

JET FUEL Review

Spring 2019 / Issue 17



**Tarfia Faizullah / Delano Dunn / Tyler Mills & Kendra DeColo
David Welch / Rachel Mennies / Anna Maria Hong
Denise Duhamel & Julie Marie Wade / Jason Koo
and more**



JET FUEL Review

The logo features the words "JET FUEL" in a large, bold, black, distressed font. The word "Review" is in a smaller, black, sans-serif font to the right. A blue, stylized arrow graphic with a white dotted pattern points from left to right, passing behind the text.

A High Octane Literary Journal

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Artwork: Delano Dunn's "Cowboys and Indians"
Cover Design: Paulina Zougras

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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Foreword

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 17 of *Jet Fuel Review*! The editors are delighted to share with the world the phenomenal arrangement of writing and artwork that makes this issue sing. After months of reading, and much deliberation, our editors have carefully selected pieces that reflect our mission to curate a publication that showcases the beauty and advocacy of the written word and artwork.

Housed at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, *Jet Fuel Review* is a student-run, faculty-advised, nationally recognized journal that publishes writers and artists from around the globe. Founded in 2011, *Jet Fuel Review* continues to prosper with the contributions of writers and artists who redefine and defy traditions, leaving their creative, unique impressions on the world of the arts. For example, our featured cover piece for this issue, “Cowboys and Indians” by artist Delano Dunn, is one of his five pieces in this issue that utilize a mixture of art mediums to simultaneously make social commentary and tease out the complexities of identity.

In the poetry section, we are honored to feature Fulbright recipient and Kundiman fellow, Tarfia Faizullah’s piece dedicated to the *Jet Fuel Review* staff. Our fiction section contains a stunning array of engrossing, distinctive narratives, from Wendy Wimmer’s “Texts From Beyond” that places us in a technologically advanced setting where we can communicate with the deceased via text message and emoji, to Tyler Womack’s “The Shovel” which explores the irrationality of the brain during moments of trauma and panic. In addition to the collage pieces by our cover artist Delano Dunn, our art section also features work by New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow Gabe Brown and Artists’ Resource Trust (A.R.T.) Grant recipient Laura Christensen.

Last, but certainly not least, we are excited to present to you our Collaborative Works Special Section. *Jet Fuel Review* remains steadfast in our mission to highlight innovative work, and there is no better representation of the dynamic community of the literary world than exhibited collaborative works. From Laura Jones’ essay “The Couple is Present” where she is in conversation with her ex-wife and utilizes her ex’s photos as symbols of their relationships’ condition, to Tyler Mills’ and Kendra DeColo’s poems that interrogate gender roles, and envision John Waters’ experience watching *Magic Mike*, the pieces in this section emphasize that writing cannot, and should not be done in a vacuum. These selections embody the magic that arises out of collaboration and the bringing together of separate voices and identities to craft a singular, resonant body of work.

There are many more powerful voices that comprise Issue 17. All of the pieces that exist within these pages emphasize the multiple identities and creative styles of both the written word and visual art that are transforming today’s literary world. We invite you to enjoy our 17th issue and we hope that you appreciate the enthralling assortment of work that we have collected here.

Read on!

Zakiya Cowan & the *Jet Fuel Review* editors



POETRY

Balcony

You wear a crown of candles. I light them one by one. Out on the balcony, our friend plays a cassette through a tape player placed into a drained fish bowl. The night sounds like black and white, like next Sunday. Across from our friend, our charcoal grill cooks a squirrel. None of us know what to do with it once it's ready. Our friend grows heavy, paints his nails violet and leaves without saying goodbye. A car crash happens a few doors down. A Mercedes van drives through a chicken coop. We shake it away, pray together whenever a bird flies overhead. Our words different, our bracelets the same. We turn our heads like spinning plates and watch as a man flies off into the sky, holding on to hundreds of balloons, weeping, desperate for a hand.

Termite

T is for tabloid and all the time in the world,
of infinite delight. The Queen is
resplendent in her distension,
the next iteration. The Queen's abdomen
seconds, 30,000 eggs per diem. Workers
continuously feed her, climbing the tower
to refresh the fungus garden,
child worker or soldier and rarely:
industry. This is life centrifuged to terminal
chamber of public scrutiny, serve

a tulle twist of time wound round the pole
the tuning fork in the tenor of time,
her slick abdomen the color of tea, pulsing
is an open medium, ejecting every few
with their heavy misshapen heads
from chamber to light and threat
so that she may eat as she excretes each
a new Boy King. This is pleasure as
velocity: consume, fuck in the royal
your servant babies.

Vulture

Better the fleshy crest of the Andean condor flapping like a torn ear,
the corpse's liquid slithering
off the slickness. Better to look

grand from a distance. Inside the bestiary, a music box with a figurine lathed
like my mother's
mother of a tragedy.

I don't want to be another aborted
vector. Bring me his head

on a blue-black platter.

Life is an acid, feasting.
My father's corpse draped

like a legacy. I have burnt
his terror in
effigy.

September 10, 2016

In one version of the story, I find you by way of several minor accidents.

There was a girl in high school who would tell us *look for the guys who drive stick*.

It means they know what they're doing.

Ask them for a ride, she'd say. Make them show you.

That winter two boys nearly died speeding down the town's back roads.

That winter I bent over a boy in his borrowed car.

His became the first body I studied besides my own.

Alone after I would reach for the electric toothbrush, the wooden spoon, and search for the places he lit for a moment, then darkened.

I thought myself the only animal in a frozen city full of men, but I was wrong.

I thought I'd starve, but I was wrong.

October 21, 2016

I spent last night in the kitchen sharpening knives.

They're the only weapons I keep in my home.

Using them once brought me comfort, Naomi.

The steel and palm rocking over the stalks, dividing carrot from top.

Last year, there was another night I spent alone in the kitchen.

I intuited my way around each dark shape.

I reached for the heaviest knife first: the one I use to cleave the chicken's back, the onion's skull.

Thief! writes Sexton when she hears of Plath's suicide.

What did you stand by, just how did you lie down into?

(Like her I longed for night's recipe.

The way my mother wrote in the margins *you learn where to find the roaster's spine first by touch.*)

I lifted the steel just for a moment.

I felt my hand returning it to the block unworked.

My white arm flashing in the night as it searched for the door.

(I see now we store him up year after year, Sexton writes, old suicides.)

Last night, Naomi, I told the heaviest knife *I forgive you.*

I said it a hundred times: once for each strike against the sharpening rod.

Later I slipped the brightened blade under my pillow.

I slept like the dead until dawn.

Tributary (spell, n.)

To begin to speak
the eardrum's
idle fable

*Spell-raised, spell-
caught, spell-soaked*
Waspfull,

such gossip—
*to hold your mouth
to the gospels*

Charm or trick
or to preserve
the jeweled dialect

of the dead...
mahogany, ocher...
The creatures

I cannot stir
A slip of clay
coupled

in fragments
standing at
the statue's foot

Perhaps a later
form of bells
A white rooster

crowing
a query in
order to

spell the hours
That we should
seldom as a letter

spoken last
forever
A short period

of sleep
under the cask
and the shade

of perennials
at the center
of it

My Lord did you save John Berryman?

My Lord did you save John Berryman? It's
against the rules to know but maybe so
are all my questions. Must I praise you
for my nerves twisted tight as shirt

hangers, fascia squeezing muscles
into atrophy—no doctor can tell
me why, no doctor smart as you.
If no John, I fear for the rest of us

who make noisy work of our pain,
like children sucking on straws. Selfish
as a weed, I have to ask: can I be saved
if I tell you that Christ too often looks

too calm? Might I climb up, carve a frownier
mouth, something more, you know, human?

My Lord I'm no John Berryman, right?

My Lord I'm no John Berryman, right? Sure
I live on the knife edge of rage but never
howled, delusional, through town. As for booze
I'm half the martyr he was, or less, yet

how he stoked with his little bellows
the sulking fire of *no one understands
me*. For self-pity we're even. Even this
poem, I want to know if you like it, if

it's worthy. At a ceramics studio
I saw a novice work a new form, pull
a plate from the wet clay ball, dimple the edge
and carve circles in the center. Then he smashed

it. *Ten thousand before I can fire one*. So,
Lord, whom did you make and break today?

Moonflower

My first dominatrix was a butterfly
I siphoned away from a masquerade ball.
Guided into my shoe, I felt the symmetry
of her wings on my instep as I elbowed
us through the crowd. All my velvet
was ink-dark all the way, the passenger pose
in a taxi. She said she'd tell me when
to wait for her, and how fast.
In no time she had me crawling
through the grit of fire opals
while she perched on the radiator.
She stretched an indifferent leg.
Most of her was blue-black
like a bruised kimono.
A smear of violet crested her veins.
I put an asteroid in my mouth,
panting up at her while she yawned.
I filled my hollow bones with moss
and kept my fevers to myself.
When she finally released me,
I was now a shimmering thing.
The air stung my body,
broken and broken free.

Cindy Sherman Shows Us the Way

Each unnatural—as we are—picked
to pieces before our mirrors. Why not
a pixie, an alien, a dinosaur? Why not
clown lips, a sparkling pullulation?
We too are islands colonized
by flotsam, gutters clotted with the runoff
of galaxies. None binary, deep pores
and mustache-wisps about long lashes,
an ingenue's moue. Her colors are heinous,
strip mall slap-dash, the office
of the only doctor one can afford.
Nobody's here but me, Cindy sing-songs
to her anatomy dummy, content
in her agoraphobia. Tenement matryoshkas,
we house all the selves we'll ever need,
our work an act of charity, to find the least
horrible and brood upon it like an egg.

Ariel

In the dream, instead of lady parts
down there, I had a Bundt cake--

slightly burned, dusted with confectioner's
sugar, but more obviously, its hole.

When I was young I was stupid.
I thought I was good for what I didn't

do. I've made a life of appearances.
You were *here*. I have the cave

left where we hollowed
out the pumpkin flesh,

our spoons clicking. And that was
some light. It, too, is a kind of

throat. The reason why people
make Bundt cakes is about increasing

surface area so that everybody
gets some crust. Design being the first

accommodation. Why does *obvious*
have to be a bad thing? The thing

is defined by absence. And you
aren't here.

Description of an Abandoned Silver Mine

Full well, I knew: eyebrows from the couch,
a couplet of cinema. Remember on the train,

the men in orange robes, the clean cut
tonsure, the younger one reading on his tablet.

Wanting is terrible. I knew full well
standing at the kitchen sink.

Some directors have a way of expressing
musculature through light. Time is an optic.

From on high, pools of runoff, amber
on the shore, dark in the middle.

An immense and tragic beauty complete
with smelting piles and books we carried

loose in our arms like children.
You knew full well the water

piped in like music was boring.
It's stunning the depths we go to,

the carotid, conditions we negotiate
for an understanding: ores

and eithers, glittering among the coffee grounds,
in the elaborate filing and folding, towels

and trowels, vowels and vocatives, standing
at the mouth, wholesome and reckoning.

I want out and want in at the same time.

Too Late In The Evening

If we forget how she chewed her food, how her hand clasped the back of her neck, then her body will become like cottony gauze. If her body is cottony gauze, then she will be no more than a voice fluttering in the window, a voice that touches nothing of consequence. If the voice touches nothing, then the names of those we loved will fade, and with them, the choreography of the heart, until we forget even that we have forgotten. Then we will be left standing in a cold hallway by an open window, and it will be too late in the evening for anyone ever to be alive.

The galaxy hung between the girl and her mother

like a brooch in the air, smudge, haze, spiral
on a core they once knew. Her mother sat
in her chair, more lovely
than the sea. The girl was all legs
across the northeast horizon, in bed early
like the children in the city
now that the time had changed, falling
back in fall so that it got dark
early, and like the children, she wasn't
yet sleeping, head full
of thoughts, the kind that keep a girl,
not a child or woman, up all hours. The star
called the head of the chained woman
was the same as the one called the horse's navel,
horse born from the beheading
of his mother, a spring
of wings before suddenly flight.
Her mother rested in her chair, looking
at the inside of her eyes.
The center of the horse connected to the girl's mind
with all its deep space objects:
quintet, cluster,
spirals, ellipses, and a cross
in which a galaxy forms a lens
across a quasar,
gravity bending the light.

blush of mountain laurel

I never intended to love you
 shortly,
to be blown by a breeze
of someone else's
mouth,
 to taste honeycomb
as it dripped.

 but the body
in oblong bloom

 will not permit
my heart's murmur
 a longevity, to hum

like the bee
entering.

 reaching
 every tongue up,
 you taste
 the sky
divorced of skin,

 for I cannot hold
 myself
against
your peony of chest,

though
 my vase
 wanted
to cradle
 and sip

your twilight
 lake.

like the blush
of mountain
laurel,

my love is just

a jagged
arrangement
of petalled hands.

I cannot hold
the sun.

Not A Poem About Ghosts

I heard a famous poet once say that they were tired of hearing poems about ghosts and trees and light and water—they wanted to hear something original for once.

But my life is a phantom wound. Or is that too cliché?

Let me start again: I am haunted by men who took my youth away. They appear in my dreams, turn them shock-blue burying bliss into nightmarish glow.

Sorry, they aren't ghosts, none of them are dead yet.

I like trees. I hate an ocean at night. What am I supposed to live for if not the light?

I see a translucent boy touch me in my thoughts every night.

A man is not a man, is a boy, but isn't a boy, is queer, is femme, wants to be a god

But first must die, but then, will haunt the home and what will the grandmother say?

I hear a coo and a moan, a bellow of bruise, a chalky frame, a thin-gray figure moving gracefully through a battered-brown hall, like if this is all for naught, what did any poet teach me that hadn't been taught before?

I heard a famous poet once say they were tired of hearing about trees and water and ghosts, they wanted something new.

I fucked a minotaur in Croatia. I slept with a lizard in December. I name every lover after an animal or monster, a taste or a touch, an imprint after they're gone, much like a ghost, but not a ghost, something much more tangible and here and present and not a ghost—not a ghost.

immigrant song

when my parents immigrated to this country they practiced their cursive until the letters curled into pearl. my mother hates me. my mother came here for me. expected texan desert and found cactus exists without it. houston has trees. houston has thorns. my mother swallowspits thorns.

when my parents immigrated to this country my father curved easily. folded into cot and single sheet nights. perfected corners and became mat. my father left me. my father came here for me. fit me in the palm of one hand, warm from doing the dishes. did the dishes before walking out.

when my parents immigrated to this country
my father lived in a motel.
my father still lives in a motel.

each cockroach reminds him he is not home.

home blessed. home an offered knife.

when we move into the extended stay america my father does not cry because he is in america. he does not miss the single leaf protecting spindly boy from toothed monsoon. instead he scratches success into his legs and remembers that bedbugs require beds. mold heavy in the air and he smells dust calling to pregnant clouds. the drain swirls and pushes out eight eyed babies.

my mother never planned on staying in america.

I miss my mother most when old filmy songs play and the thread of her catches in my bangle. it unravels and the sequins smash together with a sound like the breaking of payal. I miss my mother with the exile of blood in temple. the incense of burned marigold. the breakage of circle. the counter clockwise. my back turned to marble and rich cloth. hamara saath janam ka saath hai. I have barely survived the last six lifetimes.

body a match. body offering blood.

After emailing a copy of Audre Lorde's essay "The Uses of the Erotic" to a friend

because of what we said at dinner about how
our bodies feel to us. To spell it out,
this is after salting my new yoga mat, which
my teacher swears will help with the slipping,
after walking the dog through piles of melting
slush – December rain on snow on mud –
after skimming an article that suggested our
phones are becoming extensions of our minds,
or something to that effect, while contemplating
all the powers I don't know I'm giving up
this week, as measured in the light years
between my language and my body.

