded

by a translucent
pink, large
as a gerbera daisy,
a wild sunflower bloom.

Orlando Ricardo Menes

Macho

From the Latin *masculus,* male,
as in a pipe threaded on the outside
that screws into the inner thread
of its opposite called female, *la hembra,*
as in the stud that mounts the mare,
the three-stage rocket that pierces
our placental atmosphere.

I first heard the word from Mamá
when she shamed me (I must've been ten
or eleven) for being timid, emotional,
running to her in tears when the cracker
boys shot me with their BB guns.

A boy who isn't macho is just a girl
with a weenie, she'd say or think
(so long ago I can't remember which,
but does it really matter, anyway?).
A real man, *un macho de verdad,*
punches and kicks to break bones
(bruises are just downright sissy),
who stomps and bellows so hard
even the walls tremble, who eats
iron nails and shits nuclear grenades.

Next time you hear "macho man"
forget about the Village People's
happy-go-lucky disco song about leather
dudes who lust after Indian chiefs
in the bathhouses of Castro Street.

No, no, it's the other Castro
you should be thinking about, our Fidel,
our Fidelito, our Fidelazo,
macho of machos, bellower of bellowers,

the beastly bull that raped our island
(la isla/feminine), our cannibal Minotaur
with testicles like bunker busters,

our tyrant of tyrants whose phallus
hovers like the longest cannon ever
made (as in Hitler's or Saddam Hussein's)
from Punta Maisí to Punta Hicaco,

our nuclearly hetero caudillo
who sent gays to concentration
camps with big metal signs that read
"Work Will Make You a Man."

Michael Meyerhofer

Urban Legend

My father sat me down to tell me
not about the secret powers of women
nor my mother's failing kidneys

but a story he'd just heard: a boy my age
vacationing with family in Mexico,
a boy who saw his kid-sister abducted

and gave chase through a throng
of brown bodies. How the parents,
when they noticed the absence,

sought the help of border guards
with eagles on their sleeves—
strong, faceless men who knew

it was already too late. An hour later,
the kids turned up with their guts
scooped out, replaced with narcotics

the cartel tried to smuggle across
a border bristling with rifles and flags.
In real life, I didn't have a sister

and we never vacationed anywhere
that took more than an hour to reach.
Still, I worried myself sick

imagining pills, powder, plants,
that tug-o-war on my insides,
wondered whether those bags of sin

lied flat like deflated balloons
or bulged like the moony breasts
of women I saw in magazines,

women with eyes like damp gravestones
who leaned on men with muscles
that spoke their own language.

Susan Bucci Mockler

When Omair Shaaban Teaches Us How to Survive

Do your homework. Each kind of airstrike—shells, rockets,
phosphorous bombs, cluster bombs—makes its own unique
sound. Why wouldn't it? High-pitched squeaking, clicking,
rumbling, like thunder, even buzzing. Learn the differences.
Learn, by their sound, how close they are to you. How much
time you'll have to take cover. There is always one you won't
hear. There's no use worrying about that one. Live on the lower
floors of buildings. Stay out of the rooms near the streets. We
use ours for storage. You won't have to worry about lights
attracting bombers or snipers. There won't be any electricity.
It's almost always dark. Smoke. Smoldering rubble. It's best
to spend most of your time inside. You'll be bored, but you have
to believe life will be normal again. One day. If you have a car,
use it sparingly. Hide it in an empty garage or shop. Make sure
to keep the car windows cracked just a bit. Otherwise, the glass
may shatter from the pressure of bombs exploding nearby. That
happened to me. Not twenty feet behind me. I never heard it
coming. The windshield shattered. When you kiss your wife or
run into your friends on the street, look them in the eyes. Look
deeply at them. Memorize every inch of them. Tell them
you love them. Tell them again. It may be the last time. Tell them
how happy you are that you are together. Stay calm. Above all,
you have to stay calm. Remember why you choose to stay.
It is your city. It is your country. You must absolutely insist on it.

Note: Inspired by "We Live in Aleppo. Here's How We Survive," by Omair Shaaban, *The Washington Post,* Oct. 23, 2016.

Travis Mossotti

Déjà Entendu

"They've invented everything."
—Pablo Picasso, to his guide after visiting
Lascaux Cave, France

The voice that called you here
is the echo of an echo of an ancient one that
has already started to disappear

from the calcified galleries preserving deer,
bear, lion and wolf scat.
The voice that called you here

swathed in poetry's inky veneer,
won't curate the artifacts and paintings that
have already started to disappear

from these stony hollows; visitors blear
the images with breath, no matter how delicate,
and the voice that called you here

has done more harm than good I fear.
Please, this isn't an invitation to visit what
has already started to disappear.

Time doesn't need us to interfere
with what water does for free—leave it at that.
The voice that called you here
has already started to disappear.

Richard Newman

Donut Tree

Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands

At most a ukulele, a basketball,
maybe a flip-flop above the rising tide,
we queue on sand this morning at Donut Tree
for coffee, vodka, SPAM sushi, and yes,
donuts, while poverty sprawls on either side
like a sleeping dog,

and when not sleeping, the mongrels of Majuro
would rather chase a running pair of knees
than gnaw old bones. Consumed by hunger, madness,
and mange, they've grown too many, and no one on
this island hasn't been attacked, most bitten,
as was my sweet mutt Ginger, so any dog
without a collar will be rounded up,
throats slit like pigs, feeding the Majuro
police force and their families for weeks.

Ginger and I walked down to City Hall,
a mostly open-air building, to buy
a five-buck tag that fastens to her collar.
The clerk behind the counter couldn't change
a $20. "Can you come back tomorrow?" she asked.
"Will you have change tomorrow?" I asked. She laughed.
At least I now had time for the Donut Tree
before our weekly college lit mag meeting
which multiplies attendance as the students
magically seem to know when I have donuts.

In any other place, these donuts—hard,
unglazed, unsprinkled in brown paper bags
Rorschached with grease stains—might be tossed for rats,
but here on Majuro, they take the shape
of our atoll, where the hole is our lagoon,
the glorious blue center of this life,
and everything around it is moist bonus,

and if I take two bags to Liberal Arts,
they will be gone in minutes, and Jae, our small
Korean Marxist geographer, will eat
a whole bag on his own, and now, my turn
in line, I know, not seeing any bags
but only smelling thick, delicious air
of deep-fat sugar-dough, that they've sold out,
again, the last bag left
the counter hours ago, and this has happened
four of the last five times that I've stopped by
the Donut Tree, and I am once again
left with the hole, the fragrant nothingness
implying donut, and this is why these donuts
are so delicious—because they're sweet and rare,
because the Donut Tree's a lottery
we only savor if we're lucky, because
sometimes in this sad but carefree place,
only emptiness feeds our emptiness.
Crossing the coral rubble ocean side,
we stand on crumbling graves emptied by waves
and squint into the wind, the blurred horizon,
a ukulele above the rising tide.

Majuro, April, 2017

Nicola Koh

Forgive Not My Transgressions

In Calvin Seminary, they made us draw our genitals, at least those of us taking the Human Sexuality elective. I drew my penis flaccid, slightly smaller than average, accompanied by testicles that hung in lopsided scrota. Others in that class struggled to draw the kind of dicks and pussies you find in public bathrooms.

A Human Sexuality class in a conservative seminary is not like the real world version. Here sex was only meant for marriage between man and woman, and everything else was depravity. Here half the class believed same-sex relationships were perverse.

The CRC, the Dutch Calvinist denomination that ran Calvin Seminary, had a forty-year old policy on homosexuality that said same-sex attraction was a result of the fall, that those who were attracted to the same sex couldn't help their orientation but must abstain from acting on it. To its credit, for decades CRC synods refused overture after overture to declare the orientation itself sinful. In 1972, it was revolutionary for a mainstream protestant denomination. In 2014, in the real world, not so much.

In conservative Christendom, it was also revolutionary to be comfortable with genitals as facts instead of symbols.

"You can't begin to minister," Prof N. said as we went at it, "if you're afraid of your God-given genitalia."

N. had been both a clinical psychologist and pastor before joining the faculty sixteen years before. It was my only class with him, the first he offered after returning from his second bout with leukemia, the one we all thought he'd die from, though we never stopped praying, wouldn't, couldn't stop believing he'd make it back.

N. survived, and we called it miraculous, though the bone marrow transplant destroyed a lot of his mobility. My last semester was his last teaching, and since he was the most beloved prof in seminary, I thought I was lucky to be able to learn from him. "You're going to be disappointed," he said, chuckling when I told him.

Even the complete evisceration of my faith the semester before didn't dim my excitement. Maybe it was because denial still came easily. Or maybe I was still honeymooning from a January of wearing so-called women's clothing, bags and bags of it from Goodwill (all savings of which were eradicated by being duped into buying expensive makeup at Macy's).

Whatever the case, I overlooked some stuff. Like how the assistant teacher, ostensibly a biologist, sold the class on pseudoscientific bullshit about how oxytocin proved God's desire for monogamy. Or the time N. was struggling to describe the term for a person with both sets of phenotypes assigned to men and women.

"Intersex," I said.

"No, that's when someone's genitals are in-between male and female," he said. "Ah! Hermaphroditism."

I didn't say he was using outdated and now offensive terminology. I should have, because my classmates were taking diligent notes. But I was too scared, or I believed too much in saving face, or I was too tired, too worn out to fight. I didn't even bring it up to N. when I visited him in his office.

"Could you help me?" he asked when I stopped by.

His eyes dried out easily and he couldn't raise his arms high enough for the eyedrops. He leaned back in his chair and went bug eyes while I gently squeezed the bottle. It felt to me like a scene from Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie,* minus the catheter.

"So, what did you want to talk about?" he asked.

I explained my history with gender identity and how I had, as of that year, begun presenting feminine roughly half the time, and how I was going to start presenting fully feminine imminently. He nodded, asked some questions.

"Do your parents know?"

My parents had been his students just three years prior. I told him they supported me.

"It seems you're at peace with this," he said, smiling.

We made a rough plan for how to handle my transitioning with regards to the class.

"Do you mind if I pray for you?" he asked.

No one in the seminary knew I was no longer Christian, so I pretended to pray, hiding my smile with a bowed head.

The next day I walked into the once-a-week class and there were two stacks of paper, one pink, one blue.

"Take the color that corresponds with your gender," N. was saying to students as they filtered in.

When I sat down without choosing a paper, N. grabbed a blue one and put it in front of me. I tried not to read too much into the slap it came down with, tried to believe it was because of his poor muscle control, tried not to think of it as symbolic.

"Now draw your genitalia," he said

There was nervous laughter.

"I'm serious. You have to be comfortable with penises and vaginas—and I want you always to use the words, not euphemisms, no hoo-hahs and ding-dongs."

There was no contest to see whose drawing was most accurate, but mine probably would have won. I was familiar with my penis and drew it without shame. It was easier to concentrate on realism than to think about anything else.

A month later was the day I was coming out to the class, the only two hours I presented masculine by that time.

The plan N and I made was that for the first five minutes, I would explain to the class why I was dressed like a woman and share some of my story; then N. would invite the class to pray over me in my journey.

I thought about what I was going to say, what biblical analogy would most help them understand, and I landed on how Ruth chose to give up Moabite faith to take up the faith of her mother-in-law, Naomi—and how, in Christian thought, this was less a swap and more a choosing of what had always been natural to her.

The CRC had no official policy on transgender identities. As far as I know, I am the only one who had ever attempted a master's thesis defending a transgender identity as biblically acceptable. But most people in the CRC saw transgender identities as the same as being gay or lesbian, and most people in the CRC hate those who are LGBQTIA.

The Sunday before class, I drove up to Detroit to get a tattoo of a naked female angel on my shoulder, kneeling beside the Hebrew text *etsem meatsamay vuvasar mibbesaray*: bone from my bone, flesh from my flesh, the words Adam says at the creation of Eve before continuing: *she shall be woman, for she came out of man*. I didn't want to present feminine in the middle of the Motor City Tattoo Convention, but I promised myself that was the last day I would present masculine. My old self dying under the tattooing needle, I emerged a new creation.

Two days later, the day before the big class, I got an email from N, which opened with:

hello Matthew, or Nicola as you wish.[1]

I have given your request more thought. And I think it is a mistake to surprise[2] *your classmates with your female dress…*[3]

[1] "If I must"

[2] There's more than one gender and gender presentation ≠ gender identity. Surprise!!

[3] But what about someone else's female dress?

I replied that I understood that he wanted to prepare the class, but I asked that he consider my own well-being, too.

He wrote back saying:

I understand your need to be true to your self, especially to your new self. And I understand that Matthew is pretty much gone from your identity. However[1] *I also need to ask you to consider the emotional/learning experience of your classmates; this is also my responsibility as a teacher. We need to make this a positive pastoral learning experience for the class. And simply shocking them with your new female presentation is not good teaching method.*[2] *There needs to be some preparation so that they can be thoughtful about responses to your transgendered experience.*[3]

Wisdom to me suggests that we seek to meet both objectives, that is, for you to be true to yourself as Nicola and students to be prepared and reflective of their experience. This means that you have two choices.[4]

One option is for you to not come tomorrow and allow me at the close of class to spend about 15 minutes preparing students for your female presentation on March 12.

A second option, is for you to come to class dressed as Matthew tomorrow and then at the close of class together you and I would talk with your classmates about your new presentation as a woman. This meets the objective of the good learning of the class, but you would set aside your need to consistently present as female.[5]

Now please know that this second option is my preference because then together we could discuss your experience with in the context of the relationship with fellow students.[6] *We would then be able to pray with you and pray for you and offer personal support and support your new identity…*

[1] A good rule: when someone says, "but" or "however," disregard everything that came before. For eg. "I'm not racist, however the blacks need to work harder," or "I'm not here to point fingers, but you fucked up."

[2] Ie. "Your gender transitioning must be a learning experience for others," ie "you must be an object of public edification," ie "you exist for our sakes"

[3] Heaven forbid they reveal their bigotry in an uncrafted moment!

[4] Neither factually, practically, nor legally true.

[5] Wisdom might point out that this doesn't fulfill "both objectives" (see above).

[6] "Preference" here implies: "I have weighed your needs against your classmate's comfort and found you wanting and I will be disappointed if you don't agree."

As my therapist and friends pointed out, he missed an option: go to class dressed feminine and threaten a lawsuit if he tried to stop me. I didn't go with that. I contacted all the people who knew about my transitioning—my advisor, my dean, the president of the school—and they all deferred to N.'s wisdom.

One of my friends was in the class and knew about my transitioning. We had planned to meet up in the student lounge to chat after class. Barred from the class in my dress, I went to the student lounge and waited, sitting by the fish pond, ignoring the incredulous stares of the other students.

When Human Sexuality got out, some of the students came up to me.

They told me they were honored I would share this with them and they would keep me in their prayers. My friend said N. read the angry email I wrote back to him out loud to the class, reminding them that I had a right to my anger. He also explained that I was also homosexual since I liked women.

My friend seemed to think overall N. handled it well.

"It was very touching," she said.

After that conversation, I sent an email to N, completely erased from my memory.

I want to thank you[1] *for your kind*[2] *words on Wednesday to the class.*[3] *And I would like you to know that many of the students have reached out to me and offered their support.*[4]

Overall, I feel very blessed.[5]

Grace[6] *and peace,*[7]
Nicola

[1] Culturally I'm given to unnecessary thank yous. Once an older Chinese man and I spent two minutes thanking each other

[2] Pro tip: when you take lack of outright hostility as kindness, you might be in a hostile environment

[3] Pity I couldn't hear those words. It's almost as if something prevented me from going to class.

[4] Many = 3

[5] I did not at this point believe in blessings so this is what we in the industry called pure bullshit.

[6] cf "blessed"

[7] Closer to Peace Out, than Peace to You

I stopped caring about the class, about the seminary, about being honest. I wrote the most bullshit paper of my life (where I may or may not have interviewed myself under a pseudonym.) I passed the defense of my thesis, I graduated in a dress, and I left as soon as I could, left all those people

who smiled when I was looking and whispered when I wasn't, gathered the pieces of a once hopeful soul and put them into fifty-nine boxes, earmarked for another life.

Jennifer Lang

The Fabric of Peace

My breath catches when I look at my son Benjamin in his Israel Defense Forces (IDF) army fatigues for the first time. Because he is my firstborn. Because he towers over me. Because he is ready to embark on a journey I'd secretly hoped none of my children would ever pursue. Seeing Benjamin now reminds me of my long-ago vision of peace back when I had first moved to Israel and former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stood in the spotlight.

Pregnant in the spring of 1993, I was swept up in the cautious optimism that infused the country. The long, hot summer of swollen feet and *What to Expect When You're Expecting* coincided with Israel's season of political dialogue, peace talks and agreements. World politics centered on Rabin, his name coming up in our everyday conversation. The Oslo Accord unfolded as my belly expanded.

Midway through my first pregnancy, during a routine appointment, my gynecologist waved his magic wand over my abdomen, squinted at the ultrasound screen, and informed me I was carrying a boy. My husband, Philippe, wasn't with me; I was devastated the doctor had robbed us of the surprise.

