

# Jet Fuel Review

Fall 2011  
Issue 2





# *Jet Fuel Review*

*A High Octane Literary Journal*

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*Artwork: Ana Jaros and Jonathan Solis' "Zombies!"  
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# **Mission Statement**

We seek to create a writer's community, publish quality writing and artwork, and maintain a blog connected to the literary journal site.

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# Poetry



## **Self-Portrait As Freak**

There is a shape to my darkness to my lost  
bones. I chew the enamel from my chipping  
teeth, chew on my misfiring synopses.  
Inside my head I sit in all the empty  
pews. Light up all my orange candles  
chanting in the language of fragments.  
Inside my head the flocking birds, the constant  
veering wings. The unstoppable  
vines spinning through my veins.  
My mouth filling up with unspittable seeds.

## **Self-Portrait As Waterworld**

I am your amusement ride.  
I am tattoos and belly bolts.  
You will stand in a solitary line.  
There is a funhouse.  
I will spurt for you. I will twirl.  
I will blister the bottoms  
of your feet. There will be  
screams and the sounds  
of propulsion. My running  
water will sort your bones  
by size. There is a luminescent light  
a white like something held  
inside the body, teeth or bone.  
The signs, the maps. You are here.  
Still. Someone always disappears.

## **The Wolf That Swallowed a Rose**

Through dark trees there is a forward urgency,  
the violent blossoming of his pulse.

The wolf rubs his fur against thorns, combing tracks  
like an empty music staff along the song of his body.

When the wolf howls, he shows the rose  
to the moon, which catches the red in its white eye.

The pads of the wolf's paws are black  
petals spreading themselves against black earth.

Everything the wolf swallows  
passes through the rose's throat.

The rabbit's last thought is that it has been taken  
into the bee's heaven by mistake.

## The Babysitter

*What bothers me the most is that he kept Tim for six days.  
Every time I dream of Tim, I can't sleep the rest of the night.  
-Barry King, victim's father*

Among cardboard boxes stacked in a dark  
basement room of infiltratable walls, we  
were sure that child-smothering tramps parked  
their 1970s muttonchops and blue Gremlins,  
their suburban camouflage to replace bindles  
and porkpie hats, their cans of beans and Sterno.

In vivid minds saddled with set bedtimes,  
it's quite easy *Now I lay me down to sleep*  
to envision disturbed Vietnam vets *I pray*  
*the Lord my soul to keep* in the bushes outside,  
*If I die before I wake* listening at the window  
*I pray the Lord my soul to take*, awaiting permission.

Every new snow brought fresh pants-wetting  
treks to the bus stop, escorted only by bag lunches  
and newspaper alarms. Everyone's first-grade  
academic majors were avoiding stranger danger  
and spotting phantoms. We still avoid transients,  
nightly prayers and hatchbacks, a bogeyman cocktail.

***(the shore in parts) the inside of shells; also time:***

*a charm*, he says, but at the end of the chain, only a watch.

the shore in parts: rock & where water has worn the rock down; water & where water becomes foam on the stones. Also egg & wood. Also glass ground fine as sand. & the eyes on you.

a waste of pearl & silver.

the watch in parts: the hours. Every single thread. To never have them back.

trade: watch chain, charm, finger. Anything becomes a bead. Anything, a blanket.

***(the shore in parts) a stone-stack:***

by leather cord: to measure.

the length of it. Too the welt it raises.

egg stone in the palm. The repetition, finger after finger. I keep trying to lower my voice.  
I want it down eye-flat. Keep pressing.

lay still: rib rest, a stack. It isn't going to be the weight of it, but the balance.

black sand pounded to chalk, the river, black line below the eye.

***(the shore in parts) water clear as sand when it becomes glass:***

yolk-moon in the throat. Clear as the white of an egg.

transparent over the hour & the mirror. I am trying to see you the way that I see you.

the water a kind of glass that holds nothing. Lift the glass in yr hand & it breaks:  
bruised skin of the thumb. What enters the water: weakened.

shines the length of the shore: scales. Under the sand & still: the uncountable stripped.

too the uncountable eggs.

***(the shore in parts) the black of the water is the blue of the sky:***

in the black mirror the trees appear as trees with paper laid over them.  
Someone is going to trace the number of each.

I can see the palm of the hand: a blanket coated with salt.

more to measure than align: copper pins go tender under. A notch in each brackish head.

what we preserved we set to ride: a horse in the shape of a dog.

with every step the salt retreating into birds. I talk to lay the sky over the sky.

***(the shore in parts) the double of everything, though somewhat less:***

struck: the arc pressed, abrasion & time, fallen upon.

the category of shards: glass, sand, voice, the broken branch,  
a stone direct against another stone, shell underfoot, a feather lost, bone in both hands.

the water is a mirror & when he holds yr face to it your open mouth becomes the black mouth of  
the water.

what had you been trying to return. He peels away the silvering. He wants to

take it apart until it can't see itself anymore.

***(the shore in parts) temperature & sound:***

span: thumb to tip, to cover the length with the length.

with your hands: a given. How did you allow this to happen.

an animal sound. The back that faces the back. Aligning for what's never coming.

the sun on the sand & it is burning. Something ceases, something withdraws  
& it pulls the burning out from you. How cold & dark coincide.

everyone knows the same song all at once, singing.

## Damage

On the first day of the tenth month they took her voice. There was a clock in every room of the mansion and not a single one showed the correct time. Still, a bell rang for meals so nothing was lost. The food was good. There was always a fresh sliced tomato and cheese. The meat was already cut into bite sized pieces. They were not very trusting when it came to knives. She considered the damage she could do with a fork, but in the end her eyes were too important. Every animal she saw in the meadow or at the edge of the forest was damaged in some way; a dragging limb, twisted horns, two heads. She used to call to them, but that was no longer possible. Now she carried a small three legged stool everywhere she went. When she sat on it, she pulled handfuls of birdseed and cracked corn from her pockets and spread it in a circle around her. Some was lost in the grass and sprouted overnight. There were sunflowers everywhere she went. Most though, was eaten by the pheasants and quail and wild turkeys, all of them silent no matter the time of day.

**Inside Out**

I wear you on the outside now—  
Legs jangling,  
Arms embracing,  
Little hands making do.  
I watch your Botticelli eyelids  
Stretched taught  
In the rapture  
Of a first autumn wind.  
I wear you on the outside now—  
Belly to belly  
We move sideways  
Like dancing carps,  
Mirrorwise,  
Circling our food.  
I wear you on the outside now—  
And in the corner of your chirping mouth  
I gape  
And glimpse the timbre of your soul.  
I wear you on the outside now—  
And finally know  
What I am for:  
For turning inside out.

## **negatives from Mms. Nahima's Photography Handbook**

*(after Kristy Bowen)*

**aperture:** provides controlled light. As travelers, we tripped upon the broken bicycles of Amsterdam. The shout of city trams, the sweat of homeless.

**exposure:** accurate, or essential. As futile as nightfall (burning-in). Symbolized a need for large numbered groups and maps in pockets. Her earrings danced alleys (notes promiscuity) to shift affairs more precisely. How are we willing to sit?

**film:** latent. A pawn in play with relics, oh it strolls in museums, opened in a novel era.

**hyperfocal:** depth. as futile as daybreak (reflect). Maybe concentrated on the distortion. The fisheye. Her tour's guide of the countries.

**lens:** coma. We are foregoing all our own memory. The bridges snake cobble stones, while vino cures the mouths of the cafe, the half scones, the menus filled with tips.

**shutter:** motion. I've been jumping trains again. Bullets slide along tracks of latitudes, dotted with docile hostels.

**zoom:** distance, or simply departure.

dead man's float

seaweeds seem to be in motion again  
surrounding hallways                      filling up on algae

marbles moaning as they roll down backs  
of chairs                      calling out numbers

on chalkboards                      while sound waves  
through eardrums                      adding cushion for five minute solos

–can you hear them singing?

atop herrings necks                      stretched across the table  
it takes one                                      with a ruler to find its heart

sweaty                      and blood leaking                      from gull's feet

it's time to rewind                      it's time to remind                      passerby  
to leave some for the rest of us                      it's time to rest

pull conch shells over my eyelids                      let cattails  
live in my windowsills                      scratching the broken bell jar

–I don't want to sit

salt stains the fins in the corners of my mouth  
slide the ocean over the moon                      I soon will be able to fish

count crabs in my stomach as pelicans bellow  
–below! below!                                      urchins fill my bed

scratching the wind blown                      red skin  
and suck on the ends of my hair

tendrils of seashells      cover the carpet  
making it hard to walk on water

build a styrofoam boat      to sail  
on out of here

-it will not always be this easy

sometimes sand dollars know best  
sometimes it's time to sleep

## **gamboling alacrity**

drip Monet on my collar bone  
and splash Renoir on my voice box  
let me sing of Denver  
through O'Keefe's reds and skeleton blues  
antique rust and Van Gogh  
is an orange.

leave coattails of his yellows  
and top hats of his greens around my ankles  
let me swim  
with Herman Melville  
among the frigid waters  
to lost luggage.

case my two lips with Marlin Brando's  
photograph I want to be infused  
in leather  
motorcycle mama  
part Dalai Lama Tibet is open  
for travel open for business.  
jet fuel my stockings soaking up  
the rainwater Dickens danced alleys  
and Dickenson called birds  
blue jay cardinal  
sparrow flop  
on the pavement.

below is just Illinois just how you left  
her hover over the Hoover Dam  
and jam band  
across the Mississippi  
but my heart is leaking  
and loving Kentucky.

so pour in the medicine  
and mix with the mint julep  
cup passing  
a past time  
lost in translation  
in missionary position.

dish out water with bath water  
don't loose the baby's diaper  
dangle among the clothespins  
and ponder your existence  
this is only a paroxysm  
this remains nascent.

## **Idaho Cento**

i keep you in a flower vase  
a fenced in piece of nothing  
in dead parking lots, waiting  
for the ashtray to lead me astray.

under florescent lights  
in that jonquil dress  
all the billboards  
are our best friends.

on the shadows of over passing planes  
made of hay and cornhusks  
the moon is rowing  
and the devil is a railroad car.

like a stretch of future graveyards  
pin your heartbeat up as i light  
a fire underneath myself, the bonnet  
wears a wire albatross

singing just a little bit.

## **lighting up the tilt sign**

she is a sparkplug  
red bellied and coiled

he is a mechanic  
oil infused and callused

syringed and splitbodied brilliant  
her ankles bound in feathers

her collarbone bends in filaments  
with corsaged hemlines at her fingertips

revolver mouth and peppermint hunger  
his motorcycle jacket did the rumba

his shoulder switchbladed in tongues  
kerosened party guests eat black mamba

sutured and water bound in silence  
their spines stretch over the crowd

their arteries hum hollow from violence  
and whalebones point out the holy shroud

## Green

A repetition consists of two things-  
A repetition consists of two things-  
The same thing the same thing- The eternal  
repetition of labor, work, the job,  
hair growth, beard, shaving-  
Plant the calendula seeds.  
Plant the winter garden in September.  
Attack the plants and till the ground.  
The bottles of wine- The schedule  
that prohibits- The scholarship-  
“This week I only got 14 hours.”  
Her element is green- The sea if you  
take away the blue- Dissolve- Disagreeable-  
Pattern- Green is absent in cities-  
Color shapes our understanding-  
Go green- Kelp- Leaves of grass-  
I sing green- Chile verde- Candles in the  
hallway of a dark house- Take away houses  
from the equation- Take away parents from  
the equation- Lean toward the places that  
you know- An academic is supposedly smart.  
But they miss the green- Emerald art- Where  
is the romance? My last day- We discovered  
his lies at the Chinese restaurant- I could use  
a little room, a little space- Stop the issue of what  
should be forced.

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a little room, a little space- Stop the issue of what  
should be forced.

## Adobe Flowers

I was loved in the adobe flowers.  
They were the color of her eyes and skin.  
When I reached out to touch her,  
my fingers felt the cold mud of birth.  
When I groped blindly at the walls,  
thorns grew there, their blood already  
blessing my home.  
I was taught among the petals.  
I was lost in the adobe flowers.  
They sprouted out of the walls,  
burst into brown patterns on skin.  
When I stared at the widening cracks,  
they spelled the future, rooms that grew  
into a garden rising out of the earth.  
I was punished in the adobe flowers,  
until the petals dried and the house fell.  
When I emerged from the ruins,  
the dirt had the scent of roses  
dropped by someone who quietly  
stepped away.

## **After Wallace Stevens**

When the light detects a difference,  
the lone man crosses the road.  
His mother and father plant flowers,  
one galaxy at a time falling at their feet.  
They walk with clouds and  
the duty of mummified words.  
If you say, "Let it be,"  
sunflowers grows closer  
and the postcard shows  
a house with closed doors.  
When the darkness sees the difference,  
the lone man returns with a pale  
amphibian tattooed on his chest.  
His mind was elsewhere when the jar  
was filled with sand and the mark  
of time took him to the sea,  
forgiving him for being afraid.  
If you ask, "Is this is the mind?"  
someone will answer, "No"  
because it is the swan turning its beak,  
disappearing from your thoughts  
as you turn the page.

## **The Second Traveler**

I went home to peel potatoes in  
a kitchen whose floor was swept  
long ago and I saw drops of milk  
pour down an old man's chin.  
He told me what stays alive  
is covered in resin.  
When he rubbed it off,  
the perfect wooden carving  
of his mother warded off what  
anyone could ever say to him.  
Her arms were extended to  
those who couldn't see,  
her old son offering  
to carve a mother for me.

## **A Period of Ashes**

You live in a period of ashes  
and they fall day and night,  
delicate layers disappearing  
as they hit the ground,  
the black earth underneath  
building in secret.

You love in a period of ashes,  
though the naked bodies are being  
rained on as they come, black lines  
painting lust on bare shoulder blades,  
leaving them in exhausted sleep.

You are lost in a period of ashes,  
your hair black at birth, though  
your way through the trees  
is marked by a light that says  
if you open your mouth  
and hold out your tongue,  
the taste of ash will forgive you.

You emerge from the ashes,  
lucky they did not fall in your eyes,  
years of seeing darkened by something  
that used to be there and left when  
you blinked with a blackened face,  
no longer surprised.

## **The Animals Aren't Real Animals Nor Do They Like Me**

The Owls is the name of a band.  
The band doesn't care about logging or pellets.  
The myth is that the owl can see you coming.  
From any direction the owl's eyes are.  
Wolves see the owl and the owl's intent.  
Wolves at the door or the garden gate.  
Wolves don't care about money we just think  
they are greedy. Wolves have created a great deal  
of art that is lost to us now. Wolves invented  
weaving. True fact. The panda holds  
in a black band around his middle so much  
metaphoric weight. Best insects: bees.  
Best big cat: panther. No. Jaguar.  
Charming is the animal paying for his newspaper.  
He counts the coins so carefully.  
It's the sort of thing one loves at first and hates  
after fifty years of marriage.  
The animals can wear suits when needed.  
The important thing is that interacting  
with the animals still leaves me lonely.  
The forest we play-act in shudders outwards  
and stretches wide like a dog yawning,  
like a snake unhinging its jaws  
to eat the dog, and what the dog ate,  
and what the dog means to the snake.



## Fairness Doesn't Enter In

The birds follow  
the birds. They move in a cloud  
of shared ambition.  
The trees sway. There must be wind.  
This must be landscape, that boat house  
and the blue lake  
flapping behind it.  
These cars  
and the drivers gliding along,  
also, landscape,  
also my body  
walking between the street's bluster,  
the postcard's script.

It's not rational  
to tint the world  
with shook out sadness.  
Enough sheer layers of color,  
and you've got real depth.  
There are ducks  
now, in the thawed lake.  
Small green tips  
force the ground apart,  
shove shoulder  
and then a lemon yellow head.  
Color is its own belief.  
Everything has reappeared, and what else  
to call it—everything has come back,  
but differently, but different.

**Fragile Jezebel/Birthday Advent**

Hair bunned like a schoolmarm  
wickered, hush monied  
this legless woman

floats out to see  
her gold vinyl mattress  
piss-scented. Run

by a joystick. Shift to the T.  
Hoop-skirted, terminal  
hanging crepe

from her lashstubs.  
All two eggs in her basket  
refuse to sing orange.

**(A Pageant Poem) Pouring Green Acid**

on three Queen Bee noses                      poor little lowlight  
    intuiting swimsuits                      red open-toe shoes  
        come with me heelprints                      it's talent, her flossing  
callipygian fiddles                      but poor little nomad's  
    too sick to take off                      or even ask how  
she let that priest                      rip off her autumn  
        he runs like a girl                      leaves yellow ashes  
beech cats                      typing nonce poems  
all over the orangeskin                      of each calico whore  
        poor little smokethroat                      needing to swallow  
this bone called sadness                      or land hard and crack it

## Full-House Chronophobia/Hide-Out Poem

You climb exhausted  
    sepia knifehand  
bile-gleaming the banister  
    Marc Antony gasping

we'll try all the remedies  
    mascara     elixir  
weaving the backstairs  
    noir web they'll believe

post-cabaret heel-glue  
    a Chinese air gun  
Marc Antony gaping.  
    Cops cast their dragnets

bear-trapping Ziegfeld girls  
    costumed as moths.  
Put on this dovecoat  
do not interrupt me

    recoulementing  
our alibi lullaby  
Marc Antony bobbing  
    your blueblack hair dawn.

## The Girl

*“Girl, I can see you from a disss...tance... Baby. I’d get run over by a car for you.” -A man across the street (Akron, Ohio)*

I’m the girl with rocks  
in her ballet flats. It doesn’t  
matter what city I move to.

I walk.  
Men shout.  
Rocks in my shoes.

The mattress store in my  
neighborhood says CASH  
TALKS LOUD. I’m startled  
when a plastic bag behind me  
rustles in the wind. I’m floating  
through cities. Internally groaning  
at English professors who have  
bands, but I smile politely because  
they seem so gentle. They make  
stray cats look like robbers. When I  
see a stray cat, I cross the street.

## **Fascinatin' Rhythm**

Somewhere between the moving pianos, I could swear that I, myself, was Eleanor Powell. In Wisconsin, when you call for a cab, it often arrives in the form of a minivan, the vehicle ideal for transporting large groups of college football fans. The van will toss you around, and on your way to the doctor, you'll realize you're far from grounded. There are floating pianos, but no scratchy taps and certainly no lady-worn suits.

## **Repercussions of Glitter**

I can't say I'm surprised. A part  
of me always knew I'd end up  
flat on my back in a muddy forest,  
clad only in Oksana Bauil's pink,  
fuzzy skating costume from the  
1994 Olympics. Didn't you know?  
I missed my call time at the theater.  
The dressing room, the make-up,  
even the wings told me to get lost.  
I spit on a piece of lighting equipment  
and clicked off. Imagine my surprise,  
ending up at Super Walmart, breaking  
kitchen appliances. Snap snap like  
my injured body. I could taste the  
thuds, candy-sweet and metallic.  
Like malt powder that's also dirt.