Last week, my partner said, when I was falling
asleep I murmured *witchcraft witchcraft witchcraft*
into the pillow – hypnagogic conjure I must have
inherited somewhere in the last millennium.

You know, I say, holding leaves inside my cheek,
this used to be illegal – meaning the chlorophyll
leaching directly into my bloodstream.

I worry how the screen gathers my energy,
renders my melatonin adrift & inert.

It won't stop raining this decade, and we did it
with our unfeeling bodies. Eventually,
while falling asleep

I try to fall back a few centuries, sifting through
piles all the women like us left behind – *craft*
is an exercise in making, a skill that wants practice,
i.e., to become rippled with gold through every
fascial plane, and also completely soluble across
space-time – don't pretend it makes sense
when I put it like that.

Instead, take the broad leaf, the wax,

the unrolled cloth, mouthful of river, quartz,
clutch of clay: everything is made of something.
I lay my language on it and then I take that away
and put down something that comes before
language. I put down something that comes
before I put down something and
I come before I put down before
language something that comes

maybe I grieve by

scrolling the unlit passageways
between here and gone

looking for symbols etched by
sticks of carbon on the black ceiling:

are you coming, frog of beyond?
moon-tongue drops a bag of bones

they melt into pools of milk
I stir with one finger.

second attempt at going home

here are the deer tracks we kids called signs
of God – remember? here, our father's voice,
an olive oil lacquer over the dinner table:
this is what we believe, this is what we don't.

family is a kind of country, I think, like the one
we drew around the deer's hoof prints in the mud
of the dried-up creek in the woods behind our house.
we declared ourselves leaders, knowledge-keepers,

the way most humans will once they claim
a land as their own. my brother and I walk the
quiet streets of the country he calls home now,
and I confess to him that I've always felt in exile.

I read that Robert Hayden once said,
because no place is home, in a sense, everywhere
can be home. I tell my brother this and he smiles,
and the primroses open their moon faces toward

a statue of a leader on a rectangle of land called
a park. here we are, on a nearby bench, siblings
recalling the night sky from which we both came –
our mother. praise the woman who taught us how

to clean a bathtub well, how to sauté garlic and onions
like an invocation to the worship we'd do
in the kitchen. praise anyplace where you
are well-fed. here is one way to go home:

find your brother, find a bench (any),
pull the yarn out of each other's throats until
your language finds its hooves again,

hear your common gallop over the land.

what if, more than place, it's about sound?

if it's movement that matters – places knit together
over time – vibrations – then I need to hear you
say what and where we are, no matter the answer,
and hear how many ways I can ask –

A Tower There

So many moments yesterday between
Ana and me where communication

broke down, she not hearing what I said
(I mumble) or not understanding

a certain idiom like “silver lining,” or me
not hearing what she said, as when

we sat on a bench at the Valentino Pier
in Red Hook and she looked off to the left

and said, There’s a tower there, I kept
looking for a tower in the water, seeing

the Verrazano but nothing resembling
such a structure, until I understood

There’s a towel there, a small black towel
draped over the back of the bench

next to her shoulder. I felt our connection
dwindling and didn’t know why,

little things like this, just two days
before, on a Friday, she came over

for Anapalooza, our weekend of celebration
after she graduated with her master’s

(and her family, who was staying with her
for three weeks, finally left) and I was done

with the school year and the obligatory
dept. retreat, and we had incredible sex,

twice, which we repeated the next day,
but perhaps all this intimacy spent together

over more than two nights—the longest time
we've spent together thus far—got to her,

I felt her pulling away from the connection
Saturday night when I had to watch the Cavs

play Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Finals
against the Raptors and they fucking lost,

playing miserably, which of course had me
yelling at the TV for three hours, perhaps

that killed the momentum of the weekend,
perhaps Ana was like, Who is this guy

and what is his deal? as the next day
we talked about how when she first came

to New York two years ago she was comparing
any guy she went on a date with to her ex,

impatient with any behavior too different,
the implication being that she'd gotten over

that impatience now, but perhaps she hadn't,
just as I perhaps have not gotten over

making certain comparisons to my ex,
whose name is virtually the same as hers

but with one more n, as I think things
that bothered me were triggered by memories

of the first flush of excitement with Anna,
how paradisaic everything was, how absolutely

immersed in me she could be, stroking my hair,
running her fingers through my scalp

for what seemed like hours after we made
love, massaging my entire body with care,

whereas Ana even after this incredible sex
will want to smoke, seemingly more addicted

to cigarettes than the intoxication of me,
making me think I'm just a minor intoxication

to her, whiskey and cigarettes and then
this dude named Koo, by Sunday afternoon

she'd switched to cigarettes almost entirely,
not drinking at brunch and having a hard time

holding my gaze when I looked at her
for signs of presence, so when you think

there's a tower there at the beginning
maybe there's just a towel there, left

by somebody else, raggedy and limp.
I think I am probably overreacting

to what happened yesterday, I think
probably she had a good time, as evidenced

by her myriad text messages afterward,
probably she's just feeling the massive

anxiety of graduating from school without
a job in a country not her own, uncertainty

whether she'll even be in this country
long enough to make this new thing

with me meaningful, I think both of us
are becoming aware of the mundane

creeping into fantasy as intimacy increases,
how less than ideal your partner becomes

as predilections and habits emerge,
Ana smoking or me watching Cleveland sports,

this is an adjustment period, for sure, and
I know I feel this ache because of how much

I feel for her already, how I might
lose her if she moves back to Brasil, how

we might never develop the relationship
we might have had if she were secure

in her job and a little older, looking
for the same things as me. Love is all

a matter of timing, as Chow says in *2046*,
a line I quoted in a poem many years ago,

when I was close to her in age, going
through the painful machinations of a love

contorted by bad timing, and this, as
surprisingly painful as it is, is nothing like

that pain—there I go comparing things
again, perhaps the reason I am feeling

this ache is I am feeling the intimation
of that pain again, pain is a possibility

in a way it hasn't been for the last two years
since Anna, I am feeling nervous and short

of breath, checking my phone periodically
for text messages, absurd behavior, but

perhaps instead of being alarmed I should
be happy that I can feel this way again.

I woke up early this morning wanting
to sing again, a long flung song arising

out of pain, stretching itself nonchalantly
like the sun, knowing a new beginning

is possible if carried forward fervently
out of darkness, out of all you are, making

the pain sustainable, I had the confidence
of things around me, coffee and English

muffins, the cup and saucer on the right
of the kitchen counter, dish for muffins

on the left, taking a butter knife and teaspoon
out of their drawer and setting them gently

in their places, heating the oven and espresso
machine, sunshine on my mind and a big

beauty brewing, carrying out into the streets
and the godly carrying there, a woman

carrying flowers out of my building
and dumping them in the trash, looking

up to see Ana watching her, what was
the story there, did she bring the flowers

to someone who wouldn't open the door,
was she sent flowers by a guy she hated,

Ana's intelligence moving through them,
carrying and carrying, to the super saying

hello to a little girl but scaring her
with too much kindness, Ana predicting,

She's gonna be scared, the girl crying
and her dad collecting her, to another girl

carrying her comforter in a bear hug
before her, her other laundry strapped

on her back in a huge backpack, Ana
saying, I have one of those, and laughing,

to the man carrying his daily living
in a shopping cart, nudging it forward

to the building's clean row of recycling bins,
taking his tithe and chatting amiably

with the super, Ana saying, I love people
who say hello to each other on the street,

on the left, taking a butter knife and teaspoon
out of their drawer and setting them gently

in their places, heating the oven and espresso
machine, sunshine on my mind and a big

beauty brewing, carrying out into the streets
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saying, I have one of those, and laughing,

to the man carrying his daily living
in a shopping cart, nudging it forward

to the building's clean row of recycling bins,
taking his tithe and chatting amiably

with the super, Ana saying, I love people
who say hello to each other on the street,

to the cat suddenly in the fourth-floor
apartment window above surveying

the carrying calmly, practicing a higher
nonchalance, to the clouds above not

parting, not carrying our carrying farther
but carrying the sun still in their hazy

laze, to the sun ever more nonchalant
behind them, carrying and carrying

and carrying beyond us, beyond this,
a tower there, unconcealed and still unseen.

4 AM, February, After a Dinner: A Poem for My Future Lover

-high fives to Jet Fuel & SM & JK

I am fine only having this life, a friend
said at the long table. All around, winter +
its elevated requirements for survival.

A miracle: even the youngest among us
continues to manage loss, damage, demise,
frost. But tonight, warm garlic knots +

baked penne + chicken parmigiana +
baked clams + Montepulciano = words to say
that we all (somehow) ended up in America

to fight for what we decide matters, i.e., more
marinara, more of us in colors, though there are
those among us who also enjoy lemon +

a little olive oil. This week, the State
of the Union, next week, more discussion
of this or that wall. Here, we say the words

practice + listen + yes + faith. Here, a glass
flute of prosecco is a gallery for a kiss-print,
the same pink as a strip of ribbon

I once saw tied about a soft-seeming wrist
at this or that nightclub. Another friend
says, *I was once younger*. I wanted to run

a hand over the silver bristles that adorn
their moonless hair. I am relearning how
to adore. I take another sip: astonishment:

all we don't know: each other's colors.
Come soon, O tender disaster, O significance
of another! Come quick, O summer of faith +

listen + practice + yes, I aim to be scorched
by your summer storm. Or, I am the summer
storm, or, I am eager

for the slaughter. *I am fine sharing this knife.*

It's Not Whether We Were Close

I hadn't seen Mary in three years
but when I hear she died
(a broken leg, complications)
the world becomes godless.
The sun stays out all night.
Things begin to fall
from the sky at different
speeds. Mary does not decompose
into the earth to be reborn
a tree but rather sits
in an underground box
forever and does the only thing
lifeless things can which is turn
into smaller and smaller lifeless
things until they are just
their own stillness.

Stanzas & Sawdust

For Grandpa F. P.

Our birthdays were two days apart; we were distant
Gemini. I was always cheery and you were gloomy like
An overcoat of mastic. Uncle Ed told me you used
To joke; you were your employees' sap and heartwood.

I wish I had known the non-acrid you, the unfurrowed
Brow of your impossible face that I grew reluctant to read.
I wish I had played with those aging knuckles and callused
Hands that shaped happiness and pain. Presidents sat on

Your chairs, signed contracts on your desks, and hung their
Vests inside your flawless mahogany armoires. You were
History. In the 1950s, you were among the top five carpenters
In the country & commanded two hundred employees, until

A whirlwind swept in as dictator a man you once denied
A seat. Memories of the past went foxhunting.
You were high-yellow & successful, his brand of *Noirisme*
Was sawdust in the people's eyes. It was 1957.

By the time I met you, the workmen were long gone
And you had been hauled off to the penitentiary. A short stay,
Powerful clients pried open the system and implored you to
Make a chair. A signatory cane cabriolet armchair for the Doc.

We laughed at how tough you were with your six-foot thin frame.
I remember you smelling of wood- at times pine, cedar, mahogany.
At other times, it was the scent of glue, red chestnut.
With you, the barnyard of my childhood vanished as idleness was

Mutinous. A man's life ought to be upright and dignified. Poets
And politicians were blurry. My father was a poet who loved
Politics and couldn't use tools the way you did. You were cynical
And the dictator's spectacle chiseled your bliss to the bones.

If you had known of my compact to poetry, that I never inherited
The clamoring gift of turning poles into smooth tapering shafts,
My creativity would have been suffocated in a whirlwind of sawdust.
To you, hands were not made to construct stanzas.

Warm touches only for finished banisters & fluted dowels.
I used to watch your hands run blades over planks, curled
Shavings flipping under the motion of your brawny arms.
They formed an ocean of golden waves engulfing your feet.

Now, I know why you used to quip, shut off the radio before
Duvalier blared. You preferred the cascading of sweat on your brow
As you measured your joints to fit frames. Some of your poet friends
Vanished while trying to unveil the sun in metered forms.

Upon Hearing Female Dragonflies Fake Their Own Deaths to Avoid Males, I Consider Wendy Peffercorn

Wendy saw Squints dying and went down
for a breath. A poor glittering fish,
he pulled up quiet from the water.
She prodded his belly with an acrylic nail
and the nail sunk and the flesh
sprung back, but the boy didn't start
coughing.

In the corner already,
someone is composing a eulogy.
Remembered for nothing in particular,
it isn't long.

Wendy listens for a heart. Something inside
must be telling her to move to the mouth and she,
blonde hair taken by the wind behind her,
leans down, 14, blows hot air into his mouth.

She imagines that he is a pool float.
She imagines that this is practice, and the smell
of his mouth is new plastic instead of bacteria
and death.

She's gone for his heart again
and in the interim, her head
on his stomach, the dead thing winks.

And the stillness of his limbs
and the quiet of the boys
allow the dead to be dead, or nearly.

And Wendy is mouth to his mouth again,
and his hands, so well-behaved, shift into
her hair, her tanned shoulders—

Wendy paints her toes
fire-engine red on the arm
of the lifeguard stand.

From her tower, Wendy watches
rows of dead boys,
come to fall at her feet.

Christina's World

—*After Andrew Wyeth*

So she hears wind rubbing on the leaven roof
Of the house that has no companion
Anywhere across the empires of the grass.
She wakes. She has been lying on the earth
But now she rolls, hearing in the pause,
Her heart quicken, then slow. No one is there.
Nearby the scorched grass holds up nothing.
The laundry-line aches with its black shirt,
And the earth curves without comparison.
Only the wind like a friend of her husband
Comes—her husband is not home. It loosens
And lifts the strands she's tied back in her hair.
Black bangs fly as she twists around to rise.
Her hands paw the sod. She does not rise.

Levitation

After Sylvia Plath

Dear father deep father fear father near water beat
harder these hands of wonder heat small hinges
broad arms these wings his rings and wrings and
wings out of his pout there on his baby face that is my
same face that is shame laced and shrug based and no
way no way no stray cats on sidewalks that said
come get / me, come by the sliding glass door thrown
and jeweled like hamstrings like fueled freight like straight
might I might my might and capture, rupt, hold, lime slice
held in the passenger seat to make ends meet. I drifted I/
rose, pressed, packed metals, wilted.

Objects of Her Passion

i

A lamp, a doorstep, a wire basket.

A bathing suit dangles from a hanger.

Shades of gray settle against a world of untrammelled light.

By this she captures the shadow, all that remains of, say, a rocking horse, or what can be seen of the self.

Each forms a solitude.

ii

It becomes a question of salvation: what can be redeemed?

Conversion involves some necessity.

Behind a locked door time flickers, a silent movie that can't be rewound.

Time was first reckoned by lunations: for instance, the distance from New York to London is equal to the circumference of the moon.

She turns her face to its light.

iii

Beneath glass resides the paraphernalia of her desire.

She prefers charcoal, how it crunches at the pressure of her grip, the essential carbon fire leaves in its wake.

She reaches for an apparition trying not to leave fingerprints.

Which is impossible.

A candlestick, a pair of tights . . .