I wanted a girl. Boys scared me. In Israel, most eighteen-year-old males serve three years in a combat unit in the IDF. Just because I had chosen to live in the only democracy in the Middle East didn't mean I'd be ready or willing to sacrifice my child, something it seems every Israeli accepts.

By the third trimester, the subject of politics dominated every discussion: Oslo this, Rabin that, the PLO this, the Accords that. I pondered baby names, as well as the meaning of war and peace, compromise and co-existence.

On September 13, Philippe and I brought home our four-day-old son from the hospital. With Benjamin's crib in one room and oodles of baby presents in another, our Haifa apartment felt cramped. Even though Philippe told me to rest, I couldn't. All I wanted to do was gaze down at my infant and up at the television screen; on TV, Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat were shaking hands, the first public handshake between the two arch enemies, with U.S. President Bill Clinton at their sides.

I stretched out on our autumn-colored couch. Benjamin, his eyes

pinched closed and his lips puckered, slept quietly despite the voices emanating from the set a few feet away.

"The peace of the brave is within our reach," Clinton said. "Throughout the Middle East there is a great yearning for the quiet miracle of normal life." His words resonated deeply.

I stroked the wisps of downy hair on my baby's head, overcome by the thought that I had made this tiny, perfect being, that it was my job to protect him.

Rabin spoke next: "We who have fought against you the Palestinians, we say to you today in a loud and clear voice, enough of blood and tears, enough!" Tears formed at the edge of my eyes. As these world leaders stood on the White House lawn in Washington, DC, thousands of onlookers applauded, and many bowed their heads as if in prayer. For months, I'd been reading and listening and paying attention to the news. I believed in these men and their promises.

As a young mother and new immigrant from America, I watched these ground breakers, full of hope. I trusted Rabin to lead this teeny, complicated country to peace. I believed that when my child grew up, he wouldn't have to serve in the army.

Almost two decades later, during which we've left and returned more than once to this land, I stare at my soldier son in wonder. During his month-long basic training, he spends every other weekend at home. On Sunday, the first day of the work week in Israel, he wakes up early and quickly dresses in his compulsory layers—white V-neck undershirt, moss green long-sleeve shirt and matching trousers, tucked into ankle-high black boots with thick black socks—guzzles a big glass of water, grabs a granola bar, and races for the bus back to the base.

A typical teenager, he doesn't talk much to us, so we know little about army life. He says the food is terrible. They rise before dawn to do physical exercises and go to bed long before his circadian clock beckons him. They're warned not to bring any valuables with them, and they have limited use of their cellphones. At an age when his American peers can choose if and when to study or party, our son no longer controls his time or movements. He cannot spend endless hours online or text his girlfriend spontaneously. For now, his life belongs to the IDF.

I stand in awe of my son's commitment to Israel since he spent the bulk of his childhood in *my* homeland. Shortly after his first birthday, we left and spent one year in France, six in Oakland, California, and ten in White Plains, New York.

Transitions between moves were bumpy. By the time we had settled into our new California lives in the fall of '95, I felt torn in two. As much

as I'd wanted to reside closer to my parents, I missed the one, big family feeling in Israel sometimes.

Saturday, November fourth had started like any other. Faded leaves danced along the sidewalks of our Crocker Highlands neighborhood. Shortly after breakfast, Philippe left with two-year-old Benjamin for *Shabbat* services at Beth Jacob Congregation, where I joined them later. My husband greeted me in the entryway of the synagogue, a grave expression on his face.

"Where's Benj? Is he okay?" I asked.

"He's fine, walking around with a teenager who loves playing with him," he said. I sighed, relieved. "But, did you hear?"

I shook my head.

"Rabin was assassinated at a peace rally in Tel Aviv."

I rolled my eyes. "Right!"

"No, I'm serious. It was some right-wing fanatic. That's all I know." The corners of his lips usually turned up slightly when he was joking. This time, they weren't.

Philippe opened his arms to cradle me. I leaned in. I cried, globs of emotion clumped in my chest. I envisioned people lighting candles and keeping vigils in the White City and felt heartbroken for the distance, for not being able to mourn with everyone, for the loss of a remarkable statesman. Yet, I knew that with Rabin gone, the never-ending cycle of madness between Israeli Jews and Palestinians would resume; as long as we stayed in the U.S., I reasoned, I could protect my baby.

During five of my most important early adult years in Israel, Rabin had loomed like a grandfather figure. Without fail, he appeared—in the *Jerusalem Post*, in our weekly issue of *TIME* magazine, on the nightly news—accompanying me on my journey as young woman, new immigrant, new wife, and new mother. I met and married Philippe and gave birth to a *sabra;* said *"Shabbat Shalom"* on Fridays to the butcher and the baker; camped in the Sinai desert before it was returned to Egypt; and celebrated the Jewish holidays with the entire nation. I lived through stone-throwing in the late 1980s, the First Gulf War in 1991, and numerous terrorist attacks in the 1990s. Yitzhak Rabin and his vision of peace enveloped me like a cocoon, making me feel safe.

In the years that followed Rabin's assassination, as our family grew, the Israel issue strained our marriage. Philippe made it clear that he only lived in the United States for me, while I told him I couldn't fathom living in a country forced to fight in a war without a name while raising three young kids. We reached the most logical and non-negotiable compromise: summers in the scalding desert.

As a new century dawned, the region was volatile. In the first half of

2001, while we were entrenched in house hunting and packing to relocate from one coast to the other, not a month went by without at least one act of terror in Israel. Six years since Rabin's assassination, and peace was long forgotten.

As much as I tried to tune out the news, I was constantly bombarded. My parents, *New York Times* junkies, often called to say, "Did you hear the latest?" Friends on both coasts emailed to make sure our contacts in Israel were unscathed. Following bombings in Jerusalem, I immediately checked in with my brother, who had immigrated after college, to confirm that his family was intact. No matter what I did or where I lived, I couldn't ignore the country.

During the summer of 2006, tension between Israel and Lebanon escalated as the two countries sent rockets and tanks, missiles and soldiers into each other's territory. Israelis were either called in to serve or on standby in case they were needed; many cut vacations short or cancelled them altogether in order to help.

That summer, we planned to celebrate Benjamin's bar mitzvah in his birthplace. When we'd made the arrangements, we hadn't taken the possibility of war into account. For weeks before our departure, everyone in our inner circle emailed and phoned to ask about our backup plan, assuming that since the war had intensified we'd cancel. But, there was no such talk in our house. Six weeks shy of his thirteenth birthday, Benjamin never raised the topic, either unaware or unconcerned, assuming his parents knew best. Philippe was confident the conflict would end.

At night, my brain buzzed like an annoying insect, awakening me. Irrational what-ifs spun in circles: what if we were at a stop light in Jerusalem, next to a bus, and a suicide bomb exploded? What if terrorists blew up the plane to Israel? In the darkness of our bedroom, I tiptoed to the bathroom and felt around my medicine cabinet for Ambien to help lull me to sleep.

"You guys are so brave!" our friends said as each day passed and our travel plans stayed the same. "You're heroes!" I didn't understand who they were talking to. Inside, I felt petrified and weak, ready to cancel as soon as Philippe agreed. I was anything but courageous.

How I yearned to ask the bar mitzvah boy if, after all the planning and preparations of the past months, he would be okay if we stayed put and celebrated his entrance into adulthood in New York instead.

As casualties rose on both sides, the government and the army were criticized for their lack of preparedness, their pitiful reactions, and their poor execution. Rabin's absence left a gaping hole in the country's delicate fabric. I couldn't stop thinking about him, imagining how different Arab-Jewish relations might have been had he still been alive.

And then, on August fourteenth, the United Nations brokered a

ceasefire. The fighting stopped. We boarded our Lufthansa flight knowing that the danger had passed—until next time.

By the time we arrived, kids roamed city streets licking watermelon popsicles, people sat in cafes sipping iced coffee at all hours, and sunbathers swarmed the beaches. Friends in Israel referred to what we eventually named as the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War or Second Lebanon War in past tense.

For the last week of our trip, our parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins arrived from France and America. Together with our brothers and their families, we volunteered with the national food bank to pick onions at a field in the center of the country. Covered in dirt and blobs of sweat, we invited them all to lunch at a nearby Italian restaurant where we sat in the shade of a courtyard and gorged on pizza and pasta.

"Mazel tov to Benj," my dad said, lifting a glass of ice water, "for bringing us together to this special country on the occasion of your Bar Mitzvah."

"L'chaim," the adults chimed in. *To life.* My girls and all their little kid cousins imitated the adults, clinking spoons against glasses.

"And to peace," someone said, perhaps my uncle or Philippe's aunt.

I looked at my father, then my son. It was only Thursday, the day before the real celebration, and already I was overwhelmed by emotion, thinking about how far Philippe and I had traveled, following unexpected detours along the way, over the past sixteen years.

The next afternoon, we drove south near Kiryat Gat to Kibbutz Gal-On guesthouse, where one hundred of our closest friends and family members, most of whom had attended our wedding in Jerusalem and, three years later, Benjamin's circumcision ceremony in Haifa, would gather for the next twenty-four hours.

Dressed for services and dinner, my family of five posed on the lawn outside our bungalows for the photographer. She directed us to stand between two acacia trees, the girls on either side of their big brother. Slowly, our groupings grew: Philippe's family, then mine, eventually both sides. When, toward the end, the photographer staged the forty-something, three-generation clan together, Benjamin gaped at everybody surrounding him. "This is just family?" he asked. "I can't believe how many of us there are here!" Here, in the land of Israel.

That night, during *Shabbat* dinner in the dining hall, Philippe and I stood and shouted to get everyone's attention. We summoned Benjamin to join us. First Philippe spoke in French, thanking our guests for coming and summarizing the verses Benjamin would be chanting from the Torah the next morning, about how Moses gathered the Israelites to enter them into a covenant with God, warning of the exile and desolation of the land if Israel abandoned God's laws, but assuring them that they will eventually repent, and God will then return his people to the Holy Land.

"And now, Jennifer will speak in English," he said. Our guests chuckled.

I faced my son. "Benj, I know you've heard this story many times about the day we brought you home from the hospital," I began, reiterating that peace talks were in the making. "And how you were one of the founding members of the generation of hope, of peace." I paused and inhaled. "Despite the failure to reach peace in Israel, we bring you and your sisters every summer to see your family. We want you to know Israel—not as a tourist but as the *sabra* that you are. Here, Benjamin, is my blessing: that you continue to be the intelligent, caring, world-savvy young man you already are as you grow up, that you question what needs to be challenged and accept what cannot be changed. That you are strong and self-confident enough to go out into the world and in some way help bring peace—into your life, our lives, and the lives of the greater world." Finally, I exhaled then hugged my eldest child.

Philippe handed me a glass of wine and raised his. *"L'chaim,"* he said and everyone joined in unison.

A few days before we left Israel, one of Philippe's colleagues had asked if he'd consider working in the company's Raanana office. Assuming I wouldn't be interested, Philippe politely declined. He repeated their conversation as a fait accompli.

"This might surprise you, but I'm open to the idea of living here for a year," I said as we were packing. The kids were asleep in another room.

"Really?" His face changed from expressionless to expectant.

"I've been thinking a lot about raising children here," I said. "When the kids went with their cousins alone to the park and for pizza, they loved it. Seven and nine year olds don't get that freedom in America, and I know that."

My husband listened intently.

"I'm set professionally," I continued. "I can write and teach yoga wherever we live."

A one-year semi-sabbatical, I thought, would snap us out of mid-life stupor, a kind of spell that had been cast on us and our peers in America: re-tile roof, sign up child for another extra-curricular activity, buy another pair of black boots. The kids would be fourteen, ten, and eight, ideal ages to explore with and expose to other cultures both in and outside of Israel.

That conversation marked the first of many until, finally, just as the groundhog checked for his shadow in early February, we reached a mutual decision to leave for what I called *The Year of Living Differently.* When we initially shared the news, our parents supported us and our friends considered it a middle-aged crisis. But our kids were less enthusiastic.

Philippe and I called a Family Meeting, the first and only one of its kind, in our living room. After we sprung the news, the youngest collapsed in a fit of tears because of her best friend; the middle one bounced up and

down on the sofa like popcorn, beaming, bursting, eager for an adventure; Benjamin sank into the sofa.

A sweet but somewhat reserved teenager, his voice, still childlike and high, quivered. "No, tell me you're kidding? I'm gonna miss my freshman year of high school here, in New York?" His eyes welled up. Philippe put his arms around him.

I hadn't expected Benjamin to react so harshly. For the past five years, he had made it clear how much he disliked Westchester and had never made another best friend like the one he'd left behind in California. He avoided inviting boys over because we didn't have a swing set or trampoline in the backyard, and his sisters' Polly Pockets had invaded the basement.

I knew that he, like me, thrived on routine and structure. Big-scale change like moving would be difficult for him; yet, like his *Abba,* I knew Benjamin felt more comfortable in Israel. Every summer, Benjamin metamorphosed into a different version of himself, becoming more dynamic and outgoing and animated, when he plunged into the Mediterranean head first; walked to the nearby corner market, jingling coins in his pocket to buy cheese burekas and Bamba; or roamed the streets of Jerusalem with his cousins.

Two weeks after our arrival in Raanana on a sizzling August afternoon, Benjamin arrived home from his *ulpan* immersion class and announced that he couldn't remember the last time he had felt as comfortable with a people and a place. As each month passed, he grew more and more attached.

"We're staying, right?" he said sometimes. "We're not going back. I'm not at least."

Was he threatening me?

During our year, Benjamin tackled engaging extra-curricular activities: tennis, French, emergency medical technician training. He rode his bike or the bus long after dark, no longer dependent on me carting him to friends' houses or on his outings. He spoke Hebrew with almost no American accent. As a young and impressionable teen, he watched family friends' kids and his older cousins interview for the army, discuss potential units, and undergo the extensive testing procedures.

By early spring, the Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist organization Hamas began lobbing hundreds of Qassam rockets from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel. I was on edge, not afraid for my personal safety since we lived forty-five miles north of Ashkelon and Sderot, the two cities taking the most hits, residents running for shelter in under fifteen seconds, but for the state of Israel. Whenever anyone mentioned "the situation," code for the security threat du jour, I conjured up one-way conversations with Rabin, letting him know how much I missed him and wished he were here.

We became a family divided: the boys dreamed of staying in Israel and the girls, mostly me, balked. Philippe called me closed-minded for not extending our time, while I felt betrayed he wasn't sticking to our agreed-upon twelve-month plan. We raised our voices. We slept back to back. We didn't talk for days, sometimes a week at a time. Finally, I proffered a deal: if he'd agree to return to the United States, I'd consider coming back to Israel permanently after Benjamin's high school graduation.

While my husband softened toward me, my son grew angrier. "The Ludens are staying. The Millers are staying. The Rothenbergs stayed. They all came for a year too. Why can't you be more like them?" Benjamin said as if accusing me.

I took his blame—for exposing him to something wonderful and then whisking him away, for uprooting him again. Israel's energy and craziness had nestled itself into his blood and his bones—not mine. The smallness of the country suffocated me, and the absence of any peace process made me despair.

The following year, back in New York, Benjamin received his first draft notice from the IDF. Even though every Israeli-born child is obligated to serve, those with extenuating circumstances are often exempt. Since we left the country when he was a year old and ended up living abroad for so long, he could have easily opted out, telling them that he had no intention of coming and that he planned to go to college in America instead.

But my son had other ideas. After being dragged away from his birthplace, he had a difficult transition back to high school. Philippe and I knew that Israel, in particular the army, preoccupied him. One Saturday evening in the fall of his junior year, the conversation finally arose.

"The college fair's tomorrow at Schechter High to learn about campus and Jewish life in America. I'll go with you if you want," I said, treading carefully between my desire for involvement and his need for independence.

"I'm not going. You go," he said with a huff, plunking his body onto the living room couch.

"Why would I go without you? I've already been to college."

Aside from my voice, nothing was steady. My jaw, heart, forehead, shoulders all trembled and clenched and trembled again.

"I'm not going to college in America, so I don't need to go."

"Then what *are* you doing after you graduate next year?" Philippe asked.

"I'm going to Israel, to do the army."

Philippe and I exchanged looks. We were neither surprised nor opposed.

"We want you to know that if that's what you want to do, we'll support you," Philippe said.

We hadn't discussed or rehearsed it, but we agreed. I couldn't deprive my son of living in Israel—again.

Once Benjamin announced his plan to enlist, Philippe and I resumed the charged conversation we'd been having off and on for years—one that was easier for him than for me. We agreed to stay two more years in America and then return to the place where our story had started.

Knowing that Benjamin would be in Israel made it easier to imagine ourselves there. We made it clear to all three of our children that our move wasn't for or about him, rather it was about staying together as a family, about reclaiming our Year-of-Living-Differently adventure, seeing the world from a different perspective.

From the beginning, Benjamin took total control of his army process: because we lived in the U.S.; because Philippe and I had never served in the IDF; and because my son approached most new challenges with fierce determination and single-mindedness, almost to the point of obsession. I had never been as hands-off—and excluded—in all my years of parenting.

He aimed for an elite Intelligence unit. He followed up with any connections and leads he was given. He used every possible means of communication, scheduling calls during free school periods or on Sundays, the first day of the work week in Israel.