## **Your Penis Hearts Me**

Your penis talks  
to me when you're  
asleep. It's really an  
old school romantic.  
Love sonnets and  
shit. It's sweet, but  
pretty weird. Like  
when we're on the  
interstate and you're  
driving with one hand  
and holding my hand  
with the other. You  
look at me with this  
dopey smile, like  
someone who's  
swallowed a handful  
of codeine, and  
say nothing.

**d  
r  
i  
v  
i  
n  
g to get there**

We sink our shanks into sand.  
The water takes us, rubs our porcelain eyes  
smooth like a satire.

Low on air, the ride home,  
tires straining under the weight of babies,  
a mother's body, a father's.

Who am I fooling?  
It was only me in the car driving  
with a friend, a father too, an existentialist.

The story I told was choppy.  
Let me start again. Wish that I may  
be brief. There is little to say.

On a bridge of land leaning  
out into the ocean I unraveled my genome.  
Every animal in relation to me flew.

Now I am going home.  
The shame in my belly is mine. I am  
this light amygdale. Remember that, you?

Now I am cutting tomatoes for  
spaghetti sauce. Telling my husband all  
the turns I took to get to him.

Wide around the hardest curves  
at night, high beams crinkled in thick fog.  
Desperate knuckles on the steering wheel.

He says he knew I was coming.  
He listened in the twilight  
with his cricket song.

**w  
a  
i  
t  
s at the door**

In earnest, Lightening  
sat on my shoulders, a man so wide  
we couldn't step through the door together.

I let my shoulders flutter,  
beating my wings without reprieve.  
And then I could carry him, the shimmering man.

The beginning. No rank or order.  
My position to extend an invitation to the *other*.  
Really, I was lonely.

Turning in on myself, in to the jungles  
dank and humming with jewels of dew.  
All darkness serene and complete.

My portion of tenderness, raw and uncut  
like a heart rutting in the complex lineage of tissues.  
I created all things. Deer. Rain.

Complex synergy. Every day  
I waded through the cosmic clutter, joint compounds  
in jars, goop for holding the planetary bodies together.

But now at the door, the electric man  
on my shoulders. He is a child and I am wise.  
I am the mother of all things. Peaches and peace.

Tonight I shirk my duty, asking the man  
to get down. I need some steam to lift my feathers  
where they've been pressed like a hem.

Lightening gets down now.  
He lathers into the door knob and waits  
in the shiny appearance of brass.

## Between You and Me

I know the sound of the bones inside your skin. I know whether or not that metaphor you used was sound.

I know about your decision to leave me waiting at the terminal with nothing to read. I know you have a

Cleveland Browns tattoo underneath that Enya t-shirt. I know that you carry my heart in your bike basket.

I don't know how you gathered the nerve to tell me I'm superfluous. I know that you misuse the words

*sedentary* and *oblong*. I know that you weren't really worth knowing after all. I know how you forgave Jesus.

## The Rounded Tips of Your Fingernails

The evening charge nurse won't even order  
you a milkshake. *Clear liquids only*, she tells you.  
*In that case, make it a Beefeater martini*  
*with a cigarette on the side*, you say,  
and we laugh so hard our eyes tear,

the way we did at tales my sister Liz told us  
thirty years ago. The patient who died  
on her shift so she hid, a tenderfoot aide,  
afraid to bag the body and tag the stiffening toes.  
*Vouvray and Nicorette?* you ask, dying to get home.

I stroke the white half moons, tap the fine bone plates,  
and smooth the folding skin. Your fingernails are a late  
afternoon cream tea, courtesy of a colon resection  
and alimentary IV; their nourished strength  
shrouds this slender, fragile hand.

Two nights later I sneak you apple crisp; you dart  
the sweetness with your tongue and whirl the beating  
wing song of the hummingbird. Liz puts one drop each  
in your cataract-cauled eyes once you've sipped  
your breakfast tea, hot and strong.  
A memory: you dip the teaspoon's shallow bowl  
into the sugar, raise the handle to the rim, and *tap, clink,*  
*tap, clink* to sift the sweetness level, smooth.  
You've measured your life like vermouth

and cut the portions with a butter knife,  
incisions of cured meat carved into perfect arcs  
then squared along the edges of whole wheat.  
Dad, your slapstick foil, teased you about your precision;

when you turned your back, he hid your sandwich  
in the cluttered utensil drawer. You've got a month,  
maybe less. Meatloaf and mashed potatoes, two or three tiny bites,  
and your affair with solid food is over, kaput, done.  
Soon you'll rendezvous with a feeding tube.

Your hair's as soft as eider down;  
your skin glows. The afternoon shadows  
become as long as the rounded tips of your fingernails.  
Laid out on your bed, you raise  
a pinky finger when I cup your hand.

## **Miss Fall River, Massachusetts, 1921**

Baba was Irish,  
but she drank Scotch whiskey.  
She sipped by the hour this mighty liquor,  
which rolled down her throat in waterfalls of sadness  
that could make a priest squirm at the confessional door.

I remember Baba,  
her silky blonde hair turned to mulch,  
soft face hardened like an untilled garden,  
a chin spiked with scattered weeds.

Her hands folded, not in prayer,  
but around a highball glass.  
A mother at seventeen, excommunicate  
at twenty-three, her daughter exiled to a convent.  
Baba, the unrepentant beauty queen who couldn't be a parent.

## **Silken Nets**

In the gym by the bleachers,  
I would flutter through the season,  
limbs waving and whirling in lines and circles  
for the near-men targeting their aerial nets.

I applauded their dewy muscles, sprawling angles,  
splashy uniforms like tropical flowers on display.  
I could have drowned in the embalming nectar  
of those athletes posed as flowers,  
been pinned, splayed, displayed in their prized collection  
like a trophy in a locked glass case.

But like a viceroy, I eluded their tangled nets.  
I spread my viceroy wings, mistaken for a monarch's,  
and hovered above the court,  
leaving only the dust of my scales  
as delicate as hothouse blossoms.



**Helen**

green eyed monster in bed with us  
red ringlets like a Rossetti float over perfect breasts  
turpentine her tresses, paint myself into your past

**3 Wars**

This is Enid Getz calling—  
do you have anything for the Purple Heart?

3 wars

3 wars

3 wars

Father

Son

Holy Ghost

3 wars

3 wars

3 wars

Mother

Daughter

Gracious Host

3 wars

3 wars

3 wars

Cousin

Friend

Girl Next Door

3 wars

3 wars

3 wars

The Rich

The Middle Class

The near and real poor

3 wars

3 wars

3 wars

yes, Mrs. Getz

we have pants and coats and shoes and dresses

and ties and belts and you can count on us for more and more and more

3 wars

3 wars

3 wars

## **Half Full**

ink cartridges in new printers  
are only half full of ink  
it's a rip off  
but everybody you meet is half full  
and that's a bigger rip off  
and those who claim to be fully full  
are full of themselves

I can buy into the glass  
half full thing  
more easily  
because faucets are nearby  
and the water's free

## Short Documentary Film

Cut to a highway overpass like a bomb shelter. An unsuspecting family of four driving into Oklahoma en route to Wichita, Kansas to visit grandma with terminal dementia. Cut to an airborne Dodge Caravan in need of an oil change, paint job to cover the primer, tire rotation, rear end suspension. Cut to the damage sustained after being dropped from the heavens, like an asteroid with a VIN. Cut to the loss of virginity in the arms of a stranger, on the eve of disaster, on the hood of the aforementioned Dodge caravan. Cut to Leonardo DiCaprio and coal sketches of naked women as the wind kicks at strands of pubic hair. Cut to a dissected doublewide. A cowboy missing his horse. A blemished sun smeared from the sky, like finger paintings by blind children. Cut to me in my boxers watching reruns of the catastrophe unfolding on Cinemax, a bucket of popcorn pressed between my thighs next to a warm Miller Lite. Cut to commercial: American Idol, Midol, Tampax, and Listerine, so when in the casket the extra's teeth will sparkle. Cut to a sex scene as the storm front bares down on the log cabin and somehow fire still glistens on flesh, the improbable romance. Cut to a makeup artist whose specialty is corpses, battle scars, and werewolves. Cut werewolves from the script. Cut to neck braces, gurneys, a man scalped by a satellite dish dislodged from the balcony of the luxury condos. Cut to a vase of quiet petunias that show no signs of trauma. Cut to the family of four now huddled in a public bathhouse in Texas. Cut to the storm chasers and the widows in thin veils with tissues. Cut to rows of children in the tornado position as if knelt in prayer, waiting for class to be cancelled. Cut to a child crying in the shell of a bungalow, a meteorologist in the studio, waiting for news from the field reporter recently relocated to the emergency ward at St. Anthony's hospital. Cut to commercial: Depends, Clearasil, Nicorette. Cut to onlookers standing too close and poking the funnel with a stick like a sleeping wolverine,

like a grenade that failed in its time of need,  
but kicking might get a desired result. Cut to a man  
in a mobile home. Rather, man in a mobile casket.  
Cut to a hillbilly without a clue or sense  
of hygiene, acting like he saw something other  
than the insides of a prostitute. Cut to the scars  
in the heartland. An aerial view, serpentine burial  
mounds the indigenous constructed like veins  
running away from arteries. Cut to a two-  
by-four thrown through a retaining wall,  
spear-like. Cut to the calm. The aftermath where all  
the citizens reveal themselves, act as if just born,  
and cry until the golden retriever crawls out  
from beneath the wreckage. Cut to the credits:  
Tommy Lee Jones as the tornado. Winona Ryder  
as distraught widow. Jack Nicholson and Danny Devito  
as homeless guys two and three, respectively. Me as  
consumer accumulating ample late charges when  
the VCR eats a video. Cut to me as casualty surviving  
the day-to-day weather, surviving, but aware of tomorrow.

## Seasonal Affective Disorder

February, I am flooded with sorrow.  
It pains me to know we will not  
rendezvous until next year. Next year  
I've sworn you off, a rash I've picked  
for the time it takes the sun to orbit  
this inclement rock. If only we were better  
acquainted and made love for no other  
reason than to make love. If only you weren't  
a foreign entity to my body, the splinter  
to be removed with pliers, the tick to be burnt  
with the sharp end of a fine cigar, a peppermint  
lodged tight in my throat. February, I will fill  
you with heated helium to make your body  
a dirigible and shoot you down as the threat  
you are not, but would kill to be. If only my corpse,  
though still alive, had climate control settings:  
a thermostat to cool me off when you fire me up,  
storm windows to keep you outdoors and lonely.  
It doesn't. I carry on. Next year, the lake effect  
is preempted by some little disorder that leaves me  
vulnerable to your tactless pickup lines, and affinity  
for role playing, though this is as unpredictable as you.  
My meticulous body incessantly plots against me.  
The peppermint melts, undoing itself all together.

## Will of the Meteorologist

Under the proper kind of weather,  
I want to be remembered as the reporter

who brought you *Winter Storm Watch '94*,  
the evening edition of *Flood Warning*,

and warned you, devout public, to cover  
your petunias, wrap them in turtlenecks

when a frost kill threatened the summer  
of '87. I've defined myself by the cumulus-

nimbus, the calming effect of rain on Chilean  
llamas, and the distress a July sky causes

golfers on the back nine. A fog has settled  
on my horizon. May the following bequests

be made on the occasion of my passing:  
I bestow to my daughter, April, my poncho

from embedded reporting on Hurricane  
Andrew. To my first son from my third

marriage, I leave my faithful thermometer.  
Its bottom has leaked mercury for years.

My second wife, if she's still alive,  
please, find my other set of keys

for the evacuated, but storm-friendly condo  
in the Gulf. To no one in particular, I wish

to impart a weather-beaten hemorrhoid pillow  
from seasons of storm tracking behind a desk

cascaded by a jet stream map of lonely Seattle.  
For years, I projected baseball to be rained out

on account of tornados, grapefruit-sized hail.  
Dual Doppler radar tracked me like El Niño,

the sky now empty as it ever was in tropical  
Chicago. Like a typhoon with nowhere to be,

I am the dissipating clouds over empty Idaho.  
Constant funnel clouds have plagued since

the first diagnosis. Tomorrow: chance of snow  
with little to no discernible accumulation.

## How to Assume the Tornado Position

In grammar school, I learned to index: *dire, times in; emergency, in case of; survival; inextricably, fucked*. I was taught to love the *innermost wall, the windowless space*, the inhabitants that *seek shelter*. I pursued the body's natural reactions when struck with panic. The limpness, the aches of security, the sound of a voice when I can't discern a body. At the sound of the safe whistle allowing the body relief, I learned to drool on command.

*(see also: ponderous—how a body still beating and a body beaten differ only in the placement of the hands).*

## If you catch my drift

What a lovely word, chassis:  
it sounds like the inspiration

for white and yellow flowers everywhere,  
or the fragrance

for women who can pull their weight  
from a hanging rope.  
It started French,

then English made it support the weight  
of cars, and the queue of words waiting for  
meaning must be a mess, as the dictionary

could be full of mistakes: war  
could've easily been bean –

The Bean of Attrition –  
The Cold Bean –

“Do you realize how many lives  
were lost in that bean?”

If I could, I'd plant every bean  
there ever was, dig my fingers  
into the flow of earth, and push

until my elbows sink, push until  
the spectators lose interest, and drift,

push until I forget  
how it started, push until  
I realize I'm being pulled,

until the soot is breath, and the textbooks  
of men are breath, and the history  
of words reaches its fingerless, green hand  
through the dirt, straight for the sun.

## **How to Be Friends With a Lesbian**

Two girls fight over a cabbage in the market. They tear its leaves out one-by-one.

This is the same place hedgehogs come from. When they were little, you kept them about your person.

Pockets are just holes with safety nets sewn in.

So much for the blushing bite.

Anyone can thread a needle. A rich man living in Tent City is indistinguishable from his tent.

I think I might be the poor man's double entendre.

Love is the most overused abstraction, the alphabet's version of pastel blue.

Dip in, dip out. How to spasm with the library + such floating over your head?

Dancing With the Stars is cute, but do you have to do it outside my room?

The frequency gets set up to solar eclipse.

Reality TV is nothing new. People have been peeping since the serpent snaked the garden.

Thank-you for your support.

I understand how plumbing works. You root around under the house. Come up with dirty boots.

With a Venus smear on the bottom of the right sole.

## **How to Avoid Leaving DNA at a Scene or How to Descend a Staircase Gracefully**

Do the dirty deed.

Do it like you planned it. For a black or white photo-op.

Set a small fire for the smell of singed crosshair. Affect an air of eccentric.

Wear a peignoir trimmed in Siamese cattails.

You are a bump off doll with a sweet safe-cracker. Clam shut, dame-dish.

The low-down is you're about to get clipped anyway.

Tiptoe, socked soles slippery-subtle. Sock it to time-lapse, camera cracked.

Think of the catwalk, pivot and moue. Lean into lean time, banister-width.

Ladyfingers sparkling with diamond dust.

Gloves finger shadow government. Some agents of holy hardboiled Hollywood.

Perfume lingers in the hop-room. Trail neither gardenia nor milkshake-musk.

You are a model descending the stair. You are a role model. You model roles.

You must not be seen in public cavorting with wrong people; fuck wrong people; pleasure yourself.

O, you are a straight shooter, all right.

Swipe dust with skirt scrim. Think snood, braids saddled in faux pearl swaddle.

Breathe into blouson cleavage crease

:::: ^^^^ running from scene of crime; hiding in forest

%{}% lying to police while wearing form-fitting sheath

## **How to Draw an Accurate Mental Map of the World**

Pencil in a sea for every pirate song in the key of E flat.

Explain the differences between saltwater and freshwater.

Compass the northwest.

Compare Atlantis, Titanic, and dolphins trained to kiss on the mouth.

There ain't no mountain high enough.

Figure in for the glacial problem.

Some plate sliding is to be expected.

Ditto renaming post-revolution.

Old maps reveal xenophobia, racism, and religious bias; new maps reveal economic inequalities.

Q: Are these the same thing?

Some alien abductors require more troops than others.

If you googlearth your own location, you'll go blind.

Shadow government headquarters don't appear on any map. They have their own maps and mapmakers, and their own DJs for parties.

If you steal from a mapmaker, he/she will erase your address from the maps he/she makes. Your location will be represented as a fire hydrant or a waste treatment plant.

Mermaids have scales covering girl parts; otherwise, fake mermaids (hoax).

Hide the information in the Freud-made part of your brain.

Blame tsunami on president of Judas Priest fan club.

When in doubt, label all the capitals Providence City.

A: Africa is bigger than you think it is.

## How to Ride an Icelandic Horse

Get on a plane. Arrive in Iceland. Discover that Icelandic horses are fuzzy and fussy, and live in red barns. They graze for hours, draped in blue blankets. Horses in their dreams are clouds.

Pet your Icelandic horse gently. Call it “Sigrid” or “Astrid.” Feed it some hay.

And neigh at the clouds in the pre-thunderstorm afternoon. A kerchief full of carrots, sugar cubes, and tranquilizers and you’re scout-level prepared. Hum towards the hillsides—you’ve already escaped the wrong end of the fairy tale stick, what’s left to frown at?

Get on a plane. Fly back to your American town, minus Icelandic horse. Go to the mall. Buy sneakers that light up when you run. A red candle that smell like the potpourri of the innkeeper’s underthings drawer.

Miss horse. Draw countless pictures of horses at work. At play, at placid concentration of very green field, at escape from glue factory, and/or at jumping show with fancy bridle. Explain to your co-workers that you speak Icelandic. Respond to “Sigrid,” “Astrid,” or “Giddy.” Do not respond to “Becky” or “John.”

Stretch your ears and nose and, mostly, your neck. Brand your left butt cheek. And your right one too, it’s good measure. Take to sleeping standing up in your office manager’s two-car garage.

Be secretly pleased when your friends and co-workers stage a 12-step style intervention for you. Listen patiently while they read aloud from their prepared statements. They feel like they don’t even know who you are anymore, baby.

Peruse brochures for treatment facilities out in Arizona—they look nice, actually, most of them have vaguely Indian-sounding names. So much progress has been made over the past few years. Promising new treatments. Nothing like what it used to be, back in your mother’s day.

Smile in grace-time, open your mouth to explain the situation as it really is, as the opposite of what these people in the room think, as, here, the thing is, you really are an Icelandic horse. Snort and whinny. Prancey prance prance down the avenue like it’s your 10th birthday in equine years.

## **They Built Suburbs on Boot Hill**

When I heard that Billy the Kid was dead, had been for some time, I was concerned because last I'd checked he was still kicking, living next door to me. The neighborhood watch wasn't happy with him. They had noticed the coyotes creeping in at his lawn's edge. At midday the grass withered to brown; a distant bell tolled. Walking by his ancient stable, one could hear the blooded stallions, a clatter of hooves, could feel humid breath on the back of the neck. Nighttimes I heard gunshots, had complained to the police on more than one occasion. Billy came by the house one night not long ago, pounded on the back door until I stumbled over, just out of bed, groggy from a dream about the ocean. I opened the door; he lunged at me. I thought it was a knife in his hand at first, or a flounder, but realized after he collapsed, sobbing, that it was a tulip. He had been drinking. Confessed to me how terrified he was of becoming a sunset cowboy. When I heard he was dead I went to check. Where I remembered his house there was now a desert. I pricked myself on a cactus; a tumbleweed trailed past; a half-buried skeleton of a bison caught the wind, low-moaned through its eye sockets.