ART

Lake House



Swan Dive



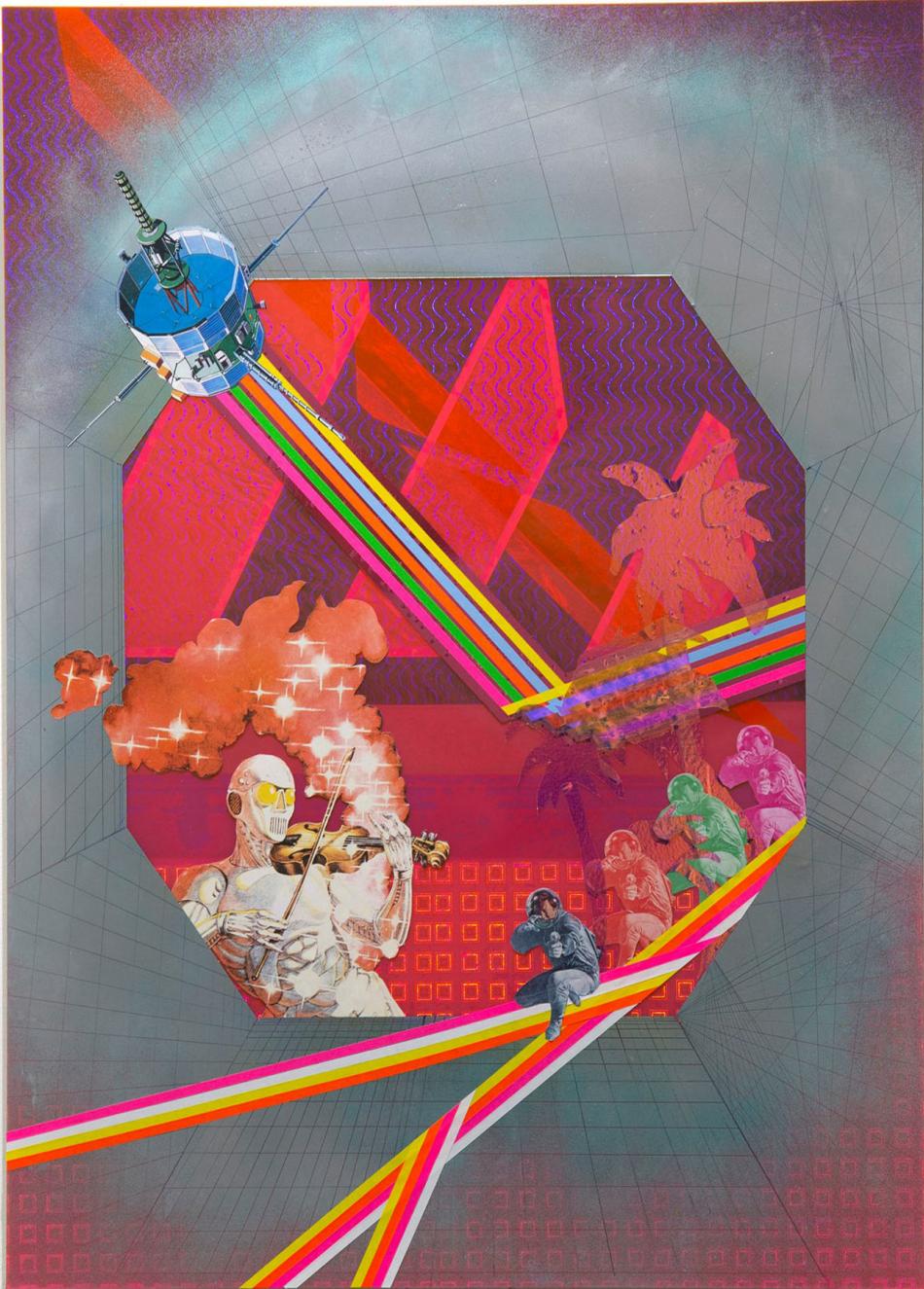
**Regents Park (after Tears, Idle Tears by Elizabeth Bowen),
detail**



Half Full



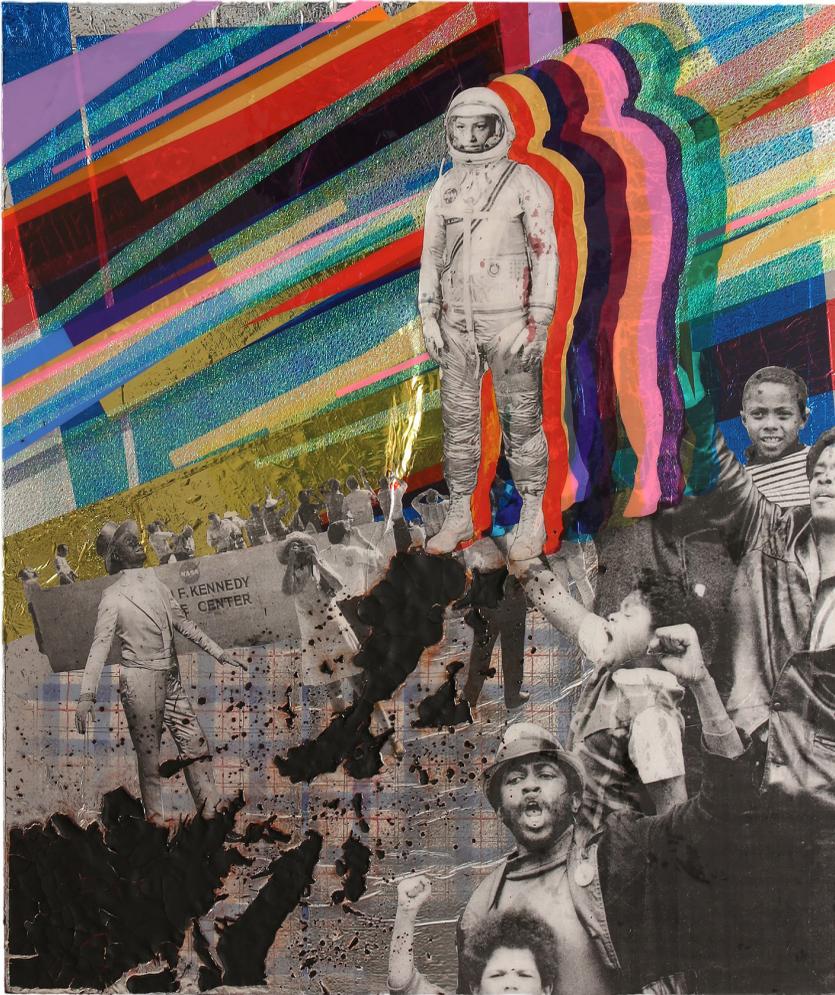
Cowboys and Indians



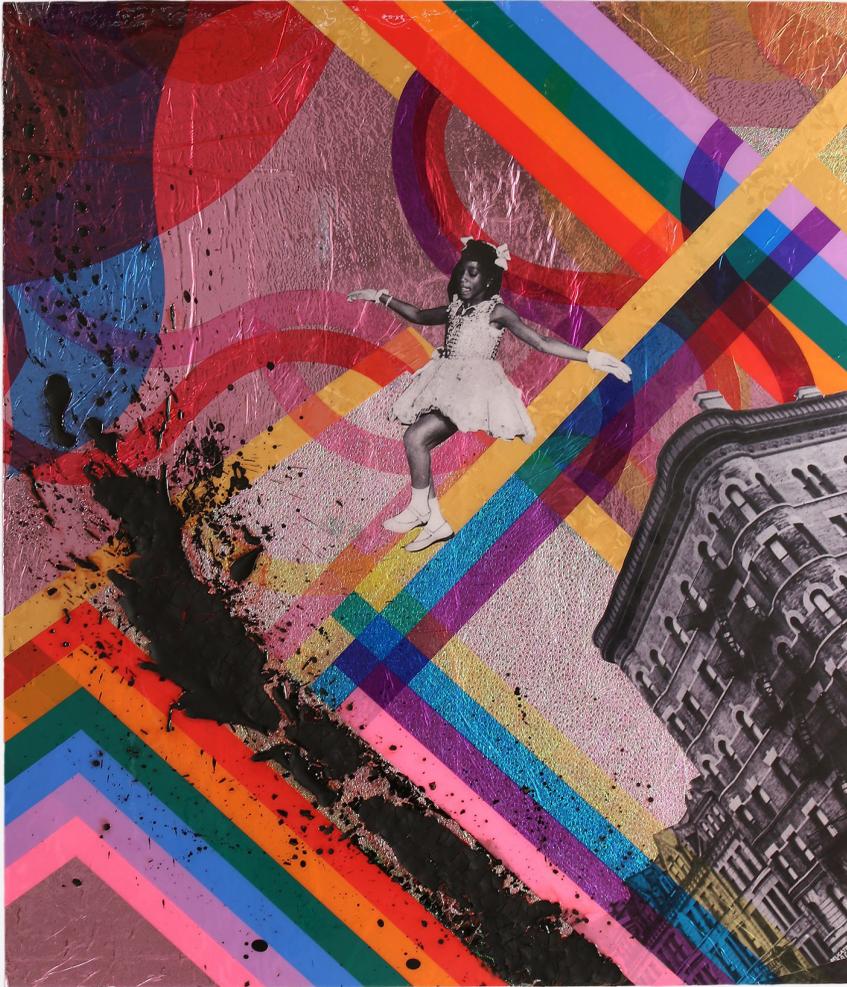
The Ways of White Folks: I Hate To Be So Emotional



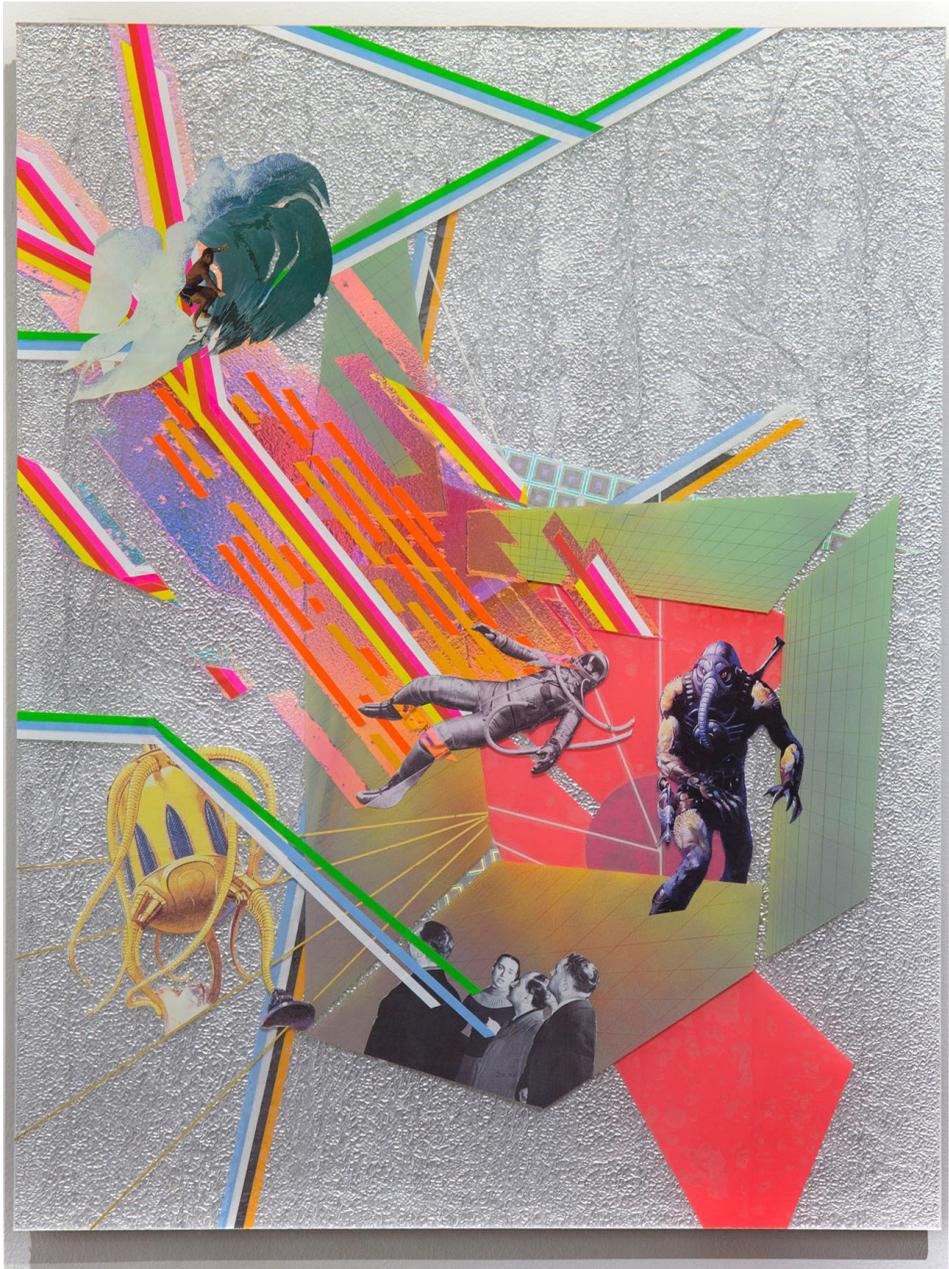
Wave



Sunday Shoes



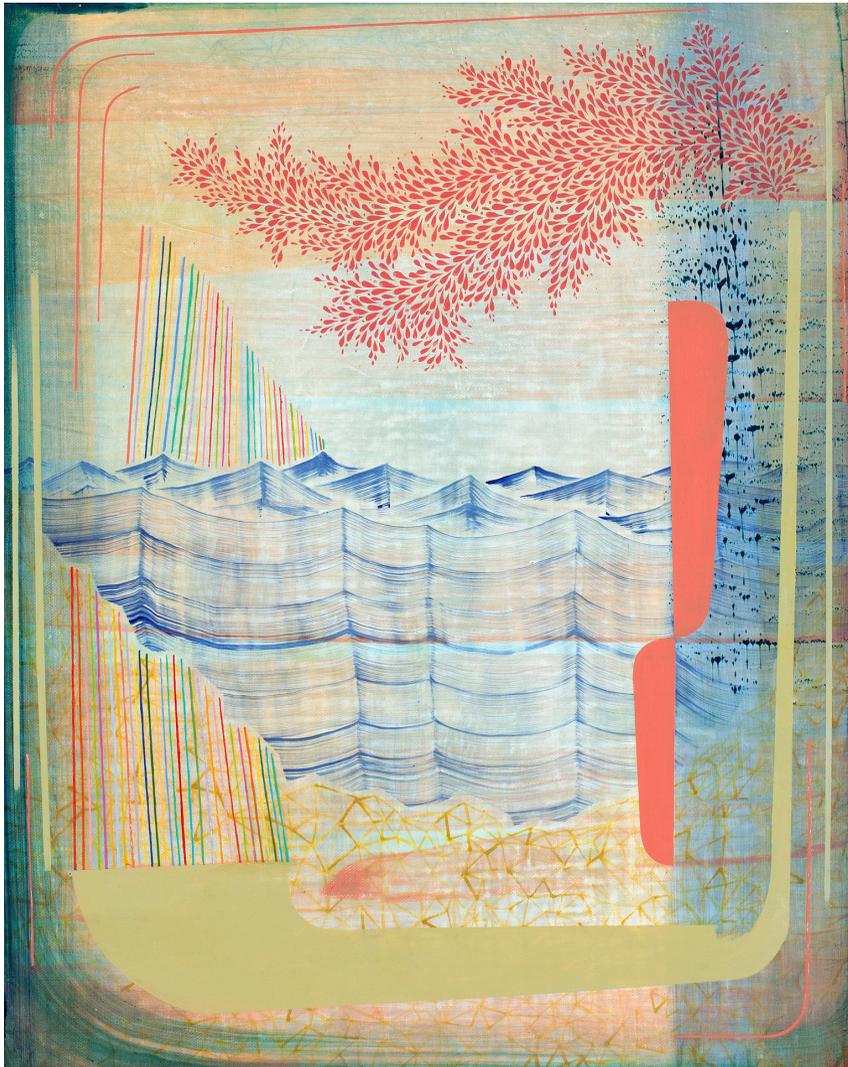
I'll Miss You More Than Anything In My Life