At the beginning of his second semester of senior year, he flew to Israel. For seven straight days, he said yes to everything a particular unit in Intelligence asked: meetings; interviews in English, French and Hebrew; computerized tests; translations.

He returned to New York skeptical, and when, a few weeks later, the unit turned him down, he was crushed, the first blow of his adult life. He knew the only way to get into one of his dream units would be to go, after school ended, to network, to take each potential exam and interview one step at a time until he got where he wanted.

Toward the end of his graduation ceremony from a private Jewish school in Manhattan, the principal summoned five students, including Benjamin. He called them exceptional and brave not just because they were heading to Israel but also because they were going above and beyond the call of duty to serve the country by entering the IDF. Watching Benjamin on stage, I sobbed. Everything I had been holding in, perhaps even denying, for the past year spilled out. My son was making the biggest sacrifice I could imagine, derailing from the traditional American path of college-job-graduate school to spend the next thirty-six months answering to a commander in the Israeli army.

He was born into an era of peace, but now, almost two decades later, peace was only an illusion. I had brought a small wonder into the world, but I could no longer protect him.

Our transatlantic move ended up easier than expected for all of us. Within the first few weeks, the girls were immersed in school and making friends, while Philippe and I focused on the house and work.

As for Benjamin, he didn't ask for pointers or guidance, knowing our ability to point and guide was nil, and I tried not to pester him with questions. He was being pursued by an interesting, lesser-known, hush-hush unit, meeting plain-clothes commanders at different bases or at local cafes to discuss responsibilities, terms, and conditions.

Six months after our arrival, Philippe drove Benjamin to Tel Hashomer recruitment base and watched him board a bus for one month of basic training. I stayed home to get the girls ready for school.

"You should have come," Philippe said as soon as he walked in the door. "The place was packed. People go with their whole family, their friends. They bring breakfast and hang out waiting for the kids to leave. It was such a scene."

No one had told me. We had no idea. I felt as if I had deserted my son.

With basic training behind him, Benjamin dons his requisite uniform, blending right in with the majority of young adult men and women in this country. I refrain from asking too many questions. A part of me wants to know what he does and another part of me has no desire for fear that it is not what I think, that rather than sitting safely in front of a computer in his office he is in fact out in the field, meeting with soldiers in other secret units, planning or plotting to thwart terrorist attacks.

With my son in the service, I choose to disconnect from the media, attempting to avoid the hourly news on the radio, news updates on Facebook, daily newspaper, weekly magazines. I cannot stomach the incessant talk of Iran and their potential nuclear powers. In the four years since we last lived here, the Arab world has turned upside down. There is unrest everywhere, touching Israel's borders, to the north in Syria where there is a civil war and to the south in Egypt, where an Islamist government has been elected. The occasional operations, mere euphemisms for war, between Israel and Gaza remind me how frangible life is here. None of these countries are secure and Arab leadership is in crisis, becoming more and more extreme. There is no one with whom world leaders—Israeli or Arab or other—can discuss or resume talks of peace.

In our sleepy city, where flowers bloom year round, I burrow down and bury my head to create a false sense of security. I like to pretend that I'm somewhere else. If and when the words "peace" and "talk" are mentioned together, it's in the negative sense as in failed, stalled, stuck, and impassable. Without Rabin and his clear-cut plan, and in the absence of strong governing powers on both sides, believing in peace has become difficult.

With Benjamin in the army, though, I must have hope. Although he and I do not discuss how we feel about being here, what we each envision for Israel's future, whether or not there are prospects for peace, I am proud of him—his maturity, dedication and focus. At eighteen, he knows what he wants and has chosen the less traveled path to get it.

I thought about my long-ago wish for my son during his Bar Mitzvah and how, all these years later, it had in fact come true. A self-possessed young man, he was forging his own path and bringing peace—into his life, our lives, and the lives of the greater world.

My soldier son was proof that Rabin's legacy might not be forgotten after all.

We had swapped roles long before I was ready. My job to protect him was finished, as he, my firstborn, considered himself ready to protect me.

Brianna Noll

The Night the Coffins Open to Reveal Themselves Empty

We go ahead of the scandal—
you to your refuge and I to
the churchyard where
the act of remembering
is its own sacrament.
At home, someone's always
on the telephone or shattering
a ceramic bowl, sounds
that pluck the tension
of my nerves. Soon, the news
will break, and free electricity
will spark from the sockets
and arc through the air in a pattern
of migrating souls. The animals
will know first, and additional
horses will cluster at the fence
posts, black-eyed sentinels
who, this once, will not shirk
when startled. Don't ask where
the dead have gone—the question
will crackle at your lips.
If you're picturing a deep pit
of ghosts and not a line of young
darlings walking into a waterfall,
you haven't been paying attention.

William Notter

Post Office in the Old Confederate Capital

In this city on whose riverbank
thousands of the enslaved took their first
American steps, Patrick Henry proclaimed
"Give me liberty or give me death."
Lee lived on Franklin after Appomattox.
Confederates burned the iron works and bridges
as Jefferson Davis fled, but their descendants
fly the battle flag on Saturdays
out in front of the art museum.

Two men work beside each other
at the post office counter, one tall and black,
the other tattooed with Confederate heroes,
both going gray, leaning toward retirement,
working together in that measured, postal way,
calm, polite when met with pleasant words,
their composure that of men who have taken
almost as much as they can, who might one day
risk the pension and rip into a customer.
But for now they let it roll
smoothly down their backs,
into the building's humming machinery.

Bibhu Padhi

Storm in Summer

It is summer night
and there is a storm
raging inside the bones,

under the skull—
a storm that is almost like love.

There are the metaphors
of Venus's shadowy transit
around the sun.

It seems there are black spots
on all things we love,

even in the prayers we make,
in the big trees within which
the winds dance.

This is the storm for which
I have no answer.

Everything seems to fall—
homes, trees
I loved to remember,

the pre-monsoon clouds
holding the rains.

Don't ask me where
angels go,

why I still wait
for truth to arrive,

even though
I am beaten by the night
and too much loneliness.

Time Is Here Still.

I hear old narratives
within my sleep, through my
muscle and bone, my outgoing mind.

Outside, the trees breathe
in and out, meditate on the night.
In the morning they'll feel fresh enough

for the shades we all need.
They do something else too
just as the night does to me.

Even then why I'm so much absent
to myself, flouting the laws
of science, the body's chemistry?

It seems something has to be done about
the needs that are so much mine—
like pampering too much

the ill-understood world,
the fancied fingers and feet, my own mind.
I wonder at my ways to clean my mind

from the very things I see,
that look so real even now.
I don't know anything about

where to start from though. A simple,
honest prayer to distinguish a formless sleep
from the world my eyes so frankly see.

Anne Delana Reeves

A Garden in Winter

In the grotto, Jesus prays for the beautiful girl
with broken feet. Her moss-drenched face,

edged in the pond's water, turns to see
a bird glide down to dip its beak and drink.

Nearby the snow brushed branches
of Lenten roses. Someone loved this garden,

where songs of wrens consume the path
of boxwoods and arbors she followed

to a shed with cracked clay pots and worms
twisting in dirt. Gone to seed like the house,

unhinged by loose bricks and sagging roof,
The open door invites me to rooms once filled

with mirrors, their impressions, a moldy blot
on the walls, and to admire the resplendent

color of gladiolas and peonies spilling from bowls,
all this a burden to children, grown and gone.

The house with its ivy-darkened windows grows
still. Soon a trembling of green will unlock

what's left of winter. I'll return to fill the empty
urn the girl holds in her arms and sit beside her,

my feet in the cool water. Summer grasses will
thicken below the purple tips of lupines, trumpet

vines blow with the song of wings inside red
throats. Jesus will look to the beautiful girl,

years of ruin drained from her face, her broken
feet made whole. Together they will rise, and go.

Deer Season

1.

The skin shudders, the haunches cave,
intestines unfurl their ruffled waste,

filling the bucket as antlers rut
through dirt and the pale tongue

laps the frozen ground. The deer's
shadow lengthens and crosses over

the fence, escapes to the darkening field
and bare trees where once I stopped to kneel

in spring's bloodwort, when the deer,
calm as a late winter pond, appeared.

2.

The skin is water. The hunter slides
the blade between fur and muscle.
His work is clean. Precise.
He washes his hands in the kitchen sink
and promises me the skin.

I watch him from the wilderness
of a brightly lit room, windows dressed
in frilly curtains. Everything safe
and locked in place. He would have me,
a complacent deer staring

out from a landscape on the wall.
Background of mountains and snow-capped
pines. I stand quietly in a river
flourished with white waves
as salmon spill their eggs.

3.

Who is this Siberian ice maiden?
the TV's narrator asks. *Shaman?*
Storyteller? The camera pans
the landscape, the excavated ground,

her body disturbed and taken away.
Her body a story of tattoos, *ghosted*,
the narrator says, by *veins of water*
that seeped into the tomb over centuries.

Antlers bracelet her arms, a deer leaps
over her ribs and breasts, hooves dig
into her belly. And buried nearby, six
horses, her faithful ride into the afterlife.

4.

Once, I was a captured maiden
with feathers in my hair, who fled

across a creek that became a river
and led to the country of my tribe,

appaloosa ponies grazing in
the green hedged wilderness

of backyards and fireflies, restless
in jars when we caught them

like the girls inside their bedrooms:
Rosemarie rolling her black hair

on tin cans and Lisa in her books,
mothers calling their daughters

back home, the moon perched
in the twisted branches of trees.

5.

Moonlight scrounges across late winter frost
to lodge inside the carcass where it shines

on ribs wed to the backbone. I break the bucket's icy shroud
and reach my hand inside to find the heart still warm.

Soon, the smell of earth and fur will rise, the white
petals of bloodwort unfold. A deer will come down

to drink from the unhinged edges of a frozen lake.
Footprints lead to a clearing, and fresh horses wait.

Trish Reeves

And Someone Said 'Forever'

1. The Republic

Say we got off to a bad start; women
fallen upon by the most restless
of men, the wrong creation story
tucked under their arms; not a legend
of a turtle, her children resting
upon her back of green diamonds,
but an earthen statue of a god
thundering through the likeness
of a man who knew the power of his fear
something to hide, and a woman the place
to put this if only she would
not feel his trembling
the mark of what he was, a mortal
with the wrong story,
a man who would imagine woman
something made from and for him.

2. Picowaxan Creation Story Through Welsh Eyes

On the Potomac, the name remains, *Torn*
Moccasins, the rocky, river inlet of the people
of a woman named Jan (I do not invent her)
of the Picowaxans of the Eastern Shore. Her name
changed to Jane when she added Lewis
to the end. I am hers.

3. Timber

Having been down to the lower Swedish cabin
today, it looks to be built to last,
yet three-hundred years on Darby Creek

is a match of mumblety-peg when I
think of the Delaware and never enough
pine pieces to complete that game.
Clear cut, they'll call it.

A stone game, Nine Men's Morris,
got me across the Atlantic, and
where were you 353 years ago?
In church, floating among the rafters,
while I sat below in the last pew, and
cleaned every pocket the schout's wife
had sewn into Pieter's breeches?

Pieter had good reason to sit in the back,
keep his eye out for evil, he said, because
evil always shows up in church. (Inattention
why I flogged him each time at Nine Men's.)

I'd thought that when I finally worked off
the five-year indenture, and then Aeltje's
four years, I'd become a schout.
How else to survive the church, Reformed or
not?
But then came the English, and I dreamed
in English, *Constable*. Constable Me.
Unworthy desires? What were you dreaming
353 years ago? Of rabbit fur
to cover your pink cherub body?
Or simply a late 1940s entrance,
far from two specific Japanese cities,
just to be safe.
It's hard for me to dream
outside my time; I often say words wrong
to try to appeal to your contemporary mind.
I've learned I don't want to sound ungenerous,
to offer the prod in place of love.

Some call me an unusual man: I say
love me like you will ask to be loved;
when you think of the lost wigwams of
Lenni-Lennapes try not to think of me,
but of yourself, judged by descendants.
Would a constable strop his conscience

on such thoughts? Ask again
after serving a Dutchman, an Englishman,
a New Sweden governor's daughter.

Love, pink cherub, let's you sort pigs,
clean stys, swear oath to England.
Try to see, when too old to shave yourself,
your time through a constable's, juror's,
husband's, father's eyes and ask yourself,
just below the old Lennape camp, who you loved
most: Aeltje, Elizabeth, James, John,
Tobias, or yourself. Or liberty.
Whose liberty? That's where we find
difficulty, isn't it?

◆◆◆

But there stood Neals Mattson, Margaret
no where around; only Mattson yanking down
that yellow and blue rag as fast as I could
paddle. Cherub, if only you could see
a stream as lovely as Darby as it narrows
just before the blue-grey rocks, sharp
and guarding the shallows, silver maple
after silver maple shadowing the way
through late September, thirty-foot trunks
angled for light. Instead of questions
formed for Margaret, I thought of the colors
de Hooch spoke that night in the tavern
in Leiden, and the texture he pulled from the smoke
and beams, vivid as Darby's deep water spread flat.

And then there I was; the Swede's cabin
seated ten rods further than canoes can run.
When I stepped close Mattson had stuffed his flag
out of sight, and all that remained in the air
curling smoke hanging about the chimney
as if afraid to leave the warmth of stone and spit,
innocent as that, though Mattson knew
I'd never travel so far over a Swedish rag.
I'd come to see Margaret, but, No,
Mattson said, his wife was out healing
a neighbor with a bad joint of the right foot.

Might she just as well have sent her
spectral form? I asked.
Sit down, he said.

Not about the flag? Mattson asked.
Nee, I said, as I sometimes forgot my English with
the Swedes. He pulled the cork, offered that tree
stump chair they make with a back, comfy, though
their brew is bad.
Going down to Marcus Hook,
I said. Neals, with an oyster-shell color to his hair,
knew English as well as I. A smile spread
under his moustache as he spoke.
Pirates, or Delaware tunnel smugglers?
Neals seemed too good a man to play
with. Why, I asked, do you think it's thought
that Margaret's a witch? A terrible thing to ask
Aeltje said the night before, but
what was my job if not to ask. To not
be stupid, Aeltje said as she snapped the
muslin sheets, then laid them in the press.

Stupid, same word Dr. Wynne had said on
Wynne Street, different accent. Wynne's
a Philadelphia Friend, as they call themselves,
and a healer as well. He learned surgery
while a boy in Wales, and is called Doctor
for his efforts, not Witch, like Mattson's Margaret.

Their shared interest, Margaret and the doctor's,
the reason I thought I might presume to ask
what he thought of a healer being sent
to the hanging tree. Aeltje said I had the gall of
a man who'd paid his own passage.
The doctor said,
How did you get here, Hendricks?

So I told him about de Hooch and
our shared tankards in my old tavern;
the artist searching for another
painting, me looking for my life.
Find my old master, de Hooch had said,
if you really want to travel. Master

de La Grange was headed to Barbados,
but realized he doesn't have the heart
for such a place. Going now to New Netherland;
not so much slavery there he heard, but
he will need an indentured husbandman.
Maybe you?

So here I stand, Doctor, 19 years later, able
to resign my constableship in the next month,
with my own land on a long stretch of
the Delaware, fields rich with rye
and timber.

4. Margaret Mattson Pleads Not Guilty

They met in Philadelphia, Hendricks
among them, Albertus Hendricks later recorded as
a Swede, perhaps since his son had married
a Swedish girl. Yet Albertus knew little of the
language, as little as the interpreter brought to the trial,
so the men might understand Swedish women.

William Penn had appointed a petit jury
of tough men, ten English and two Dutch,
to say if Margaret and Yeshro
should hang till they died.

Henry Drystreet attested: I was told
20 years ago Margaret was a witch,
and that she bewitched several cows.
Charles Ashcom said he had been told:
"there was a great Light but Just before…
an Old woman with a Knife in her hand…
was seen at the Bedd's feet, and cryd out
and desired Jno. Symcock to take away his
Calves, or Else she would send them to Hell."

5. Margaret's Words, Without Attorney

As to the calf's heart, I never
said any such thing. I deny all
these witnesses' accusations.
They speak only by hear say.

6. What Mattson Told the Constable When Asked Why Some Thought Mattson's Wife a Witch

Our land, Hendricks, is too rich
for some to see every day without
great envy, we being Swedes.
And then there's
King James, and also
his Bible.

7. King James

had a scare when six women raised a lashing
storm at sea for Queen Anne's coming home.
The six women, it turned out, were witches,
arrested, tried, and executed, and James
went to work writing his book, *Daemonologie.*

Next he wrote for England:
An act against conjuration, witchcraft, and
dealing with evil and wicked spirits.
New rules: Witchcraft a felony. Hanging
substituted for burning at stake except
when also petty treason. In that case,
light the fire.

8. King James Bible

"Do not allow a sorceress to live." *Exodus* 22:18

9. The Philadelphia Jury Returns a Verdict

"Guilty of having the Comon fame of a witch,
but not guilty in manner and forme
as Shee stands Endicted."
Penalty: Neals Mattson to post 50 pounds
for good behavior of Margaret Mattson
for six months. Yeshro's husband, Anthony,
required to do the same. February 27, 1683.