## **My Father: After Lightning**

My father liked to tell me about the time he was struck by lightning and his body split into halves down the middle. Finally he saw himself without a mirror, experienced first hand the bent of his lips, the troubled quiver in his hand and eye, laid fingertips gingerly upon his half's cheek. He was vulnerable, opened intimate. He could see the cavity where his heart had once rested. He took a pinecone, filled the gaping hole. He began replacing the other organs: a stone for his liver, cicada shells for kidneys. He removed his tear ducts completely. He discarded his finger- and toenails. He discovered a flaking vellum scroll tucked around his spine, upon which all of his truths were written; let the wind breath life back into crumbling paper. He took out his mind, scrubbed it clean of memory in the river—lost hold of it in the flow of the river—sculpted one anew from the river's loam. He told me how arduous it was to pull himself back together, to seal the wound, because it meant he would never again be able to know himself, always a broken whole.

## **The Boy Made of Mud**

My grandmother told me he had been murdered by his father, a man given to bouts of paranoia, terrified his son was bedeviled because he could read poetry by the time he was six, enjoyed reciting lines of Eliot, how “April is the cruellest month.” The father had drowned his son in the river. My parents told me to disregard the mad ranting of my grandmother, but also to stay away from the boy. I didn’t listen, a child like all children, but instead started bringing the boy books of verse. Sometimes I would see him standing by the river—sometimes he wouldn’t be there. We were friends, or were at least as close as a boy of flesh and a boy of mud could be. I read him parts of Whitman, and he recited Ovid and Langston Hughes from memory, until one day I went down to the river after a spring rain and found only a mud puddle and a soggy page of Keats. My parents told me to stop concerning myself with trivialities; handed me a dense volume of collected instruction manuals and escapist prose.

## Ode to a Star-Eyed Beauty

O, cherubic lubadub; you runamuck boy,  
framed up by a pale plate-glass dawn, window cut—  
all night-tame & rough-tussled; elegant & coy.

Last night, slackjawed by your hips, your halogen joy,  
I watched you dance slipstreamed & sideways: sweet-ass strut  
of a cherub, a heartthrob, a runamuck boy.

& this sorry sucker so luststruck, fawned (the ploy  
of he besot with loinsfire & a wet dream's rut:  
a night-time of tussling rough—elysian, uncoy),

lazyeyed, bought you booze. These punch-drunk hands toyed  
at your knuckles, your fingertips—this sauced fool stuck  
on you, cherubic lubadub, runamuck boy.

—O sweet desire, you streetweaved back with me, buoyed  
on my shoulder, lips dripping syrup notes. I cupped  
you: hair all night-tame & rough-tussled, smiling coy.

Snuck upstairs, past sleeping ears & dark, to enjoy  
a moment enraptured beneath dusk's bedclothes, tucked  
all night-tame & rough-tussled, elegant & coy,  
me & this star-eyed beauty, my runamuck boy.

## **My Recurring Dream of Brad Pitt**

OK this one is hard to admit.  
Each time we meet I am drenched  
with sweat. I sprint up to a clearing  
in Pan Pacific Park, having kicked twenty  
clicks (he taught me this expression).  
He lies back on a picnic blanket  
fingers laced in red wraparound  
shades and tells me that he's bummed  
he hasn't had time to call with how busy  
his film about my life story has kept him.  
Brad asks about the times  
I fired guns, passed out, fought  
men and took home girls with bruised  
legs who wanted to wrap me in papyrus,  
and escape in a cocoon of poetry and lies.  
We passed around a Pinot Noir  
from New Zealand with a screw-off  
cap and recounted the time we sang  
karaoke with Thai Elvis at the Palms  
in order to save the world from terrorists.  
Finally, we mastered our own  
language of curse words and cool  
until the sun revolved and he faded  
into the eyes of women who drank  
him dry until morning and I remained.

## Bookmarks

A dry leaf from a winter garden pressed  
between the pages, just before the paper  
yellows and chlorophyll crumbles into dust,  
marking yet another page in our lives.  
You remember a piece of string from your  
shirt, candy wrapper from your appetite,  
toilet paper folded into a bulging cover,  
grains of sand from a desolate beach.  
You reached for what was important  
because you needed to read and remember.  
You think about listing the books you've  
branded, a leaking pen for *Poet in New York*  
that left smudges deeper than ink, than blood.  
A fingernail for *The Arabian Nights* as though  
in sleep you would not twitch from the dread  
and hope of an empty bed. And no bookmark  
for *Naked Lunch*, dog-eared, page bent back,  
random works spewing to people on subways,  
on street corners, sounding like *hello, fuck you,*  
*please help me*. No. Listing books will not do.  
So let's remember those tales without authors,  
the incantatory chants of mysterious knights  
roaming woodlands for monsters, wicked step  
mothers combing root cellars for children.  
These tomes we remember with sharp  
tongues, dry tongues sticky with epitaphs,  
wet tongues. And what about the authors  
hidden behind the lambskin and papyri?  
Their endings are our passages, echoing  
down a hall we close on a shelf before  
returning to lives indelibly marked with bent  
corner, a tassel in the velvet spine, a leaf stain  
upon the page that tells us we have lived  
and lived well. Or that we will conquer  
mountains of air on words that form  
translucent ladders to the constellations  
of our adventures. Remember and it will be.  
Step from the book and do not fear. Your place  
is kept here with me. You will not be forgotten.

**You Say Maelstrom, I Hear:**

can it be just a pretty poem

lost in translation –  
does it need the apocalypse

in your mouth

asking me to look  
away, the nakedness

pulsating into an algorithm

for how to quantify  
a distance between

where you have been & where  
you are going?

Distractions,  
retractions with mulch:

write something beyond  
sound,

or sit in the back  
row and count down

the minutes.

## In Lieu of Song

*She never spoke except in  
low tones, split skull,*

loosened in a sandstorm,  
or a wind tunnel,  
or maybe by a swarm  
of crickets, humming the pieces apart,

*because she believed that there was something  
broken inside her head and  
floating loose there*

unwinding cochlea from lumbar,  
coccyx from retina.

In her head cottonwood trees peel  
kites into soft sirocco –  
no – not  
white, but in her own house –

*which she might displace by talking too loud.*

In a kitchen  
knuckled by women,  
molded by wolves that leave  
prints in nothing,

her voice swells  
into morning, luminous  
and yawning,  
getting louder  
in her throat but losing  
its tongue: a respite, then quiet.

she mouths, “I lost an entire language  
in my hair.”  
“Once,”

## **De Retour [RETURNING BACK]**

Ukrainian/American, but neither  
really. A woman/omen.  
When I was little/stupid they  
told me my mother  
went away on a trip/  
died when the earth  
shifted off its axis to turn  
away from sun/moon,  
take a drag of its cigarette/  
joint and close its eyes for  
just a second, a stillness  
without noise/time.

Women, I hear, are irrational/  
fractions. I've never seen the  
mother my city comes from.  
Understand, this is only  
sad to me. I can now  
speak/read the language  
I was born into/out of, but  
feelings of trespass  
haven't gone far/far enough.  
A blessing/curse, that I  
think the words "Я тебя люблю"  
in Russian, yet when I  
speak/sing the  
waves that come  
out of my mouth  
sound like English  
is my only  
country/

**Alex**

She says she does her best  
studying sitting on street corners,  
textbook resting on skinny thighs,  
back pressed up against a  
concrete wall. She has  
a worn cardboard sign asking  
for donations, any small amount  
of generosity  
will help.

The dog nestled against her  
hip is tired and mostly goes  
unnoticed. The city is sweltering,  
then violently cold and some sweet  
suburban mother offers her a few  
dollars to go warm up with a cup  
of hot chocolate.

When she's reading  
about astronomy she lies flat on  
the sidewalk at night pretending streetlights  
are stars and she can point out the galaxies.  
She learns about Mexico, Africa, China and  
other places the smattering of change and  
dollar bills in her cup will never take her.  
She'll finish college  
one day.

Somewhere in a warm bed  
there is a friend who is pretty  
sure she has lost her. A friend  
who contemplates letting go.

Somewhere in a screaming house  
there is a mom who doesn't really  
think about her. Who has already  
let go.

She strains her eyes to read by streetlight  
after the sun has gone down for the day,  
the dog moves a little closer so they can  
borrow each other's warmth and they  
stay. They hang on.

## **The Burial**

The soldiers stand at attention,  
my brother's ashes are in an urn  
sitting on the table, and I know  
that this is the point where I am  
supposed to cry, where there should  
be a visible tremor in my shoulders  
as I try to keep a sob from escaping  
and breaking the silence. But  
all I can seem to do is stare at the eyes  
of the men who move so rigidly,  
searching for any indication of emotion.  
I want confusion, sadness, curiosity,  
anything but this empty plate of solemnity.  
I want them to understand.  
I need them to know how  
sometimes I had to stay up  
late to guide his wobbling  
body to a bed. How he  
drank too much and lost his  
temper too quickly, but  
there were people who loved  
him unconditionally and not  
necessarily in spite of.  
He wasn't a great man, no one  
is going to stand up and call  
him a hero, but he is my  
brother and I think he deserves  
a flicker, one small misstep.

**Tell me your story again.**

We all sometimes feel  
how our own stories  
are no more alive  
than day-old salt cod.

Come here by the fire  
where the flame  
crackles and leaps.

Let the heat work  
your center line  
soft and smooth and  
strong and sweet as  
freshly pulled  
salt water taffy.

Tell me your story again.

## What Her Nose Says About Her

She's not from here. Her nose says you can find me on the mother's face too. Her nose says *it looks like I'm pouting, like I was made for profile photographs. Take my picture.* Her nose says it wants to be more like Akhmatova. Her nose says it's useful, can detect fire, alcohol, and barbecue better than anyone in the state. Her nose says sometimes it's unfortunate how sensitive it is, especially when it comes to colognes and perfumes, of how the last man she kissed, kissed her nose too and she knew it was because he liked looking at it in profile behind her dark hair like a villain, like the shadow of the blonde heroine.

## **Like El Cid**

She's here because she touched that face,  
like El Cid's—not that notch above his lip,  
that's not considered part of the beard.  
That's a small fact real beard lovers know.

The beard hummed like a siren, like the brightest  
bit of candy. Uninvited, she wanted to tame it  
like a snake in some dusty marketplace far away.  
She'll take whatever storm's coming for her.

## Wrecking Yard in West Kansas

East Colorado: parched, late Summer.  
Storms hold back rain, rush East—  
beyond the hundredth meridian. I might be dead.  
I hitched through Chivington—home of the massacre.  
A chill went through me, I felt or heard drums,  
stumbled into Kansas, and the King of all wrecking yards—  
a square mile of true Kansas dome—cars in pastel rank.  
On its side a faded van said “Bunny Bread.”

It was complete—not stripped for parts, in tall grass  
by the fence line—scritch of windmill pumping  
ghost water from the plains—safe for the night.

How long have I been here? There's a lump in back  
beneath floor-mats that is shrinking. I think it's me.  
What I did before wasn't living. This is better. I'm now  
a company of distant parts: heat-lightning, trill of red-wing,  
squawk of magpie, rustle of sage. The wind goes through me,  
or, I make of myself a sail. I can drift for miles this way—  
then snap back fast—in the crick of a cricket.

I'd been hitching toward home, or thought of home  
when I felt it. The day was warm as a virgin bride. A chill,  
and, though it was miles away, rasp of cars  
on the interstate cut through me. I moved toward the van  
and the wise-cracking rabbit. One thing is certain. I dream,  
so, in some strange way, I am.

In the cool of day, friends, lost for years, come 'round.  
I can't see them yet. They signal—bend a flower, stir  
some pollen to show they're here. What I want to say  
is *don't worry*. Soon enough, you'll be clear. What you do  
doesn't matter. When a car no longer runs, it becomes art.  
You too. Everything rests. Indians pull memory fish  
from the creek. Pony Soldiers stand down.

## Football Hero

New on the new grass, the monkey green boy,  
everything to learn – breast, bone, deep curve,  
gods of the body – and to know gods age long.  
Always go alone, as he goes where he goes, torched  
with youth, big veined blood-return to strong  
heart, and she the flutter, the tremor, never  
close enough, tackle, crush and gasp.

Arrived from swimming, drips his body onto sand.  
Grin, grin, grin. Engage him, she thinks. He will not  
engage other than a goddess – too brunette. It's  
a blue-eyed blond up the beach gets attention.  
Kitchen, cooking, cleaving – all ancestral baggage.  
Tailgate, tailgate, tailgate. Ever the blocking, kicking,  
the game of passes, won and lost by touchdown there,  
where we're pretty sure she knows what he's doing.

## **Gabriel Plays Hollywood**

He played the wilting part, so  
slip-out-unnoticed, stage directed  
behind the scrim, stage left, turn,  
rise, wings under purple light.

He moved sluggish, torso all ribs.  
He stumbled when the dance  
began, gave tripping the boards  
that awkward meaning.

He never memorized his part.  
He bowdlerized the song of golden  
streets, missed the major keys, even  
clanged the tunes, a brass band sound.

Awkward that he feigned joy at the party.  
Every soul attending saw him, pale as air,  
costume eerie-jeweled as tiny molecules  
under dimmed house lights. They watched  
him wing away before the maitre d' bowed  
out the finale, *G'spièce de résistance*.

### **Frozen Assets (a Sculpture in front of SMU<sup>1</sup>)**

Ten thousand coins poured at a roundabout,  
Suspended in time, without a clink,  
Like a cracked iron bell that once tolled,  
Mourned for in a nearby church;  
Rust creeps on the brazen display  
Like robbers on the Yellow Emperor's hoard,  
Moored on horseshoe clamps and clay,  
Outshone by a Cathay billboard.  
The sculpture's alto ring (with a tap)  
Is lost in the din of sputtering engines  
Rushing. By love of lucre their owners trapped,

In Nicoll highway's cave-in<sup>2</sup> played a part.  
A torrent of coins deposited in air  
Crushes limbs and smothers art.

1 The Singapore Management University

2 An accident caused reportedly by the use of cheap, substandard construction materials that resulted in several deaths.

**One Night Stand**

*thanks to David Bowie*

Give me steel, savage jaw, sunken glissando  
of the tongue on teeth. Stranger, divine  
a sunrise tattooed on the arms of Mr. Tuesday Night,

from molar to bicuspid. The taste of night-  
caps lingers in a ring around my tongue, glissando  
of taste buds on tonsils. Shall you or I divine

the path to the elevator, the key to your room: Divine  
Jacuzzi Suite #4, where I'll listen to your night-  
music, finger technique down your lumbar keyboard, glissando.  
In the night, you'll divine the ripple of empty sheets, glissando – the sun rises.

## **To a Youngwife**

*after Vincent Zompa*

My quiet friend the wife says the last two years  
were medicated.

If seamed down the center  
the wife would compact itself. An old stump  
peeling back her toes. She would clamp her rooted feet  
and say each leg of the hose is trouble,  
even the fur, the domesticated pearl. Her sisters  
in scissors would sink into her saunter. She would say  
pearl brings perspective. A series of teeth.  
And all her smiles would clash clash clash.  
A premonition blowing through the dress.

For years, the riot side of me slept, dry-drunk  
against the vow. I collapsed into a child when I woke,  
what riot side of me stays riot.  
They said, “her accidental heirlooms –  
they scattered on the shoulder.” Prematernal, I ran  
out of the dress shop, never the same.

Rippling, a skirt fell from a boy’s teeth and shattered.

Her hands were compassion, her lipstick a murder.  
Or perhaps it was the other way; she came  
obedient from the rib. And way back in the dress,  
the firstwives speak in my head:

“Youngwife, we see you dawning in the dark  
water. Letting the pearls roll by.

Your other earring was found  
half-digested in the trash.

In your time you were a ripper  
through the seams. Overboard from before  
the first shore split from the swell.

We saw you pouring in the park.  
And we know who split the swell.”

Every story from the new begins with  
“When I wasn’t wife ...” When we are new  
what will they cut from our womb?  
My own womb? The mussel becomes less and less

a neck, more and more a cavity.

I will hide these things in pearl  
and we should remain bedded.

Necessity roosts on a rib in the youngwife.  
Caresse in the night are teeth. Hooked in  
from the youngwife, how we females  
feel belonging to things. From where she speaks,  
the icebox, to where the firstwives  
spin her to – what alters when I follow her spine,  
those clear strings of broken little eye-teeth,  
we'll pearl to find our way new.

## Uncompleted

Mostly, I make lists; some numbered  
some with bullets—all sorts.

I put checkmarks next to completed  
items. Later, I'll put a circle around  
my checkmark and then another, bigger  
circle around that circle and slowly

shade it in while drinking coffee  
and smoking heavily; staring steadily  
at my glorious list. Never a completed  
object, unless it leafs an offspring  
a smaller list that's lost a few things  
from turning pages and has yet to

gain the elaborate shading of time.  
Time, spent contemplating its most  
important objects. An underline enters  
the equation and suddenly it has grown  
into a page revisited, now there's a doodle  
in the left hand margin; a tattoo that reads:

*I was here*, without having to say it outright  
and older items start to show up from the  
patriarchal pages. He becomes a list of many  
past lists; revealing patterns and renewed  
beginnings. Patiently waiting for that final  
moment when *nothing* will appear on his

list, and then other hands will form a faded  
circle that surround this faithful checkmark  
and all-together singing, slowly—shade it in.

## Catastrophe Theory

It is here that the folding house comes to mind—  
the weight too much for the shallow foundation.

The house developed germs: scotch soaked pillowcases,  
mold in the toilet, a head-sized hole in the linoleum,  
broken television set, cast iron skillets,  
wood stove and the bones of a cat.

The tipping point was the father's behavior.

The house developed disturbances: dehydrated houseplants,  
yeast lining the inner walls, blood in the toilet, a knife at the mattress,  
sniffing cockroaches on the ceiling, cracked cusp and water filled,  
broken dishwasher.

It is here that the function of the house became irregular  
the daughter began to break—  
the fluctuating heat from the stove set the dwelling to sweat.

The house slumped,  
doubled over,  
collapsed—  
and bore a woman.

## Practical Geometry

$$c^2 - b^2 = a^2$$

They told me I didn't have to come back and they would still count my 30 hours—  
They told me that the last thing I will think of won't be my toenail fungus  
but the untouched bed with our separate blankets. They told me none of this.

c = the supercritical pitchfork I'm welding or the sledgehammer I'm wielding.  
Did I really get that wrong in my last letter? Moving forward, my relationship  
is too open. C is the 'center' where there is a fist  
a great fucking big fist  
where I hold your letters.  
I keep filing them under propaganda.

b = 15 hours. It could be as practical as that. But time isn't practical.  
Only this fist that is pink inside and no matter how many letters white pages  
and I'm trying not to inspire you or lift you from the ditch you have curled  
under all those beautiful houses we said we were going to live together  
and set fire to instead I have to ask why we're still friends anyway  
it only makes me hate you more.

a = the dark areas the unsettled areas the places where we could never build a bridge  
or a house or a fire.