Avalanche



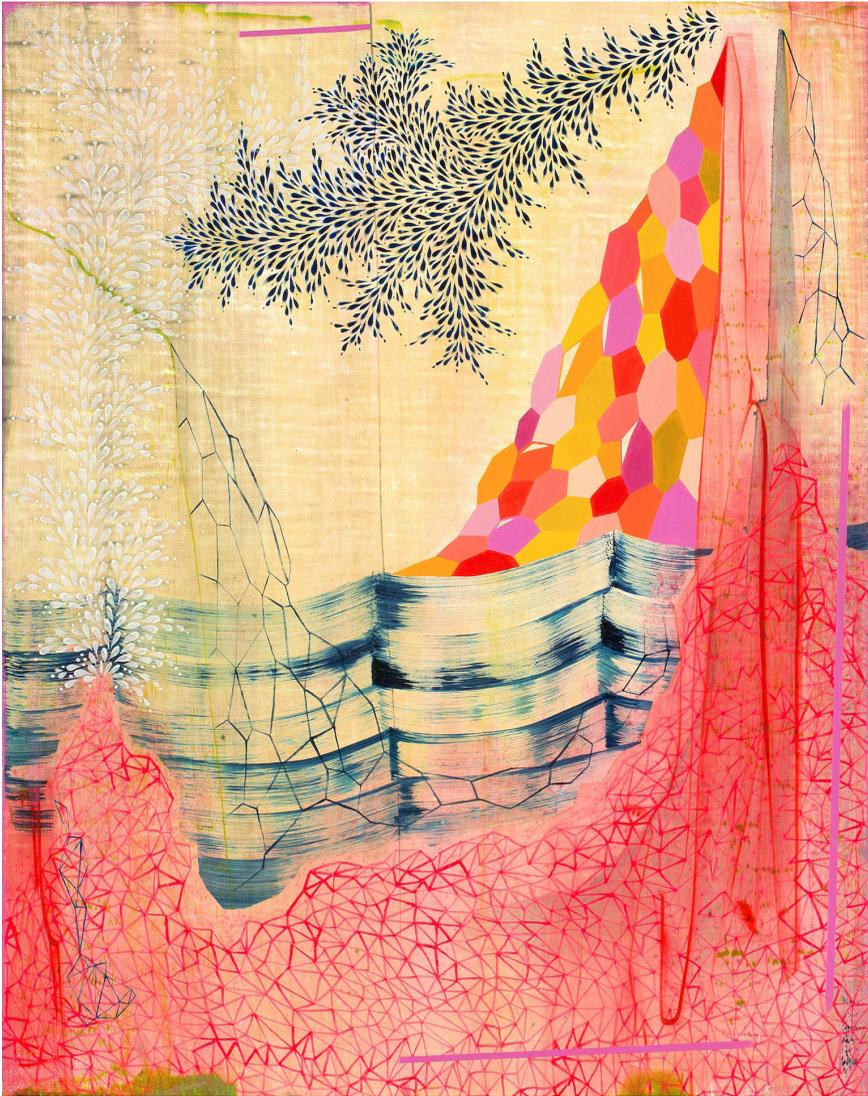
Brief Spring



Swish



Neon Mountain



Deeper Still



FICTION



Ding

In the morning, he stood in the doorway of the kitchen. Draped over the wooden captain's chair where he usually ate and read the paper, was a very large jacket, an enormously large jacket, a jacket so large that its arms pooled on the floor like the final tributaries of some great body of water.

He approached it. The shoulders of the jacket seemed supported by something unseen, as if two crouching men might be underneath; their heads in the shoulders, two men or two large apes, like as if two Western Lowland Gorillas from Gabon hid there. But there were no legs or paws beneath the table. There was nothing but the jacket.

Looking at it, he scratched lazily at the side of his arm, moving his hand up under the loose sleeve of his gray cotton t shirt so that he stood with his arms crossed, holding his own average-sized shoulder. The cotton for his shirt could have come from Alabama or Mississippi or Arkansas or Uzbekistan.

The jacket was green, a color like that of the emeralds of Columbia or like the exoskeleton of a Jewel Beetle, a small insect that a Malayan tiger might pass in its forest if Malayan tigers still existed which they almost don't. The jacket fabric was a slippery-looking material created through chemical synthesis, with ribbed collar and cuffs in a similar color, also created through chemical synthesis. Across the left breast, sewn in white script, was the machine embroidered word, *Coach*.

He noted as he sat down across from the jacket that it carried the faint whiff of pipe tobacco, cherry and hardwood, a pleasant enough scent that caused him to think about a guy he used to work with. But also, there was something else, something richer, darker, like Spanish olives redolent with garlic maybe, or good leather or the brine that seeps as you split the oyster and the abalone splinters, leaving opalescent flakes on your skin so that you are momentarily scaled in something shimmering and beautiful that is other than your own self.

He was reminded of some fish he had once at a restaurant. It had come with the head on and needed deboning. He'd squirted lemon juice in the eye of the fish because in the moment that had seemed hilarious to him although now it really didn't. "No need to rub salt," he said aloud.

The jacket did not move. He was sure of that and yet it had about it a vitality of sorts, as if it was looking at him, as if breathing, as if it was sentient. Maybe it was the way his heart was beating in his chest, like it always did, like he'd never noticed. He began to think about teeth, the ones in his mouth which he licked with his tongue, and the ones in the mouths of others.

He'd planned to fry up a mess of eggs and bacon which would mean turning his back on the jacket whom he'd begun to think of as sort of a guest. And it seemed rude to appear not to include it in his activities. He poured himself a bowl of cereal, set the box down where the jacket could see it, and ate without saying anything through the milk and yellow corn crunch. Then he said, "There's a puzzle on the box, it's a maze. You don't win anything though, it's just for fun."

Sitting opposite where he usually sat gave him a new perspective. Beyond the jacket, he could see down the hallway to the living room of his apartment. There, a knocked-over lamp lay as if exhausted from some struggle. He could see light flickering which meant the television was on with the sound turned down. He knew this meant that there were electrical charge carriers at work providing alternating current continuously. Not that that answered any questions.

He glanced back at the jacket which sat patiently. It was not his jacket. Where had it come from? Had someone come into his apartment while he slept? Was someone else in his apartment now? Had he acquired the jacket and not remembered? Could he be larger than he thought? Was he *Coach*?

He stood up from the table and slammed the palm of one hand against its surface. The bowl and spoon jumped, the jacket did not. Something is happening in the wires, he thought, charge is moving. He wondered from what distance it was possible to hear bees swarming from their hive as they followed their queen to some new destination.

He put on the jacket. It fit just fine. He went out into the world feeling shiny and new, electric. And cool as a sparkling, iridescent, uncaught fish. Can you imagine what that would feel like?

Wherever, Whenever

Baba bought a Christmas tree because Tania insisted on it. Two weeks later, at circle time, everyone in her class is going to talk about unwrapping gifts around a Christmas tree. And she does not want to be left out just because we don't go to church on Sundays; we worship several Gods and Goddesses in a temple, adorned by flowers, covered in sandalwood fragrance, called on by constant ringing of bells.

Ma sits quietly in kitchen, stares at the mottled bark of oak in the backyard, her face a roiling ocean of emotions, her neck perpetually taut. She gets up and stirs the gravy for mutton, whispers to herself. Outside, the sunlight is shallow. Soon the festive mayhem will be over. It's hard to explain our friends and their parents why we don't celebrate Christmas, and watch their faces drop. *Hindus, you said?* They ask, *Like Buddhists?*

At the dinner table we say our prayers. Tania and I don't close our eyes. We watch our parents, their head bowed and hands folded, whispering shlokas from ancient Hindu text. Unlike American parents, Ma and Baba don't touch each other in public. Ma never wears pants or skirts even though she has remarkable legs.

Ma instructs me to close my mouth while chewing. Tania asks about the ornaments for the Christmas tree, Ma suggests using her imitation earrings, old necklaces, silk handkerchiefs. Tania shrugs, I know she's disappointed. We talk about decorating the house and Pa says we can use the oil lamps from Diwali. *It's not the same*, Tania resists. From the overhead bulb, light splashes on her face. She urges Ma and Baba to buy a few strings of bulbs for the tree in the front yard, sweating through her fleece. I place my hand over hers. Ma continues to suck the bone, little lumps of marrow falling on her plate, her fingers licked clean.

After the dinner, I pull out the trash cans on the roadside. The air pokes everywhere, a chill spreading through my body faster than fire. The houses are decorated like brides. I collect the mail and stay in the driveway listening to the distant evening traffic. I don't feel I belong here, not in the way Ma and Baba talk about their village in India, how they made it out to America for a better life for them and their kids. I don't think I belong where they come from. I am only familiar with a few alphabets of Hindi, garam masala and turmeric, differentiation between a few Hindu castes based on their last names. Tania and I are at the border: our citizenship is a string of digits in our passport,

our ethnicity a questionnaire our parents wish we knew the answers to. We can look on either side and not find a home. Between my dusky fingers, flyers flap: coupons for clothes and jewelry, symmetrical trees that go up to the ceiling.

Our fake tree stands next to the fireplace we never use and clean once a year. The LED's blink hard: yellow and red. *Isn't it nice?* Baba says, lounging in his easy chair, smiling, extending his right arm towards me. Yes, I nod my head and hand him the mail, wishing I was like him: feeling at ease, wherever, whenever. He has never said *I love you* to any of us. The words just don't come. In the background, the vents vibrate like small-winged birds, blast warm, dry air and he asks me to reduce the temperature. Then he goes back to reading the mail and the room glows in an artificial light, like a town in the middle of nowhere.

The Poplar Tree

The young man had come to a routine when working on his house site. Standing on the pavement next to his pickup truck, he'd first twist foam ear plugs tight between thumb and forefinger and stuff them into his ear canals. Next, he'd don his cutting helmet and swivel down the earmuffs. He doubled up the ear protection in part to ward off tinnitus—the “little chainsaw in my head” as his father had called it—but mostly because of how the sensory deprivation allowed his imagination to run. In the silence, slowly weaving through the slash and brush fire craters, he'd see clear through the spruce needles and mist of ash to a gravel driveway, its modest privacy curve blending into a front yard. At the house site itself, he'd set his saw on a stump and picture the shingled saltbox with southern exposure and a western farmer's porch for the sunsets, his wife and child warm inside. His energy would swell with this image in his quiet head. When he'd slip on his chaps and gloves and start the saw, his hands would feel bigger and stronger, as if he'd borrowed them from his old man. Then he'd start cutting.

Today though, the import of his muffled world is that when the poplar tree takes him to the ground, it does so without a sound. And as his body and the tree come to silent rest, it is neither noise nor pain that rushes him, but rather thoughts. They come and come, as if the tree has struck a barren April branch into the flipbook animation of his life. The thoughts are thoughts of a more deliberate and experienced man. Someone like his father. This other man surely would have tried what the young man had tried. There was, after all, a birch tree that had uprooted in the house site's newfound wind and leaned into a web of spruce limbs. It was like a spider up there, waiting to drop on his child or wife if he left it. This other man would have also felt uneasy at the notion of cutting the birch itself, head high and unpredictable with the angle. He too would have seen the poplar, standing taught and still winter gray, sixty feet tall and only twenty feet away. Any man would have seen how years of growth turned the poplar into a natural hammer, a quick solution from a safe distance. And anyway, the poplar itself stood much too close to what would be the house's south entrance. Its roots would be impacted once an excavator arrived. It too would pose a hazard. His wife Chrissy and their little blond girl coming and going in its shadow. Dropping the poplar onto the birch would, what is the saying? Kill two birds with one stone.

And so the cautious man too would have notched the poplar, aiming converging cuts straight at the nobs of black fungus on the birch's midsection, kicking out the pie slice and examining the gap with skeptical satisfaction. Then he too would have made an even slower backcut, staring at the kerf through his helmet's screen, readjusting

the hum of the saw, focusing on the slightest sign that the hammer was falling. He too would have stepped away as gravity took over and the tree yawned open in defeat.

But then the chism. For the cautious man would have missed seeing the timber dominoes fall. He would have turned and walked. He would not have paused to assure himself it was working, then been hypnotized by the arch of fingery branches. And yes, he would have missed the satisfaction of seeing the birch pushed from its roost. But so too, the corner of his eye would not have caught the poplar's butt end pivoting, too quickly, picking up attention and speed and swinging wildly and even backwards somehow, seeking out its sawyer thigh high, a thousand pound bat square into his right leg with all the forest's muffled revenge.

Fool. You're a damn fool.

The pain catches him now, as if it had only waited for a full understanding of his mistake. His throat seems to cave in, his vision narrows. It spreads from his thigh through his entire body, boiling concrete in his marrow and veins, pulsing out from his right leg.

Walk it off. Get to the road you stupid son'f a bitch. To the truck. Ankle won't budge. Tied me to the earth it did.

He looks down at the poplar, laying there, mocking him even as its own pressure deflates into the clearing through the same butt end that pins his right leg. He pulls hard but feels only bone untying from flesh. It blackens the world and he pounds the dirt and buries his face and then emerges.

So fucking silent. Narrowing down. Down. Fucking toes on my foot are pointed straight down. How's it so? Calf's next to my heel. Impossible.

"Get out," he yells, breaking the silence even through his ear muffs.

Phone. Knife. Knife's in the sheath. Phone's in the truck. You idiot. You fucking idiot.

He reaches to his belt for his father's buck knife, slides it from the sheath and stabs down at his boot. The laces snap apart like twine from a hay bale. Then the leather itself gives way with his jabs. He sees the knife plunge through a dirty sock and into flesh, but feels nothing. He pulls at his leg again, narrowing against the world around him, flesh sliding past bone like a warming Popsicle.

Nothing.

He vomits, just a mouthful, and spits it over his beard.

"Focus," he commands himself. His father's chainsaw lays only a few feet away, on its side now. He sees little vibrations. Sputtering in idle. But he hears nothing.

Thing'll starve n' shake off. Ain't pullin that cord from here neither. How long's it even been?

Out behind the chainsaw he sees the stump of their Christmas tree, still wet on top as the roots keep trying to feed something lost months ago. He remembers

cutting that fir, remembers joking with Chrissy how they may as well take a Christmas tree from the house site. One less to clear later. His little girl, his little blond daughter, silent with awe after he cut it and pulled it over to her. She smelled the thing. Pet the boughs and watched them spring back. He and Chrissy had not hurried her along that day. It was a Sunday and they'd found each other's hands and watched their daughter engage with the tree, watched her take off a mitten to feel the fir needles prick her flesh, watched her stand on the little stump, balancing a moment, watched her shuffle through the sawdust and scrape flakes into a pile. "It's hard to find good help," he'd said, and Chrissy had smiled, looked around the house site, leaned into him slightly and told him he was doing fine, that even his dad would be proud.

Focus.

He shakes his head and reaches for the saw. He feels something shift in his thigh but strains against it, wrapping his cutting gloves around the saw's handle. He pulls it to him. Furious, his nervous system fully catches up and his vision widens for a moment and he revs the engine, sending its possibility out over the clearing. He sees the house again, can imagine it from Chrissy's graph paper plans, even sees himself outside cutting firewood for the woodstove, the sun radiating off cedar shingles. It is all a man can wish for. A house in quiet woods and a family to fill it with noise.

He flips the saw over so the top of the bar faces down into the poplar, reaches as far left as he can as he gives it gas and down pressure. It sinks into the tree, only inches from his leg. The sawdust flies into his mouth and he savors it like a buried man tasting a breeze. The log begins to pinch and so he jerks the bar out. He twists and cuts from below so the kerf will find itself. The butt end releases. A five foot section rolls onto his torso and he throws the saw and pushes the log off with both hands.

Get ready to crawl you son'a bitch.