10. *Forever* As Human Theory

And someone said 'forever' comes from the Greek
poem "Abandonment" by the poet Cavafy,
who knew much of men, and history.

John Repp

The Salt Hay

lined caskets, but who scythed it, bound it, piled the bundles
on the wagons pulled by horses, later by tractors chugging black smoke,
four wagons, six, even eight trundled down the puddled two-tracks
snaking the meadows? To where? Salem? Loaded on flatbed cars
bound for Wilmington, Camden, across the trestle bridge
to Philadelphia where the carpenters tucked handfuls of hay
between the casket walls & the satin tacked into pentagonal
pillows so the body would rest unbruised & dignified?
Who owned the land barely land, spongy, squelching, tidal punk
a pall from Shiloh south, horsefly clouds through the windless summers?
Who rowed the punts tied to the dock tumbled over the brackish creek?
Who crabbed off the bridge? Who worked the kerosene heaters,
skinned the minks & muskrats, plucked the woodcock clean?
Who ate the eels roasting on the rusted freezer grate? Who drove
to the Egg Harbor icehouse for the blocks half-melted
by sunset, cream soda frosty, catfish briny, numbers totted up,
moon full though faint overhead, a damp shiver in the air,
the sun squatting white & huge or bitter orange on the bay?

Billy Reynolds

Sitting in the Car with Huck

I let the key dangle from the ignition strange and harmless.
Here it is,
lucky, small, late, good breaths coming and coming,
quiet sitting here without trying, hands in our laps,
little apron of light barely noticing itself.

I turn the ignition key and the fan clocks us
with dust blowing through the vent,
that cool, warm air I breathed as a boy,
looking, talking, dwelling in sunlight.

This dust is mine, this dust is yours,
good medicine all around.
Quiet take us twice over,
grass and soil, the elm over the garage.
Last light on our hands,
go nowhere fast once and for all.

Leona Sevick

Doll's House, Provincetown Museum

Walk through the giant open jaws of the blue whale,
back toward the stunned faces of the china-headed
dolls wearing Victorian clothes and clutching real leather
purses to find the house that's the size of a small gas
stove. Set on a three-foot platform so you can peer into
its windows, point at its tiny fixtures and the books
with real and separate pages, this house glows with
a softened light that draws us closer. Pressing a cheek
against the wooden siding, your nose to the windows,
you'll discover thick plastic panels shielding its orifices
and rebuffing our fingers, the pincers and pads that long
to probe everything—the hurricane lamp half the size
of a pinky, the lovingly quilted coverlet, the perfectly
placed cup and saucer no one uses anymore. What
dreadful thing has happened to this family? Some hard
truth erupting among them on an otherwise quiet
evening, driving them out, inviting the transparent
barrier that makes it impossible to return.

Cathy Mauk

Present Progressive

A ringing phone interrupted our brief respite as we leaned into the peace of the last Saturday in March of 2012.

"Don't answer it," said my husband. He stretched into a patch of afternoon sun.

Surrounded by weekend newspapers, we lazed on a sofa drinking an afternoon coffee. Australian summer was drifting into autumn. A wind chime tinkled in A minor at the back of the house.

"It might be about one of our mothers," I said.

We had just returned from three weeks of winter in the US, where we'd gone to help my 94-year-old mother transition back to her home after two months in a rehabilitation centre. His 90-year-old mother, who lived in an assisted living facility on the central coast of New South Wales, had lost feeling in her legs the day we arrived home.

"Hello?"

I sensed the distress in that slight pause at the other end. It was my husband's cousin. She said she had some horrible news.

Passing the phone to my husband, I perched on the end of the couch to listen.

"Hanged themselves?"

He pushed the newspaper to the floor and sat up; he stared out the window with his left elbow in the air, his hand gripping the crown of his head. My mind tracked through names of acquaintances and family members searching for likely suspects.

"Joan and Ray," he said when he got off the phone.

"Jesus!"

In the night, my husband's aunt and uncle, Joan and Ray, both in their early eighties, had hanged themselves: a double suicide. Joan's son found a message from his mother on his voicemail when he returned home Friday evening, asking him to stop by her house around ten the following morning. When he arrived, the house was shut tight against the Sydney heat. Taped to the front door was an envelope with his name scrawled in his mother's hand. A note inside instructed him not to enter the house and to contact the police.

On a table in the entry police found a second note, this one addressed to Joan's sister, Belle. 'I apologise for all of this,' it read. 'I hope you can forgive me.'

It had been two years since we last saw Joan and Ray. On a visit to Sydney, my husband and I had gone to their house for morning tea. We sat in a kitchen flooded with butterscotch light, sipped tea from fine china cups and ate a vanilla cream pastry. Joan, tall and slender, wore a calf-length brown denim skirt and a beige knit top, a fashionable belt of rope and beads around her trim middle. Both were tanned and fit from days on the tennis court—they boasted they still played three days a week.

Shortly after that visit, Ray suffered a stroke that left him partially paralysed. Joan's memory began to fail; the word 'dementia' was mentioned around the family.

That kitchen fixed in my mind. I saw Joan and Ray hanging from the ceiling, tanned and unmoving, a noose around each of their necks, heads drooping, mouths gaping in that sticky soft light.

Those closest to Joan didn't believe she had *chosen* to end her life. My husband's mother, Olive, constructed her own version of events: Joan had died in her sleep; Ray was so distressed when he woke to find his dead wife that he suffered a massive stroke and died by her side. Others blamed Ray, believed he coerced Joan into joining *his* suicide. My husband, in a state of disbelief, was ambivalent about Joan's role.

I didn't accept that Joan was an unwilling participant in her own death. With Ray's paralysis he couldn't have pulled this off alone; the ropes had to be bought or retrieved from a back room or garage; they had to be secured; the knots had to grab at the right moment. Ray would have been unable to climb up on a chair, a railing or a bed without help. It was Joan who left the phone message for her son. And, there were the notes. To me, the decision to end their lives together seemed as intimate as a decision to make love or to create a new life.

And I had no quarrel with what they did. Faced with the option of enduring a prolonged, undignified, and pain-filled demise or ending my life, I have often thought I would choose the latter.

Yet I *was* distressed by the deaths of Joan and Ray. The actuality of their suicides and the brutality of hanging agitated my own fears about ageing.

Most of the people in my family have died of old age in nursing homes. My maternal grandmother, Elizabeth, after more than a year in a nursing home, rolled out of bed when the nurse left the bedside railing down, and broke her hip. She died within a few weeks at 91. My paternal grandmother, Jesse, aged 89, a long term resident of another nursing home, died of a heart attack while strapped to the commode having a bowel movement. My father, in a demented fog, unable to recognise his family and perplexed for 18 months by the sights and sounds and smells of institutional existence, aspirated his scrambled eggs one morning and died before anyone realised he was in distress.

This pattern of slow wasting and graceless finales terrifies me. I fear the agony of joints that swell and freeze and ache; the grim sentences imposed by cells that multiply without restraint, blood that thickens and clots, synapses that refuse to fire, senses vandalised by time, and plaque and tangles that suffocate the brain. I dread the day I no longer have control over my decisions or my bladder. And there is the horror of beneficent lingering—that state of limbo between life and death where suffering is *managed*—I tremble at what a human life can be reduced to and the myriad technologies for extending it. I do not fear being dead; I dread the dying—the present progressive.

My mother, whose father lived to 102 and whose aunts lived to be 102 and 103, had a coterie of dedicated helpers who kept her from the tomb of a nursing home and allowed her to suffer the offence of old age in the privacy of her own home. Cataracts, glaucoma, corneal dystrophy, shingles, and macular degeneration had consigned her to a world of shape and shadow and dull colour she could discern only with her peripheral vision. She relied on two expensive hearing aids. Congestive heart failure restricted her circulation and swelled her legs. She endured multiple eye surgeries, back surgery, and two total knee replacements. A cerebellar stroke on her 86th birthday left her with unstable balance. The consequences of impaired vision and poor balance had been at least two broken noses, several head lacerations, a broken wrist, and frequent bruising from head to toe. She was, however, 'blessed' with good bones and strong lungs. A pink plastic box, partitioned into rows for AM and PM and days of the week, contained the pills that were her lifeline: they thinned her blood, lowered her blood pressure, controlled her heart rate, rid her of excess fluid, reduced her body's response to pain, suppressed inflammation, replaced potassium, deterred depression, and provided the recommended daily dose of vitamins and minerals. A portable machine hummed through the night and ensured a plentiful supply of oxygen to her brain.

I told her when she bounced back from her stroke, "You're a tough old bird."

"I am," she said proudly.

It was early March in 2012 when my husband and I arrived into the grey and brown of late winter in Idaho to transfer my mother from the rehabilitation centre. Exhaust-stained snow lined the gutters of the streets. Bare trees grazed the low clouds.

She was sitting on the side of the bed, dressed, suitcase packed. Pale skin stretched tight over her high cheek bones and sunken cheeks. Her blank eyes were sucked into her skull. Her hair had thinned. She pushed up from the bed with her gnarled hand to greet us, her arm trembling as she put pressure on weak muscles. Black sweat pants hung loosely around her bird legs. For weeks she had struggled with nearly unbearable nausea,

pain, and fatigue following her surgery, but she was determined to go home rather than to an assisted living facility.

Once home, she paced the loop from the kitchen, through the dining room, into the living room, then the utility room and back into the kitchen of her large ranch-style house.

I suggested we have some lunch. She wasn't sure she was hungry. Well, maybe she was but she didn't know what she wanted. We agreed on some chicken and vegetable soup from the stock of food my sister had made and stored in the freezer. While I set the table and got bowls from the cupboard, I watched as she fumbled with the lid on the soup container, then with the settings on the microwave. She pressed '30 seconds' again and again. After two minutes she turned to me, "Is this what I'm supposed to do?"

The phone rang. She jabbed away at the buttons until she lost her caller. When the caller rang back she handed the phone to me.

The Home Health nurse arrived in the afternoon to check my mother's vitals and blood thickness and to establish a schedule for regular visits. She was a compliant patient as the nurse wrapped the blood pressure cuff around her tiny arm, pricked her finger for blood, took her pulse, stuck a thermometer in her mouth, and jotted down her findings. Then, the nurse sat down on the couch with her clipboard stacked with forms and told my mother she needed to ask her a few questions for their records:

What is your date of birth?

Who is your regular doctor?

What other doctors are you seeing?

How many times have you been admitted to the hospital in the past 12 months?

Are you allergic to any medication?

What medications are you currently taking?

What surgeries have you had?

She strained her memory for answers. I filled in where I could. The winter sun slid to the western sky. Twice, her eyelids drooped and her head flopped towards her chest.

"Do you want an order to resuscitate?" the nurse asked.

"I'm not sure what you mean," said my mother. She looked like a child in an oversized chair.

"If we arrive at your house and find you unconscious, do you want us to attempt to resuscitate you?"

"Okay," she replied.

The next morning opened on a bleak winter day. Outside the kitchen window, a smiling ceramic sun on the fence between our house and the neighbour's looked like a death mask. My mother, still in her nightgown and robe, sat at the breakfast table with her orange juice and plastic box of pills. I reopened the conversation she had with nurse the day before.

"Mom, if your heart stops do you want someone to try to revive you?"

"Absolutely not!" she shook her head and felt for a place to set down her glass. "No way."

"Well, that's what you agreed to yesterday when the nurse asked if you wanted to be resuscitated if they find you unconscious."

Her eyes widened in horror. "No!" she cried, hitting her open hand on the table. "You must call her. I DO NOT want to be resuscitated under any circumstances. I WANT to die. There is no joy in living this way."

After a few days, a respiratory infection set in, and my mother's pain worsened. She spent days in bed or stretched out on the sofa in the living room, while fresh snow piled onto the patio and back terrace, and warm air from the furnace whispered through the house. She was so still that my husband and I took turns checking for the rise and fall of her blankets. She ate little. I made an appointment with the doctor. She insisted on having a shower and having her toenails trimmed before her appointment.

I steadied her onto a shower bench and put the shower nozzle in her hand. She struggled through soaping and rinsing her body while I shampooed her hair. Afterwards, I wrapped her in a terrycloth robe to dry and sat her on a chair in the middle of the bathroom. Plopped on the floor, I worked at each toenail with a podiatrist's nail clipper. Her nails curved and dug into her crooked toes. While I chipped at the thick big toenail, my husband gave her sips of tea. She moaned quietly on each exhalation. I smoothed lotion over her feet, up ankles tattooed with a network of veins and arteries, and onto legs that looked permanently tanned from poor circulation.

In those days, I wanted my mother to die, to be unfettered from her failing body, released from this pointless endurance.

But she didn't die.

The great Montaigne, in his essay "On fleeing from pleasures at the cost of one's life," wrote ' — that it is time to die when living entails more ill than good, and that preserving our life to our anguish or prejudice is to infringe the very laws of Nature—.'

But who gets to decide when a life entails more ill than good and when its preservation invites only more anguish?

Nearly 70 years ago, German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer assured us that, 'God has reserved to himself the right to determine the end of life, because he alone knows the goal to which it is his will to lead it. — Even if a person's earthly life has become a torment for him, he must commit it intact to God's hand, from which it came.'

I would like to believe there is a divine plan for my mother's life, for my life. I would like to believe that a benevolent deity has us in its sights. I would like to believe there is some eternal reward for virtue. But I don't.

Three decades ago, while living in Idaho, I worked as a speech pathologist in a neurological rehabilitation hospital, two nursing homes, and an acute

care hospital. My days were filled with the broken lives of patients and families devastated by acute and chronic disease: cardiovascular accident (stroke), Parkinson's disease, motor neuron disease, dementia, traumatic brain injury, multiple sclerosis.

I was in my early thirties. I could not then imagine my own death, the end of feasting on the world—the music, the movement, the buzz of ideas, the endless possibilities, the sensual banquet, the laughter. I feared nonexistence, the eternal nothingness. But equally, I feared the prospect of enduring the same torment as my patients. I dreaded the indignity of institutional living: discovering I had dressed twice earlier in the day and was now wearing three sets of clothes, one over the other; being swaddled like a toddler to deal with loose bowels; puzzling over words, faces of loved ones, and common everyday objects; being bathed by strangers who call me 'Sweetie' or 'Doll'; eating pureed peas and mashed pumpkin; painting plaster models of summer fruit; joining a sing-along in the day room and stumbling over the words to "You Are My Sunshine" and "A Bicycle Built for Two." Pumped full of pills to abide this misery from day to day.

A hospital colleague and I, prompted by our aversion to suffering and only half in jest, dreamed up a unique locket that would store a tablet of cyanide to expedite our escape in the event our lives 'entailed more ill than good'—a catch would disengage with pressure from the downward twist and tilt of the head (particularly useful when nothing else moves) and a spring inside the locket would uncoil and propel the tablet to the mouth. There were design challenges.

I don't know how I might end my life should that time come. As brutal as it seems, Ray and Joan resorted to the most common solution for the elderly in Australia—hanging; other frequently used options include ingesting toxic chemicals or drugs or inhaling carbon monoxide or gas. In the US, the most common method of suicide in the elderly is gunshot.

My husband finds the topic morbid and refuses to be drawn into a discussion. "Life's a lottery," he says to me. "I'm focused on the day to day and I'm not going to waste my time on what might happen."

An elderly friend with Graves' disease and biventricular heart failure, but a lucid mind, told me over dinner one night that she has 'a little pill'. "I just hope I know when the time is right," she said. "One doesn't want to leave this sort of thing too late."

My brother-in-law, who has Type I diabetes, says his solution is easy—insulin.

Another friend, who lives in the northern hemisphere, plans to walk into a freezing landscape, curl up in the snow with a bottle of whiskey, and let hypothermia do the job.

I hope for peaceful means, the opportunity, the mental facility, and the courage if my time comes. Cyanide, I now know, does not produce an easy

or painless death. However, the drug Nembutal, a heavy duty barbiturate—also known as Pentobarbital and colloquially as 'Death in a Bottle'—is described as ideal for a swift, painless, sweet sleep. Unfortunately, it is a highly controlled substance. Across the US border into Mexico it is more freely available—in pet shops and veterinarian offices. I'm encouraged to know it is also used for physician-assisted suicide in several US states, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.

During those days caring for my mother that funereal March, I held a fantasy about scooping her up and flying her to Australia, where I would take her to a special place I know on the southeast coast, a big weatherboard house with a wide veranda on top of a headland. There, I would set her up to breathe in the smell of the sea, to make out what she could of the green ti-trees and she-oaks and the endless expanse of sapphire water. Rainbow lorikeets would land on the wood railing looking for crusts of bread, perhaps one would light on her chair. Scratchy-voiced wattle birds would call from the gum trees. I would wrap her in a soft wool blanket to keep off the chill of the afternoon breeze while letting it gently lift her thinning hair. We would sit in silence sensing the world, the two of us holding hands, sipping martinis (my mother still loved her martinis). The afternoon shadows would lengthen. I would pour a vial of Nembutal into a second martini and place it in her hand. I would wish her sweet dreams as she closed her eyes on a drift of sea, an enveloping sky, a rainbow of feathers, and the love of a daughter.