## **I worked for a boss who wanted sex.**

I had a box knife in my pocket.  
I had a tape machine, door card, staple remover.  
I had nails that curled under. I had chicken wire in the trunk.  
I had dreams we had sex.

I worked for a boss who thought I was smart.

I could use a computer, type, sweep, drink whisky.  
I drank black coffee rampantly. I had toenail fungus.  
I had bad nail polish. I drank alcohol with coffee.  
I had soda sundaes, ran office machines.  
I priced all the wheat.

I worked for a boss who thought we were friends.

I had chipped nail polish. I coveted sunglasses.  
I suffered from a lack of kindness. I prayed.  
I drank beer mostly. I cleaned office buildings.  
I cleaned someone's shit off a toilet lid.  
I stole everything.

I temped for a boss I hated.

I had four hours to call a thousand people.  
I tried to be good. I could use a computer.  
I drank coffee, talked eagerly. I was smart.  
I priced health care, had a tape machine.  
I left at lunch on my first day.

I worked for a boss who hated me.

I thought he was real cute. I cooked vegetable soup.  
I ate grits mostly. I wouldn't obey nor listen nor whatever.  
I wore argyle socks, was good at karaoke.  
I slipped on butter, fell real hard. I drank whisky.  
I found other jobs.

I worked for a boss who paid me to pose.

I rarely wore clothes. I'd lie like tapestry.  
I felt each brush stroke. I was on time. I cried.  
I posed for three hours. I wore a scrap of polyester  
If I wore anything. I drank cold coffee. I sneezed.  
I ran or walked quickly.

I worked for a boss who liked to watch me work.

I'd lift five pound bundles for twelve hours.  
I wore very little. It was hot. I talked. I drank.  
I set up machines. I felt my bones, everything.  
I had never been so broke. I had never been so wrong.  
I took speed. I had a pattern.

I worked for a boss who took me to lunch as reward.

I thought. I noticed. I twisted my hair.  
I drank cocktails, felt smart, could use tape.  
I could pose. I had benefits. I gained ten pounds.  
I talked business. I priced services. I had manicures.  
I wore black shoes.

# Art





**Farm, 1934**



**Temple of Heaven, Winter, Beijing, 1985**





**Hibiscus Pattern**





**Zombies!**







**I am Going There**





**Skeleton Man**





**Not All Those Who Wonder are Lost**





**Perspective**





**Leaves Over Grass**



# Fiction





## Strange and Subtle

Wally had just finished pouring his shop specialty, a rich, frothy chocolate soda, for a new customer that graced his quaint pink and white ice cream parlor. She was a curious woman. She ordered her confection with her head down, as if she was shy or unaccustomed to her surroundings. Wally surmised that she must have been a visitor to the shopping area on 63rd and Green on the south side of Chicago, a blue collar area of town, but what confused him the most was the way she dressed. It was a scorcher of a day, and most women had on brightly colored sundresses, flopping hats, and their children were in tow. Not this newcomer. She had a long, wool, navy, apron dress over a cotton, long sleeved blouse, and her auburn hair was pinned in a bun under a matching scarf. She was quite unusual, and not just in Wally's eyes.

Wally was expecting his pal, Ed, to swing open the glass entry door to the shop and make the bells chime any second now. It was just about 2:00 p.m. everyday when Ed closed his boss' butcher shop and treated himself to a quick conversation with his friend, devoured the best homemade ice cream in town, and then went back to carving whole sides of beef and serving a line of customers. If Ed had a vice, it was his penchant for sweets, especially plain old vanilla and chocolate ice cream, which, if he had the time, he would eat a quart of each. He never touched the sauce, be it chocolate, caramel, marshmallow, or even of a more potent nature served at the corner tavern.

While Wally served the stranger her bubbly chocolate soda on a white paper doily, he asked, with a friendly smile, if this was her first visit to the shop and, if so, was she from out of town. Before the intriguing woman could lift her head to respond, the bells on the front door rang and Ed Wood burst through the door. His eyes were intent on Wally; however, they quickly diverted to the lady being served by his best friend.

Normally, Ed would say hello to Wally and sit at the far end of the counter next to the wall and near the restrooms where he could meet with Wally for chat time when he wasn't busy with customers, but circumstances were different today. Ed, an extremely handsome man, who resisted the flirtations of women of all ages and marital status, whether in his shop or on the sidewalk, was altered when he entered the shop and saw the enigmatic stranger who met his gaze for but a moment and then, out of shyness, turned her head to sip her soda.

"What will it be Ed, ole' buddy, chocolate or vanilla?" Wally asked with his usual high-pitched, cheerful voice. Wally was a short man with dark hair that was barely visible under his little white cap that matched his full apron; however, the apron was smeared with yellow, brown, and pink ice cream from the cones he made for the three boys sitting on the round, white cane chairs with their elbows on the shining chrome tables in the middle of the establishment who ordered banana splits. There was also neon green liquid drizzling down Wally's front, compliments of the recent order from the elderly man in the corner sipping on a green river.

For the first time, Ed sat at the front of the counter, just two seats away from the woman, and he ordered. "Wally, I'm going to surprise you today and have what the young lady is having," Ed responded with his deep voice. He was all man. He had suaveness from being a business man whose customers were primarily ladies, an enviable physique from the physical labor of his trade, and the looks of a movie star. When he filled the orders of his customers, he would tell the women how lovely their hair or dresses looked. When he walked down the streets of the south side of Chicago, ladies would stare and even stop as they watched him pass. Ed was used to being approached by the prettiest girls in town and he dated several, for he was now twenty-five years

old, but he was never one to fall for the looks of the 1920's woman with the heavy makeup and flamboyant style of dress. Ed was a simple man with simple tastes.

"Excuse me, Miss. May I ask what you are having?" Ed inquired in his polite manner.

"Certainly, Sir. I have a chocolate soda," the stranger responded in a soft spoken tone. Her bundled auburn hair created a frame around her face that highlighted her soft, ivory skin and serene, blue eyes.

"A chocolate soda—what a great choice. I'm sorry. I don't know your name. May I ask?" Ed requested as he turned on the charm and perched himself more confidently on the stool at the counter.

"I am Edna. I suppose we have our names in common with mine being the female version of yours," she said with a smile.

"What a beautiful name. I have never heard it before," Ed responded with delight. He could hear the comfort level rising in their conversation.

"I'm afraid I have been teased because of my name, but I have heard names such as Pancracretius and Thaddeus that I would not want to wish for anyone!" Edna joked.

"I agree with you there. Did you hear these names in books?" Ed asked quizzically while trying to drink the extremely rich soda before him.

"Well, no. It's a long story, and you probably wouldn't be interested, Ed," Edna replied timidly and covered her mouth with a napkin.

"Please continue, Edna, if it is not an intrusion. I am enjoying this so much, and I have all the time in the world for you," Ed wasn't truthful with the latter, which shocked Wally who was eavesdropping on the entire conversation.

"Well, I live in the Carmelite Convent just about fifteen miles from here, and the nuns take on or, more accurately, are given saints' names when they take their final vows, some of which are quite extraordinary. You may be wondering why I dress so plainly in this heavy blue smock and plain black shoes. It is because I intend on becoming a nun. I start my postulancy in a few months. I have been with the Carmelites since I was orphaned at eight-years old. I really don't know any other way of life. I just came to town to get some cloth and sewing supplies next door. There are only two of us who can leave the convent; everyone else is cloistered, which is what I will be in a few months."

"I don't know if all of this talk is disorienting me, or if the bus ride rattled me, or if I am not used to having a chocolate soda, but I think I need to get some air. Would you excuse me, Ed?" Edna exclaimed with exasperation while patting her forehead with a handkerchief embroidered with red roses.

"Oh, please, let me assist you," Ed quickly responded as he took Edna's arm, paid the bill, and waved to Wally.

Outside Ed found a bench for the two of them to sit on in the shade of an awning from a nearby store. A cool summer breeze whiffed over their bodies on the walkway and Edna felt renewed. Ed noticed how petite Edna was, just five feet tall with the daintiest fingers and feet. She was a delicate flower that required no adornment, no makeup or bobbles as the fashion of the day dictated. Her beauty was all natural.

"Thank you so much, Ed. You are such a gentleman and I truly enjoyed our ice cream together, or at least out time together. I must be getting on with my errands to catch my bus," Edna hesitantly stated.

"Edna, I would like to see you again. Is that at all possible? I know you have plans for your life, but that's all in a few months. This may sound strange to you, but I can't let you leave today without the hope of knowing I will be in your life," Ed gently pleaded.

"Oh, Ed, I don't know. I rarely get out of the convent. It's been months since I came to town for supplies, so I don't expect to be back until near the holidays," Edna responded with frustration.

“Can I visit you?” Ed eagerly inquired.

“No. That wouldn’t be a good idea,” Edna replied with a stunned expression.

“Then I can write,” Ed quickly retorted.

“If you write me, you will have to drive to the convent and put the letter under the rock by the mailbox on the roadside. I will check for your letters every morning and leave my reply the next day. Do you think that will work, Ed?” Edna asked with hope in her eyes while her heart was beating with rapidity.

“Oh, yes, Edna. You just made me the happiest man in the world,” he exclaimed while shaking her hand.

They exchanged letters for thirteen days and on the fourteenth day after they met, Ed and Edna were married. It was a two-week courtship that turned into nearly forty years of marriage.

## **The Internet**

The father never had to ask why he scattered his offspring around the great country. He understood how it happened: first there was the dream of it in the night, a visage on a mountain; then there was the act of it, the dynamite fingers in the rock. He never had to wonder who the children were because he cleared his browser after every dirty thing he did. What came before the Internet was never clear, and after Its birth out into the world, no one knew where It lived. These are the questions we are allowed. These are the answers we are given. Where do we go when don't go anywhere? What will become of America? Who are the people we never see, and how do they live when we're not looking? Why do forget the truth? When America caught the Internet in the forest, they tried to type these questions into the search engine, but the auto-complete function ruined them. Why am I so tired? How do you sleep? Who is God? What does my dream mean? Where am I?

## **Wal-Mart**

When Wal-Mart was born, all of the local papers wrote stories with words like wowza and printed pictures of smiling geriatrics holding cotton candy. The reporters ate complimentary hotdogs and spent a week living inside the camping section. When they came out, their towns were gone. So the reporters handed each other the stories they'd written on red, white, and blue napkins taken from a 1,000 pack they'd bought for \$1.96. Each story ended, !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! except for one written by a high school girl in Tecumseh. Her story was on a white napkin. There weren't any words, only a ketchup stain that looked like Lake Michigan. It was all America could talk about until Wal-Mart began to sell t-shirts with screen-printed ketchup stains that looked like Lake Michigan. Then America decided the stain wasn't cool anymore so it conquered Prince Edward Island and used the dirt to fill in Lake Michigan which was so terribly lame. Everyone started to spell ketchup catsup. The girl disappeared and no one looked for her except for Wal-Mart who issued an Adam Alert. Every day they would lock the doors from 4:00p.m. to 1:00a.m. and have a doctor perform a physical to identify the girls. Then a lawyer would compare the girls to a picture printed on all the milk cartons. They could not find the girl—mostly because everyone, even the dairy farmers, had forgotten what she looked like—but the doctor found so many diseases that Wal-Mart invented medicine and sold it at a reasonable price. America was still sick but death was more profitable than before.



## Five Meals in Paris

### I

Take the last stale pastry off the hostel's tabletop buffet and pour a mug of drip coffee; recall the commandment Professor Jacobs issued a decade ago from her pulpit, the lectern of a Cuyahoga Community College literature classroom: "Everyone must see Paris once." Replay that moment as you sip—how her hands flailed and her brooch gleamed, how her eyes widened and her southern drawl receded every time she said it: Paris. The others rolled their eyes and mocked her, but you took her seriously, took as gospel that Paris was for everyone, an experience that must not be missed in a meaningful lifetime.

Forget the cab driver who last night circumnavigated the city until you owed him half the Euro notes you purchased inside the airport terminal. Forget the irritable hostel desk clerk, the snoring Finn and sexually adventurous Turks with whom you shared a dorm. Think of the gallon jug that for eight years sat like a shrine atop the apartment refrigerator, collecting every spare coin—the change from every pack of chewing gum or soda from the break room vending machine.

You nearly hid that jug, weary of sarcastic remarks from friends. But as it slowly filled you ignored more pressing uses for the cash, like last April when you fell behind a month on the electric bill rather than plunder your savings. Plane fares rose and exchange rates jackknifed but finally you rolled and counted each coin, scoured the Web for a cut-rate, off-season e-ticket from Cleveland-Hopkins. The foreman laughed so hard when you told him why you wanted a week off in February. You ignored the guys who called you Frenchie, and when someone left a beret in your locker, you smiled and wore it all day. And now, as they scrape around in coveralls, you are in Paris.

As you consider what waits on the other side of that weathered hostel door, remember to chew, at least a little. Sling one last sip of coffee and undertake what will become morning routine: hide securely away in your back pocket the stigma of a navy blue U.S. passport, flip coat collar upward, yank scarf tight, straighten hat, and burst out the door. Smile.

Nothing will seem common in those first moments. The stone streets are rough with charm, not from neglect like the worn asphalt back home. And the buildings—every one unique and intricate, and you'll wince just to think of the crumbling cube of concrete that holds your bed and all your belongings. Every step presents something vibrant and new—coffees and breads and roasted meats send their smells out onto the street, and the sun peeks down in strange, wonderful angles between buildings. And even though the voices around you are morning-muted, they swirl into a warm blur—remember to breathe.

The budget allows for one meal each day; at three in the afternoon, split the difference between mealtimes and smile at the providence of bold letters on a street cart, a word that springs back from the mind's recesses, a remnant of high school French class, boulangerie. Try to read panini descriptions in French, but when impatience takes over, switch to parenthesized English. Near the bottom of the clapboard, find a safe selection—bread with five cheeses, and it's even simple to order in French: "Un sandwich avec cinq fromages, s'il vous plait."

"Comin' right up," the man behind the counter will say in a manufactured drawl, grinning in acknowledgment of both the effort and the hacksaw you've taken to his native language. Do not hand him the money while ordering, as you would back home—he won't take it. First, watch him pull the sandwich from the display case and clamp it with a heated press. Only after

the man has wrapped and handed you the bread/cheese torpedo will he accept your coins. Trade ‘merci’ formalities with him, but don’t bother with beaucoup—no one ever really says that in France. Pull back the paper wrapping, and keep the bites slow: this has to last until breakfast. Burn to memory the mild crunch of that first bite—just bread—and then the second when the cheeses get involved, their flavors alternating sharp and mild, strong and smooth.

Between bites, scan the streetscape for the housewives carrying armloads of fresh bread, the boisterous vendors, the plucky artists, the hopscotching children whose photographs illustrated *Introduction à Français*. Whose images distracted you, those nights in an attic bedroom atop your parents’ row house, when you should’ve been studying the language of France, rather than the daydream of *Away*. The Cuyahoga was on fire back then; above glowing pilot lights, the sky alternated between grey and black—never clear. *Away* was a beautiful idea. Today, finally, *Away* is a beautiful place, even if you see none of the people your textbook promised.

Take a final bite of the sandwich as you stroll brick-inlaid Rue Mouffetard, teeth grinding in slow circles—victims of that sad mechanism, restraint. When the panini is gone, wait awhile before chasing its remnants with still water from a grocery store, just like your dog-eared second-hand guidebook recommends.

That evening, tease the budget and sip espresso at a table in the front window of *Le Café de Flore*. When a waiter in vest and bow tie offers a small tin pitcher of milk, nod. This is a matter of volume, not taste—it will double the size of your drink, double the number of sips, double the length of your lease on the seat. Marvel at erratic taxicabs and gaudy winter clothes as everyone floats by in a blur. Buy a second thimble-sized coffee shot to further delay the walk home.

## II

Dump sugar and packets of processed creamer into the hostel’s burnt coffee. Drink it fast, and know one will notice it’s blonder than Marilyn. Pour a forbidden refill when the breakfast man looks away, distracted by the washing of trays.

Walk all morning, walk to weariness, smile, look up—always upward, at the balconies, the verandas, the gold foiling, at the intricate bronzework of statues memorializing people you’ll never hear of or care about. Don’t look down—the beauty of Paris is upward, even if the sky is charcoal.

In the afternoon, another street vendor—this time for a crêpe. After ordering, watch the cook eat a bite of something, then lick his fingers one at a time. Without so much as wiping on a rag, he’ll pour your batter over a circular form, spread it thin, wait for the heat to do its work, flip, fill, top, wrap then thrust your food forward, smile, and say “voilà.” Ignore those unclean fingers and accept it, crush between your molars the sweet concoction of batter and sugar crystals. Smile. It’s Paris—smile. With hints of crêpe lingering on your palate, walk by the Tour d’Eiffel and Arc de Triomphe, see their grand forms and magnificent arches from the ground, but don’t pay to climb any stairs. Paris offers plenty of those for free. Later, shell out ten Euro to enter the Louvre because, well, you must. Once inside, follow the thick evening crowds to the right, see Venus and Mona, then peel away to the museum’s left bank, to the lonely rooms of paintings no one has in mind as they’re patted down by guards looking for bombs and spray paint. Marvel at the splendor and sadness in the ancient shades before you. Note that the painted forms are your only neighbors. Inside this famous building in this bustling city, you are alone.

At night, duck into a bar, someplace cramped and dim. Buy the biggest, cheapest drink they’ve got and watch students carry animated but whispered arguments. Imagine they’re discussing something profound or sexy. Sip and sip, watch and listen and long until your glass is empty. Return to the hostel, slip quietly into the room, trying not to wake anyone until you realize there’s no one else—you’re the first one to return. Pull the sheets up to your chin and fall asleep before the Turks can stumble back in and keep you awake all night.

### III

Same godawful breakfast, but it's still free. Swipe an extra croissant (the last one) and slather it in strawberry jam, because cheap croissants in Paris are just as dry as cheap croissants in Ohio. Paris by foot will begin to take its toll. As the day unravels, muscles will resist footsteps first with a dull ache, then with the hint of a blister on the smallest right toe. Rest by taking a seated meal amongst chatty students at a café along Rue Sorbonne, one where the wooden patio chairs all face the street. The front row will be filled, but second row is not so bad, and so it's petit déjeuner pour un, but the waitress will roll her eyes and say "that means breakfast, not little lunch." Study the English menu she'll produce from the right pocket of her apron. Angle it away from others so no one can see the conspicuous absence of accents aigu or grave.

When the waitress finally returns engulfed in the scent of a prolonged smoke break, order the special, a small salad, followed by chicken encrusted with something that has no precise English translation and so its title has been left in French. But the picture looks nice, so that's where you will point, and it'll be tea and tap water. She will bring Perrier and will not understand—or pretend not to—when you explain you want water from the sink or basin or pipe, and she'll summon another waitress and make a scene. Voices will escalate, arms will flail, people with English and French menus will stare—just take the damn Perrier, count it as sunk cost.