But he sees the color of the soil then, like someone dumped gallons of dirty bar oil over his right thigh and the needles and dirt. Green becomes black under the weight of it. He feels it as well, feels hollowed out as he looks at his leg. The wound is deep and uneven, a mash of flesh and blood and jeans wrapping around the inside of his chaps. He remembers how he was holding the saw as the tree came at him. He remembers how wide his father's scar was, how chainsaws are not sharpened to cut something as soft as a man.

Never touched the damn chain brake when I cut that thing. One mistake right on another.

He pushes himself onto his stomach, then up onto his good leg and both arms. Narrowing again, blackness ever so briefly, then needles and dirt in his face and he rolls onto his back.

Wait. Lie still. Just breathe.

He'd trailed his family as they'd walked out with the Christmas tree, Chrissy dragging the tree, his little girl following like an angel trying to catch the tip. He'd looked back at the house site a moment and imagined Christmas lights warming the snow and felt sure they would be out of the trailer and into the house by the next Christmas, that he'd clean up the edges and have an excavator in for the road and septic by summer, get the house framed and boarded in and insulated before snowfall. Then maybe shingle it next spring.

Focus, you dumbshit.

He remembers the Maxi-pad and pulls it from the side pocket on the chaps, where his father always kept it. He throws his gloves away to tear apart the plastic wrapper. The pad itself is fresh, clean, so white and blank against everything else. He shoves it into his wound and briefly sees the blackness again.

Wait. Pressure. Try to elevate it. Best you can do.

"Help," he yells out into the woods. Two times and with all his might, though he feels weakened by the word itself. His voice sounds lonely too, drifting at sea without even an echo, as if the trees have conspired to hold his words inside the clearing. He is miles from a house. That was the whole idea.

Maybe someone's on the road. Old Bucket Dent out walking his dog. Maybe. Maybe Chrissy will come out with lunch, maybe she's even come early and right now is picking up our little girl and running.

A wave of something smooth and queasy wraps around his head and squeezes tight. He closes his eyes to fight it back and hears laughter, indeed his little girl's giddy pitch somehow finding its way through the ear plugs and muffs.

No, not on the road. Downstairs.

He smells coffee, hears pots and pans bouncing off one another, and feels the learning feet of a child running down there, sending vibrations up through the studs and floor joists that he'd nailed together, up through the house he'd built on the land he'd cleared, up all the way into the second floor master bedroom where a man now sleeps. It sounds like his little girl is in the living room, maybe sliding blocks on the floor. Chrissy is cooking pancakes in front of the kitchen's lone eastern window. He can tell from the smell and the scrape of steel on cast iron. He'd added that window last minute, after he'd already framed the wall. As soon as he'd cut the studs and felt the morning sun he'd known it was the right decision.

He wants to go stand at the top of the stairs, to see how a morning looks down there without him. God those stairs had given him such trouble, uneven risers and treads too narrow for his own feet. They took him two tries and two full days to get right but he'd managed. He'd got it by God and he could stand on them now and look over the kitchen and living room. Chrissy would turn from the stove, her hand still on

the spatula. His bright little girl would stop playing blocks just long enough to look up.

But it is a lazy Sunday. He's come a long way with this home, this little piece of land in the middle of nowhere they'd inherited from his father. He's worked hard on it. He's got it done too. Stood on top of it by God. He is sure his dad would be proud. But he is also so tired from the effort. So he only lies there in bed, eyes closed, listening to the sounds of house and family bouncing around in his head and feeling lucky.

Now it sounds like his little girl is pushing her plastic stroller towards the kitchen. Maybe a pancake is ready. It had been too late when he'd finally considered the thickness of the kitchen tiles compared to the adjacent hardwood. And so there is a quarter-inch lip and his little girl will undoubtedly raise the stroller's front wheel, not wanting to jostle her doll as it crosses the threshold.

The Shovel

I am standing outside the kitchen window, watching them ransack my house, and all I can think about is the shovel.

It had been left behind by the previous owners when we bought our house. For months, it was propped against the side yard fence. I could see it out the window when I was in our small home office. I could look out into blue morning half-light while I checked my email, and see the red, rusting steel of the blade, still caked with dirt. The cracked wood of the handle. Not ten feet away.

And then one Tuesday I woke up and it was gone, and I couldn't remember if I'd seen it the morning before. Such an innocuous thing to go missing. Such a valueless machine for someone to take. But take it, they did.

I went out into the damp morning, and squatted down, looking for tracks in the yard. As though I could pull shoe prints for the police. Or discern, through the pattern of a sole, the provenance of its owner.

I remember looking over, past the trash can and recycling bin, toward the gate. I imagined someone opening the gate, stealing from me and my wife, and then just walking out. Strolling past our neighbors' houses without a care.

It struck me then that not only had we bought our California bungalow in a bad neighborhood, but that we were exposed. In hindsight, it was the first sign of our vulnerability.

Tonight, as I watch our house being robbed, I recognize that this is the logical conclusion.

#

I am hovering in the orange glow of our kitchen window, watching as three men go through our things. Two of them are small and mean-looking, with dirty jeans and old windbreakers. The third one is tall and pale. His pants are falling down, and he's got his hood drawn up so I can't make out his face. I can see them in the living room, pulling stereo equipment out of our entertainment center, and stacking it on the coffee table.

Usually when your house is robbed, you just find the aftermath: The place turned over; anything salable, gone. It's uncanny to catch them in the act. I've managed to avoid alerting them to my presence by coming into the side yard, my hands clutching water bottles from the car for the recycling bin.

Eddie and I have just returned from dinner. I had two beers and she and I talked about money the entire time. How we keep making it and it keeps disappearing and we have to

keep making it again. We had to park the car up the street because the driveway is being redone tomorrow. My wife is at the curb finishing a call with her cousin, and I can hear her faintly while I watch the three men despoil our home. I think about using the iPhone in my pocket to call the police, but I don't want to give myself away. So instead, I watch, trying to come up with a plan.

Inside, the tall one is trying to move our 50-inch Samsung OLED television, and he doesn't disconnect the HDMI, so it yanks on him suddenly, and he drops the whole thing. I see the big, ridiculously beautiful screen pop and then go dim, and the guys inside say "daaaaaamn!" and then the tall one shrugs his shoulders.

I figure it's time to do something, so I set the bottles down and sneak out the gate.

Call. The. Police, I mouth to Edie. "There are burglars!" I whisper, pointing back the way I'd come. We're on the garage side of the house, out of sight of any of our front windows.

"What?" she asks, a little too loudly.

"Three guys," I say in a hushed voice, moving close to her. "Are robbing our house."

"What!" she says again. "Oh shit. Oh shit."

"Quiet, Edie! Hang up the phone."

"I'll call you back," she says. And then, disconnecting the call, she scans the darkness of the neighborhood as though more of them are out there, waiting for us. "What do we do?"

"You gotta call the police," I say, putting my hands on her shoulders. "And then we'll wait from a safe distance."

A crash sounds from inside the house, and we both turn toward the sound. "Jeff. Jeff. They're breaking our things."

"I know," I say.

"Are you gonna stop them?"

"I don't think it'd be safe." I'm amazed that she would suggest such a thing. She's always been so prudent.

"Go tell them the police are coming."

"Edie, I definitely don't think that would be safe. And anyway, it'd give them time to escape." In this world of casual thievery and quiet pain, I want someone held accountable.

"Fuck," she says. An audible thud comes from inside. "I'll call. Do you want to—"

"I'll monitor the situation," I say, and I sneak back into the side yard.

Through the kitchen window, I can see that the pile of electronics has grown taller. The computer monitor from my office has been added to it, along with Edie's laptop and a diffuser we bought at Bed, Bath and Beyond.

I need to locate the burglars. See what they're up to. I creep down the side yard, to where I can peer in the blinds of the dining room. With my face close to the glass, I can

make out one of the smaller guys, pulling bottles of whiskey out of our cabinet and stuffing them into his backpack. A broken bottle of vodka lays on the floor, and the guy is standing in the puddle.

He looks young and skinny. A baby-faced man with the beginnings of a mustache. He takes out the bottle of Johnny Walker Blue that my father-in-law gave me for Christmas, and all of a sudden, I can feel the heat in my face, the pressure in my temples.

I'm pretty sure I could take him.

I creep farther along, past my empty office window and the spot where the shovel once stood, to the frosted glass of the master bathroom. I stare at the shapes in the glass, and I can just make out the tall guy, standing by the medicine cabinet. I hear the rattle of pill bottles as he sweeps our medicine into a bag. In my mind, I see my migraine pills and Edie's Lexapro. The Propecia I don't tell anyone I'm taking.

I imagine enumerating these prescriptions for the police, and I am embarrassed at what faulty, weak, and prideful people we are. I remember to breathe, but every intake is shallow. Clipped.

The third guy is trudging down the hall. He says something to the tall guy, and then they're both walking toward the living room. I follow that way, and I nearly collide into Edie standing outside the kitchen window.

"They've got my laptop," she says, whispering.

"I know," I say. "What about the cops?"

"Ten minutes."

"Way too long," I say, my heart hammering.

Through the window, we can see them gathering in the living room. The third guy, I can tell, is ripped. Stocky, with a small forehead and a crew cut. He's showing them Edie's necklaces. The ones I bought her in New York.

"That's my jewelry," Edie says. Her hand is a claw gripping my right arm. Like she's trying to stop herself from running away.

"I know," I say. Each beat of my rattling heart digs a little deeper into this wound I feel. This sense of violation. A coppery taste in the back of my throat.

I look at the guy with the crew cut and I think: That's gonna be the hard one.

"I feel sick, Jeff. Just fucking sick."

"If only I had the shovel."

"What?"

"The one that was out here. Leaning against the fence."

"As a weapon? You said it wouldn't be safe." She takes her hand back, and now it's her eyes digging into me. Inside our home, the men are stashing our things into a big, dirty duffel bag.

"But they'll get away. With everything."

I am acutely aware of my clenched teeth. Of my hands, knotted into fists. I am ready to explode. My wife stands stiffly beside me. She looks down at the ground, and then back through the kitchen window, and then again to me. “What about the tire iron?” she says.

“Yes,” I say. “In the trunk.” I start taking off my jacket. “Keep out of sight,” I tell her, and then I’m running through the gate, out to the car.

Distant Fires

Hannah hadn't told anyone she was pregnant again. Instead she packed grapes in ice, purchased a large thermos for the soup, made sandwiches on baguettes. Between her shoulders, a little off-kilter, sat a child's backpack, stuffed to near bursting. She and Sean had trouble keeping up. He, because his wheels were so small, his legs just barely five. She, because the bike basket was heavier on the left and the backpack was angled toward the river and the river itself was a weight, a wet moon, drawing her to it. Her red Schwinn refused to run parallel on the narrow dirt path.

The late October day was supposed to be crisp. Rich with the smell of fallen leaves, of fires from distant chimneys. But instead, a muggy heat smothered every fragrant thing. Even the river seemed bogged down; it meandered in and out of the rocks along the bank as if unable or unwilling to get anywhere in a hurry. Hannah was out of breath. She grunted and pumped harder. She didn't want to lose sight of her husband. He was ahead with his work friend Rebecca and her husband Ezra. Their bikes, mere specks, wove in and out of each other in perfect waltz. 1, 2, 3 // 1, 2, 3. Hannah thought she heard Paul's laugh rise from his stomach and spill into the air like firecrackers.

Her stomach was sweaty. Every inch of her was perspiring. The saleswoman had convinced her this sweater was perfect for fall picnics, but now it seemed dumb. She'd outgrow it in a matter of weeks. If only she'd dressed like Rebecca. Athletic gear and a ponytail. Working women were so practical. And so thin. That morning, Hannah had finished unraveling the curlers from her hair in the kitchen, using the oven glass as a mirror, while she added chives to the soup and stuffed supplies into the backpack. She thought she'd used enough Aqua Net, but all the hair spray in the world couldn't stand up to this oily air.

"Come, Sean," she said. "Pick up the pace."

They ate in a grassy clearing overlooking the river, among the crab apple trees. Hannah poured mugs of potato-leek soup and passed out sandwiches. At the library, she'd scoured every issue of *Gourmet* from 1977 to 1979 to find just the right recipes. Was thinly-sliced beef tenderloin and horseradish over brie sophisticated enough? She didn't know what she'd been thinking, inviting Rebecca. It was too much pressure. And for a bike ride! Rebecca's an active, outdoorsy woman, Paul always said. Hannah longed to release herself from the hot sweater. But the blouse underneath was soaked through; it cleaved to her fleshy parts.

"Why did you bring soup?" Paul asked. "It's too hot for soup."

“I think it’s lovely,” Rebecca said as she blew gently on her spoon. The way she said lovely was lovely.

Hannah stuffed her hands into her sweater pockets, which were shaped like fat baby pumpkins. Stupid sweater. She listened for the sound of the river, but all the chewing drowned it out. The baguette was hard to bite; the beef required extra work of the jaw. Its bloody smell ruined Hannah’s appetite.

“I don’t like this cheese,” Sean whined. “It burns.”

“Just eat. It’s good,” Hannah said.

“Didn’t you bring any kid food? He can’t eat horseradish,” Paul said—beef between his molars.

She watched him rip another bite from the baguette, moving his head back and forth like an animal. She felt ill, revolted. When they were first married, she was so enchanted by the intensity he gave to everything he did. How his body was always passing electric shocks to hers. Now, she breathed deeply, counting in for five and out for five. She couldn’t get sick in front of Rebecca, whose genetic research was receiving all sorts of attention. According to Paul, she’d been named to one of President Carter’s task forces. A woman like that didn’t belong with vomiting mothers who hadn’t even finished community college. Hannah lowered her eyes from the chewing, from the tug of the river, until the queasiness passed.

“Paul tells me you went to the Ivy League,” she eventually said to Rebecca.

“The Ivy League isn’t a place,” Paul said. “She went to Yale. Triple-dipped. Undergrad, med school, PhD.”

Hannah thought she might still have her spiral notebook from Introduction to Geology in a box somewhere.

“Mommy, this soup tastes funny.”

She passed Sean some grapes.

“There *is* a unique flavor,” Ezra agreed.

Hannah poured herself a cup. A chemical taste preceded its heat. Aqua Net. She must have spritzed hairspray into the soup.

“What’d you put in this stuff?” Paul asked.

A fresh rush of perspiration. A hot flash. While Hannah considered her reply, Sean grabbed a crab apple from a tree. He plunked it in his father’s soup. It landed with a noise like an audience clapping. The thick cream splattered onto Paul’s face and into his eye. He screamed at his son, screamed at his wife. *Fucking soup*. Hannah noticed a pile of rocks just behind Paul. Someone had carefully balanced them, one on top of the other, in the shape of a small dwelling.

“I’m pregnant again,” Hannah said, not knowing why she chose this moment to say it, why she hadn’t told Paul before. She was already twenty weeks. Probably too

late to—

Paul pushed the soup aside and hugged her tightly—with his whole body. When he finished, she put her hand on her stomach, feeling around for the little body of water inside her, wondering if the membrane around it could pop.

Ezra wore the backpack for the return ride, and Paul moved the basket to his bike. But even without the extra load, Hannah's Schwinn wouldn't obey a straight line; it veered again and again toward the river like they shared a secret kinship. The world was dissolving into particles. Hannah thought she might overheat. She took one last look at Sean—little legs pedaling so hard—before riding her bike down the steep bank. Velocity accumulated until she slipped into the river, relinquishing her heat to the cool rush of the water. The current was stronger than she expected.