"…unstring my bones," I would recite the words of poet Mary Oliver like a prayer, "let me be not one thing but all things, and wondrously scattered, shake me free from my name."

While I genuinely wanted to relieve my mother of her suffering and allow her a peaceful end to her life, I also realised she is not me. And, although she has said she does not want to go on, that she prays for a heart attack and wonders what would happen if she stopped taking all her medication or turned off her oxygen, she would not be a party to taking her own life.

"I wouldn't want to miss something," she has joked on her good days.

In my fantasy I was both daughter and mother. In life and in death my mother goes before me. I learn from her strengths, her failures, her fears, her courage. Her suffering evokes my own fears. I wanted to do for her what I want someone to do for me.

As my mother approached the age of 97 she fell at home and fractured her pubic rami. It wasn't a serious break and, after a few days in hospital, she was transferred once again to the rehabilitation centre. But this time, as much as she had hoped she would die in her own home, she decided

it was time to move to a place where a more consistent level of support was available. Her large house and yard were too difficult to manage, she was reliant on the goodwill of others, she had no family nearby and she wasn't safe. She had been alarmed by a previous fall; she wasn't hurt but lacked the strength in her arms and legs to get herself off the floor. She had crawled from the living room into the kitchen and to the stove, opened the oven door which was low enough she could pull herself to a crouch, then pushed and pulled herself to standing by grabbing at cupboard door handles and countertops.

My brother found a retirement village in the town where he lived; there, my mother had a two-bedroom apartment that looked out onto a stream and was able to have meals in a common dining room. Someone cleaned and did her laundry weekly and there were a number of social activities she could participate in if interested. Emergency pull cords in every room had become a necessity. She continued to fall frequently—slicing her arm where the skin was too thin to suture, opening her forehead, banging her ribs. And, she developed yet another complication with her eyes: "I don't see things that are there and I see things that aren't," she told me. Riding in the front seat of my brother's car, the road would disappear and she felt as if they were about to go over a cliff. At other times, walls and floors were richly patterned in paisley and prints. Sometimes there was a woman on her sofa; sometimes the woman was at a table in the dining room; sometimes there were four or five of her. She was always wearing a pink chenille bathrobe.

"Does it concern you?" I asked.

"It's kind of interesting."

She had been to the doctor. Surgery was an option, but of course she could die from the general anaesthetic.

"Surely, you're not really thinking of doing it are you?" I asked.

"Well," she said, "that would finally put an end to all this business." Then, after a momentary musing, "But, I don't want to have to pay all that money just to die."

Six months short of her 100th birthday, my mother fell again, this time sustaining a compression fracture to her lumbar spine. I rang her at the hospital from Australia; it was 7:00pm in Idaho. No one had brought her an evening meal. She was supposed to fill out a menu but because of her blindness was unable to do so, and no one had helped her or been in to see her for several hours. I suggested she ring her nurse call bell. She felt among her bedding for a remote.

"I don't know which button to press," she told me.

"Press them all," I said.

"My bed's moving up and down."

I rang my brother.

My mother was transferred to an assisted living facility to recover from her fracture. As she had no phone in her room and needed to keep in touch with her dispersed children and grandchildren, my sister sent her a mobile phone. It buzzed with static and my mother held it upside down; she had also lost one of her hearing aids. Her conversations, when she was able to have them, were a running complaint about the food and lack of care (which my brother said was not unfounded). She was often puzzled about what was happening around her and lost track of the time and the sequence of events. She confused the physical therapist with the nurses, the nurses with the cleaners. Words frequently eluded her. "My memory has become just terrible," she said with exasperation and fear.

After five weeks of this, my two other siblings and I supported our brother's decision to give our mother another chance at living independently in her apartment at the retirement village, but with additional support through home health and other daily services. It was her New Year's gift. But, two days later, she was back in the emergency room at the hospital, this time in congestive heart failure and respiratory distress. She was adamant that she would not go back to assisted living. The doctors advised her she could probably go back to her own apartment in a few days, but she would need to be on continuous oxygen rather than just at night and increase her regimen of medications. She could also expect to become a revolving-door patient in the Emergency Room.

"This just doesn't make any sense," she wailed. "There's no point. I want to die."

On the 9th of January 2017, my sister, who is a nurse, and I took our mother back to her apartment to care for her as she died. All interventions that had been keeping her alive had been discontinued, except oxygen; the 'laws of nature' could take over. But, this wasn't like the movies where the patient falls off mid-sentence into that eternal sleep with loved ones hanging on last words. I should have understood that when the hospice nurse explained what drugs were in the 'comfort care' bag: morphine for pain—which we could administer in increasing doses, something for the morphine-induced nausea, Ativan for anxiety associated with the dying process, something to manage 'air-hunger,' and another pill to manage 'death secretions.' *This* was beneficent lingering.

When my sister gave her the first dose of morphine, my mother clenched her teeth like a child, afraid we were giving her something to prolong her life. Daily we assured her we were helping her die, that she needed to let go. My sister slept in my mother's bed next to the hospital bed provided by hospice and I slept on the sofa in the living room. I use the word 'slept' loosely. There is no ordinary sense of time in a death vigil; it is T.S. Eliot's 'still point of the spinning world.'

Southern Idaho was experiencing its heaviest snow fall in 125 years. Beyond my mother's bedroom snow drifted onto the banks of the stream; ducks and geese paddled and fed; a drift of quail pecked in the snow for seeds; the sun glanced through bare trees. Family and friends came and went through the day; at night my sister and I sat on the side of our mother's bed watching in the dim lamp light; the rhythmical pumping of my mother's oxygen machine a white-noise that numbed our minds. We wiped her face, gave her water through an eye dropper, washed her hands, brushed her hair, cleaned her mouth, and kissed her forehead. My sister squirted drugs under her tongue. Sweet dreams, Mom. I wished for a vial of Nembutal.

Each day when my eldest brother arrived and heard our mother retching or crying out, saw her fidgeting legs and hands and the startled opening of her unseeing eyes, listened to the rattling in her chest and her moaning on each breath, he wept. "This is not what she wanted."

It took my mother five days to die; she died on Friday the 13th, four months shy of her 100th birthday.

I have imagined many times the torment Joan and Ray experienced in making their decision on that hot summer day in Sydney. I have not had to imagine the protracted demise of my mother. I am not sure which will demand more courage of me as I march towards old age, a planned death by my own hand or a prolonged d-y-i-n-g. Despite all this rumination, I do not dwell on my demise; like my husband, I am more focused on the living. And there has been nothing like the irrevocability of my mother's death—her absolute disappearance from the world, her non-being—to compel me to pay attention to and savour each singular moment of being. But this is certain, I want to be the one to decide when 'living entails more ill than good' in my life, and I want the power to choose how and when I leave this world. I do take note, of course, of the advice from my elderly friend who has the 'little pill,' "One doesn't want to leave this sort of thing too late."

B.J. Miller

Skin and Walls

—Ekphrasis in DC

Some will be able to sit in this storm and name the buried crops planted in these fields of color—terror, awe, melancholia.

Others will ask the guard, "What's the fastest way to the gift shop from here?"

*

an X-ray with buried tumors a cedar chest with baptismal dress worn by a river

of family a woman pushes it closer to me this rothko

an unripe orange without a pungent scent above a sinking sun

weeping need dark sky sheets of low country rain

rise the marsh and evening tide I'm in a room behind rooms of art

a curator had to put her card to an eagle on the wall to get us in

the faces beneath a hole at the edge life without bones

in the middle of every old story unhappiness and hunger

in the wilderness every lake of honey holds strong

*

Please, do your job. It's the prayer I offer to my dentist as the smoke from her drill rises to my nostrils. O god, this is not a pleasing sacrifice.

I've said it on airplane and bullet train. It's what I say when someone needs to do their job well, because things are at stake.

I whisper it to the White House as I run by this morning, as I imagine small hands desperately clutching a phone. After I return to my hotel and shower,

I read about D. W. Winnicott's "transitional objects," the things children use to soothe the terror of being. Alone.

*

I meet the Rothkos; the Rothkos meet me. Which self will each of us send forward next?

*

I cannot look away, now that I have found the door.

Starlings—three—in midnight beds.

oh my god.

A man enters the room and checks a box in the corner. He's looking for seismic activity.

*

Rothko stacks his veils of paint geologically. A crowding pressing this on that, like emotions, which are rarely experienced singly.

I weep because I am in the presence of the ineffable, because I am human, and because art is a house, a dwelling made for rest but also the location of arguments, tension, and edges against edges. The place for the I I am and the you you are. Mess and glory. In and out. Skin and walls meeting other skins and walls.

I weep because of what's at stake. What, but art (and cultivating certain kinds of stillness), can anchor our days that swell and rock and sometimes upset and drown? Like a bumblebee's legs, art drags the dust of us from here to there, over, under, now *into* the darkness, where we are stripped of all we have accumulated.

Because god is here, there are also the usual victims: words, comfort. *Run.* Stay with this storm, this canvas teeming with invisible claws and wings.

Kerry Neville

Teaching the N-Word in Georgia

My first day teaching a nonfiction workshop at my new liberal arts college in rural Georgia and my students and I were reading Jesmyn Ward's essay, "A Cold Current," out loud, paragraph by paragraph, word by word. In the essay, Ward argues that it is necessary to name racism, to be exacting in the words transcribing that experience because, "When we speak, we assert our human dignity. That is the worth of a word." All fifteen of us were white, and upon first-day-of-class superficial evaluation, seemed untroubled. Time would reveal the darker forces at work beneath the long, shining hair, the spray tans, and the tee-shirts announcing Δ Σ Π Spring Fest 2014. Some of these polite collegians would write essays later that semester about being raped by a once-boyfriend, having "Faggot" scrawled on a locker, seeing a father die of cancer or a mother of drink, and having arms, or at the very least, hearts crisscrossed by scars. I, too, once had the perfect (and perfectly entitled) surface life with long sleeves covering the cuts on my arms and drunk-drinking to hide the shame of an abusive relationship.

Their impatience, when I announced that I wasn't just going to read the syllabus and send them on their way, as is the custom on the first day of the semester, was evidenced by cool silence. "You've paid for my time," I said. "I won't waste yours." Rather than have the students skim the essay in silence, marooned on their own islands of irritation (*We had other plans for these ninety minutes*!), we read it aloud, each person taking a paragraph.

Most of the time, we read silently to ourselves, the writer's voice turning inside of us, like rocks polished in a tumbler. But when we read out loud, the writer's words travel down the tongue, tumble in our mouths, our voices giving them sound.

The first student, hunched over the table, began: "There are moments from childhood that attract heat in our memories, some for their sublime brilliance, some for their malignancy.…"

The next student, slumped in his seat: "As a child of the '80s, my realization of what it meant to be black in Mississippi was nothing like my grandmother's in the '30s. For her it was deadly; it meant that her grandfather was shot to death in the woods near his house, by a gang of white patrollers looking for illegal liquor stills. None of the men who killed her grandfather were ever held accountable for the crime…."

And the next, a woman whose flip-flop thwacked her heel in time with

each word: "Of course, my introduction to racism wasn't nearly as difficult as my mother's, either. She found that being black in Mississippi in the late '50s meant that she was one of a few who integrated her local elementary school, where the teachers, administrators and bus drivers, she said, either ignored the new black students or spoke to them like dogs."

The students read quickly and without investment, plowing through the words. Racism fatigue? Too many black men dying, too many black people protesting? Or the inertia of not-me, of mundane preoccupations: bookstore lines, sorority rush, and friends waiting on the college's lush green lawn?

But then the next. A young woman with a spun sugar voice: "I first learned what racism was on a long yellow school bus, when I was 6….That day on the bus, some of the children began telling me a story about their friends who rode other buses.…These friends, the children told me, told one another nigger jokes and sang short songs that all of us knew about 'picking niggers.' As the children told me this, they looked at me as if I'd grown horns or turned green, and it was then that I realized that I was a nigger, and that those other kids were telling jokes about me, and singing songs about me. I said quietly, 'That's not right.' One of the children said: 'We don't say that word. They do.'"

She faltered at "picking," registering the weight and worth of the next word, then side-stepped to "As." A shortcut across that particular chain of letters. *Nigger* appears again and again in Ward's essay, a deliberate hammering, meant to be read, to be said, to be considered, but each student thereafter followed that first example and could not, would not sound the word, deleted the word, an empty pause where truth should rest. I asked about their resistance. Obvious, maybe. The New South distances itself from its historical shame as ground zero for slavery and lynching and the KKK. For instance: when I first took a tour of Rose Hill, the 1852 Greek Revival Mansion at Milledgeville's Lockerly Arboretum, the guide said (quietly as if to dodge the whole difficulty of the antebellum South, as if to redirect my gaze to the beautiful mahogany doors and marble mantels) that the "servants were treated well in comparison to slaves on plantations." Servants not slaves, but slaves not servants.

A young man, his green baseball cap on the table beside him (addressing me all class as *Ma'am, Ma'am, Ma'am*) spoke: "It's wrong. It's not our word. Not anymore. I'm not going to say it."

What right did I have to ask them to say *nigger*? How do you understand the taboo if you don't hear its brutality in your mouth and its shame through your voice? If you evade *nigger* as if it doesn't exist in Ward's essay in its black letters on the page? But *nigger* has associative, historical weight. My students of color don't need my thoughts on this, but my white students? This word is not just a taboo, racist insult, but the race in chains, fetters,

and collars, at the center of a webbed lexicon: NiggerHeaven, NiggerLover, NiggerMilk, NiggerBoy Licorice, NiggerBaby Juice, NiggerHead Stove Polish, "Ten Little Nigger Boys went out to dine; One choked his little self, and then there were nine."

I am consumed by my own shame, too, when it is my turn to read aloud, stumbling through the sound of this word, Ward's word. I think of Flannery O'Connor words: "The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it." How do I say a word that I cannot stomach? Should I? Should we, as whites, even if it is on the page demanding that we swallow it whole?

What is the worth of a word? On March 3, 1859, at the "Weeping Time" auction in Savannah, a plantation's inventory was sold off at the racetrack. 436 slaves. What is the worth of the word? $6180 for a mother and her five grown children, $6180. $250 for an old man. The word's worth.

The first time I read *nigger* typed out in a book given to me by a teacher, rather than (just) gouged into the wooden bench at the playground, was in the fourth grade. Miss Colardi, knowing that I needed something more than *Cricket in Times Square,* handed me *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The folksy language was annoying; Aunt Polly's abusive smacking was disturbing; and Tom and Huck's capers had nothing to do with my life as a girl. But I sat at my desk jotting notes for the poster I would have to make at the end of two weeks: drawings with quotes from the novel's major scenes.

I read silently, ignoring the boy poking my shoulder with his pencil, until Chapter VI, when Tom says to Huck, "They'll all lie. Leastways all but the nigger. I don't know him. But I never see a nigger that wouldn't lie."

My body flashed with shame's heat at feeling that word inside of me. Shame, too, at the shock of the word inside of me. Illicit and explicit. I whispered, not so loud that the girl in front of me could hear.

"nigger."

A hard word, with its pile-up of consonants that clattered in my mouth like stones or loose teeth.

I heard a story on NPR while driving through Milledgeville, a town built where its slaves are buried in graves on the edge of the city, their bones in forgotten piles underground. The story was about a long-forgotten memoir, *Trials of the Earth*, by Mary Mann Hamilton. She ran a boarding house in the Mississippi Delta and found a parcel in a sick guest's pocket. She writes, "A Negro's finger fell in my hand. I yelled, dropped that thing like it was a red-hot iron, and started to run… if you have any fingers or toes about you don't bring them in the house."

Amputated fingers point to "nigger toes," Brazil nuts and "nigger heads," prison-cooked prunes. Heads and toes. Trophies.

Those fingers and toes and heads repurposed for a nineteenth-century puzzle game, "Chopped Up Niggers." Black men jigsawed apart. In a photograph of the game on the auction block, (opening bid $4500) the box is open, pieces of black bodies in a hodgepodge pile. Which arm with which torso with which leg with which head?

In 2011, a publishing company issued sanitized versions of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Instead of *nigger* (used 219 times in *Huck Finn*), there is now *slave*. The editor explains in the *Introduction* to the editions, "I always recoiled from uttering the racial slurs spoken by numerous characters, including Tom and Huck. I invariably substituted the word 'slave' for Twain's ubiquitous n-word whenever I read any passages aloud. Students and audience members seemed to prefer this as expedient, and I could detect a visible sense of relief each time, as though a nagging problem with the text had been addressed."

Nagging problem. If we choose, we don't have to read the word, swallow the word, or say the word (of course, a choice not available to the word's targets). Yet, *slave* is not *nigger*: *slave* is a potentially changeable circumstance of condition; *nigger* is inherently immutable as it is the a priori designation creating the conditions for slavery. This whitewashing (like Tom whitewashing that fence) feeds, what Jamelle Bouie, *Slate*'s chief political correspondent, calls, "American aversion to history and reflection."