When the food arrives, ignore the pulsing blister on your toe, ignore the seeping blood that will have to be bleached from your white sock—focus instead on the flavors, the encrusting which turns out to be some sort of spiced cheese. Don't take it personally when the tea never arrives except on the bill, or when you notice the unwanted Perrier cost six Euro. Just pay the bill and go. Brush aside what loud curses follow you onto the sidewalk when the waitress discovers a fifty-cent tip, despite assurances by both the menu and your guidebook that tips are unnecessary. Walk quickly, and think only of the food, which rests heavy in a satisfied stomach.

Evening time, explore the mad colors, jagged shadows, manic sounds of Saint Michel's tightly drawn streets. Walk with confident purpose past restaurateurs who shout at you in English, "Couscous!" When one of them grabs your arm, draw back. He will point to a photo menu taped to the window. With bulging eyes and aggressive posture he will persist: "Couscous! For you, drink included!" You'll understand by then how dearly an included drink can cost. When he tightens his grip, shout: "No! No couscous!" He will release you. As you exit the narrow street, Notre Dame will stand stark and backlit before you, will steal your breath. Fall in love with this place, with this moment; forgive those who would try to tarnish its beauty. Back to the hostel, back to bed, back to tap water from a paper cup, back to sleep.

### IV

Explore further reaches of the city, legging it out to avoid Metro fares. Window shop stores in which you'd never be welcome—black-clad doormen will glare and fold their arms to make this quite clear. From the steps of Sacre Coeur, use Notre Dame, the Pantheon, a bent black ribbon of the Seine to estimate the hostel's location. Feel at first elated about how far you've come—then crushed at how many roofs, how much distance separates you from your goal. The sun will set and street signs won't match the names printed on your hostel-issued mess of a wrinkled map—go ahead and say it out loud: lost. No one will respond to your feeble 'excusez moi' and either there are a dozen Chinese dry cleaners in this neighborhood—each with an inexplicable stuffed duck hanging upside-down in the window—or you're walking circles down a street the map proclaims straight. Forestall worry by focusing on your toe, which throbs its way to the front of your mind, precludes even the instinct to panic. Try the Metro, but its ticket machine will be out of order—they always are. The steps back to street level will seem the embodiment of defeat.

Desperately hungry, pull the bill of your cap low over embarrassed eyes when entering McDonald's to order a value meal by holding up three fingers. Astonishingly, this will tax the interpretive skill of four employees. As you sit alone in the molded plastic booth and drag soggy

French fries through two packets of ketchup that cost a Euro each, conversations and lovely accents will fill the restaurant. Grimace as you realize this is the place where you'll encounter the most actual Parisians living their actual lives.

## V

Twist a faded black necktie around a white collar, giving the knot dimples in the mirror. Run through your hair a dab of gel from the corner sundry. Run across your cheek the 4-Euro single-blade Bic, lubricated by hostel soap. Jacket on, shoes shined with a square of sink-dampened toilet paper—it's okay to smile at the makeshift job you've done in putting yourself together. In keeping yourself together.

Tablecloths will be sharp white, the array of silverware will dazzle and perplex. Waiters will maneuver with immaculate strides and precise, angular gestures. Blacks and whites, silvers and golds, boisterous laughs—this night will embody the Paris you expected, will embody hope, escape, Away. Wave off the English version and order from the set menu in broken but admirable French.

The wine will be deep red and heavy, will race quickly through your veins, will numb your toe, your worn muscles, your tired mind. Take another sip, then slow yourself. Savor each bite of the light, flaky bread, ignoring the thought that it's just bread, nothing substantively different than the loaf you could have bought at the 24-hour Kroger two blocks from home.

The soup will be creamy and flavorful, but don't linger over it so long that the waiter wordlessly swipes a half-full bowl when he brings the fish course. Though you haven't touched a speck of seafood since third grade (when you vomited cafeteria fish sticks and chocolate milk all over the fold-out lunch table) push aside leafy garnish and fork the tender fibers of filet. Check to see if anybody is looking before dousing it with a squeeze of the lemon that is almost certainly ornamental. Chew quickly so that bits of the fibrous flesh do not have a chance to stick on the caps of your molars or slip into the chasm between gum and cheek. Chase each bite with wine.

The main dish will arrive drizzled in a deep brown sauce and surrounded by a small forest of inedible greenery. But as the knife slides along the entrée's edge, the meat will be grey and tough. You will want to push it away, but years of grandmother's 'clean-your-plate' commands have become intrinsic, and so you will continue, repressing the urge to let your mind freely think what you know it wants to: that in this moment of fulfillment, what you really want is a greasy burger with a refillable paper bucket of soda and cubed ice. Concentrate instead on the slim flickering candle that lights your table, on the waiter's finely groomed mustache—on anything that makes Paris feel like it's supposed to.

The cheese plate will arrive, a sweet respite. Each bite will be lustrous, but your stomach will feel bloated by the foods that already reside there. Then, the desert—cheesecake (more cheese!). Quietly wrestle down the entire beige triangle.

The dark coffee will appear majestic and expensive when it arrives in the white porcelain mug atop a saucer. But sip after sip, it tastes just like the instant stuff you make each morning. This disappointment, you will decide, is a welcomed one.

When the check comes, place the colorful bills into the thin leather portfolio without pausing to calculate or convert. Walk out the door and catch a glimpse of a raven-haired Parisienne, ruby-lipped and sucking on a cigarette, complete with a black turtleneck. Smile at this cinematic perfection until she speaks—in a British accent.

Just a short walk back to bed, but you will weave and bob—delay. Relish the chance to pull this air once more through your lungs, to see Paris through the lens of your own retina. Begin, already, to filter your memory, to shape the stories you will tell coworkers and friends and family of the wonders you've seen and felt and tasted. Decide which memories to leave behind. Plan the argument you will use to prove the professor right, to prove yourself right, that Paris must be seen, that there is nothing like it. That yours is a meaningful lifetime. Check your watch.

The cab will take you directly to the airport this time, sparing money but robbing you of one final ride amongst the monuments, the grand buildings. Watch the empty 5 a.m. sidewalks, the street lamps, the quiet homes blur past. Outside the heart of the city, the suburbs look like they could be the suburbs of anyplace. They look like they could be the suburbs of home. Across the lap of a sleeping businessman in the window seat, watch the daybreak departure through that thin oval film of glass as the plane curls up and away, leaving beneath you the city of flickering lights, a city that from the separation of a couple of moments and a few thousand feet carries an amber glow strikingly similar to the hue of the street lamp canopy that on Monday will guide your way to third shift at the plant, that will lead you to normalcy, that will direct you toward the mundane beauty and comfort of home.

# NonFiction

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## My Two High School Dream Girls

... visit me at dawn, arriving not long before I awake, shuffling forward out of a sooty dimness in tandem, glimmering bodies visible only from about the clavicle up. Perhaps they are naked, perhaps not. Side by side they consider me, pale faces devoid of expression, as if mute watchfulness were their sole nature. Bare slender shoulders almost touch, though an invisible line separates them, as if a vast division—a great span of distance and time—exists between their beings despite their visual proximity. This paradox of intimacy and estrangement affords them a collective impression of mutual unawareness as if each has arrived at this common destination entirely of her own volition and devices.

It is always the same. They watch, they wait. I peer back at them. The place around us is very dark and very silent. The air is cool and dry; a faint odor of cinnamon comes and goes. Sometimes it is a short time, sometimes long, but when at last I grow aware of my waking, they are gone.

On my farm there is a rooster, a descendant of a feral Indonesian line called Sumatras—a bird so black even its bones are black. This dark herald of dawn has come to serve as something of a gatekeeper for us, his initial morning call often signaling simultaneously the girls' departure and the arrival of consciousness for me. Silently, we adjourn to our separate worlds until the next night, one reality giving way to another with the cock's first crow.

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Ours was a school within a school, made up of the so-called best minds from all the surrounding counties. Yet these two educational spheres might have existed on different planets, for the students of the Regional Governor's School—the Magnet School, it also was called—were forbade from going out into the old high school section. If an attentive student were to ignore such a directive, however, he would be struck by the stark differences between these space-sharing places of learning.

The long corridors of the city high school were dingy, confused, overcrowded expanses—old flattened gray gum clinging to the undersides of the much older furniture lining the walls and occasional alcoves, while a pervasive mustiness arose from somewhere other than the thoroughly mopped, chemical-soaked floors.

Through a locked door one could enter the Magnet School section to discover a glassed-in entry space with a spiral staircase, an open-area carpeted lounge containing cushioned leather chairs, walls lined with a generous assortment of plaques and certificates, and shiny computer rooms and labs outfitted with all the latest technology, including an electron microscope. Even the lights in the ceiling were brighter—more expensive, better made.

Yet for all these advantages and comforts, a sense of anxious, nervous abstraction pervaded the place like a muted curse—a kind of crouching, bashful academic paranoia. When all was silent—during the voiceless interval of yet another exam, or over the course of the long dark after hours when the place projected the appearance of slumber—the lonely hallways whispered their doubts: We are the best, but are we good enough? Will the data for my project work out? Am I as smart as he is? Will I get the full ride to a top university? Will my parents love me more?

One day in class a teacher seeking to push us ever upward and grasping for some semblance of creativity, instructed each of us to conceive of a question of startling simplicity which, nonetheless, we believed no one could succeed in answering.

Not used to such open questions, the class struggled mightily with this task of humble

conception and, in fact, the first couple of questions from students did not really follow the assignment, merely posing simple math problems, the solutions to which were contingent upon obscure, arcane formula.

Uneasy feigned laughter echoed about the room, the super-students attempting to embody an air of nonchalance while all the while their minds labored harder than ever, reasoning furiously, tearing through the prodigious contents of their skulls with a speed resembling wrath. At last my turn came. "What is the tallest and greatest tree at this school?"

At first a pause and then, again, the strained laughter, as if the question had been posed as a joke. A boy excused himself to the restroom and, when he returned, hazarded, having doubtless peered out a window, that the answer was a particular tree at the edge of the woods below the entrance road.

"Come on," I mocked them. "We're all supposed to be geniuses and we come here every day . . . it's only the biggest freakin' tree on campus."

When the teacher frowned and asked that I reveal the answer, I told them. "It's the sycamore atop the hill to the north. Three grown men would be hard-pressed to join hands round its trunk. The upper branches are as tall as the lights from the football stadium. And if you walk up close to it, you can see long, thick shoots of ivy running up it like a tangle of climbing serpents. On windy days the uppermost limbs seem to clutch at the sky like fingers. I'd bet you anything its hollow too. And the bark of that tree is really something to look at. It's an odd bleached white color—like bone."

\*

Let us speak first of the slightly taller dream girl: B—. Possessed of brown eyes: soft and warm like wide pools of sorghum molasses. Eyes that might take in the world, might brim and overflow with it, spilling back its secrets in little rivulets of warmth.

It was the secrets of water that interested her most. "The study of water quality in local bodies of water is important for many reasons," read the prospectus for our research project, written almost entirely by her. "Water surrounds us everywhere. It is one of the most important things we need to stay alive. Humans use water for everything: power, nourishment, agriculture, leisurely activities. Due to the essential role water plays in our lives, it is vital to know what quality of water exists in our surroundings."

Every Friday during the first two months of spring semester we drove together to a different stretch of Blackwater Creek and proceeded to trace a given section on foot, straying along its floodplain, saplings and dry brittle briars scratching at our jeans—me bearing a cooler and she a canvas pack filled with instruments and equipment. The creek curved, deepened, and took on alternate characteristics; the Fridays were rainy or sunny, fair or cold; but everywhere and every time we measured the same things: dissolved oxygen, conductivity, ph, temperature, coliform bacteria. Yet no one excursion might be afforded the name constant, for all the while spring slowly was unfolding around us, the creek and its surroundings literally coming to life as these two young people clung to the monotony and routine of science, even as their youthful blood began to stir and run like the sap of trees.

One particular late morning Friday, weather unseasonably warm—a gray expanse overhead and a breeze so slight in its interruption of the creek-bottom humidity as to be palpable only on my neck and forearms, slightly damp with sweat.

On two great, lichen-covered rocks we had seated ourselves, the creek before and below us, and the bank rising behind, pungent with the odor of damp leaves and rotting wood. The current might have run faster, except that a number of trees leaning over the stream had flung down their branches into the water here and there.

Blackwater Creek murmured and whispered its old tale, so different from the story we sought to set down for it—to prove—with our numbers.

B— leaning forward to nudge me with an empty SCI bottle where I lay sprawled on my

rock. “Best get a sample here.”

Laboring to an upright position, I dramatically swipe the bottle from her hand, then lean over the edge of my rock, belly down, to gather the passing waters.

Filled and capped, into the cooler the bottle goes, though the hand that places it there does not proceed to reemerge empty. Arm outstretched, I offer to B— a dripping, frosty can of Milwaukee’s Best Light.

Musical laughter as she takes it, followed by a mocking admonition. “You’d be so busted for that.”

Shrug from me as I pop open my own. “Whoopy shit.”

Accompanying the beer, as if on cue, there breaks down upon us a sudden flood of sunshine, and as B— drinks an enigmatic smile plays about the corners of her mouth. Freckled, pale-skinned redhead that she is, even half a beer sets her cheeks aglow with a crimson flush. Yet the nature of the beauty that springs forth from her is less of a cosmetic quality and more the simple embodiment of her youth and her being in that place in spring, and a private joy at life in that moment that would always remain a secret of her very own. The sun shines full upon her, turning her hair to fire. She blooms.

But then the introspective spell passes and her levity returns. “You get to take the dissolved oxygen readings next week, since you’ve come to be so full of hot air.”

And me killing my beer and glancing at her sideways, eyes narrowed, mock-threatening. “You’re the one doing the fecal coliform. What does that make you full of?”

Quick, back-handed blow to my arm, followed by a giggle from her and an answering laugh from me. Then she sips her beer and peers up at the budding canopy, before allowing her head to roll back towards me. “You know,” she says, “we could live out our whole lives in a wild place and when we died wolves would devour our flesh and gnaw our bones, and birds would build nests with our hair.”

I smile at the creek and crush my can against the rock.

“And if the earth has forgotten you,” she says, as if quoting, “tell the still earth: I am flowing. With the moving waters say, ‘I am.’”

“Not very scientific.”

“Nothing that’s really true is. It’s like the other day in Vector Calculus when we got off on Euler’s Identity. Just kind of there, you know, like a part of nature rather than something a man made up or discovered. There and beautiful: the natural essence of something. Like love.” I cast my crushed beer can up into the air and at the top of its arc it glints in the sun before landing in the creek with a small splash and floating slowly, listlessly, downstream on the current.

“Don’t worry, it’s biodegradable.”

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A week later. Girlfriend troubles. Alone in a little study room at the Magnet School, sitting quietly before a book-strewn table, staring off into space.

Enters B— carrying a stack of empty petri dishes. A glance at me and a pause. Then she sets down the containers, very carefully, atop an open medical thesaurus, and takes up the chair opposite. She considers me for a moment, face unreadable, then slowly reaches across the table for my hand. Gently she turns my palm upward and then rests her small hand in mine.

“Your girlfriend broke up with you.”

“How did you know I had a girlfriend?”

“I didn’t.”

I smile at her, then look down at the table, probably with a frown. Next second—fluid, quick motion of a high school athlete—hand removed from hers and seizing a gray-blue graphing calculator from the cluttered table to send hurtling against the far wall. Sharp crack of breaking plastic, followed by a hard clattering echo as it strikes the vinyl floor tile, parts scattering in all directions.

Exasperated laughter from me as I motion at the table. “Look at all this shit.”

And B—, laughing too, eyes as soft as Amherst County sorghum, mirth flushing her face with blood. “I should be your girlfriend.”

Which makes me laugh harder, until finally, gasps reigned in at last, I manage my best air of solemnity. “That would be alright, I guess, but I think our relationship would have to be purely Platonic.”

“No!” She exclaims, striking the table with an open palm, blood deepening her face almost purple. “No! No! No! No! No! No!” She sings, stamping her foot in time.

And me laughing, heart turned to slush, leaning across the table to cup her hot freckles in the palms of my hands and kiss her on the mouth.

\*

A smile fades with the vanishing of this memory, but even as it does let us turn our attention to the other dream girl. For though she was not known to me as intimately as B—, she has been neglected long enough and, as I have related, it has become my custom of late to afford them equal time and attention, arriving, as they do, without fail, in tandem.

Despite her alert eyes and constant air of nervous, physical motion, A— somehow managed to appear more or less oblivious to her surroundings much of the time—looking without seeing, as if meditating powerfully upon an entity not present. A fierce worker, alternately flitting or striding from room to room on some new spectral errand, a perpetual sense of process fueled by a smoldering passionate purpose almost volcanic in nature—that might tempt her to seek conquering the air itself should it challenge her in the form of a hypothesis. Rarely could she be found at rest, but at odd moments an unconscious smile curved just so slightly the far ends of her lips, though hardly ever in conjunction with any of the talk or events unfolding around her. Reason and reaction remained all hers—the smile was entirely her own.

Violent thunderclaps and heavy spring rain. The entire school cast into darkness, save for the intermittent glow of the sporadic weak emergency lights inhabiting the rooms and lining the walls—nature’s electricity triumphant despite all the city’s organization, contingencies, and best laid plans. And the Magnet faculty herding the super-students to the glassed-in entry area, where they can see each other, and their books—some already flopped back open, studies resumed—and the hard rain and periodic flashes of lightning cutting jaggedly about the tops of the stadium lights—and the swaying upper branches of the school’s tallest tree, which clutch at the sky like fingers. The darkened hallways and inner chambers of the Magnet School lie deserted, forlorn, except for . . . me—who has never minded roaming dark places—and, as I eventually discover, A—, seated in a lab at a lifeless computer terminal beneath a flickering, half-functioning emergency light, scribbling furiously into a notebook.

I call to her from the door and she speaks though her writing does not cease. Then me, walking toward her, uneven lighting—vaguely strobe-like in effect—playing a game with her form, causing it to appear distant and close at the same time. The silence and darkness of the room magnify my motions to myself. Each forward step resounds in my heart.

As I reach her the writing stops and the notebook casually closes, fevered focus having resolved suddenly into a calm lassitude. A— leans back in her chair, looks at me.

“I see you managed to avoid being evacuated.”

Slight nod but no reply, hints of a secret smile at the corners of her mouth, shadows of dimples deepening in the dimness.

“Robotics, right? Lose any data?”

Then a triumphant smile, a superior smile. “That’s been done for a while. A monkey could program that robot with a loop to move objects.”

Silence and then, “How is your project going?”

Me, looking away, peering toward a dark corner. “I haven’t made it out to Blackwater Creek lately.”

And her, smile fading, eyes focusing, as if coming back from somewhere.

“I’m sorry. I liked her.” “I liked her too.”

Hesitation, as if weighing something, and then the shadow of a nod as she decides. A—flips open the notebook and looks at me. “I’ve been exploring the notion that the physical state on a surface prior to a temporal region might be unconstrained.”

“Time travel.”

Eyes suddenly hard, narrowing, as if challenging me to doubt her. “It hasn’t been proven to be impossible.”

Me, as noncommittal as I might. “Not my area at all, but if it’s true that space is curved and time is relative, then why couldn’t it be possible?”