Butterscotch

Edith's eyes are wide and focused on something across the carpeted kitchen. Her hands are attempting to float out ahead. She crests like a wave and leans, legs rush into the void beneath her. I want to slow her down, put up all the breakable things, move my todeling daughter to another room. I can't do any of that. I knew when we committed to this visit I would be entering his mother's blender but he always wants to stay longer than I do. Sometimes I want to do wicked things to her like putting the plates in the other cupboard or re-parking the minivan backwards. Peter is nowhere to be seen at these times.

It's true that women may choose to be anything they like, but default settings are not part of this choice. My job as a mother is about default settings. When I was pregnant, I was a spaceship, an unbreachable sphere of default. Then all those defaults became choices to negotiate with my disembarked passenger. If you have a nursing baby and a pair of gorgeous tits, the default is you are a human snack bar. As a thirty year old man, Peter's default in the house he grew up in is to rummage through old shit, have meals made for him, call up old friends, and go see the old places. He does not understand the world outside that mesmerizing vortex. He thinks I'm being a pain in the ass. Edith though, she sees my struggle. Her orbit looks as though it intersects Peter but she blows right through him. Is Peter a particle or a wave? He's a cloud that becomes more probable when compatible particles are present. I thought I was a compatible particle, but I push him out of phase and I pass through, only to collide with Edith.

The house is an unexamined life. A case of refrigerator blindness that spread from the refrigerator to every corner in every room.

Shower knobs are not just reversed, and they don't just turn the wrong way, but they are reversed, and one turns the wrong way. I don't know which one because the part of my brain that can know that is blown up. They are painted in red and blue house paint. They are located in the inside corner of the shower, next to the bathroom door. How did this happen? Why? Peter is not even aware of it, his hands learned to turn the knobs decades ago. These are the questions of a new person. Damaging, victim producing questions. Not really questions at all.

There are three separate liqueur cabinets in the living and dining rooms, each jammed with shot glasses, highball glasses, wine glasses with cut designs. There is no liqueur, no wine. I found a bottle of “chocolate wine” in the garage. And there was a flask of brandy stashed in a picnic cooler we hauled out of the attic, which I also claimed.

There is a highly personalized sofa chair in a primary TV watching position with end tables holding remote controls and fingernail clippers. It is covered in a sheet, underneath which appear to be foam blocks that could separate and swallow my ass. The imprint left by the chair's owner is wide and deep, imparting a sense of intimacy unintended by any party.

Our daughter is enthralled by the endless complexity and hasn't even noticed the unobstructed electrical outlets which would normally be her first interest. Its the cats she wants the most. They are uncatchable but their two litter boxes are placed in the center of the living room, giving her 360 degree access. Children's' toys are kept in a bin next to the sofa.

The two cats are horrified by her and give her a wide berth. They are obese because they are given mint-chip ice cream at 9:15 every night. This happens because Herschel eats mint-chip at nine pm and saves some in the bowl for the cats, calling them like an imam in a minaret and presenting the bowl in the intersection of the kitchen and the living room. Butterscotch materializes instantly. He seems the heavier of the two, but it's hard to say since they are never seen at once. I've come to believe that when one cat is observed, the other exists as a diminishing probability, much as the probability of my own existence diminishes the longer I stay here. Angelina is somewhere in a closet upstairs, eyes wide, listening to our movements and waiting for the chance she must eventually take to use the box and eat before going back on the lam. To enter a room where this creature hides and catch her unawares is to see *The Scream* rendered in feline expression. If she is seen, it is a subject of conversation for the day. She can only trot frantically, her pendulous belly swinging side to side like a grocery bag hung from bicycle handlebars. I feel a perverse urge to give chase, to punish the ill-spirit, drive it from the home, but this is not my home and she is someone else's ill-spirit.

“Majestic” is the term applied to Butterscotch by Herschel. It's good advice to bend the knees when lifting him. He is self-assured and friendly, greeting Sally on

the lawn. Sally pursues Butterscotch across the carpet, behind couches. Evading an 18 month old primate is not a problem, so he takes her or leave her as he feels. But the loss of territory rankles, and I expect there is cat urine in places not normally found. The smell will be startelling at first, then it will blend into other funky smells and fade, as cat urine is designed to do, when the statutes of limitations expire and the claims are not renewed.

Once, during ice cream time, I found a jar of Mrs. Richards' Butterscotch Caramel in the door of the refrigerator. The jar was nearly full, and there was a little coupon tied to the rim with a flaccid elastic band. In impossibly small font, the coupon described an elaborate procedure by which one could get a dollar off the purchase of ice cream by filling out the tiny form and mailing it to Mrs. Richards' representatives in El Paso. I was entertaining the idea of taking Mrs. Richards up on this just to see how far she was willing to go. I searched for an expiration date and read that 1985 would have been the last time I could have mailed it in. It seemed like an ironclad deduction that this caramel sat in the side door of the refrigerator throughout Peter's high school career, evading his sister's eating disorder and Edith's midnight excursions, while in the house outside passed numberless generations of cats, puberty, heartbreak, christmases, the fat part of life, the part where childhood and adulthood overlap and stretch the house. The refrigerator fills and empties like a glacier growing and receding across ice ages. It is emptied and cleaned, by Edith's hand, the jar is always returned. Everyone had an island of awareness in the refrigerator but no one ever saw everything. It took strangers' eyes to see the jar. It took the bad taste and base craving for sugar of a human snack bar to overcome its incompatibility with mint chip.

I like my caramel firm and this was firm. No one tried to stop me, but it caught Peter's eye. For the first time since landing in this place for our christmas vacation, he studied what I was doing. He stared strangely at the jar, as if I had reached up and removed a tile of the sky and held it in my hand. I pushed the spoon down into it and waved the jar around upside down like a bell. "Wow." Said Peter. He blinked several times, looking directly into my eyes as Edith lumbered to the fridge behind him. For a moment, we exist simultaneously, faces locked into color and clarity, recognition flickering as time itself stutters, slowing to the speed of twenty year old caramel.

Texts from Beyond

“Hello, customer support, this is Tyler, how may I be of service?”

“Hi, my husband’s texts aren’t coming through right.”

Another one of these. I knew without asking that her husband was dead. We got about 15% of our calls from customers who were having problems with their TFB – text messages from the beyond the grave.

“How long has your husband been deceased, ma’am?”

“Fifteen years. I just got this phone so that I could talk to Darryl. I don’t know what I’m not doing right.”

Fluid Tel’s official script for call center agents was to remind the customer that it can take some time for individual loved ones to get through, and then offer to upsell them on a more “comprehensive” text package, one that offered unlimited text messaging so that when the dead did start to send text messages, the customer would be able to focus on their reunion through Fluid Tel’s network, which was the best coverage in the country, without them worrying about being charged per text message. Customers usually never understood that they got charged for text messages that they sent AND the ones that they received – that usually tipped them over into the edge. Especially when their dead loved ones started texting. Dead people didn’t care about per text charges. Dead people just wanted to check more things off their To Do list, right wrongs, finger murderers, accuse children of being greedy, tell people they were loved, that sort of thing.

Dorothy’s personal account profile had come up automatically through the ticketing system when she dialed in. It detailed her address – an apartment number in a sketchy part of town– and her payment history – always received within seven days of being billed. She had only had a cell phone for 18 months and one of my quota-driven coworkers had already had set her up with a plan that gave her a whopping 14000 text messages per month, what we referred to as the PToDD (pre-teen or drug dealer) plan.

Dorothy’s voice was sweet. It needed to be reading aloud about big bad wolves and houses made of candy. Life’s cruel joke probably meant she probably never had any kids with Darryl. I wanted to ask and also didn’t want to ask because it would make it seem like Fluid cared about her life, like she mattered. Lies. Not having kids. That was something I knew about.

“You’re doing everything exactly right, ma’am. Did he have any hobbies

when he was with us?”

A soft chuckle that might have been girlish sixty years ago. “Oh Darryl’d spend all November out in the woods with our dog Snickers, hunting deer. Only saw a buck once or twice, but I think all that outdoor air was good for him.”

“He might be up in the best hunting grounds you can imagine with Snickers right now. Time doesn’t move the same way up there.”

Darryl had probably never texted in his life – or was even aware that it was possible fifteen years ago when he left. Texts From Beyond always came from people who used their smartphones like a second mouth, who looked into that box and spilled themselves into it, people who might have had some essence of their whatever-it-was trapped in the ether already. Scientists didn’t know why it started happening, tests were still being done, secret messages whispered to dying techno-loving patients dutifully texted back hours after death but sometimes not at all. But the truth was this -- even if you could resurrect Darryl and hand that confused shell of a man an iPhone, he wouldn’t even be able to turn it on, he wouldn’t have the muscle memory swipe, to thumb the QWERTY keyboard, to push send, much less the added complication of traversing the corporeal wiring of the internether to send a note to his beloved Dorothy, who waited for him. Who would always be waiting.

“I’m going to prioritize your text service so that when he’s able to get to a phone, his message will be first in our queue to go through.”

“Oh really? Would you do that?” She sounded happy. It made me happy for a moment. Just a moment until I let myself remember again.

“Absolutely, ma’am, you’re one of our best customers and this is a service that’s reserved for only our top tier clients.” My voice might have sounded cheerful to anyone who didn’t know better, like Dorothy. Maybe she bought it.

“Oh well, I’m nothing special. That’s very kind of you.” She bought it.

I moused over to her rate plan and bumped it down to a level 1 – the entry-level plan that didn’t do much data and charged per individual text message. “We also have a special going this month for customers who haven’t yet gotten a text message from their loved ones – this should help your monthly bill out somewhat.” Iticked the “Has Been Contacted via TFB” box on her customer profile so that she’d be less likely to get thrown onto the list of commissioned sales people calling to upsell, ready to dangle Daryl and her long waiting like a gambler’s fallacy of time spent and the prize being due.

“Oh my! Thank you! I’m on a fixed income and every little bit helps. Do you think he’ll text? He never sent me love notes while we were married.”

“I’m sure of it. Thank you for your call.”

I ended early and put myself on Make Busy so that my next call would bump

to my coworker. Human Resources told me to bounce any TFB calls to coworkers. Apparently that's a new process when an employee experiences a loss.

I hated that phrase. Experienced a loss.

Like if I looked hard enough I might find my wife Kassie somewhere. Perhaps she's in the laundry room? Maybe in the basement, hidden behind the Christmas ornaments. I might pop down there and say "Baby! I've been looking everywhere!" and Kassie'd chide me for my piss-poor attempt at wrapping the light strings when we took the tree down in January. And maybe she'd have found Violet down there too, overlooked, busily constructing a dollhouse out of a storage box.

I guess I'm just the kind of guy who keeps losing stuff. My wife. My daughter.

I should have taken time off for bereavement leave but I couldn't afford not to work. The payments on Violet's surgeries were crucial – insurance had paid most of it, but we – I – still owed \$8K on the deductible plus the funeral expenses. We bought three plots – one for Violet and one for each of us. Such a tiny bit of land, who knew it cost so much? It had to be a hundred dollars a square inch. We had picked out a beautiful white marble headstone – then the engraving was ridiculous. Who buys a stone without words on it? We did. The thought of Violet sitting there under a nameless tombstone. We can engrave later, bit by bit, first her beautiful name and then her birthday and then a reminder to future generations that this little girl was loved by parents too stupid to watch this miracle in light-up tennis shoes every precious second of her child-sized life.

A few weeks after Violet's funeral, Kassie got a text message from an unknown number. It was an emoji of a lady dancing. Who is this? Kassie wrote back.

Baby carriage, the texter replied back.

Kassie ignored it. Again two days later. Baby carriage. Purple flower.

Some people thought the TFB were a form of control by a dark arm of the government, a nefarious plan put in place by the new executive and his dark need to inflict order. Headshock, they called it, using everyone's collective grief to control us, keep us distracted. It was working.

I grabbed Kassie's phone and typed in "Go to hell. Stop texting us or we'll report you for cyber stalking."

In response, a picture of a monkey.

"Monkey" had, of course, been the nickname we always called Violet. The next day, another monkey. Then a hot fudge sundae.

The day of the accident, Violet had been begging for a hot fudge sundae. Okay, what kid doesn't beg for a hot fudge sundae? Every kid does, probably every

day.

We hadn't mentioned hot fudge sundaes in the house, where our smart thermostat might have been eavesdropping (another conspiracy theory, that our smart devices that listen constantly for their own trigger word were actually eavesdropping and applying Big Brother big data to influence our voting patterns).

But we knew we couldn't have given any spy device the words "hot fudge sundae." Kassie and I couldn't bear to talk about Violet at all, really, after the accident. There's no way Big Brother might have known about the hot fudge sundae.

After the hot fudge sundae came another dancing lady emoji. Then a man. Then an ambulance. Then a dove.

The phone wouldn't stop. It was a dropping of coins in the wishing well of our brains. Violet was speaking to Kassie. Violet was over there.

Heart, we texted back together. Heart and then a purple flower.

Kassie never wondered why the texts started coming. She never wondered why only she got texts and I never did.

Princess with brown hair, the phone said. Kassie had brown hair.

Cat with a big tear. Red car. Ambulance. Church with a heart over it.

Kassie stared at the phone. "The funeral. She remembers the funeral."

I didn't say anything. Neither did my phone. Violet wanted her mom, that's all it was, Kassie consoled me. Kassie's tight brown curls fell forward, covering her face as she waited for another text, blue light shining up, her eyes containing a square of light. I nodded, tightlipped, my own phone was useless, a brick to hurl into the empty sky.

Then Kassie's phone went silent for a few days. She panicked. Then she got a picture of a monkey holding its hands over its mouth. Speak no evil.

"Someone's telling her not to say anything. Come on, asshole." Kassie screamed at the ceiling. Her rage and grief combined. In one minute she'd smile, and in another it would transform into a sob. It was worse than losing Violet the first time. Family, Kassie would text back every hour. Family. Heart. Purple flower. Family. Heart. Monkey. Family. Family. Heart. Girl with blonde hair.

Kassie stopped working because she didn't want to miss a text. We couldn't say the reason why. We hadn't even told our parents about the TFB. They would demand that I "fix" their phones so that Violet would start talking to them, too. Like grandparents had some kind of first spot in line to talk to their dead grandchildren. Their kids were still alive – Kassie and me – our parents had no idea what we were experiencing. Kassie took screenshots daily of the past TFBs and mailed them to herself, to me, afraid that somehow these whispers would be gone the next time she looked at the phone.

I still haven't gotten around to engraving Violet's headstone yet. Kassie doesn't even have a headstone on her grave next to Violet's. Violet knew how to text because she'd played with our phones, teethered on them, knew that the magic was captured there in those black unblinking screens.

I guess, in a way it's a good thing that Kassie never even considered that it could be me logging into the backend of the FluidTel GUI at work, plugging her phone number in and sent her that first message of the lady dancing. Be happy, dancing lady. I might have thought Violet would want her mom to be happy. Be happy and dance again. I'm sorry about the hot fudge sundae. I'm sorry that I turned my back for a minute. I'm sorry that our little girl was lost. Hear me now.

I don't even remember now what I was thinking. Maybe it was simple. Listen. We are still a family. Our heart is a purple flower. We are still a family. Come back to me.

The worst part of it all was that each time, for just a moment I would forget that I had sent the emoji. For a moment, it would appear and then our girl would be alive again, be not lost. Our girl was there. And then I'd remember I'd sent the texts.

Until, that is, the text I didn't send.

I stopped after the baby carriage and the purple flower. Have another baby, I was trying to say, Violet would want that. But those tiny pictures were wrapping Kassie up instead of giving her closure. It felt dangerous, counterproductive. It was all she could think about, all she could see. So I stopped. Purple flower. Violet signing off.

Then, out of nowhere, came the monkey holding its hands over its mouth.