Nigger. *We don't say that word. They do*. This is how most of us feel who are white and believe that we are not racist. Except we are, even if it is only an implicit bias, hidden from view like a small mole on the scalp under hair under hat. *Oh, hell, no*, I say. *Not me. Liberté, égalité, fraternité!* I wanted confirmation bias, so I took the Harvard University Implicit Bias Association Test for Race. This online test "requires the ability to distinguish faces of European and African origin, and indicates that most Americans have an automatic preference for white over black." I sat at my kitchen table in front of my computer, fingers on the keys, feeling self-righteous in my smug hubris: *Not Me. I'm not most*. Famous last words of Icarus, Oedipus, Macbeth, Doctor Faustus, Custer, etc., etc., etc..

The test rapid-fires the faces of varying skin tones and qualifying adjectives (good/bad/intelligent/dumb); you assign faces to adjectives using two fingers on two keys at the same time. The test doesn't measure how color-blind you are in assigning the faces to adjectives, but measures how quickly you react to the prompts. A millisecond of hesitation is recorded and tallied, and by the end? A sickening sentence on my screen: "You have a likely preference for light skin color."

Eat my words. Chew them up, swallow them, digest them and know that elimination will cause cramping, will send me, in humiliation, running for the toilet.

At Flannery O'Connor's farm, Andalusia, five minutes away from my Georgia home, peacocks penned on the lawn caterwaul and fan their shimmering feathers. In her first-floor bedroom, her crutches lean against an empty bookcase, and her typewriter waits empty of paper. Here, O'Connor once typed, "The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it." My chewed-up words rumble in my guts. Five minutes away is the antebellum capitol building of Georgia where, on January 19, 1861, the state voted, with great celebratory fanfare, to secede from the Union, and a few blocks further, at Memory Hill Cemetery, are the graves of both O'Connor (pilgrims leave flowers and peacock feathers) and of slaves (anonymous under brown stone slabs).

Once upon a time, I built my syllabi around "established writers" (the ye olde literary standard-bearers), and "integrating" writers from more diverse viewpoints. The words we choose or are given to read ("In the beginning, God created heaven and earth," "At the mid-point of the path through life, I found myself lost in a wood," "Now is the winter of our discontent,") have the authority to shape the way we read the world ("I said the hills look like white elephants."). Literary catechism. In college, a semester was devoted to Hemingway and his safaris, wars, fishing, and drink. I underlined word after word in dogged admiration of Hemingway's spare, direct prose, his gruff swagger, and his resonant pronouncements about how to live in this world: "Courage is grace under pressure" and "The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places." Memes shared from one person to the next on social media, bearing the weight of psychological and moral truth.

But having spent several years in and out of psychiatric hospitals due to Bipolar Disorder and *its* pressured breaks, I can say that Hemingway's primer is privileged rot. Grace under the pressure of debilitating mania and depression (*Fish it off*!), under the pressure of systemic oppression (*Dance like Astaire*!), under the pressure of a cop's gun pointed at you who have done nothing except drive a car with a busted taillight or walk in a neighborhood not yours-to-own (*Yes, sir. Hands up!*)? And if after surviving devastation and trauma (acute or long-lived), are you weak if you cannot bring yourself to gore a bull or shoot a lion as proof positive that you are no longer hunted by fear but are now hunter? The "some" marshalling their way through adversity, often by benefit of privilege and resources, are the few. The rest of us are still broken and our courage is in living despite our brokenness.

In the five years that I've been away from teaching (see aforementioned Bipolar Break-down), I've learned these names, a collective (still collecting) of black bodies: Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, Philandro Castile, Terence Crutcher, and Keith Scott. I've watched campuses contend with institutionalized racism (and sexism, homophobia, and intolerance in all

manifestations etc.). And #BlackLivesMatter. But what had I done except volunteer here and there for my local Democratic party in Georgia (where I was told, on my first day of cold calling for the African American candidate, "Blacks call blacks, and whites call whites. That's just how it goes here.")? Or teach a writing workshop for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault? Or repost articles about racial injustice on my Facebook page because, as a recent Pew study finds, 67% of social media users won't post about race?

Or, instead of recycling an outdated syllabus circa 2010, I could undertake an actual re-vision: see how courage is constructed not by those writing from the grace-fueled privilege of heroism, but from the jagged edges of brokenness. That is, not from the actual minority, but from the majority. A syllabus is not necessarily about the hierarchical accumulation of knowledge, but starting with a roster built on the great whites suggests that their perspective might be authoritative and all who come after derivative. Thoreau, McPhee, and Nabokov got bumped, if not entirely off, then down on the schedule. So Jesmyn Ward, John Edgar Wideman, Paul Lisicky, and Lidia Yuknavitch usurped the historical heavyweights. Black, brown, gay, female.

But who was I to presume to teach anyone about injustice from my bully pulpit of privilege? One night in college, a friend asked me to drive his Jeep home because I was less drunk than he was—stick shift and I didn't drive stick, but, in the way that judgment is impaired by drunken bravado, I took the wheel, stepped on something, shifted something, and the Jeep leapt into the brick wall of the bar as well as into another student who fell to the ground. He was mostly okay except for his knee (in this, I hear my own privileged shame speaking. *Fell to the ground* and *Mostly okay* glides right over *I was drunk and hit a boy named…?*). The bar had closed, and the owner wouldn't let me in to call for an ambulance (this was before cell phones, and, too, I imagine he was concerned about liability). The student caught a ride to the hospital with a friend while I stumbled in pursuit trying to figure my way clear, chewing through a pack of gum, breathing deeply to steady myself for my eventual meeting with the police officer. No breathalyzer. The cop never even asked if I'd been drinking.

"You seem like a nice girl," he said," but I have to ticket you for leaving the accident scene. I'm sorry."

Years later, when I was in the psychiatric hospital for mania and suicidal depression, doctors and nurses took an extra interest in me over the other patients who were mostly poor, often black or Hispanic, mostly uneducated—at least not degreed by any institution other than the one we were locked inside. Though my actions (cutting, starving, suicide attempting) suggested otherwise, the professionals agreed that with enough attention and encouragement, I would be fine, an exception worthy of exceptional treatment. My fellow patients didn't receive the same kind of therapeutic cheerleading, just cursory questions at rounds and paper cups with assorted pills.

One morning, my psychiatrist asked me to explain, from my "learned" perspective, what it was like to have Bipolar Disorder to his residents.

"Take notes," he instructed the residents. "She knows what she's talking about."

Though I was in the middle of an intensive electric shock therapy regimen, I was still the university teacher in possession of rational self-knowledge (if not her wits) rather than the 6th Floor patient with anti-psychotic pills stowed under her tongue and a chart the size of a New York City phone book in which I was described as a "thin, pretty, 34-year-old white woman (though appears younger), highly educated, and polite. A brief admission is indicated. Prognosis is good." The refrain I heard most often? "You don't belong in here, honey. Look at you!"

I'd be lying if I didn't admit my gratitude for such singular treatment, that the staff saw promise instead of wasted opportunity (though that optimism, I believe, interfered with the more acute level of care I clearly needed), but did they look at Odette, the black woman who shared my room, and sobbed every night for her dead son shot in the street, as having the same promise? Or Ronald, the whippet-thin black man, who gladly ate my uneaten trays of food because when he got out, all he had was a box of 10-count ramen? I ordered doubles of chicken and mashed potatoes and pudding and cookies just so he could have more than he could ever eat. Clean trays every time.

The only way to try to teach my students about oppression and injustice is to speak from this simultaneous position: I am officially designated by the government as disabled, kicked out of the heterogeneous checked box and into a special category of consideration, and I am also aware that my color (white) and my education (PhD), allows me to move out of this category at will (except when my crazies creep up). But to presume to teach with this deliberate agenda as a white woman from wealthy, suburban Long Island at a primarily white-student-bodied college in rural Georgia? What did I presume my students wouldn't know and what my students wouldn't know to know? Wasn't I just another Northern carpetbagger with my consciously aware syllabus (collective minorities form a majority) as my only real action in support of #BlackLivesMatter? Flannery O'Connor might have been pointing her finger at me when she wrote, "The South… is traditionally against intruders, foreigners from Chicago or New Jersey, all those who come from afar with moral energy that increases in direct proportion to the distance from home."

A few days before the start of the semester, I shifted the syllabus again for John Edgar Wideman's essay, "Looking at Emmett Till," an essay that I read ten years earlier with students at my Pennsylvania college, all of whom were naïvely indignant and certain that Emmett Till would never happen again, not on their watch. But of course: Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Alton

Sterling, Philando Castile, Terence Crutcher, and Keith Scott. And recently, an Indianapolis homeowner, Carl Williams, called police to report an attempted carjacking at his house. When the police arrived, they assumed he was the carjacker and shot him.

I asked my friend Michael, who is black and a surgeon, or a surgeon and is black (*What do you see first?*) if I was being, well, a white liberal asshole. In the essay, Wideman argues that looking at Emmett Till's mutilated face if you are white is not the same as looking at his face if you are black. White: *This will never be me, not at random, not at the hands of racists wielding flashlights to club my head, a knife to gouge my eyes, and a gun to blow off my head*. Black? *This can always be me. Chased. Beaten. Shot. Killed.* Black white-outs everything. What do you see first?

Michael told me that despite being the son of a surgeon, despite having graduated from an Ivy League university at nineteen, despite living an exemplary life rooted in service (AIDS research, water purification research born out of his work in Africa), he is afraid. "My father told me: Don't speed. Ever." he said. "Check the lights. Never give them a reason to pull you over. Keep your identification in the visor, not the glove compartment."

"This essay," I said. "Wideman's point is that we have to look at Emmett Till's face. At the photographs from *Jet Magazine*." I say this and think of the puzzle box and fingers and toes and heads. "His own mother asked us to look, but do my students, do I have the right to look at his face on the screen for our 'discussion'?"

Michael was adamant. "You have to. Your students have to see his face, and his eyes, missing. You see Emmett Till and you can't forget what you've seen."

"Who knew about Emmett Till before reading the Wideman essay?" I asked.

Two *Hands Up!* (No fear).

"Who went online to look at the photos?"

No hands up.

I turned on the projector screen. Emmett Till. Or rather, a close-up of Emmett Till's brutalized black face, disembodied, filling the wall-sized white space. A black-out. What is the gruesome slang for the prison-prunes? You know the words.

Wideman describes this boy's face: "[C]rushed, chewed, mutilated, his gray face swollen, water dripping from holes punched in his skull… an aerial snapshot of a landscape cratered by bombs or ravaged by natural disaster…a smashed, road-killed thing, not a boy's face." In *The Wave in the Mind: Talks and Essays on the Writer, the Reader, and the Imagination*, Ursula LeGuin writes, "The shift from denial of injustice to recognition of injustice can't be unmade. What your eyes have seen they have seen. Once you see the injustice, you can never again in good faith deny the oppression and defend the oppressor."

Emmett Till was murdered for violating race taboos of 1955 Money, Mississippi, but killed, too, because his murderers had the prerogative as whites to kill a *nigger*, get away with it, and get paid by a journalist for their confession. What was the worth of their words? $4000. Equal to the appreciated value of that box of "Chopped Up Niggers."

Wideman writes, "Our horror, our refusal to look too closely at Emmett Till reside in the same deep, incriminating knowledge." *Nigger*, a taboo word, for whites, anyway. The word reveals how we (whites) see and name and enslave, but is it a word worth our (white) reading and speaking? To look away from *nigger* out of discomfort, to pretend as if Ward didn't write the word at all and hasn't been brutalized by this chain of letters? I don't know if I was right to ask my students to read this word out loud and to each other, but I'd like to think our shameful, shame-filled soundings had some worth.

Emily Skaja

The Brute / Brute Heart

After Pennsylvania, I couldn't breathe.
—Lucie Brock-Broido

The facts are: I drove all night through the mountains
to get away from him
I cut up my credit cards to prove I would not leave him
I woke up in the hospital
to bonesaw / brushfire / thralldom
the pieces were out of order there was glass in my cheek
I tried to swallow an entire bottle I tried to leave
without giving away my name I was not lost
I listed no forwarding address
There was a reason why I named the dog *Valor*

If I was silent I'd learned the virtue
of protecting my mouth at least
I was going home
to the house between the cemeteries
to the red bud the willow trees
the heavy muck-wet woods
I loved & in my absence
the house had been torn down
to make more space
for the dead

I stood there breathing
It felt like
sliding a hand through loose dirt looking
for tendrils & pockets of air
It's easy to be angry
about how much hope there is
in reaching
The whole house gone
& so many little monuments
to the wrong thing

In the bare yard all of my good trees
still framed the hole where the house had been standing
I imagined the house erasing itself
against violence
In my new life whatever I claimed
I didn't feel it was *mine*
How easily I could be a river dragged
a gray car raised up from the bottom dripping
Already I was on a string I could be lurched up
out of hiding & the evidence tagged

He took the money he said I made him crazy it was my fault
What was wrong with me how could I ever think
I could leave was I really so stupid he said
he would call the police
he set my furniture on fire he said
he would drive my dog to the pound if I went out
I'd like to say now that he was just a list of grievances
Who else would try so hard on someone so fucking worthless
is some kind of war proposal
that no longer works on me

What I want is a permanent figure
I want a marker here to separate
the time before from *the time now*
One ivied-over angel
for a woman with no known name & no known history
A monument for the disappearance of X
For the opening of a deep well in which I would tread water
For the blood to tide
For the trees to fall
For 100 years of winter

Yerra Sugarman

The Teacher

For a finger's width of love, I'd hold my hand out to her like a beggar
in the world outside the sterile ward. Blades sharpening in my belly,

my hunger ended the day I heard curses swell—shit, help, fuck—
from the hospital's corked room. A whitewashed cauldron.

For years, to let her poems enter me, I'd devour my own skin
the way some insects eat their wings. Desire would candle me

whenever she called me friend. In poetry class, she was the teacher.
Even my name prayed to her voice and its cool red dust.

But wreckage was a promise I knew we would keep.
In lockdown, there were no shoes, no pens, no cell phones,

just the white bread of days I found calming: plastic forks
and knives; pills dispensed in paper cups. The city and its mouth

of broken teeth, still indifferent and bruised as when I'd left them.
But, locked in, I was free of her, sirens shearing off the surface of night.

◆◆◆

Locked in, I was free of her, sirens shearing off the surface of night,
and her hands that held poetry in them the way the earth holds water.

When she'd speak, I'd be happy.
Her words' wooded smell lifted me.

I was dazzled even by the light rain falling in her praise,
and traced her mind with my finger, erasing myself,

a self who knew love as a fragile house,
ruin cradled in it, although its rubble made me sing.

The city air fat with ash that autumn,
could I see her coming as clearly as I saw

the towers' exit wounds, those two behemoths
suddenly delicate? The month we met,

I learned the ease with which cities crumble
giving in to the hot metal of longing, its curved blades.

◆◆◆

Giving in to the hot metal of longing, its curved blades,
I forgot my own throat, my soul as muscle and tissue,

and dashed toward her like a deer, hooves shattering wind,
because I lacked the skill not to love her. The city unraveled,

its ground seeded with bone where the towers crumbled
night and day on TV screens as if they'd been built just to fall.

Posters of the lost who'd worked inside them: psalms
Scotch-taped to shop windows, hymns calling on us to be sung.

"Every day, this happens like a promise in places we don't think of,"
she emailed me, "in cities wreathed in dust and blood,

in the markets of refugee camps, where knees drop into mud."
She was right. And I sensed my grasp of history rust

like the skyline at dusk. To be a body inside her body,
a pin of light on her wrist—this is what I wanted.

◆◆◆

A pin of light on her wrist—this is what I wanted.
Want as in yearning and lack. Not lust, but fusion,

so that the fenced-in country of the self unseals
its spiked borders, so that we shed a layer of prickly skin

the way a palm tree sheds its rough bark
to reveal the softer bark within. *Mother,*

you wrapped your skirts around me to make an amniotic sac
in which we coiled together like a double helix, two strands

of a single molecule. And so I believed the world was all mother.
I didn't tell. I reached for the phone on my nightstand

the morning the planes struck the buildings, clutched the cold
plastic receiver, then remembered you were already dead.

Therefore, I wanted, as in lacked. I laid your image over her—
my teacher—who cut absence from me with a scythe.

◆◆◆

My teacher cut absence from me with a scythe—
absence wild as the milk thistle in an abandoned field.

Stay, I said to my father, his teeth clenched as he pushed
his soul out of a body that could no longer contain it.

The ambulance's whirling light stung the air
two months after my mother's spirit seeped out of the world

as seamlessly as water swirls down a drain.
"Sometimes, this happens," the hospice nurse had warned me.

A wife's death stabs her husband like a bayonet
and he escapes his emptiness. Emptiness, absence:

two wicks looped together inside us. Stay, I said.
But he couldn't stay, not my father, not my mother.

When my teacher opened up her fist, her hand was full of words.
I would have eaten the syllables from her palm.

◆◆◆

I would have eaten the syllables from her palm,
though why would she have let me when I loved her just to ruin

what she gave? I held onto her, but knew I would fall, as if falling
were something I wanted, as if love curdled into loss is sweet.

Our country, at war, was a knife
honed by the cries of the ones it slashed,

cries sinking in daylight, which is only light, not mercy.
I marched in protest with her. Shells burst in another land

reminding us of how easily the body can burn.
My mind: a sheet of paper waiting for her ink

because I needed to be rewritten, not knowing revision
means the self must first be broken then rebuilt

and glued together again. But I wasn't ready
to be the friend she carefully repaired then left behind.