Relaxing of the eyes and subtle loosening of the mouth. “Precisely, and it’s not so far-fetched if you ignore the stupid books and movies and think about it as physics. It is true one cannot change the past to be different from what it was, since it only occurs once. But it is physical possibility, not logical possibility, that is of interest to me. And insofar as that is concerned, time-travel is consistent with the universal validity of certain fundamental physical laws and with the idea that the physical state on a surface prior to the time travel region be unconstrained. It is perfectly possible that the physical laws obey this condition.”

I offer what I can. “Seems to me the real problem then is the demonstration part of its actuality. But, from what I’ve read, to really give it a shot you’d need to harness a couple supernovas and some negative matter. Not exactly easy lab material to come by.”

Her look does not answer my smile and instead she beckons me closer as she flips through her notebook. When I take up the chair next to her I notice her breath possesses a slight intimation of onions and when our hands inadvertently brush, hers is like a summer hailstone, burning with cold.

On a page littered with red-ink equations she points to a figure containing two spheres on a grid. “It may well turn out there are solutions to the Einstein field equations for the exterior and interior gravitational fields of the light cylinder, and that the exterior gravitational field contains closed time-like lines. The presence of these may indicate the possibility of time travel into the past.”

Closing the notebook, she suddenly seems very tired and gently brings a hand up to her head. When she speaks again it is as one who has attempted to keep hold of an idea that somehow has eluded her. She looks about the room abstractly. “It is hard sometimes to keep it all in mind. I wonder if these ideas are really mine, or are they only a dream? Maybe even someone else’s dream. You’ve heard people say that life is a dream. Where did the dream come from?”

Suddenly it seemed to me as though I had lived my entire life very close to her and when I speak it is very softly. “Sagan believed that time is profoundly resistant to any single definition. It may be that time is like a dream and the unfolding of it that we know is only the dream of our lives.”

She glances down at her notebook, then brings back the hand to run a wayward strand of hair behind her ear. “It’s alright now. What I told you is true.”

“Do you remember Euler’s Identity?”

She considers this for a moment and then a smile slowly forms on her face, until suddenly it breaks open into an abrupt laugh. “Yes, I understand. We do not really know what it means, yet have proved it theoretically. Therefore, we know that it must be the truth.”

Just then that the lights come on: blinding, stabbing, fluorescent light.

Her squinting at me. “That’s precisely why I don’t tell people about what I’m really working on.”

“You told me.”

“That’s because you’re not like the other people in this place.”

Me smiling, rising to go. “I’m not like anybody.”

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B— died alone one spring mid-morning in a single vehicle highway wreck two weeks after I kissed her, running off the road without any cause or reason anyone could determine. Several months later, A— dove head first through an upper floor dormitory window, was withdrawn from school by her parents, and sent away, circumstances equally unfathomable, causes unknown.

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Sitting at my writing desk, morning sun on the back of my neck, dwelling upon those occasions in my life when events have occurred that seemed already familiar—that I already somehow knew. Thinking too that my way of writing is not unlike those occasions: that I am only discovering what I already know. And that I was meant to know it all before. I am a time traveler: my past becomes my destiny in the symbols I set now to paper.

Yet another morning, at my desk, sun on my neck, forming characters slowly, gently, as a calligrapher might, with a black felt-tip pen, careful to afford them their slight leans and rounded curves, attempting to infuse them with warmth:

$$e^{i\pi} + 1 = 0$$

Euler's Identity, the most beautiful equation in math.

Leonhard Euler enrolled at the University of Basel at the age of thirteen and had earned his Master's degree by sixteen. In 1727 Catherine I of Russia invited him to join the faculty of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. In 1735 he lost sight in one eye while working three days straight to establish the answer to a mathematical problem that had taken his colleagues months to solve. He published ninety articles while in Russia, as well as the two-volume book *Mechanica*. In 1741, at the urging of Frederick the Great, Euler moved to the Berlin Academy of Sciences. Over the next quarter century he prepared nearly four hundred papers for publication. In 1766 he returned to St. Petersburg, almost completely blind, yet still working—possessed now of the ability to solve complex calculations entirely in his head.

For all his dedication and accomplishments, he doubted his endeavors. Possessed of the wisdom to remain skeptical of his knowledge, he felt acutely the inevitability and terror of his own fallibility. Writing to a German princess in a letter now lost, he remarked, "We are so liable to suffer ourselves to be dazzled by the senses, and mistake in our reasonings, that the very sources laid open by the Creator for the discovery of truth, very frequently plunge us into error."

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"None of the acceleration options has been shown to do psychosocial damage to gifted students as a group; when effects are noted, they are usually (but not invariably) in a positive direction." – Nancy Robinson

\*

In my waking mind, I hold their images to me. Then I set them down in grass, push away the clouds, and summon the wind to curve round their brows like kisses. If I were a better writer, I would breathe life into these girls. They would play out their lost lives with my words. If I were a better writer, I would summon them from their oblivion and give them to the world.

\*

Poem given to me by B— (Spring 1992)  
For all her learning, the meaning of this eludes her.  
Oak leaves blown across endless fields.  
The succession of lovers who have held her,  
possessed of hands as soft as hers,  
watching as she sleeps with eyes grown weak  
from endless paper trails.  
In dream she wanders empty, lonely places,  
A wayward blizzard of unstable molecules,  
Until a shadow being arrives to gather her,  
Felt more than seen: rough, dirt-stained hands,

As gentle and as warm as the upturned ground in May.

\*

$A + B + C$

Dusty, old unsolved formula housed now solely within the mind of the latter-most variable: a poor mathematician but an avid dreamer. And perhaps something of a sorcerer or a madman, depending on who happens to work the equation.

\*

These two forever young girls, always as they were, watchful and waiting, long gone from the lives of everyone who knew them then, save the one to whom they present themselves at the tail-end of every night. To what purpose, he does not know, sleeping mind considering them in the instant before it awakens to itself. With the arrival of dawn—with a black rooster's crow—their dim watching forms melt into an awareness of morning, yet leave behind in their wake the trace signature of something beyond the world that is also strangely comforting: something like the half-life of a blessing.

## No Turning Back: My Journey with Depression

My two children sent me a digital frame for Mother's Day. They filled it with pictures they had accumulated throughout the years, including ones they had surreptitiously borrowed from my family photo albums. Each picture flashes on and off the screen as quickly as each year begins and ends. Like those passing years, the pictures show my transformation from a smooth-skinned, brown-haired 16-year-old to a 64-year-old with wrinkles and graying hair. Yet, the more I study the photos, the more I realize something else: The forced half-smile of my earlier years has gradually become a full smile that reaches my eyes and brightens my face. The pictures reveal what I have felt but have feared to verbalize: My journey to delete depression from my personal lexicon and dismiss it from my daily life is finally reaching completion.

While the thought of living a depression-free life appeals to me, it also makes me feel like Alice tumbling through the rabbit hole into a foreign world. After all, depression has been my constant companion from the moment I was conceived. My maternal grandmother, an immigrant from Romania, spent her days struggling to raise four children in a country whose customs and language she never learned. My maternal grandfather rarely stayed home; when not traveling to eke out a living as a peddler, he would socialize with his cronies at a park or synagogue. In his later years, widowed and living in a nursing home, he set fire to his leg, his way of showing his inner unhappiness with himself and life. It is no wonder, then, that my mother grew up in a house filled with darkness, even when the sun shone and the curtains were open. Maybe Ma nurtured some dreams as a child, but when her parents refused to send her to college so she could become a teacher, Ma succumbed to a life devoid of dreams and hope.

Ma tried to bring joy and comfort to her husband of 68 years and to my brother and me; she tried her best to give us a dream-filled life. Yet, even Ma, the woman who took charge of the house like a general controlling her troops, could not overcome genetics. She not only gave me her size 10 feet, her fear of dogs, and her love of reading, but she also passed on to me her propensity for depression.

Even as a little girl, I knew I differed from the other kids on the street. I remember feeling heavy – not only in body but also in spirit. Although I did not yet have a vocabulary that included words like depression, I knew that my inner darkness did not just come from my being taller than everyone else. I found it hard to give in to laughter and fun. Something – which I now know as depression – imprisoned me and disabled me.

I preferred to sit in the basement playing with my family of dolls while Ma washed and ironed than going outside and interacting with the real kids on the block. I knew with a certainty that stemmed from my depression that the other kids would tease me for “striking out” in kickball, mock me for failing to keep the hula hoop spinning around my waist, and allow me to remain lost in a game of “hide ‘n seek.” I filled my days and evenings with doll-playing, television-watching with Dad, and canasta games with Grandma. At night, however, long after my bath and reading time had ended, I would awaken, unable to catch my breath. The more I yawned to inhale oxygen, the more I gagged and gasped. Hearing me, one of my parents would rush to my room, gently rub my back, and hold my hand until I fell asleep.

But my parents never took me to a doctor to learn why I spent my days isolated from

peers and my nights fighting the demon who lived inside me. Doctors were for sore throats and aching tummies, not hopelessness and anxiety attacks. Psychiatrists were for those people locked away in some institutionalized cuckoo's nest, not for a little girl who made her bed, respected her elders, and did well in school. My parents did not address my depression because parents of the 1950s and 1960s did not recognize depression as a real disease.

I, therefore, traveled through life earning the kudos of teachers while squelching any opportunity for peer friendships. While the other girls jitterbugged and did the twist, I sat in my room and retyped the notes I had meticulously taken in school that day. I often fantasized about going to a sleepover where girls painted their nails, drooled over movie magazines, and gossiped about the latest couple on "American Bandstand," but my "once upon a time" fantasies never ended "happily ever after" because happiness had no place in my world of self-loathing.

No one, not even the parents and grandmother who loved me, saw that I was sick. Instead, they applauded my report cards and attended the ceremonies that inducted me into National Honor Society and Phi Beta Kappa. When the limousines lined our street to take the others to the prom, they did not think it strange that I sat home behind closed windows and a locked door. "You're a late bloomer," Ma would say. "Your time will come," Dad assured me. Although both my high school and college yearbooks list a plethora of clubs and awards under my name, they are more significant for what they omit: no phone calls from a best friend; no classmates with whom to share a Coke and fries; no memories to exchange at a reunion. I was the invisible girl who trudged through the halls and across the campus. Like a turtle, I buried my head into my neck; I did not want others to see me, and I did not want to see myself.

Perhaps as a young adult, I should have sought professional help. Yet, therapy still had a stigma attached to it. I worried that I would lose my teaching job if my principal heard I was seeing a "head doctor," and I feared my parents would look down on me should I confess to them that I was being counseled. Therefore, I adopted the philosophy of my paternal grandmother, a woman who had lost her husband in the 1918 flu epidemic, endured a second marriage to an alcoholic, and spent years toiling in a grocery store: "Life is about getting out of bed, going about your business, and not complaining."

Following Grandma's advice took its toll. While I never had the skeletal frame of the stereotypical anorexic, I did exhibit anorexic behaviors. Knowing I could not control my sense of hopelessness and despair, I decided to instead control what I ate. During my senior year in high school, I ate only two meals: a hard boiled egg for brunch and a slice of chicken for dinner. Determined to avoid the typical freshman weight gain, I spent my first year of college in a state of dehydration. If I did not drink milk, juice, water, or soda, I would not add liquid pounds to my body. Shortly after giving birth to my second child, I turned to a diet of yogurt and carrot sticks. Food brings joy, but I did not believe I deserved joy; deprivation, then, was the right course for me.

Ma, a woman who believed that one could never be too thin, loved my vanishing body. She bragged about my thinness, my grades, my degrees, and my teaching successes. Dad also complimented me, but his love came unconditionally; I knew he would be there for me even if I ballooned in weight, did not get tenure at my school, or stumbled in any other way. Earning Ma's love, however, not only required more effort but also motivated me to mirror my life after hers. For 41 years, Ma worked at a children's furniture store. Because the store gave her a sense of worth she could not find in herself or in her personal life, she allowed it to consume her time and energy. I, too, devoted myself to my students, leaving little time for my children and potential friends.

Genetics, then, planted the seed of depression within me, but my choices, rooted in my need for Ma's love and approval, watered and nurtured that seed. That need lay behind every decision I made, including the one to do what society and Ma expected of me: get married. I pursued one man – not because I liked or respected him, but because he was slightly taller than I. With my arm tucked into my Dad's, I walked down an aisle strewn with rose petals; with my new husband next to me, I again walked that aisle, but this time I felt as if I were trampling on shards of broken glass. Those in attendance smiled at me, the glowing bride, but I knew this marriage was doomed to failure. Not only did my husband have to deal with his own issues, but once I tossed my bouquet, I returned to what I was: a woman with depression. After two children and thirteen years of wedded bleakness, I became a statistic – a divorced woman and single mother.

Like many divorced women of the late 1980s, I placed personal ads in the paper, asked colleagues to fix me up, and tried to live the teenage life I had not ever experienced. I put on make-up, bought new clothes, and flirted with men both married and single. Yet, constantly playing the role of happy divorcee depleted me. No matter what façade I presented to others, my children always saw me as the mother who rarely laughed or relaxed.

My son and daughter, therefore, were the primary victims of my depression. During a Disney World vacation, I remember abandoning them to their father, sitting alone on Main Street, and sobbing as the Disney characters paraded by. I felt threatened by the happiness of the Magic Kingdom. I prolonged every school day for my children by forcing them to spend hours creating perfect projects and error-free homework assignments. I violated their privacy by invading their rooms and discarding stuff I thought they did not need. As I drove them to a classmate's house to play, I complained about my tiredness, and I voiced my resentment of this chauffeuring chore.

My depression also caused me to physically isolate myself from my children. I erected an invisible shield between them and me. I got the idea from a toothpaste commercial I saw as a child: Use this toothpaste and you will create a shield between you and decay. I hid behind my shield, guarding myself from the decay ready to attack me. When I got really down, I refused to even talk to my children; I literally lay in the fetal position on my bed in order to make myself as small and as invisible as possible. My children, products of a generation that saw therapy as healthy, begged me to “see someone.” I refused, unwilling to admit I had a problem.

My children got angry at me, and I got angry at myself. I wanted to smash my fists through my invisible shield and cause my hands to bleed. I wanted to fall down the escalator at the mall or wreck my car like Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. I never took pills or sat in a garage with the motor running, but I did want my pain to end.

Like Ma, I rarely looked in a mirror. When I did, I saw what she saw: a woman who went through the motions but who gave up the right to happiness – even the right to pursue happiness – a long time ago.

Then, March 21, 2007, Ma died. When Dad asked me to write and give the eulogy at her funeral, I spent many hours sitting at my computer, searching for the perfect words and memories that would capture Ma's vitality and feistiness, not her darkness and despair. As I reflected, I could not help but envision the day when my son or daughter might be writing my eulogy. I did not want my children to remember me as a prisoner of depression. I also did not want my daughter, an adult who deals with her own demons, to feel that she is doomed to repeat the life of her grandmother and mother. No matter how much I blamed Ma for giving me depression and no matter how much I blamed myself for passing it to my daughter, I suddenly realized that I needed to act before I ran out of time. My desire to become a positive role model for my children and to leave them a strong legacy became my motivation to take the necessary steps to change. To implement this internal transformation, I turned to what I know best: teaching. This time, however, my students would not consist of the sixth and eighth graders with whom I spent two decades, and the curriculum would not focus on the magic of reading and writing. Instead, I would be my sole student, and my course of study would be *Defeating Depression 101*.

I have devoted the past four years to teaching myself how to be happy. Knowing I needed a jumpstart, I finally agreed to a regimen of medication that I should have begun years ago. I convinced myself that an anti-depressant is not a sign of weakness but rather a symbol of self-awareness. I also entered into therapy on a regular basis.

As a teacher, I always encouraged my students to keep a journal. After Ma's funeral, I bought a journal with a daffodil-yellow cover and a sun smiling in the upper right corner. Every morning I give myself the same assignment: Write three positive goals you hope to accomplish today. I end every day by recording three happy things that occurred during the day. Sometimes I write about spending five minutes in front of the mirror without having to turn away; other times I describe a walk to the library or the joy at finding the newest Philippa Gregory or Alexander McCall Smith book on the shelf. The subject of my journal entry matters less than its positive tone and focus.

I also find time during every day to "gift" myself by listening to music on my iPod, walking the treadmill at the gym, indulging in an ice cream cone, or taking a nap. I have tentatively entered society by establishing friendships with women who share my single status and interest in movies and theatre. I warn myself about jeopardizing these relationships by returning to my old habits of jealousy and insecurity. When I feel myself donning the familiar cloak of depression, I ask myself two questions: Aren't you tired of living in darkness? Don't you want better for your children? My answers energize me to turn to the light.

Like all educational situations, my learning is a process that often finds me taking two steps forward and three steps backward. It is one thing to promise myself I will change, but it is another thing to do it – to rid myself of a companion who has shadowed me for six decades and to develop healthier ways to deal with both old and new problems. Like any addict, I experience moments of such intense frustration that I just want to return to who I have always been: a person who finds familiarity and comfort in depression. Yet, when I handle an upsetting call from one of my children without reacting with "doom and gloom" or when I deal with my 95-year-old father's spinal stenosis pain without wringing my hands in despair, I soar like a bird that has been freed from its cage. I allow myself to believe that the past does not have to determine my future. I am not Ma, and I do not have to follow her path.

I lie in bed every night, watching the digital frame flash its pictures. The ones of Ma sadden me because I can clearly see the pain that clouded her eyes like cataracts. It is too late for her to live a life filled with more than fleeting moments of happiness, but it is not too late for me – or my children. No matter how difficult my journey towards happiness becomes, I will continue to move forward. Returning to depression is no longer an option.



## Aunt Lucy

I had a fat aunt. She'd been plump all her life, so when I first met her she was already fat. I loved her even more than I loved Dad, whom I loved more than Mom.

My first memory of Aunt Lucy is of her robust figure draped in a billowing gown checkered in red and black, as she towered over me, a skimpy four-year old. She wraps her arms around me, and pulls me into her bosom. I breathe in the warm odor of stale sweat and garlic, with hints of lily of the valley and fresh nail polish. We have arrived at her tiny walk-up studio, which she shares with my Grandma Maria, for a customary Sunday family dinner. My heart is pounding from climbing five flights of stairs. My limbs are frozen, yet my back is sweating in my shuba, a sad-looking hand-me-down, fake-fur coat. Aunt Lucy's big soft hands, impeccably manicured in scarlet, untie the many folds of my mother's downy gray scarf wrapped around my shoulders and bundled up to my eyes. She lifts me from my valenki, the gray felt boots with black gashos, and sets me free from the shuba.

"Oh, let me take a look at you, my kitten," she murmurs, kissing me on the cheek. She steps back to size me up, her lips making the customary "tsk, tsk, tsk" sound of a Russian relative admiring the offspring. As she shakes her head at me in wonder, the plastic rollers in her perm shake, too. She smiles, and I see one golden tooth in the row of white ones, which I had always thought real. She draws me back in. If I was freezing a moment before, I don't recall it. I melt in the warm folds of her stomach, press my cheek against her giant soft breasts, and forget about the fight with my sister on the way over.