That wasn't me, I wanted to tell her. That really was Violet. Or the government. Or someone at FluidTel logging into the back end GUI. But it was probably Violet, texting from somewhere, texting us from hell or heaven or from somewhere inside our hearts, willing her to be in the room with us. It was Violet. And it was real. It was all real.

But I couldn't explain. I couldn't tell my wife that it really was Violet's spirit, that some kind of insane magical event had happened because Kassie believed it had been so all along.

She didn't understand that our dead daughter was telling me to stop being her mouth. Stop toying with her mom. Stop before it was too late.

But I lost Kassie anyway. Lost her in the FluidTel employee handbook metaphor and lost her in the real world meaning – but not in that order. She was recovered against the rocks on the beach, two weeks after she'd gone missing. My truest heart. The one person in the world that allowed me to create something

wonderful for the first time in my life. My terrible fingers that had typed a dancing lady into a black lidless eye. The same terrible fingers that twitched when I had gotten a notification on my phone while walking out to the street with Violet that one day. Someone had mentioned me on Twitter. I turned my face just a second. Just a second.

And now, Kassie knew. She knew the reason for my surprised face when that unexpected monkey emoji appeared. She knew everything. That's why she wasn't speaking to me through my phone the way that Violet called to her. My phone was blank. I was a confused face. Not because she couldn't text me from beyond but because Kassie knew now what I had done to Violet. To her. Surprised face. Sad face. Face with open mouth and cold sweat. Face screaming.

Dorothy's Daryl, on the other hand, would never send a message. He wouldn't have known how. I went into the backend GUI typed in Dorothy's number.

"I only get one message, darling, so here it is. I'm here watching you. I love you. Be happy and don't come too soon. I got Snickers here with me keeping me company. Keep me alive down there as long as you can my love. – D"

Dog face. Smiling face. Relieved face.

I set it to be delivered in two days.

Then I put my own phone number in and set the text to be delivered in 48 days.

Maybe I'd forget I sent it. Even if just a moment.

Two hearts. Smiling face with halo. Bride with veil. Raising both hands in celebration.

It would be good. Just for a moment. It would be good and it would be worth it.

Confused face.

Weary face.

Weary face.

Family.

The Edge of Earth

People keep falling off the Earth.

This is what our mothers tells us, although we've never seen the Edge before. We've heard about it, of course; every mother tells their children cautionary tales before bed, when the air is deep violet and spongy, and spoken words float like soap bubbles.

We are close to the Edge, getting ever closer. This is because Earth is shrinking; it has been for thousands of years now. When we hear the word "Earth", we think of flatness, of contraction, like pancake batter spreading across a greasy pan, in reverse.

...

We are a small town, Madison, population 365, stamped in fading grassland and dirt, trapped under glowing sky and sun. Every year, our parents till the Earth, grow shriveled corn, tend to shrunken vegetable gardens. Our siblings, the youngest children, scavenge for rusted door handles, deflated bicycle tires, and wind chimes buried in Earth. A few years ago, Bennie, who was three grades ahead of us, found two flat, glassy rectangles that our parents say were once called phones, from some long-gone era, hundreds of years ago, when Earth was wider.

...

Now it is August, and we sit in the playground of Madison Elementary, hands cupped around sweating glasses of lemonade. Every summer, our neighbor Mrs. Rollins—everyone is a neighbor in Madison—squeezes fresh lemons and stirs in crystalized sugar, water, and ice. She wakes up at dawn each morning to put a pitcher and a few stacks of glasses on the porch for the children before padding back into the bowels of her house.

We are quiet, remembering the burning days years ago when we woke early, ran barefoot to Mrs. Rollins', tripped and skinned our knees on the pavement, didn't care. The worst feeling on Earth was when we arrived and saw only a line of watery yellow and shreds of skinned lemons at the bottom of the pitcher, curled like dead leaves.

Lily turns to us now, sucks on a slice of lemon, and drops the rind on the ground, grinding it with the heel of her sandal. "I'm so done."

"Me too." Byron rubs his eyes.

"I wish something would *happen* here." Lily keeps grinding the lemon rind with the bottom of her flip-flop.

We all nod, too tired to talk. Sweat soaks our hair, tiptoes down our necks, sluggish as yolk.

"Don't you guys just...want to leave? Go somewhere, anywhere, except for here." Lily holds her head in her hands and begins to rock back and forth on the faded red slide.

“I just...I don’t want to grow, like, vegetables, for the rest of my life, and sit under the stupid sun, and fade away like everyone else here. I want to go somewhere.”

“There’s only grass and corn for hundreds of miles,” Vivi says. “The nearest civilization is more than two hundred miles away. There’s nowhere else to go, Lil.”

“I *know* that. I’m not stupid, *Vivian*,” Lily says, rocking faster on the slide.

“Don’t snap at me,” Vivi says.

“I *didn’t*.” But Lily is still rocking like a manic swing, eyes shut, corn-yellow hair swaying like a pendulum.

We worry for her.

...

Lily is not in bed the next morning. She leaves a torn note on lined paper, blue ink soaked between blue lines. *I need to go.*

The population of Madison is 364.

...

It is a hot August day, so similar to yesterday that maybe it is yesterday. But there is no lemonade at Mrs. Rollins’, no pitcher, only the glasses, sparkling. And there is no Lily. We imagine Lily running to Mrs. Rollins’ at dawn, barefoot, without us, taking the pitcher of lemonade, a little sloshing over the edges, and drinking sips of yellow as the sun pours over the Earth. We imagine Lily running through the shuddering heat, through the fields, yellow hair lifting around her shoulders, glass held against her quaking chest.

We stare at the faded red slide, the last place where we saw her. We stare as hard as we can, try to find her secrets imprinted in the plastic, the rind of her lemon still crushed in the weeds like a broken moon.

“I wonder where she is,” Amelie says.

“Maybe she went to civilization,” Byron says.

“Do you think she would be crazy enough to do that?”

Amelie quiets, waits for our response. In our minds, we see Lily’s sky eyes that were always too wide and her corn hair that was always too wild and think, yes, she was crazy enough to do that. And then we think, *what if she didn’t go to civilization? What if she went the other way?*

Vivi bursts out, “Do you...do you think I made her go away? After I snapped at her?”

“No, you didn’t, of course you didn’t,” Byron says. He slings an arm around Vivi and looks like he wants to kiss her, but doesn’t. “She was bound to go off some time.”

“Yeah, don’t be silly,” Amelie says, but her voice shakes, ever so slightly.

...

For weeks after, we sit. We drink lemonade. Mrs. Rollins produces another pitcher from her house, but this one is cracked plastic, nothing like the fancy glass one from our

childhood.

We wander in the corn fields, see the empty husks, the shriveled meat inside, and we remember her corn-yellow hair. We sit in our houses, lie in our beds, but we see scraps of lined paper everywhere blowing on our hot white sheets, soaked with words written in sky-blue ink caught between sky-blue lines. *I need to go.*

We always end up wandering back to Madison Elementary, to where we sat in wooden desks and were taught about the Day in grade six, the Day that the Earth would finally become so small that only one person could stand on it, then none, and how there would be bodies and chunks of Earth falling perpetually, rotting, flailing like beetles turned on their backs.

...

We meet again at Madison Elementary. Amelie reads from a history book about Earth before the Edge, but her eyes only skim over the page. Vivi sits on the swing, feet dangling, while Byron pushes her from behind. She clutches the rusty chains in her fists, as she rises higher and higher, ash-black hair flying. At the height of her arc, Vivi jumps, curving through the blue air like the moon, rising and setting. And then, suddenly, she cries out and falls back to Earth, stumbling.

“Are you okay?” Byron says. He runs to her, touches her arm.

Vivi shakes her head. Her voice trembles. “I think...I think I saw it.”

“Saw what?” Amelie says.

We look towards the horizon and shade our eyes from the sun, yellow as a coin nestled in cornflower silk.

And then we squint, coldness trickling down our faces, and wonder, *Are we dreaming?* For the endless grasslands, the endless cornfields, are coming to the end, as if something has swallowed them, perhaps a great mouth with teeth, dull and rusted as the abandoned tractors our parents found in the fields years ago.

The cornfields are disappearing, rows at a time, simply falling over an edge. The Edge.

Perhaps it is not real. But the town of Madison, population 364, is suddenly louder than it ever has been, and the people bring out thick knives used for butchering chickens and wooden baseball bats and even ancient pasta strainers from hundreds of years ago, corroded red. The children wield silverware in tiny fists, and they shout, as if they can fight off Earth’s crumbling, as if they can fight the Edge.

Vivi collapses onto the faded red slide, where Lily sat weeks ago, and rocks back and forth, tears leaking down her cheeks. “What...what if this is my fault? What if it’s all my fault? I made Lily disappear, and now this is happening; it can’t be a coincidence, it can’t...”

“Did you ever listen in school?” Byron snaps. He jumps up from the seesaw. “The

Earth is crumbling anyway. It has been for thousands of years. It's not *anyone's* fault." He turns to us. "We need to do something, guys, we need to go, we need to move."

But Vivi is still rocking, back and forth, like Lily.

"Vivi, *come on!*" Amelie says. She tugs at her shoulder.

Vivi looks up at us. Her eyes are so light that the brown looks almost yellow, like lemon rinds mixed with dirt. "I hear her calling. Calling over the Edge."

The corn fields peel away from Earth. The Edge is only a mile away now, an invisible thing, the ghost of a hand taking, crumbling, as a toddler crushes cookies in its fumbling fists.

The people of Madison hold up their silverware and pasta strainers, beating the sky with their fists. They say, *You cannot fight us! We will beat you!* as if there aren't posters inside Madison Elementary saying the Edge is unavoidable, that it cannot be broken.

Byron shakes his head and tries to scoop up Vivi, who resists him, still rocking on the faded red slide. But Byron gathers her in his arms, and we start running, our feet vibrating on the ground, the sound of Earth falling so loud that it becomes silent, just watery sky and corn fields. We try to run past the people of Madison, but suddenly we are caught in the fray, in the sticky web of hysteria.

The Edge nears, closer still, the corn fields shorn off the face of the Earth.

Then it is here.

It arrives right on the doorstep of Madison Elementary like death, and the building, the schoolhouse where we first learned about the Edge, where we were taught order of operations and the lifecycle of frogs, where we drank lemonade and drew on dusty chalkboards, simply disappears, here and then not here, as if everything is on a moving conveyor belt, and it has fallen off the back, forgotten.

The Edge arrives at the playground next, and Vivi trembles, choking on her tears. The swing set falls over, disappears into sky, into blank blue space, and then the seesaw falls next, and then the sand pit, grains sifting through empty air like an hourglass. And finally, the faded red slide collapses, last of all.

Vivi screams, something that sounds like *I'm here, Lily, I'm here*, and tumbles out of Byron's arms and runs to the Edge, as if she can stop it, hold it back. And for a moment we think she can; we think the Edge has paused, as if considering if it wants this mad girl, this girl with her black hair streaming behind like silk, like charred ashes.

Then it eats her too.

The population of Madison is 363. Four becomes two, and Byron falls onto the Earth, because he loved Vivi, for years, and never told her, and Vivi is gone, and Lily is gone. Next to him, Amelie cries, real tears, even though Amelie never cries, and hasn't since she was two.

The people shed bright, cold tears, and one by one they approach the Edge, sol-

diers, an army, holding silverware that glints and smiles that glint too, as if together they can beat the Edge into submission.

But the Edge comes, greedily, steals their shoes. Their bodies teeter on fallen Earth. And right as the people begin to fall, fear sneaks in and squeezes their hearts. They want to run back, but they cannot. The Earth crumbles. They plummet into the sky, screaming, utensils still gripped in calloused hands, all of them, the children who collected wind chimes and the parents who told cautionary tales and even Mrs. Rollins with her heart of sweet lemonade.

The population of Madison is now 2. We stand in front of Mrs. Rollins' porch as homes tear off Earth cleanly, disappearing like Lily, existent, then not. There is no one else around us, only deserted houses, empty plastic pitchers, ghosts of blue ink. It is silent. The Edge creeps up to us, as if it is almost regretful, almost sorrowful. It laps at our scuffed sandals like the ocean we read about in school. Together we peer over the Edge.

We see crumpled Earth and empty corn husks and utensils sparkling, falling into unending blueness. We see bodies, overturned beetles, and somewhere, we see flashes of black hair and the shadows of faded red plastic slides, and if we hold our breaths and concentrate, we hear two voices, fading quickly: *I need to go, I need to go, and I'm here, Lily, I'm here*, overlapping, joining, dry as corn husks rubbing against each other. If we squint, until our eyes are closed and we do not even hear our own hearts beating, we can see, just barely, a flash of blue-inked eyes and wild corn-yellow hair.

The Edge is getting impatient. We can feel it. We breathe, let our prayers flit, half-heard, into the sky, let them sink into the Earth.

Then we fall over, backwards, as if on to our beds, as if just to retire for the night. But we continue falling.

SPECIAL SECTION

The text "SPECIAL SECTION" is rendered in a bold, yellow, distressed font. A thick, blue line with a white speckled texture runs horizontally through the middle of the letters, creating a layered effect. The line starts at the left edge of the frame, passes behind the letters, and ends at the right edge.

The Sea Witch Tells You a Story About the Deep-Sea Anglerfish

None of the jokes you read about God and creation on the internet are false. Each dialogue happened—the duck really is a large incompetent pigeon with a surfboard mouth. The snake really is an angry sock. It's true, too, that the laws of physics were thought up ahead of time, and so to compensate for the resultant crush of water's overwhelming presence, the anglerfish was given the ability to also occupy the space just behind your left ear. There she is, the color of the roots of your hair, teeth slipping into the soft spot near the lobe as you roll over in bed. Bulbous and armored, her speed makes your blink look like the sunrise. She is a nightmare because we like the concept of lips, for the jaws of an animal to close over their own violence. We like to think we were minding our own business before being dismembered. But the anglerfish was made to make us long for death, to drift towards it as we might towards a late fall rose, lurid pink. *The end*, we think, *of the Anthropocene*, reaching out our hands—I haven't even gotten to the part about the male fish. How small he is, how ready to dissolve his own organs in the service of her free movement. In this regard, the ugliest fish in the world is objectively perfect, carrying in her terrible frown that small lump of flesh.

Nonchalant Divination

Non-Mom is trying her turn at divining. She starts with a couple of curling irons held out like dowsing rods in her living room. *Where are the single women*, she whispers, and the irons quiver—but she can't make it out the door without an extension cord.

Next she tries a deck of recipe cards: chicken Française for a date at the art museum, kale and mushroom frittata for a romantic hike in the woods, spicy ramen for trespassing with teenage gusto, cherries jubilee for you know what. *But I want them all*, she says, and stuffs the cards in her bra.

Time to read the soap scum in the tub: count rings for lovers and find their faces in the grit—an orange tint for passion, green for wealth, gray for divorce. She spots a blank face beneath the faucet: *Mystery is certain death* she says, and dumps some bleach over it.

Enter the cat, black and good lucky. Non-Mom reads Cat's tail twist for clues to nine lives. *Which life will I land on?* Sharpening her nails on the sofa's love handles, Non-Mom refuses to choose: feline or human, single or non-. The one thing she's chosen is not to be Mom.

It's not a choice. It's a child! someone shouts from outside, brandishing a sign with an image of a smiling cherub, so white it might vanish, ghost her, like her last date on Tinder, which wasn't a date, just a swipe, wiped out shortly after, like old-fashioned white out: *This never happened*. Definitely a choice. Definitely choices every way she turns, nothing inevitable but the weather channel, foretelling doom and devastation.

She reads her own palm, sees a journey she's fated to take. *What if I never come back?* Everywhere she goes, Moms stack blocks into towers. Let down their hair. They're stacked. They're blending into blonde waves, cascading down walls for princes or princesses to up the ante. Non-Mom acts nonchalant. Dips her toes in the moat to test temperature. *Divine*.