◆◆◆

To be the friend she carefully repaired then left behind
meant not knowing how to feel when the alphabet caved in

and only the letter C survived intact on my pillow: a fallen hair.
To consume nothing for days but a *Milky Way*, Klonopin,

Xanax, Prozac, shame, shots of vodka.
To whittle the world down until it fit inside a keyhole.

To have my heart beat so wildly, it seemed I had two hearts.
It was as if the barrel of a gun pressed against my gut—

Every hour, I googled her name, trying to conjure her
from a link's blue ink. I write this in another city now.

Streetlights turn the palm trees white. I'm happy
to pick out constellations although I believed I was through

with muscle, flesh, blood. I wash my hands then type:
For a finger's width of love, I'd hold my hand out to her like a beggar.

Avia Tadmor

Ruth after Crossing the Water

There was a field I used to go to in summer.
My grassland, my lea, my feet

caked in earth. The sun ripened in the navel
of cumquats; at night, the stink of goats and hyenas

wafted and faded in no particular measure
as if it came from the moon. As if to tell,

in Sivan sudden winds will gust from the fells
of another country. Like asps

they will move through you. Let them. What split tongue
they will brush cool against you, and you will be liable,

be alone. Be still in their stirring: your braids
unplaiting at once— the sternum snapping

and lifting; your cotton dress also lifting
to show the heels unhinged from the ground,

the knees grass-wet, inclined toward
the other side of the drought. Obey them,

the strange hiss they will bring to your lips—
lines from a scripture you did not know. But its music,

the way it crosses out language, crosses out import.
Crosses out a need to know. Like a blind man

crossing a turf at a distance—his voice titanic and sprawling
through the unhoused night. And the night itself, how it sets

slowly over the turf as if on the wounded
lion's back—the animal heart travelling elsewhere

through the thin edge of sleep. And because it's the way you too
will move after the field, when crossing the water,

and the way the water will also move through you:
some nights with faith, some nights without.

Sunni Brown Wilkinson

My Son Says He Has an Owl Inside of Him —

soft with large, sad eyes.
        The snow has not stopped falling
all morning, and I am pregnant,
and the baby is soft
and has eyes we can't see.

In the garden,
        white slowly smothers
the flowers, lights lining the walk,
the goose-necked gas meter ugly
in its protrusion.
                Gone.
What falls now
        remakes the world.

Inside me a child like an orchid
        unwraps itself.
In the exam room,
on the black and white screen,

particles swirl around the child
whose eyes are dark clouds.
        What will he find when he comes?
        Was it worth the work of making

himself?
Loose matter gathers
around and inside him
        like a snow globe settling.
Even when the doctor turns off
the screen, prints the photos, something
falls into place, something

        crouches, unwinds, prepares
to fly.

All day I wonder
if the world is enough.

Pieces of light fall
endlessly.

The owls inside us open their wide eyes.

Girls of the Underworld

The beginning of the names
are strange, but the endings
the same. That long e stretching
out, giggling or squealing.
Like the string on the end of a kite
or the mean little tail of a wide-eyed
shrew.
Persephone, Eurydice.

◆◆◆

These are the wages of beauty,
to be both captivating
and captive.

They took to wearing black
to blend in. But their faces
were the flame
on a lit match, and their hair the smoke
that gave everything away.

◆◆◆

One had a good mother.
That helped. She tried to fish the girl out
first, with a long pole,
but the god there found it, broke it over
his knee. She buried a message

deep in the earth saying,
Eat, and you stay.

That night in his dreams, the girl
was a peach. In her dreams,

he was a pomegranate.

◆◆◆

She wasn't alone.
Another girl showed up
with a snake bite and a
husband
who could sing
just like Dylan, though his tux
was tattered after months
of searching
and he wasn't good
with rules. He couldn't
carry her out
like he wanted, like the day
they got married and she danced
in the meadow and the little house
waited in the oaks. Instead,
he had to walk in front
like a criminal,
his one look back
a slamming door.

◆◆◆

The other girl awoke
to hunger. The god in the doorway
was waiting.

Butter on the Bread and Honey on the Butter

There's an engine in the garden
this morning, chugging from yarrow
to cosmos. That beggar of blossoms
carries a dagger, and all his sugar's
the aftermath of spit. Later, the baby's foot
finds him in the grass, and the wailing starts,
high and thin, until we bring
the cut onion to cool it
out of pain. It's a trick: what makes you cry
under the knife
is also a balm. Like each child

I have borne. On the field trip
to the pioneer farm, kids crowd
the kitchen for a chance
to churn butter. The girl in the blue apron
wears her hair in two braids
and upbraids the kids like a mother
for not raising their hands. My son
has just milked a cow, slid
his hands over that strange balloon

that fills with milk slowly
from a place we can't see. He is a room
with one bright window, he was the first
to make honey in my breast.

◆◆◆

The baby roots
the moment he wakes, turning his face
to whatever moves him. Flanked

by his cries, I shift the T-shirt,
everything in the way of the breast
that opens itself like a flower.

◆◆◆

There are days the bee comes sharply
and the sugar hardens
in the dark cupboard. Then I call myself
Honey, take me gently
by the hand. Like bread,

I'm practiced in the art
of rising. Like my son, I'm hungry
for what I don't have.
Jesus called death *the sting*
and we understand. After he raised the dead,
what would they eat, the body
and the spirit fresh with empty?
The good bread of the house
and something on top. They ate their way
back to a consolable hunger,
like a baby, back to that rooting
that loosens the clutch. In the end

of the mouth it's the tongue
searching, the tongue
that finds what's sweet.

Ian C. Williams

Boys Will Be Boys: A Confession

I'm still composing distance by closing doors
on childhood haunts, on a backyard's invisible
militaries, trips to and from thrift shops

in the back of J's parents' station wagon, dirt
scraped between my front teeth after his fist's collision,
the blood mixed with spit. I'm still pressing down

how he slipped unwanted love notes in my older sister's
backpack, how he sleeved his forearms' riots as if
his confidence didn't stand on the backs

of every other kid beaten down. But every closed door
doesn't shut out the sounds of another kid
getting his breakfast kicked out of him. Every

curtain drawn doesn't hinder another shrugged
justification of boys just being boys.
After it all, what we label childhood rivalry,

what we label history, I deny its resonance.
And still I let in the whispers, wet
with the yellow stench of want,

of not letting go of the stories: a neglected
apartment crumbling on its foundation,
reports of leering gaze and grimace,

accounts of women who received love notes
and were too afraid to slip from the sheets
until he was sleeping.

Kiani Yiu

Pangaea

I learned about marriage
and divorce on the second row of my high school
geography class, chewing gum

and sticking it between my nose
and the textbook. Mr. Sorel, later fired
for inappropriate physical conduct, spent a whole

class talking about the ancient, long-gone
unity of the earth. In history,
he quaked, all seven continents fit together—

suctioned fast like thumbs in Chinese finger traps.
In these pages of the book, the beginning,
notice the word *continents* exists only

in the singular. Then he'd pause, waiting
for questions, as if we had never heard
of something wrecked having had a decent past.

The crusted surface had yet to crack,
he claimed. People could crawl
on one full mass of land without breakage

or fear of drowning. But now, things
are plural. And say the seven anchored
vessels of the world decided to join

crevices again—odds are they would leak,
densely waterlogged, in suspense of tectonic affairs—
in possession of no viable map.

Josephine Yu

In Times Such as These, We Find We Must Make Do

I need an oracle, but I'll take a phone book,
a therapist, any 1-800 hotline
on a box of nasal spray.
Someone, somewhere,
must know something. I need a morphine drip,

a stretcher, an exam table with Allen stirrups,
a CAT scan or two. There're things they missed
at my last check up—this knot
on my aorta, like a branch stump
on the trunk of a tree, and this plummeting

uncertainty. A host of symptoms. I'd settle
for an Advil and a Fresca.
I need an expert witness to testify.
A peer-reviewed article. Results confirmed
in a clinic trial. But I'll take the cabby
smoking at the 7-11, minding his own business,

didn't see anything, or the 1944 Funk and Wagnalls
New Standard Encyclopedia of Universal Knowledge,
twenty-five cracked-spine volumes
molding in my parents' sunroom.
I need a verdict passed down by a jury of my peers,

a mea culpa, a speech launched beneath
a net of balloons. I'll take a horoscope, a fortune
cookie prophecy, the blue window
of a Magic 8 Ball restoring order
with a cool "It is decidedly so."
I need a cathedral, old school,
all gray stone and buttress

and a confessional like a dank mouth biting
the tongue of my secrets. I need a meadow.
I need some goddamn peace and quiet
so I can finally think.
Instead:
my neighbor's Lilith Fair CD bleating
through our shared kitchen wall and a dog barking
from a car driving past the house. I need a couch

and a nap in the rain—Don't you think it's time to lie
down for a bit?
No, you're right, you're right. We'd be lucky
to snag an empty chair
in the boarding lounge, or a scrub of carpet
at a window overlooking the runway, where we could
watch our breath on the glass
and the plane taxiing toward us,

any plane, to take us to any destination,
anywhere we know
we'd land safely.

Contributors' Notes

Lauren K. Alleyne is an award-winning poet from Trinidad and Tobago. She is the author of *Difficult Fruit* (Peepal Tree Press) and her second collection *Honeyfish* won the 2018 Green Rose Prize and is forthcoming from New Issues Press in 2019. Her fiction, nonfiction, interviews, and poetry have been widely published in venues such as *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Guernica*, *The Caribbean Writer*, and *Gathering Ground*, among others. She is currently Assistant Director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center and an Associate Professor of English at James Madison University.

Idris Anderson's second collection of poems, *Doubtful Harbor,* was selected by Sherod Santos for the Hollis Summers Poetry Prize and was published by Ohio University Press in March 2018. She has won a Pushcart Prize and the Yeats Poetry Prize. She was born and grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, and moved to the San Francisco Bay Area two decades ago.

José Angel Araguz is a CantoMundo fellow and the author of seven chapbooks as well as the collections *Everything We Think We Hear* (Floricanto Press) and *Small Fires* (FutureCycle Press). His poems, prose, and reviews have appeared in *Crab Creek Review, Prairie Schooner, The Windward Review,* and *The Bind*. He runs the poetry blog "The Friday Influence" and teaches English and creative writing at Linfield College.

Karen Babine is the author of *Water and What We Know: Following the Roots of a Northern Life* (University of Minnesota Press), winner of the 2016 Minnesota Book Award for memoir/creative nonfiction. Her second essay collection, *All the Wild Hungers*, is forthcoming from Milkweed Editions in 2018. She also edits *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies*. Her work has appeared in such journals as *Brevity, River Teeth, North American Review, Slag Glass City, Sweet*, and more. She lives and writes in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Molly Bashaw's book of poetry, *The Whole Field Still Moving Inside It,* was published in 2014.

Jacob Boyd is originally from Holt, Michigan. He is currently in the Program for Writers at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and he holds an MFA from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Poems of his have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Blackbird, Cold Mountain Review, Copper Nickel, Iron Horse Literary Review,* and elsewhere.

May-lee Chai is the author of eight books, including the memoir *Hapa Girl*, a Kiriyama Prize Notable Book, and the novel *Tiger Girl*, which won an Asian/

Pacific American Award for Literature. Her short prose has been published widely, including in *Catapult, The Offing*, *The Rumpus*, *Seventeen, Glimmer Train,* and *Missouri Review.* She is the recipient of an NEA fellowship in prose. She is Assistant Professor of creative writing at San Francisco State University.

Anne Champion is the author of *The Good Girl is Always a Ghost* (Black Lawrence Press), *Reluctant Mistress* (Gold Wake Press), and *The Dark Length Home* (Noctuary Press). She was an 2009 Academy of American Poets Prize recipient, a Barbara Deming Memorial grant recipient, a 2015 *Best of the Net* winner, and a Pushcart Prize nominee.

Martha Christina is a frequent contributor to *Brevities*. Longer work appears in *Innisfree Poetry Journal, Naugatuck River Review, Crosswinds Poetry Journal, Red Eft Review,* and most recently in the anthology *Ice Cream Poems* from World Enough Writers. She has published two collections: *Staying Found* (Fleur-de-Lis Press) and *Against Detachment* (Pecan Grove Press).

Jessica Cuello is the author of *Pricking* (Tiger Bark Press) and *Hunt* (The Word Works). She has been awarded The 2017 CNY Book Award (for *Pricking*), The 2016 Washington Prize (for *Hunt*), New Letters Poetry Prize, and a Saltonstall Fellowship. Her newest poems can be found or are forthcoming in *Passages North, Missouri Review Poem of the Week, Foundry, The American Poetry Journal*, and *Red Paint Hill*.

Melissa Cundieff is the author of *Darling Nova*, selected by Alberto Ríos for the 2017 Autumn House Press Poetry Prize. She holds an MFA from Vanderbilt, and her poems have appeared in such places as *Best of the Net, Ninth Letter, Mid-American Review, TriQuarterly,* and *Four Way Review*. Originally from Texas, she now lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with her two children.

Reilly Cundiff is an MFA candidate and teaching fellow at Hollins University. Back home in Fredericksburg, Virginia, she repairs books and uses a deck of Tarot cards to tell her what to order for dinner. She was a finalist for the 2017 Francine Ringold Awards for New Writers in poetry from *Nimrod Journal*.

Raphael Dagold's poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Diode*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *North American Review*, and *The Asheville Poetry Review*. Recent awards include finalist for *Southern Indiana Review*'s Mary C. Mohr Award in Poetry and fellowships from the Jentel Foundation and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. His second book manuscript, *Self Storage*, has been a finalist for the Georgia Prize, the Cider Press Book Award, and other manuscript competitions.

Lauren Davis is a poet living on the Olympic Peninsula in a Victorian seaport

community. She holds an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars, and her work can be found in publications such as *Prairie Schooner*, *Spillway*, and *Lunch Ticket*. She also teaches at The Writers' Workshoppe in Port Townsend, Washington, and works as an editor at *The Tishman Review*.

Rebecca Dunham's fifth book of poetry, *Strike*, was awarded New Issues Poetry & Prose's 2018 Editor's Choice Award and will be published in Spring 2019. Other recent books include *Cold Pastoral* and *Glass Armonica,* both published by Milkweed Editions. She has received an NEA Fellowship in Poetry and her poems have appeared in journals such as *FIELD, Alaska Quarterly Review, Antioch Review,* and *Notre Dame Review,* among others. She is Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Saddiq Dzukogi is the author of *Inside the Flower Room,* selected by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani for the APBF New Generation African Poets Chapbook Series (forthcoming in 2018). Saddiq was on the 2017 Brunel International African Poetry Prize shortlist. His poems appear or are forthcoming in *Kenyon Review, New Orleans Review, South Dakota Review, Prairie Schooner, Best American Experimental Writing Series,* and *Verse Daily.* He is also a fellow of the Ebedi International Writers Residency.

Kerry James Evans is the author of *Bangalore* (Copper Canyon Press). He teaches at Tuskegee University.

Renee Evans earned an MFA from Southern Illinois University Carbondale in 2009. Her work has appeared in *roger, Fogged Clarity,* and *SN Review,* among others.

Allison Funk is the author of five books of poems, including her most recent, *Wonder Rooms* (Free Verse Editions of Parlor Press). The recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, she has been published in *Poetry, Paris Review, Cincinnati Review, Shenandoah, The Best American Poetry,* and elsewhere.

Colette Anderson Gill's poems appear in *Oberon, Smartish Pace, Tar Wolf Review,* and *The Southeast Review*, among others. She was the recipient of the Howard Moss Poetry Prize from the University of Houston. Two of her chapbooks have been published by Finishing Line Press.

Rachael Hägglund is a graduate of the MFA program in poetry at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she served as the Larry Levis Reading Prize Coordinator. She is the recipient of fellowships from VCU and the Carol Weinstein Foundation. In 2017 she was awarded the Catherine and Joan Byrne Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets.

Lois Marie Harrod's chapbooks *Nightmares of the Minor Poet* (Five Oaks Press) and *And She Took the Heart* (Casa de Cinco Hermanas) appeared in 2016. Her 13th and 14th poetry collections, *Fragments from the Biography of Nemesis* (Cherry Grove Press) and *How Marlene Mae Longs for Truth* (Dancing Girl Press) appeared in 2013. She is widely published in literary journals and online ezines from *American Poetry Review* to *Zone 3.* Visit her online work: www.loismarieharrod.org.

Amanda P. Hartzell received her MFA from Emerson College in Boston. She won the Alexander Patterson Cappon Prize for fiction from *New Letters*, and her work has appeared in *Paper Darts* and *Midway Journal,* among other publications. Born in Whitehall, Pennsylvania, she now lives in Seattle with her fiancé and their dog.

Amanda Hawkins holds a MA in theological studies from Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. Her poetry can be found in *Tin House, Poets.org*, *The Missouri Review*, *Flyway*, *Ruminate*, and *Orion*. She has received scholarships, residencies, and awards from the Napa Valley Writers' Conference, the Dorland Mountain Arts Colony, *Ruminate*, *Flyway*, *Arkana*, and *Bellingham Review*. She teaches writing in Northern California and advises the undergraduate-run literary journal, *Metonym*.