Aunt Lucy loved me more than she loved my big sister. She never told me this but I knew. That meant I was aunt Lucy's favorite person in the world, as she never married or had kids. Perhaps she loved her own sister Svetlana, my mother, more than me, but I wouldn't find out until after my mother's death. At four, my small big heart was certain that love for a grown-up could never be as strong as love for a child, because adults argued often and slammed doors and told lies – at least in other families they did. With kids, adults were soft and kind, especially with other people's little kids.

After Aunt Lucy's mother and sister died, she grew from fat to obese, spent a decade locked up in her fifth floor walk-up apartment, staring out the window, always eating and talking to herself, and died alone in her sleep. But that was later.

On the wall above her couch, which was covered with dusty quilts and half a dozen pillows, hung a black and white photo of a semi-nude young woman. She sat with her bare back to us on a river's bank, her head turned just enough to see her face in semi-profile, holding field flowers to cover her naked breasts. Her thick flowing hair reached to where the back met the buttocks in a voluptuous curve; her eyes half closed, looking at the small bouquet. The picture, so serene and melancholy, always struck me as being out of place in Aunt Lucy's small colorful apartment, with its maroon wallpaper embossed with golden flowers, a crystal chandelier dimmed by a decade of dust, and her own rapturous laughter that broke out as often and unexpectedly as a summer thunderstorm.

When I was about ten, Aunt Lucy told me that the woman in the picture was she at the age of 25. I wondered why a plump woman would allow anyone to photograph her topless. I didn't ask who had taken the picture or on what occasion. The only question I had then was whether she was naked from the waist down, too. Because if she was, what would that mean? What was she doing nude on the river? I thought of consulting a friend from school who claimed to know what

people did while naked, other than taking a shower, but never did. It was through that picture that I learned my aunt Lucy had been plump, and pretty, before she grew fat.

For my fifteenth birthday, when she herself was getting on in years, approaching 50, she gave me a customary greeting card embossed with S Dnem Rozhdeniya in gold italics, inscribed with best wishes from Aunt Lucy: grow big and smart, be a joy to my parents and the rest of the family, be the top student in school. And then there was a new message: be careful with boys.

I was still a virgin then and wondered why she had to mention boys: I'd never even been kissed by one. Of course there was the best athlete in school, two years older and two heads taller, who always flirted with me. I remember his dark brown eyes undressing me during our only walk home together. I'd been dying to kiss him. We walked and held hands, and I kept looking at his lips, missing what they were saying, only wondering if they'd be as soft as they looked. I remember licking my own. When we reached my apartment building and stood at the entrance, trying to pretend the urine we smelled was that of cats and not of the drunks that frequented our building's backyard, I turned my face up so that his lips could descend on mine, but he only smiled and wished me a good night. Perhaps the boys I was interested in were already careful with girls, so I had nothing to worry about.

Inside the birthday card was a 20-ruble note, a small fortune: about a quarter of her monthly salary as a librarian at the Public Library of Vasileostrovsky District in Leningrad. I hugged Aunt Lucy so hard she said I might break her neck, but she knew what the money meant to me – I could buy new shoes just in time for the summer, instead of wearing out my sister's half-dead flats, a decade old and grey brown instead of the original maroon. My sister had gotten married the year before, and left all of the things she no longer needed behind. We had the same shoe size even then, and my parents reasoned that no money should be wasted on such a frivolity as another pair of shoes.

When I turned 18 and finished my first year of an engineering school with all "As" and one "B" for organic chemistry, she wrote me another birthday card; same golden italics, same warm wishes. This time, there was no money or mention of boys, as she must have thought I'd made good grades in that area too. She wouldn't have believed that her spunky niece was still a virgin then, albeit one ready to give up that precious status if an opportunity with a tall and smart enough guy presented itself. She gave me her golden earrings instead.

I remember opening a small black box, tied with a dark blue ribbon, wondering what I might find inside, as I knew she had no money for jewelry. On the silk square sat a pair of diamond studs. I'd never seen her wear them before, yet knew instantly, from the way she gave the box to me, her hands trembling, eyes misty, that they were her heart's jewel.

"Oh, how beautiful," I said. "Are they yours? How come I've never seen them?" My lips were dry and all questions became superfluous and unimportant. I felt that Aunt Lucy was bestowing upon me one of her true treasures, the significance of which I couldn't grasp and wouldn't understand for years. I didn't know what to say.

"My ears are not even pierced," I said, feeling dumb.

"You're eighteen now," she said. "You no longer have to ask your mother's permission to have it done."

"Does it hurt?"

"Like a mosquito bite," she said. "I can go with you if you want."

"But are you sure?" I placed them on my right palm. "They're so beautiful. You must love them."

"I do. But I love you even more," she said.

I knew that. But I also wished I had asked more questions. There must have been a story attached to the earrings. A nervous vibration traveled from the pit of my stomach up to my throat and I shivered as if chilled by a sudden burst of icy wind. A story that might hold secrets I didn't have to know. I hugged Aunt Lucy, as I always had, burying my face into the folds of her fat body,

and whispered, "Thank you. I love you even more, too."

When I fell in love with a musician I knew my parents wouldn't approve of, it was Aunt Lucy who received the honor of meeting him. The world twirled around me and Alex and I didn't want the magic stopped by my parents' questions. I knew that Lucy wouldn't ask any, just treat us to some borsch and tea, share the wine we brought along and perhaps tell us stories. That was my biggest wish when we climbed the five flights to her apartment on a Sunday afternoon in June of 1992.

Aunt Lucy opened the door in a wide swing. She was well-prepared: a new white-silk embroidered shirt billowing over her giant breasts, a dark blue skirt tightly hugging her massive hips, and a freshly done perm. How did she know this meeting was so important to me? Even I didn't know. I had only mentioned that I'd be bringing a guy over for a cup of tea. Perhaps she knew about men more than she let on, and I'd reached the age – 21 – when she could start sharing.

"Welcome, welcome, my kittens," she murmured, smiling at me and hugging me with all her might.

"You must be Alex," she said, sizing up the man I considered my boyfriend, despite his never telling me so. "Look, she picked one shorter than herself! Who'd believe it? Must be good in other departments!" Her laughter rolled and cracked. "Come on in, I made borsch."

I couldn't believe my ears, yet Alex joined in, his laughter contagious and rapturous, as he tiptoed – to look taller? – into the living room.

"This is for you," he said, handing Aunt Lucy a bottle of red wine and a box of chocolates, unable to stop laughing. Her eyes glistened with pleasure yet she darted a quick look at me – we'd never shared wine before without my parents being present. I knew she was seeing me graduate into her world, and was grateful.

After we devoured the borsch and had enough wine flowing in our veins, she announced she needed a smoke. I had guessed she was a smoker, but she'd never acknowledged it or smoked in my presence. Alex offered her a cigarette from his pack of Camels, and she took one, her eyes darting "from the corner of her eye, to her nose, to the subject (Alex)", as she'd once instructed me was the proper way to flirt with boys. I hadn't used the advice, but watching her in action, remembered it for the rest of my life. 24-year-old Alex was flirting back with my aunt, a 55 year-old fat woman!

"Fancy, aren't we?" she said to him while looking at me, and put away her own pack of unfiltered Belomor. They walked into the kitchen, opened the window and stood there side by side, her massive behind almost touching Alex's, their heads outside, the smoke unfurling above them like the curls of a fairy. Back in the room, Aunt Lucy pulled out a few black and white photographs from her dresser and spread them on the table.

"This is the guy I once brought to meet my aunt," she said. "His name was also Alex." A young man looked at us, chiseled cheekbones, sad eyes, bushy eyebrows, his expression solemn and serious, the one people wear in black and white photos taken in Soviet photo ateliers. "He's the one who took that picture." She pointed to the photograph on the wall above the couch.

"Is he the one who gave you the earrings, too?" I asked.

"Of course."

"What happened?"

"It was a long time ago."

She gathered up the pictures, her eyes misty, and locked them back in the dresser. Alex excused himself. I wanted to hug Aunt Lucy, but felt that it would ruin her moment of reconnecting with her Alex. I poured her more wine and she gulped it.

"I like your guy," she said, looking away from me. "But he won't be faithful. I can see it in his eyes."

She was right, of course. But how did she know? Was her Alex the same way?

\* \* \*

Ten years later, she died alone in her sleep, on a hospital-style water-resistant bed. A visiting nurse that I had hired told me over the phone. I was in New York, eight-month pregnant with my first child. I cried soundlessly, so that nobody at work would see, as I begged a police officer on the other end of the line, in Aunt Lucy's room, not to seal her apartment. He agreed.

I arranged the funeral. Nobody came to her cremation except for my father. Aunt Lucy's two life-long girlfriends must have chosen a weekend at their dachas in Vsevolozhsk instead of witnessing a fat body reduced to grey powder. My sister said she couldn't cut her vacation short.

I came to Russia to collect the urn with her ashes a year later, in June, during the White Nights, Aunt Lucy's favorite time to sit by the open window in her kitchen...

The air in the crematorium's dim storage room, stale and cold, made me shiver as I reached for a tin box on the top shelf, second from the left. As I held the cold box with numbers corresponding to her death certificate, I wondered if the ashes inside were Aunt Lucy's or everyone else's cremated on that day. I buried the urn next to my Mom's grave, which had turned into a jungle of weeds since my previous visit.

When I came to tidy Aunt Lucy's apartment, I found the key to the dresser in its old place, the top right drawer of her vanity set. When I opened the drawer, a pile of old pictures fell out, Aunt Lucy and Mom as girls, Aunt Lucy with Alex, Mom's wedding, my sister and me.

On the back of Alex's portrait that she'd shown us, the dates read: 1937 – 1965. I didn't touch a stack of letters tied with a coarse brown thread, all addressed to her in calligraphic handwriting. I opened her journal instead. Her Alex died in a plane crash the week before their wedding, at age 28. A yellowed newspaper article, one paragraph long, stated that Alexander Gordon, a pilot for the Leningrad Navy Guard, engaged to be married to Ludmila Trevinsky, had died during a training exercise. His body was never recovered.

I went up to a window and lit one of her Belomor unfiltered cigarettes, instantly choking. When the coughing fit passed, I looked out the window as Aunt Lucy had done ten years earlier, standing next to my Alex, perhaps thinking of her Alex who had left her an unmarried widow. I had so many questions. How did they meet? Was he a good lover? Did he play guitar when she sang? What would I do if my fiancé died?

Who had first abandoned her? I wondered. Her fiancé? He didn't mean it, of course. Was it then that she grew obese? Or when her mom and sister died? Or when she retired? I couldn't remember. I abandoned her, too.

I pictured her alone, in this small apartment: the faded wallpaper, the phone that hardly rang, the TV on mute spitting out soap operas, the stairs leading to fresh air but no longer obeying her heavy steps. I could see her sitting in the kitchen, chewing on a piece of bulka with bologna, mumbling: "The only thing I understand is that I don't understand." She had every right to let her body take over her soul. What else could she do? Jump out this window? I looked down. Two girls, age six or so, played school on the pavement washed clean by recent rain.

I returned to the room and noticed a flat white box hidden behind her vanity set, which I'd never seen before. As I opened it, a cellophane bag fell out, filled with a few clean clothes. The note read: "Whoever will read this... When my time comes, please don't cremate my body. I'd like to be buried intact, as a true Christian, next to my mother and sister. This is my last wish."

Signed, "Ludmila Trevinsky. June, 1992."

I folded the clothes and put them back in the box. I took her last note, the letters and the journal. "Forgive me," I said to the black-and-white photo above the couch, smearing the tears with my sleeve. I then took it, too.

I had a long flight back to New York. This time, Aunt Lucy went with me.

## Roots: A Foundation of Identity

Skin: any integumentary covering, casing, outer coating, or surface layer, as an investing membrane, the rind or peel of fruit, or a film on liquid.

As human beings we possess different layers of skin and we are judged by that skin. First on the list is the type of clothing we wear, second comes the layer of epithelial cells that we are covered with entirely, and lastly is the “skin” that nobody sees with their eyes, but still perceives through every other sense. This layer can be better defined as our personality, traits that are molded and characterized by our environments. Our skin is like a canvas of our lives. At each stage of this journey our skin radiates a different story, or perhaps the first is just expanded. Amongst the passage of time, different scars, scents, tones and perhaps different pieces of art accumulate on our bodies and different experiences pile onto our inner skin, the soul. All these traits come together to build something so beautiful and unique, something nobody can take away: our identity.

Although my parents immigrated to the United States about 32 years ago, my identity begins in a small town and farm in Jálisco, México. Santa María del Oro, my father’s home town and la Mesa Prieta, the farm on which my mother was raised. My father’s family didn’t have much money, but they were of good social standing in his town. He crossed the Mexican-American border several times making year long trips to the United States to work. He labored long hours in different factories just to gather money to send to his incredibly large family. On his trips back to México, He helped my grandfather tend the cattle and crops. It wasn’t an easy life.

On the other hand, my mother’s family was dirt poor. They lived in a little shack in La Mesa, a farm which wasn’t even their own. Even though the chance of doing anything great with her life was slim to none, my mother did anything and everything she could to alleviate her eleven member family’s needs. She taught herself to make clothes and repair her own shoes; it was necessary since she only received a new pair once a year, if she was lucky.

I like to say my parents past is the beginning of my personal roadmap because they have so much influence on my character and not only that, but it wasn’t for this country, I could have simply said goodbye to my first language, my favorite artists, favorite foods and favorite colors. Born and raised in the Chicagoland area, I was raised into solely Mexican traditions; I don’t even think I knew how to speak English until I was four. Mariachi and banda was what I came into this world listening to and it will probably be the last thing I listen to before I die. I can remember my sister giving me a bath in the pink bathroom in our Cicero home, and together we would sing “Tristes Recuerdos” by Antonio Aguilar, at the tops of our lungs. It was like singing praise to one of México’s greatest musical legends. The feeling of music notes filling our lungs became more profound on our trips down to México.

The drive usually took about three days, but every “tick” of our digital clock was appreciated. My first few trips felt as though I was exploring a whole new world, one where to use toilet paper at the gas station you were charged two pesos (for five little sheets). This is a place where besides the dessert and the dirty public restrooms, everything was vibrant: the scorching sun, the blue agave fields, the hand stitched clothes, the papaya red and yellow homes and even the enchilada dishes looked artistic.

Upon returning from my vacations my skin had a glow no other place could bring. It radiated happiness, nature, family. It smelled of queso Cotija (what I like to call “foot cheese” due to its strange smell) and dirt. As unattractive as it all sounds, it’s a scent I long to smell. I assume

it's just a connection between yearning and something concrete. Since it has come to be a great expense to visit one of my great loves, I try to embrace it any way I can. My favorite and most convenient way is through my belly. I sprinkle some of our "foot cheese" on almost all our dishes. By rule, I will not eat beans if I don't have any cheese. Since my mom knows how much México means to me, whenever she goes to visit my abuelita, she brings me back an authentic dress or shirt. Sometimes she even brings me some big hoop earrings to complete the outfit. Last time she was there she brought me back a white manta fabric dress with papaya pink, hand embroidered flowers. I remember an instance when my friends and I were sitting around the kitchen table and one of them told me she had been exploring my Facebook page. I have a few older pictures, some in which I embrace my Mexican heritage and look completely different than I normally do at school. Jokingly, but hurtfully, she said I looked like I had just jumped over the border. What she didn't know was that it wasn't by any means an accident.

In reality I have only been in México a grand total of about six months in my life, but just like a tree's body is hundreds of feet above the ground, its roots still remain below the earth, anchoring the tree in place. America is a melting pot, and in some ways I can't say it's a good thing. Some people forget about their ancestor's culture and ways. I say this because I have had friends who don't speak a word of Spanish. A couple years ago I was babysitting this little boy, I always forget his name so I call him Chulo. I spoke to him in English the whole time he was here, but it never crossed my mind he didn't speak Spanish. When Esperanza, his mom, came to get him I noticed something a little strange. She spoke to him in Spanish, yet he responded to her in English. I asked if he spoke both languages and to my surprise she said, "Yes, but he doesn't like speaking Spanish." The little boy was three years old then.

Not only am I proud of my Mexican heritage, I am also very thankful and proud to be an American. There are so many things I would never have had, had I been born and raised in México like my mother. Not only material things, but the freedom of being equal to a man, the liberty of not having to cook and clean just because I am a woman and the right to an education. I could have very well been like mother and only received three months worth of schooling. However, I now attend Lewis University and have the opportunity of doing something great with my future. It is my obligation to thank my parents for giving me the ability to live a different life than they did at my age. I can't imagine what my life would be like if I had to live like they did, but knowing what they and their families endured gives me a sense of humility as well as a sense of pride.

We may move to Italy or France and completely change the way we live, but it doesn't mean we changed our identity. People may read us a certain way and we may feel different than we did a year ago, but our past remains and no matter how much we try to fight it off, it still shapes our identity, our character, our way of life.

# Review



## Poetry Review: *The Chameleon Couch* by Yusef Komunyakaa

*The Chameleon Couch* by Yusef Komunyakaa  
Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2011. \$24.00

Review by Mary Egan

Yusef Komunyakaa's latest poetry collection, *The Chameleon Couch*, reads, at times, like a piece of jazz music in several movements. Each section has its own timbre and rhythm that propel the reader through poem after poem, each reading like their own miniature symphony of images and wordplay that challenge readers to reconsider the world around them. In addition, Komunyakaa is a master of weaving the past and future together in an abundance of images that make readers forget the division between what happened and what is to come.

While traveling through ancient times and recent decades, readers of *The Chameleon Couch* will find themselves transported around the world as well. Komunyakaa takes us from the enchanting and lush to the urban and gritty with ease. From a "leafy pagoda" in "A Translation of Silk" to "the smoke of the Chicago B.L.U.E.S. club" in "Canticle," Komunyakaa melds setting with message. With just one line, one suggestion of an image, Komunyakaa places us where we need to be to experience his poetry with all the depth and emotional impact that he intended. When, in "Dead Reckoning," he calls us to the sea with the lines "out among the tall waves where/freshwater meets a salty calmness" we can practically smell the salty air.

Komunyakaa's first section opens with "Canticle," a poem that sets the stage for the rest of the collection. "Canticle" encompasses many of the elements throughout the book such as romantic relationships, images of the natural world, and a vein of urban grit. His first section is rife with poems that force readers to consider their identity, ("The Story of a Coat") and contemplate the world in a more whimsical way ("A Translation of Silk"). In the former, Komunyakaa says he is "American as music made of harmony and malice" and we walk away wondering about how we fit into a nation with equal parts opportunity and disappointment.

Two poems in this first section also showcase Komunyakaa's juxtaposition of the past and present. In "The Story of a Coat," he employs images such as "his Cincinnati laugh," "the heat of the pizza parlor," and "the young James Dean" to place readers in the quintessential American locale. These images will likely lead readers to the city streets of America at a time when our identity as a nation was being explored and stretched — hence the inclusion of James Dean. These images, while fitting the grit of American identity being examined in the poem, also put readers in a mindset for contemporary society.