Justin Herrmann is the author of the short fiction collection *Highway One, Antarctica* (MadHat Press). He is the winner of the 2016 *River Styx* Micro-Fiction Contest. His stories have appeared in journals including *Mid-American Review, SmokeLong Quarterly, Washington Square Review,* and *The Tishman Review.* He spent twenty-four months living and working at McMurdo Station, Antarctica. He has an MFA from University of Alaska Anchorage.

J.J. Hernandez is a poet living in Fresno, California. He holds an MFA in poetry, and he has served as the inaugural fellow in the Laureate Lab: Visual Words Studio under Juan Felipe Herrera. You can see some of his work in *Tinderbox, Cactus Heart*, *Flies, Cockroaches and Poets,* and *The San Joaquin Review.*

Alisha Erin Hillam's work has appeared in such publications as *decomP, Architrave Press, Prick of the Spindle, Midwestern Gothic, Passages North, Rust+Moth,* and *War, Literature & the Arts*. She is the recipient of several literary awards from Purdue University and is a Best of the Net nominee. Originally from Indiana, she currently resides in Massachusetts with her family and is at work on her first novel.

Cynthia Hughes writes poetry and music from her home in southern Vermont. Her work has been published in literary journals and anthologies in the US, Canada, Ireland and the UK. Her poems have been listed for recognition with The Montreal International Poetry Award, The O'Donoghue Poetry Prize, Fish Poetry Prize, and The Poetry Society National Competition (UK). She is working on a first collection of poems.

Lizzie Hutton's poems have most recently appeared in *Denver Quarterly* and *Antioch Review*; her collection of poetry, *She'd Waited Millennia,* was published by New Issues Poetry and Prose. Lizzie's current poetry project is a series of poems on the life and aesthetic of the sculptor Eva Hesse. The italicized portions of "Marriage: The Factory" are excerpted from comments made by Tom Doyle, as quoted by Lucy Lippard in her 1976 book, *Eva Hesse.* This year, Lizzie will also complete her Ph.D. in English and Education at the University of Michigan.

Lindsay Illich is the author of *Heteroglossia* (Anchor and Plume) and *Rile & Heave* (Texas Review Press), which won the Texas Review Press Breakout Prize in Poetry.

Madison P. Jones is a doctoral candidate at the University of Florida, studying place-based writing and environmental rhetoric. His poetry collection *Reflections on the Dark Water* was released spring 2016 (Solomon & George). Recent poems have appeared in *Shenandoah*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere. He coedited *Writing the Environment in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Lexington Books). His articles have appeared in *ISLE*, *Kairos*, and elsewhere. Visit his website: madisonjones.com.

Elisa Karbin's poems have recently appeared in, or are forthcoming from, *Indiana Review, Blackbird, West Branch* and *Notre Dame Review,* and her chapbook, *Snare*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in 2018. A multiple Pushcart nominee, she has received several honors, including a residency at the Vermont Studio Center. She teaches composition and creative writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where she is finishing her Ph.D. in poetry. She has two cats.

David M. Katz is the author of three books of poems: *Stanzas on Oz* (Dos Madres Press), *Claims of Home* (Dos Madres Press), and *The Warrior in The Forest* (House of Keys). His poems have appeared in *Poetry, The Paris Review, The New Criterion, The New Republic, The Cortland Review,* and *The Hopkins Review.* He lives in New York City and works as a financial and cultural journalist.

Nicola Koh is transandrogynous, an agnostic atheist, and a Malaysian Eurasian. They have an MFA from Hamline University, and their work has appeared in *Southwest Review*, *Hermeneutic Chaos Literary Journal*, *Word Riot*, and others.

Kara Krewer was raised on an orchard in rural Georgia. She is a former Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University, and she holds an MFA from Purdue University. Her poems have appeared in *West Branch*, *Best New Poets*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Adroit Journal*, and elsewhere. She is currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Georgia.

Jennifer Lang is American born, French by marriage, Israeli by choice, and she

writes mostly about her divided self. Her essays have appeared in *Under the Sun, Assay, Ascent, The Coachella Review, Hippocampus Magazine,* and *Full Grown People.* Honors include Pushcart Prize and *Best American Essays* nominations and finalist status in the 2018 *Crab Orchard Review*'s Literary Nonfiction Contest. Find her at http://israelwritersalon.com and follow her @JenLangWrites as she writes her first memoir.

Devi S. Laskar is a native of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She holds an MFA from Columbia University in New York. A former newspaper reporter, she is now a poet and photographer. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Fairy Tale Review, Rattle,* and *Tin House*. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is an alumna of VONA/Voices. Finishing Line Press published her second poetry chapbook, *Anastasia Maps*.

Han-Jae Lee has studied poetry at Chung-Ang University and Korea University, and in the United States at library workshops in Santa Cruz, San Jose and at the Hudson Valley Writers' Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York. In 2005 his poem, "A High-rise Apartment," won a silver award in a national contest sponsored by The National Assembly of Korea and The Federation of Korean Cultural Center. His first poetry collection, *A High-rise Apartment*, was published in Korea in 2008. He also co-published three poetry anthologies. His second collection in English in 2013, *The Golden Gate Bridge and Other Natural Wonders*, was published by River Sanctuary Publishing. His chapbook, *A Place Where Clouds Are Flowing,* was published by Finishing Line Press. His poems have appeared in *Catamaran*, *The Monterey Poetry Review*, and *Caesura*.

Emily Leithauser's first book of poems, *The Borrowed World*, was the winner of the 2016 Able Muse Book Award. Her poems have appeared in *32 Poems, Poetry Daily, New Ohio Review*, *Literary Imagination*, *Blackbird*, and *Unsplendid,* among other journals. Her scholarship on contemporary poetry has appeared in *The Hopkins Review* and *The Global South*. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor in English and Creative Writing at Emory University.

Esther Lin was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and lived in the United States as an undocumented immigrant for twenty-one years. She is the author of *The Ghost Wife,* winner of the 2017 Poetry Society of America's Chapbook Fellowship. Her poems have appeared in *Copper Nickel, Crazyhorse, Drunken Boat, Missouri Review* Online, *Triquarterly, Vinyl,* and elsewhere. She is a member of Undocupoets and is currently a 2017–19 Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University.

Brynn Martin is a Kansas native living in Knoxville, where she recently received her MFA in poetry from the University of Tennessee. She now works as the Reading Series Coordinator for Sundress Academy for the Arts. Her poetry has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Contrary Magazine,* and *Yes, Poetry.*

Cathy Mauk is a US expat who has lived in Australia for twenty-seven years. She is a writer of place, nature, philosophical issues, and memoir. She has been published in both the US and Australia and selected as finalist or winner in multiple literary nonfiction contests (terrain.org, Solstice, Nature Writer Conservancy, Calibre Essay Prize, *Briar Cliff Review,* Tasmania Wildcare Nature Writing Prize). She is currently working on a collection of essays on the politics of place.

Adam McOmber is the author of *My House Gathers Desires* (BOA Editions), *The White Forest* (Touchstone), and *This New & Poisonous Air* (BOA Editions). His work has appeared recently in *Conjunctions*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Diagram*. He lives and teaches in Los Angeles, California.

Orlando Ricardo Menes is the author of five poetry titles, most recently *Heresies* (University of New Mexico Press) and *Fetish*, winner of the 2012 Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry. His forthcoming collection, entitled *Memoria*, will be published in 2019 by Louisiana State University Press.

Michael Meyerhofer's fifth book, *Ragged Eden,* is forthcoming from Glass Lyre Press. His work has appeared in *Ploughshares, Hayden's Ferry Review, Rattle, Brevity, Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine,* and other journals. He is also the author of a fantasy book series and serves as the poetry editor of *Atticus Review.* For more information and an embarrassing childhood photo, visit www.troublewithhammers.com.

B.J. Miller lives in Minnesota, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *West Branch* and *The Rumpus.*

Susan Bucci Mockler's work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Poet Lore, The Northern Virginia Review, The Delmarva Review, Beltway Poetry Quarterly, The Cortland Review, Paterson Literary Review, Lunch Ticket, Voices in Italian Americana*, and the anthology, *My Cruel Invention*, among others. Her chapbook, *Noisy Souls*, was published by Finishing Line Press. She teaches writing and literature and lives in Arlington, Virginia with her family.

Jenni Moody is a writer of fiction and hybrid forms in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Ph.D. creative writing program. She holds an MFA from the University of Alaska Fairbanks and is a graduate of the Clarion West Writers Workshop. Her work has appeared in *Aquifer: The Florida Review Online*, *Booth*, *Strangelet*, and elsewhere. She tweets at @moodyjenni.

Travis Mossotti's latest collection of poetry, *Narcissus Americana* (University of Arkansas Press), was selected as the winner of the 2018 Miller Williams Poetry Prize. He serves as Poet-in-Residence at the Endangered Wolf Center in St. Louis,

Missouri. Mossotti teaches at Webster University and works for Washington University in the Office of Information Technology.

Kerry Neville is the author of two collections of short fiction, *Remember to Forget Me* and *Necessary Lies*, which received the G.S. Sharat Chandra Prize in Fiction and was named a *Foreword* Magazine Short Story Book of the Year. Her stories and essays have appeared in various journals, including *The Gettysburg Review*, *Epoch*, *Triquarterly*, *The Washington Post* and *The Huffington Post,* and have been named Notables in both *Best American Short Stories* and *Best American Essays*. She is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Georgia College and State University.

Richard Newman is the author of the poetry collections *Domestic Fugues* (Steel Toe Books) and *Borrowed Towns* (Word Press). He served as editor of *River Styx* and was co-director of the River Styx Reading Series.

Brianna Noll is the author of *The Price of Scarlet*, selected by Lisa Williams as the inaugural poetry collection in the University Press of Kentucky's New Poetry and Prose Series. She is poetry editor of *The Account*, which she helped found, and her poems have appeared widely in journals including *The Georgia Review*, *The Kenyon Review Online, Prairie Schooner, 32 Poems*, and *Crazyhorse*.

William Notter's collection *Holding Everything Down* (Southern Illinois University Press) won the High Plains Book Award for Poetry and was a finalist for the Colorado Book Award. His poems are published or forthcoming in *About Place, Alaska Quarterly*, *AGNI Online*, *The Hollins Critic, The Midwest Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review, Sou'wester,* and *Terrain.org*. He has received fellowships from the Nevada Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Wendy Oleson is the author of *Please Find Us,* winner of the Gertrude Press 2017 Fiction Chapbook Contest, and *Our Daughter and Other Stories,* winner of the Map Literary 2016 Rachel Wetzsteon Chapbook Award. Her stories have appeared recently in *Cimarron Review*, *Copper Nickel,* and *Moon City Review*. Wendy teaches for the Writers' Program at UCLA Extension and for Washington State University at Tri-Cities and serves as an associate editor for *Fairy Tale Review* and *Memorious Magazine*.

Bibhu Padhi has published eleven books of poetry. His poems have appeared in distinguished magazines throughout the English-speaking world, such as *Encounter*, *The Contemporary Review, The Poetry Review, Stand, The Rialto, The American Scholar, Colorado Review, Confrontation, Poet Lore, Poetry, The Southwest Review, TriQuarterly, The Antigonish Review, The Toronto Review, Queen's Quarterly, The Bombay Review, The Illustrated Weekly of India,* and *Indian Literature*. His work has been included in numerous anthologies and textbooks. Three of the most recent of these are *Language for a New*

Century (Norton), *60 Indian Poets* (Penguin), *and The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry* (HarperCollins).

Joanna Pearson's short stories have recently appeared or are forthcoming in the *Alaska Quarterly Review, Blackbird, Carve Magazine, Copper Nickel, Hopkins Review, Joyland, Mississippi Review, Shenandoah*, as well as others, and have been noted as a distinguished story in *Best American Short Stories 2015* and anthologized in *Best of the Net 2016*.

Anne Delana Reeves is a poet and essayist whose work appears in *Image*, *Antioch Review, Indiana Review*, and *Chapter 16,* in addition to *The Southern Poetry Anthology IV: Tennessee;* an anthology on Che Guevara titled *Che In Verse*; and *Nasty Women Poets: An Unapologetic Anthology of Subversive Verse*. She is co-editor of *Each Fugitive Moment: Essays, Memoirs, and Elegies on Lynda Hull,* forthcoming from MadHat Press. Anne lives near Nashville, Tennessee, with her rescue dog, Fergus.

Trish Reeves has recent poems in *New Letters, I-70 Review*, and a poetry collection, *God, Maybe*, forthcoming from Scattering Skies Press. Her first collection, *Returning the Question*, received the Cleveland State University Poetry Center Prize. She has received fellowships for her poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, Yaddo, and the Kansas Arts Commission. Reeves leads Changing Lives Through Literature seminars for Johnson County Corrections, and is a Kansas Humanities Scholar in Literature.

A native of the Pine Barrens region of southern New Jersey, ***John Repp*** has lived for many years in Erie, Pennsylvania. His latest book is *Fat Jersey Blues*, published in 2014 by the University of Akron Press.

Billy Reynolds was born and raised in Huntsville, Alabama, aka "The Rocket City." His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review, Measure, Poet Lore,* and *Tar River Poetry,* among others. Currently, he lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Leona Sevick's work appears in *Verse Daily, North American Review, The Journal, The Florida Review,* and *Gulf Stream.* Her work also appears in *The Golden Shovel Anthology: New Poems Honoring Gwendolyn Brooks*. She is the 2017 Press 53 Poetry Award Winner for her first full-length book of poems, *Lion Brothers,* and the 2012 first place winner of the Split This Rock Poetry contest, judged by Naomi Shihab Nye. She can be reached at leonasevick.com.

Emily Skaja's poems have appeared in *Blackbird, Crazyhorse, FIELD*, and other journals. She is the recipient of the Russell Prize for emerging poets, the *Gulf Coast*

Poetry Prize, an Academy of American Poets College Prize, an AWP Intro Award, and a Taft Research Fellowship from the University of Cincinnati, where she is finishing a Ph.D. in Poetry with a certificate in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She is also the Associate Poetry Editor of *Southern Indiana Review.*

Yerra Sugarman is the author of two poetry collections: *Forms of Gone* and *The Bag of Broken Glass*. Her work has lately appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Image*, *Bellevue Review*, *AGNI*, *Literary Imagination*, and *Mississippi Review.* She recently earned her Ph.D. in Creative Writing and Literature from the University of Houston, and is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship.

Avia Tadmor was born in Israel. She received a BA from Harvard University and is currently completing her MFA in poetry and literary translation at Columbia University, where she also teaches undergraduate writing. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *New England Review, The Adroit Journal, Apogee, Fugue, Cider Press Review, Nashville Review,* and elsewhere. Avia is the recent recipient of a Vermont Studio Center Fellowship. She was named a finalist for the 2016 Indiana Review Poetry Prize.

Sunni Brown Wilkinson's poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *B O D Y, Sugar House Review, Cimarron Review, The Cossack Review, Southern Indiana Review* and has been nominated for two Pushcarts and *Best of the Net*. Her first full-length poetry collection, *A Hand on the Other Side*, was a 2017 finalist for the Hudson Prize and is forthcoming from Black Lawrence Press in 2019. She has an MFA from Eastern Washington University, teaches at Weber State University, and lives in Ogden, Utah with her husband and three young sons.

Ian C. Williams is pursuing an MFA at Oklahoma State University, and edits the online poetry magazine, *JARFLY*. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Harpur Palate*, *Salamander*, and *The New Territory,* among others, and his chapbook, *House of Bones*, is available from the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. He lives in Stillwater, Oklahoma with his wife, Bailey, along with their two dogs and two cats. He tweets at @ianwilliamspoet.

Kiani Yiu studied English Literature with a concentration in creative writing at Samford University where she served as the Creative Writing Editor for *Wide Angle: A Journal of Literature and Film*. She currently resides in Tennessee where, in her spare time, she leans too far over a potter's wheel and watercolors her favorite natural places and architectural spaces.

Josephine Yu is the author of *Prayer Book of the Anxious* (Elixir Press). Her poems have appeared in such journals and anthologies as *The Southern Review* and *Best New Poets* and received awards from *Ploughshares*, *Meridian*, and *New Letters*. Visit her at josephineyupoet.com.

CRAB ORCHARD REVIEW

From this point forward, we will not be open to receiving submissions for the next three 2019 online issues of *Crab Orchard Review.* Because of the health problems of our managing editor, we will try to make these publication deadlines on the issues we have received work for, but we cannot guarantee this amidst these difficulties. We will remain closed for new submissions until we get caught up and at that tine any new submissions during 2019 will be for the 2020 online issues of *Crab Orchard Review* and everything should be sent to us through Submittable (no postal or email submissions). Here is our plan:

Issue 1. "KA-CHING!: THE MONEY ISSUE" **(closed to new submissions)**
publication goal: March 2019

Issue 2. General issue with COR 2019 Annual Literary Prizes
(closed to new submissions)
publication goal: June 2019

Issue 3. A WORLD OF FLAVORS ~ WRITERS ON FOOD AND DRINK
(closed to new submissions)
publication goal: October 2019

https://craborchardreview.submittable.com/submit