Contemporary locales are quickly melded with antiquity, though, as readers flip to "Ode to the Chameleon." It is fitting that the color-changing reptile is mentioned in the title of this poem as well as the title of this book because the poem represents, in a way, the collection's blending of times and ideas. The chameleon is presented as "clearly prehistoric and futuristic," thus, the animal epitomizes the perfect poetic mascot for Komunyakaa's book. The use of the chameleon could also be an analogy for the way in which Komunyakaa's poetry flips between the ancient and the modern, his images shapeshifting and metaphorically changing color to dovetail with each shifting era about which he's writing.

The second part of this book brings in intriguing elements of narrative poetry ("Memory of the Murdered Professors at the Jagiellonian") and surprises readers by considering the correlation between Jewish persecution and African-American suffering ("Poppies"). This section

accentuates oppression and the suffering that humans have endured throughout the centuries. If the first section of Komunyakaa's book is an exploration of the relationship between past and present, the second section focuses on hardships that people have endured. This is evidenced by titles that include the concepts of war, murder, Hades, dementia, and crucifixion.

Though the second section's theme somewhat deviates from the first section, elements of the past-present collision are still apparent. The section's opening poem, "Aubade at Hotel Copernicus" combines many elements of history within its lines, jumping from "Chopin's piano" to "Copernicus's heavenly bodies," to "Galileo's trial." Several poems later in "Poppies," Komunyakaa recalls images of 1940's Germany. He speaks of "Hungarian gypsies," "German storm troopers," and "Auschwitz," again creating an unmistakable portrait of WWII Europe in this poem.

What is intriguing about these two poems is that they both have such vivid, historical settings and both focus on similar elements of danger. In "Aubade at Hotel Copernicus," Komunyakaa tells the tale of a couple on the run in "a city/gutted by war & torn down to stone clouds." In "Poppies," the speaker tells of a woman on the run from the Nazis. The inclusion of these similar dangers in both poems that parallel one another, though one occurs in the 15th century and the other in the 20th century, serves to remind us how terror encroaches across centuries.

Komunyakaa's third and final section opens itself up with a sketched image reminiscent of Greek or Roman gods and goddesses. A plump figure rests upon a throne seemingly created by the figure's subjects. Indeed, this ancient theme bleeds into Komunyakaa's poems in this section with the image of "the clear waters of the Arno" that remind us of ancient Rome and "the powdered faces of the rich" that call upon Victorian society. Don't be fooled though, because the more modern themes of Komunyakaa's poetry quickly return with the surprising cameo from "Dallas, Jeopardy,/& Falcon Crest" and "Mercury & Pan" are placed on Fifth Avenue.

The blending of past and present that is pervasive throughout *The Chameleon Couch* functions as a reminder of our roots, a calling for readers to look within themselves and see influences that date back to the time of Caesar. When he speaks of hardship in this time transcendent way, it's almost comforting to realize that people throughout history have dealt with danger, feelings of uncertainty, and the loss of love.

Overall, *The Chameleon Couch* by Yusef Komunyakaa is an intriguing read full of historical references that create a sense of place and images that make each poem a sensory, if sometimes disturbing, experience. Komunyakaa's work will challenge readers to think about the space they occupy, not only in their own lives, but in history.

# Biographies

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## Poetry

### Carol Berg

Carol Berg's poems are forthcoming or in *Weave*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *qarrtsiluni*, *blossombones*, and elsewhere. Two chapbooks, *Ophelia Unraveling* (dancing girl press), and *Small Portrait and the Woman Holding A Flood In Her Mouth* (Binge Press), are forthcoming.

### Jan Bottiglieri

Jan Bottiglieri is a freelance writer and an associate editor for the literary journal *RHINO*. She lives in Schaumburg, Illinois, and has an MFA in poetry from Pacific University. A few previous publications include poems in *Margie*, *Court Green*, *After Hours*, *Cloudbank*, and *Pearl*.

### John F. Buckley

John F. Buckley lives in Orange County, California. His work has been published in a number of places, one of which nominated him for a Pushcart Prize in 2009. His chapbook *Breach Birth* was published by Propaganda Press in March, 2011.

### Lisa Ciccarello

Lisa Ciccarello's poems have appeared in *H\_NGM\_N*, *Saltgrass*, *Sixth Finch*, *elimae*, *Anti-*, *Poor Claudia*, & *Corduroy Mtn.*, among others. She is the author of two chapbooks: *At night* (Scantily Clad Press, 2009) & *Atnight, the dead* (Blood Pudding Press, 2009).

### Lisa Cihlar

Lisa J. Cihlar's poems have been published in *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Green Mountains Review*, *In Posse Review*, *Bluestem*, and *The Prose-Poem Project*. One of her poems was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She lives in rural Southern Wisconsin.

### Maryellen Davis Collet

Maryellen Davis Collett is an Associate Professor of Theology at Lewis University. She has been writing poetry since childhood. She lives in the Lincoln Square neighborhood of Chicago with her husband, Keith, and baby daughter, Maya Marie.

### Chelsea DeRose

### Maureen Foley

Maureen Foley is a writer, artist and teacher. Her writing has been published in *Caesura*, *Skanky Possum*, *Bombay Gin* and elsewhere. Her freelance journalism has appeared in the *The New York Times*, *Wired*, *Santa Barbara Magazine*, *Destination Wine Country* and others. In 2002, her collection of poems, *Epileptic*, was published by Dead Metaphor Press as winner of the Chapbook Award. She also received an MFA from Naropa University. This year, *Urban Velo and Boneshaker: A Bicycling Almanac* are publishing two excerpts from her memoir manuscript, *Smidge and Space Go West: A Bicycling Adventure*. She currently lives on an avocado ranch in Southern California with her husband, writer James Claffey, and their cattle dog, Rua.

### Ray Gonzalez

Ray Gonzalez is the author of numerous books of poetry, including five from *BOA Editions*—*The Heat of Arrivals* (1997 PEN/Oakland Josephine Miles Book Award), *Cabato Sentora* (2000 Minnesota Book Award Finalist), *The Hawk Temple at Tierra Grande* (winner of a 2003 Minnesota Book Award for Poetry) and *Consideration of the Guitar: New and Selected Poems* (2005). *Turtle Pictures* (University of Arizona Press, 2000), a mixed-genre text, received the 2001 Minnesota Book Award for Poetry. His poetry has appeared in the 1999, 2000, and 2003 editions of *The Best*

*American Poetry* (Scribners) and *The Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses 2000* (Pushcart Press). He is also the author of three collections of essays, *The Underground Heart: A Return to a Hidden Landscape* (Arizona, 2002), *Memory Fever* (University of Arizona Press, 1999), and *Renaming the Earth: Personal Essays* (Arizona, 2008). He is the editor of twelve anthologies, most recently *Sudden Fiction Latino: Short Short Stories from the U.S. and Latin America* (W.W. Norton). He has served as Poetry Editor of *The Bloomsbury Review* for thirty years and founded *LUNA*, a poetry journal, in 1998. He is Full Professor and the Director of the MFA Creative Writing Program at The University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

### **Rebecca Hazelton**

Rebecca Hazelton attended The University of Notre Dame for her MFA, and completed her PhD at Florida State University. She has received fellowships from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Creative Writing Institute and Vermont Studio Center. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Agni*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Southern Review*, and others.

### **Jessie Janeshek**

Jessie Janeshek's first book of poems is *Invisible Mink* (Iris Press, 2010). The 2011-2012 Renner Visiting Scholar/Assistant Professor of English at Bethany College in Bethany, WV, she teaches writing and American literature. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville and an M.F.A. from Emerson College. In 2008, she co-edited the literary anthology *Outscape: Writings on Fences and Frontiers* (KWG Press).

### **Meg Johnson**

Meg Johnson's poems have appeared in *Slipstream Magazine*, *Word Riot*, *WTF PWM*, *Blood Lotus*, *Camroc Press Review*, and others. Her poem "Free Samples" was nominated for Best of the Net. She is currently a poetry student in the NEOMFA Program, a teaching assistant at the University of Akron, and the poetry editor for *Rubbertop Review*. Prior to this, Meg worked for many years as a dancer, choreographer, dance teacher, and actress.

### **Stephanie Johnson**

Stephanie N. Johnson's first book of poems, *Kinesthesia*, was published in 2010 by New Rivers Press. Her writing is inspired by the multitude of ways that humans commune/communicate with the natural world. Stephanie's poems have appeared in *AGNI*, *Borderlands*, *BPJ*, *Dislocate*, *Massachusetts Review* and elsewhere. Stephanie currently lives in northern New Mexico with her husband and two daughters.

### **Nathan Kemp**

Nathan Kemp is a senior at The University of Akron, located in Akron, Ohio, where he focuses on creative writing. Outside of his academic pursuits, he has participated in two internships, one with Black Lawrence Press and one with The University of Akron Press. After graduation, Nathan plans to attend an MFA program specializing in poetry.

### **Jennifer Litt**

Jennifer Litt teaches writing at Saint John Fisher and Monroe Community Colleges and is the sole proprietor of Jennifer Litt Writing Services ([www.jenniferlitt.com](http://www.jenniferlitt.com)). Her poetry has appeared in *HazMat Review*, *Lake Affect magazine*, *Mixed Fruit* and will be included in Accent Publishing's short poem anthology. She lives in Rochester, New York.

### **Allie Marini**

Allie Marini first started kicking ass in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. She is a 2001 alumna of New College

of Florida, which means she can explain deconstructionism, but cannot perform simple math. Her work has appeared in *Goulash!* (1996), *Pan' Ku* (1999), *New CollAge* (2001), *Scratch* (2008), *Penumbra* (2009), *Crash* (2010), *Shaking Like A Mountain* (2010), *Multi-Culti Mixerations* (2010), *A Daughter's Story Anthology*, (2010), *Eyrie*, (2010) and *Interrobang?!* (2010). She has lived all over Florida and Washington State. She calls Tallahassee home and is a research writer and sometime-hairdresser when she isn't writing. She will start her MFA degree in Creative Writing at Antioch in 2012 and is waiting to see where life will take her.

### **George Miller**

George David Miller is a teacher, writer, and philosopher. He is currently Professor & Chair of the Philosophy Department at Lewis University and Education Director of Chicago Slam Works.

### **Eric Morris**

Eric Morris teaches writing at The University of Akron and serves as a poetry editor for *Barn Owl Review*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Pank*, *Post Road*, *The Collagist*, *Anti-*, *Devil's Lake*, *Weave*, *Redactions*, and others. He lives and writes in Akron, OH where he searches (mostly in vain) for a way to lift the curse of Cleveland sports.

### **Bryan Murray**

Bryan C. Murray, poet, graduate of Virginia Tech's MFA program, 2010 winner of the Emily Morrison Prize for Poetry, born and raised in the Bronx, New York, has recently published with *GUD*, *The Northville Review*, *The Legendary* and *Sou'wester*. Bryan also recently started a blog.

### **Daniela Olszewska & Carol Guess**

Daniela Olszewska is the author of two full-length collections of poetry, *Citizen J* (Artifice Books, forthcoming) and *cloudfang : : cakedirt* (Horse Less Press, forthcoming). She sits on Switchback Books' Board of Directors and serves as Associate Poetry Editor of *H\_NGM\_N*.

Carol Guess is the author of numerous books of poetry and prose, including *Tinderbox Lawn* (Rose Metal Press) and *Doll Studies: Forensics* (Black Lawrence Press, forthcoming).

Their book-length manuscript of prose poems/flash fictions is called *How to Feel Confident With Your Special Talents*, a collaborative work based on the titles of articles on the user-generated-content site, WikiHow. Pieces from the project have appeared or are forthcoming from *Consequence Magazine*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *Sad Robot*, *South Dakota Review*, and *Stoked*.

### **Matthew Ostapchuk**

Matthew Ostapchuk is a graduate of Chester College of New England, and is currently pursuing his MFA at Hollins University. His work has also appeared or is upcoming in *Insolent Aardvark*, *Interrobang!? Magazine*, *Specter Literary Magazine*, and *Best New Poets 2010*, among others.

### **Martin Ott**

A former U.S. Army interrogator, Martin Ott currently lives in Los Angeles and still finds himself asking a lot of questions. His poetry and fiction has appeared in more than 100 publications, including *Confrontation Magazine*, *Harvard Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *New Letters*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and *Zyzyva*. His book of poetry, *Captive*, won the 2011 De Novo Prize and will be published on C&R Press in 2012. He has also been nominated for two Pushcart prizes and his short story manuscript "Perishables" has been a finalist for the New American Fiction Prize.

### **Lana Rakhman**

Lana Rakhman was born in Kiev, Ukraine, and currently lives in Chicago. She has poems published, or forthcoming, in *Psychic Meatloaf*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Poetry South*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Main Street Rag*, *Juked*, *Rougarou*, and others. She is the poetry editor for the literary journal *TriQuarterly Online*, and has an MFA from Northwestern University.

### **Ellie Renz**

Ellie Renz is a senior in Lewis University's College of Education. She won the 2011 Delta Epsilon Sigma Gamma Chi Chapter's Paper Writing Contest in the category of poetry.

### **M.S. Rooney**

M.S. Rooney and her husband, poet Dan Noreen, live in Sonoma, California. Her work appears in journals, including *The Cortland Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Other Voices* and *3 AM Magazine*.

### **Jenny Sadre-Orafai**

Jenny Sadre-Orafai is the author of the Finishing Line Press chapbook *Weed Over Flower*. Her poetry has appeared in: *Poemeleon*, *Wicked Alice*, *FRiGG*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *Caesura*, *Gargoyle*, and *h\_ngm\_n*. Sadre-Orafai's prose has appeared in numerous anthologies, *Ships that pass*, and is forthcoming in *The Los Angeles Review*. She holds an MFA and is poetry editor for JMWW. Sadre-Orafai is an Assistant Professor of English at Kennesaw State University.

### **Steve Trebellas**

Steve Trebellas is a substitute teacher living in Burlington Iowa, a river town in S.E. Iowa. He has lived in the Midwest all of his life and writes about topics relating to small town and rural living. He has an MFA from SIUC in Carbondale, Illinois, and much earlier was able to take a class with Alan Ginsberg at the Naropa Institute. He has a number of journal publications and is looking for a first book.

### **Eldon Turner**

Eldon Turner lives in Gainesville, FL. He was the inaugural editor and is now poetry editor of *Bacopa*, the journal published by The Writers Alliance of Gainesville. He has published poems in *Blind Man's Rainbow*, *Harpur Palette*, *Main Street Rag*, *Poetalk*, *Prairie Poetry* and several other on-line and print journals.

### **Eric Valles**

Eric Valles is a Filipino poet who has published the poetry collection entitled *A World in Transit* with Singapore literary publisher Ethos Books. The book has generated a lot of interest. Eric is set to participate in a panel discussion on the creative rendering of the migrant experience in a big local bookstore, and to read some of the poems therein at a conference with the island's founding father, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. He will also be included in the soon-to-be-launched *Under the Storm* anthology of contemporary Philippine poetry.

### **Elizabeth Weber**

Elizabeth Weber spends her days reading science fiction on public transit, cataloging the untold wonders of the internet, and perfecting her urban pedestrian scowl. She recently earned an MA in Writing & Publishing from DePaul University and also holds a BA in Radio/TV Broadcasting and English from Lewis University. Her poetry was recently featured in *Threshold*, *Prick of the Spindle*, and *Arsenic Lobster*.

## **Chris Wood**

Chris Wood is a life-long resident of the Hudson Valley region of New York State where he hosts and participates in various music and literary events. He is the Editor-in-Chief of *Heyday Magazine*, occasionally sleeps a few hours every other Thursday, converses with woodland creatures, and enjoys devouring deep poetry and coffee.

## **Susan Yount**

Susan Yount is editor and publisher of the *Arsenic Lobster Poetry Journal* and madam of the Chicago Poetry Brothel. She is finishing her MFA in poetry at Columbia College Chicago and works fulltime at the Associated Press. Some recent works have appeared in *Weave Magazine*, *Glint Literary*, and *Anobium Literary Magazine*.

## **Art**

**Dr. Ewa Bacon**

**Audrey Heiberger**

**Anna Jaros & Jonathan Solis**

**Lauren Kill**

**Marcin Majkowski**

**Clorissa McPhail**

**Krishan Nadarajah**

**Cara Nicholson**

**Michael Progress**

## **Fiction**

**Therese Jones**

Therese Jones is an assistant professor at Lewis University and has served as the editor of Lewis Arts and Ideas Magazine (Fall-Spring of 2002-2003) and is the current Editor, Designer, and Coordinator of Lewis' annual journal, *Windows Fine Arts Magazine* (2003 to present).

**Adam Peterson**

Adam Peterson is the co-editor of *The Cupboard*, a quarterly prose chapbook series. His series of short-shorts, *My Untimely Death*, is available from Subito Press, and his fiction can be found in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Indiana Review*, *The Southern Review*, and elsewhere.

**Brooks Rexroat**

## NonFiction

### Casey Clabough

Casey Clabough is the author of the travel memoir *The Warrior's Path: Reflections Along an Ancient Route* as well as four scholarly books about contemporary writers. He serves as editor of the literature section of *Encyclopedia Virginia* and as general editor of the *James Dickey Review*. His first novel, *Confederado*, will appear in 2012, as will his fifth scholarly book, *Inhabiting Contemporary Southern & Appalachian Literature: Region & Place in the 21st Century*.

### Ronna Edelstein

Ronna is a teacher and a lifelong student, a daughter and a parent, a caregiver to her 95-year-old father and a recipient of others' care. Ronna is a dreamer and a doer, an optimist and a realist, a lover of M&Ms and daily workouts on the elliptical. Ronna is a thinker and a writer. As a part-time faculty member of the University of Pittsburgh's English Department, Ronna works as a consultant at the school's Writing Center. She also teaches Freshman Programs, a course that introduces students to the University and the city. Her work, both fiction and nonfiction, has appeared in *Quality Women's Fiction*, *Ghoti Online Literary Magazine*, *First Line Anthology*, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

### Vica Miller

Vica /Vinogradova/ Miller was born and grew up in St. Petersburg, Russia, and is a New Yorker for two decades. She's the founder of Vica Miller Literary Salons and a Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications at DataArt, a global technology company.

Upon receiving her Master's degree from Interactive Telecommunications Program at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, she founded and ran her own Web consultancy in Moscow, for which she was named one of Russia's "magnificent five" business women by Harper's Bazaar magazine in 1999. At other points in her career Vica worked as a magazine editor, new media producer, TV reporter, and art publicist. She has also taught New Media and Public Relations at Hunter College. Vica's articles appeared in *Russian Vogue*, *Internet and Matador* magazines, and her poems were published in Alexander Zakharov's book of paintings, *Big Little World*, in 2003. Vica has worked on her fiction writing with Maureen Brady and Peter Selgin. *Inga's Zigzags* is her first novel. She is an excellent swimmer, a beginner paraglider and a mother of two.

### Candelaria Sanchez

## Review

### Mary Egan

Mary Egan founded the *Jet Fuel Review* in 2011. She is a graduate of Lewis University with a Bachelor's Degree in English. Her poetry and short stories have been published in *Windows Fine Arts Magazine* as well as Sigma Tau Delta publications. She is currently working in the Chicago publishing world. In her free time, she enjoys political satire, British television, and surfing the internet. One of her favorite sites, of course, is the Jet Fuel Review Blog, which she updates daily.