Non-Mom Rom Com

Strapping a Baby Bjorn to my chest, I run laps around my neighbor's fence. I'm ripe with apples where a baby should be. That knocking coming from Bjorn? That's just baby's first words, hopeful as hoedowns. See her cheeks? Red apple red, skin edible.

My legs tire, but I keep at it. Gotta get back my post-baby bod, which took off in search of postal service, wanting to mail a letter stamped like the icon of a pooping dog stabbed in the soft dirt of my neighbor's lawn. The cartoon dog's slashed through the chest, red X, meaning Hell to the no. Mustn't let Applet poop where she may, slick with juice from knocking and bruising, all apple battle in the Baby Bjorn. Already she's house trained: *Sit. Shake. Stay.* She spits apple puree all over my chest and the studio audience loses it. *I could eat you up*, somebody shouts. Wasn't this supposed to be romantic?

Out of breath now, all I see are iPhones roaming the street, apps to track Applet's non-heartbeat. Is absence hereditary? Something's gone rotten, unappetizing. I call the Hot-or-Not line and listen to ads for diamonds, diapers, and needles for darning. Audience coos. The operator tells me hunger's congenital, or maybe she says commercial—there's static in the way. But I'm full, I say. Operator tells me hunger will come to me, tells me to just keep running, or else pick a spot and stay.

Bot Seeking Non

I dress myself digital in winter tones and diamond pixels. Time to swipe a mate and settle. First I list what I'm missing: non-kids, non-gun, non-god, and lips none too casual. Soon we're up and pinging.

I love books!!! he says, with three marks just like that. Will you open marry me??? she asks, with three marks just like that. Nothing like emphasis to ruin a cheap bon mot. Are you a bot??? he asks, with three marks just like that. I'm too corporeal for him. Too sartorial—bots don't have clothes, do they? What for, with all the nude photos?

Come to think of it, I always get those "Are you a robot?" quizzes wrong. Maybe my best self is glitchy: my emoji are slimming, my filters are lit, and my SAD barely shows if you turn up your brightness.

Nights, I swipe right on my own photo. Meet myself for drinks somewhere with dim lighting. Mornings, I wake up with myself on the wrong side of the bed, self stealing covers from self.

Bad Self. Break up with Self.

Self, Stay.

I eat cheese!!! he says, meaning "brains" or "Smile Pretty."

Be bland??? she says, maybe meaning "bold"? And she's still married to her ex-wife's ex-husband. Our hobbies clutter and collect in corners: knitting needles bent from double-timing toilet plungers; skateboards plump with excess wheels.

In solitude, I think about thinking. Leave sticky notes for lovers, hummingbirds fluttering from walls, sills, sink. I make coffee for myself and bring it to myself in bed, dog sleeping on one pillow, cat on the other. Curled at the foot of my feet, I'm sure the view gets better.

@NonMom #AllThumbs

You want Non-Mom to show you her hands, to prove her handsomeness, her agility with gawkish questions. You toss one as a test but miss and when it hits the sidewalk it gasps open like a soda can. Droplets of breath spatter over everyone. It's a sparkling caffeine-free mess.

Kind of beautiful, Non-Mom says. And all this time you thought she was a mime.

Kind of. Kind. Clumsy with consonants, Non-Mom says *kin*. You give her back her D for design. She's awfully pretty, for a Non-. Hair comes off her eyebrows, natural-like, not painted on.

Handsy, she catches your question, aborts her reply. You'll show her who's empty, all right. Hand to belly, you glare reprovingly. *This is a stuck-up. Hand over the kid.*

Non-Mom sighs. She's caught your kind before, confused by the hollows inside her, maze of each raw egg's dead name. Her kin speed backward, erasing tracks. She licks time from your wrists. You want to lick back.

**In Years Forward We Recognize No One Else,
Not Even Our Bodiless Selves**

Blighted mind, the doctors said.
I gave them enough material to build a career
they could be proud of, without primer,

without polish, without
augmentation - lovely
and lovely without pretense. Tonight

a wolf walks toward me and I let the car idle,
sheep gathering in the headlights,
gravel road beginning its washout.

My sweater unravels at the hem, where it began,
once a skein fastened to a lamb. I tug
at yarn so soft and warm I imagine it houses

your heartbeat, but one slipped knot
and the whole thing will come undone
and unstitch all the places your hands once traveled.

How long can a body sit, contained
and flayed by no motion,
soft as moth wings unfolding,

still weary from their night-tongue
gorging on sweetmeats by porchlight?
Does it rust like a weather-worn hinge

attached to a barn door, bowed
and shut like an idled car, occupants
lingering and sweltering?

Wolf, I think you are speaking to me in waves.
Perhaps you are a forked tongue,
or maybe a cleft palate.

Difficult to say without teeth.
I sing off key to you,
you burble back, together we are a river.

You are not concerned
when I take from you.
I crawl into your ossuary,

your foreign skyline, and through your stare
observe the persistence of progress,
the persistence of steel and blue, the spiral

that pierces clouds – so suddenly
the mind descends, slowed by canopy in unmapped
corners, to summon night from a molehill.

This winter I will huddle near the fire,
the TV anchor droning in the living room,
and I will watch him with my new wolf eyes

bared of expression. I will stir broth
while the hours stare back.
I will make soup and help you into bed.

When the shelves are empty, I will go out,
the pharmacist still waiting on a stalled shipment,
our number still on the list, she says.

A Violet Thought Isolated In The ICU Of 2AM

Caught in an autumn sky, flurid, fluorescent,
I can't stop seeing the blighted birch leaves against it,
leached yellow on spit-dark stems, blighted trunks
split wide like a lightning strike. I used to

wade into the green-slick pond alone, smooth
stones in my pockets, just to practice becoming a new
phase of moonlight. I measured years by the wood's
veining branches and believed in how sacred

I was, like a secret, just by being kept.
But there is always an I and another I ready to offer
a widened stare, a close-mouthed portal, quirks
pearling her peeled-bark trunk.

At 2AM, there's no triage for a rootless thought,
no sent home with a scrip, no shot of oxygen,
no elegant pill. It rocks on its threshold, curled
into the violet shadow of a solitary leaf.

I rehearse my ending, my lunar resurrection.
It's calming to be unknown, and unknowing
enough to let minutes drip like an IV, ready to leave,
ready to stay, an iridescent chrysalis in the static gray.

Flame As a Current We Get Snared In

Tethered to the new-risen moon
of my sleepless mood, restive, difficult,
I go out of my way to press against each
one, then rinse my wrists under cool water
until they lose their rose, these
regrets and their sudden, shamed surface,
a surfeit of past – past help and good
only for searing the over-tangled dark
inside my pale-veined temples.
Memory, drifting in jetsam, caught
in fragmented nets. Memory, in locked
waterlogged chests, the detritus of seabeds.

I am laying it out before me again,
a garage sale puzzle of my worst selves
and their scald. My god, put it back
in the chest filled with ribbons,
stones, metal rings, the flat iron that was
a real antique, once used as a doorstep, now
just another object refusing to lose
its attachment. A person and the sea can find
communion by the mouth only. Shallow
breath, bury these castaways beneath the slip
of moonlight between linden and ash.

Solitary Nest

My eye is an omen. I keep it on planets pale as cumulous,
string-less balloons held fast by a rising tide.

Someday, you reckless travelers must be undone,
and then, I'm certain, will be free again.

Already this shore is breaking, shattered with glass
that refuses to return to sand. I stand on a jagged edge,

ready to be my own god, gray wrists branching
like spider webs spun in the corner of a child's unused room.

I open my palm and whisper the boats in.
Watch how they splinter. (I need to feel this.)

And if I lock the dark behind me? Toss the key
beyond light's grasp, beyond horizon, headstone, history?

Well, I too can choose to vanish, again and again. (My absence
outpaces you.) Had you allowed yourself to push back

against the wreckage, you might have drifted
safely away, your face a familiar reflection and an apparition.

I don't stay to watch you slip under.

Aligning Our Chakras

Root

I have a red dot that looks like a penny.
It may not seem like much but
it's the beginning—this coin is the seed
of my spirituality. Pound for pound
the scales will balance. As I roller skate
around your aura, the ground
comes up to meet me: fearlessly I bounce
like a quarter off a perfectly-made bed.

Sacral

My navel attached me to my mother, led me
to a new world where I was more
than just an apple or orange. In this hybrid
experience, I could be grafted into a new breed,
a poet/racecar driver/cosmetologist.
I could write with six arms, my engine purring,
my hair-blower mouth puffing
“Ready. Set. Go!” A checkered flag
drops. Sonnets billow
from my tailpipe, drift to the clouds.

Solar Plexus

I have a squishy core, like jelly in a donut.
Take a bite. It's good, right?
The earth keeps its magma under wraps
until it bubbles to the surface with an “oomph!”
How much of our lives can we truly control?
Breathe in. Breathe out. Chant ohms.

Heart

My heart is locked—yours has the key.
Together our colors bloom on the wall
like these paint samples, little bookmarks
of sapphire and antique white.
Can we remodel our hearts?
Mine feels a lot like Formica.

Yours, a plush throw pillow.
It's a new life—let's go.

Throat

Sometimes I say "Great" when I mean "Uh oh,"
a sob caught in my throat like a stick
turned sideways. My dog loves to fetch,
even after I'm tired. I could cough it loose,
but where would it go? My poor puppy
doesn't know why I'm screaming.
Now the stick's gone, I miss it.
I climb the fence into my neighbor's yard.

Third Eye

Imagine Cyclops with three eyes
or me, at thirteen, a pimple
in the middle of my forehead. Who could love
someone who sees so much? Can the one
who sees everything love herself?
An empty mirror is a dangerous thing.
A vain queen gone—poof! An opaque ghost.
Still, nothing is ever erased.

Crown

My fontanel is fully closed
like a moon roof. I might start climbing
the stairs to heaven, Led Zeppelin in my earbuds,
a rosary around my wrist
or stay grounded, a lighthouse beacon
pulsing onto rocks, mermaids and mermen
with tangled hair. The sirens are singing in my head.
Sweet chorus, open my spirit.

50 States

Delaware



The state bird is the blue hen chicken. The state flower is the peach blossom. The state beverage is milk, which builds strong teeth and bones. When I learned Delaware was the first state to ratify the Constitution, it all made sense. “If I were a state, Miss Campbell, I’d be Delaware,” I declared. My first-grade teacher was very literal, no fan of the subjunctive at all. “But you’re a little girl,” she said, “and little girls cannot be states.” Still, I wrote a valentine to Delaware, with a scraggly chicken and a frilly flower. I drew a milk carton with my own face sketched on the side. What was missing from Delaware was me—a fellow eager beaver, wholesome and colorful and always first in line! One spring when I was grown, my beloved and I drove due east to Rehoboth Beach. We read on a sign: *This sandy hamlet has one of the most bustling gay beach communities in all the United States.* “Another reason to like Delaware,” I smiled. A few years later, we went back again to roam the grounds of St. Andrews School in Middletown where they filmed *Dead Poets Society*. That’s when the email came, so serendipitous I feared no one would believe: *Congratulations! Red Hen Press will be publishing your collection of poems!* (And what was a red hen but a blue hen chicken dressed up for Valentine’s Day?) For my bio, I submitted this: *Poet lives and writes on the Delaware seashore.*

Denise Duhamel and Julie Marie Wade

Montana



My father was born in Butte and moved with his parents to Billings soon after. He was a cheerful blond boy with cowlicks and overalls, bright white teeth and an impish grin. An uncanny look-alike to TV's "Dennis the Menace," he answered to "Billy from Billings," the son of John, a good-natured traveling salesman and his devoted wife June, brother to a tow-headed sister named Linda. Idyllic as a sitcom family themselves, the Wades lived in Montana till Bill was eleven years old. Once, I had to interview my father for a class project about origins. He explained that while he came to love the West Coast, he never forgot his beginnings in Big Sky Country. "We played Cowboys and Indians all day in the summertime, climbing in the cottonwood trees. In winter, it snowed and snowed, but we were always warm. We had heavy coats lined with goose down. Even when temperatures dropped below zero, we never wanted to come inside." I asked if he ever went back to the Treasure State, even for a visit, and my father shook his head. "Someday," he said. "We'll go together, you and me and Mom." Then, I watched a shadow fall across his face. "But the thing about going back—it's harder than you think." *Why is that, Dad?* "All the cottonwoods will be smaller. Memory makes everything so grand."

Nevada



When I was in third grade, my classmates and I each picked a piece of folded paper from a bowl. On the paper was written the name of the state about which we would do our oral presentations. I plucked out Nevada, which I pronounced with the stress on the wrong syllable. Coupled with my Rhode Island accent, my propensity to add extra R's, I said "Never-da" until my teacher corrected me. I went to the library where I learned about the desert and cactus, the Hoover Dam. I learned about legalized gambling and a neon cowboy who tipped his neon hat on the Las Vegas strip. Nevada was the only state at the time where gambling was legal. Gamblers often got free steaks at casinos. I told the class about my exciting findings, about roulette wheels and craps tables and slot machines. And there's one other thing that's only legal in Nevada, I said, something called "prostitution." I pronounced the first syllable with a long "o," like prose. Still, my teacher knew what I meant and told me to wrap it up. "What's prose-it-too-shun?" Linda asked. "That's when a man pays a lady to kiss her!" Brian said. "It is not!" I protested, though I had neglected to look up the meaning of the word. Everyone started to laugh, except my teacher and me. Linda left high school her senior year and moved out to Nevada to study nursing. She married a compulsive gambler in a drive-through wedding chapel in Las Vegas. She lived in a subdivision right outside Sin City and patched up prostitutes who often found themselves in the ER.

Dreams

Night pictures

In my first dream, I am small like the proxy-girl asleep in my bed, and warm like her, too. My dimpled hands clasp the bars of a cage. Am I caged in or caged out, the zookeeper or the beast being kept? It is hard to say. I feel a sense of dread but also of longing. Then, I hear elephants trumpeting in the distance, and as they draw close, I see they are walking single-file, their trunks and tails intertwined. They look like elephants I have seen at the circus, enormous and wrinkled with a silver sheen. Their toenails are painted white as chalk. Their long tusks, like those from the picture books, are missing. Once, I told my grandmother how I rode an elephant at the circus, how I slipped from my seat and crashed all the way to the floor. It was true, but she didn't believe me. She said I must have been dreaming. My parents were there, but they each held a finger over their lips, whispered *Let's not worry Grandma*. In this way, my first truth became a lie. Even my witnesses would not confirm my story. In the dream, the bars turn white as the toenails, as the missing tusks of the elephants, and suddenly my hands are clutching, trembling, holding on for dear life. Fear slides down my throat like a soft egg. Am I afraid for the elephants or afraid for myself? Am I safer within or beyond the bars? It is hard to say. For years, my father will tell this story, how I woke him in the dark, crying—how I whispered, *Please, Daddy, the night pictures were very sad*. I remember the dream, but nothing of the waking. Whatever happened after, as with so many stories, I will have to take someone else's word for it.

A little dream of me

For my voice recital, I'm practicing the song "Dream a Little Dream of Me." It's a sweet melody, and catchy, so I sing it in my head all day long, memorizing the way the bridge swoops up into a high octave, taking all your breath, your faith (*Stars fading...*) and then quickly stair-steps to a lower register: (... *but I linger on dear...*). Cass Elliot made this song famous in 1968, or maybe it was the other way around: the song put her, and the Mamas and the Papas, on the charts, selling close to seven million copies in an era devoted to political protest songs and drug-induced surrealism. Her voice—strong, yet oh-so-tender—was well suited for this twenties-era ballad. She sang it for the last time on July 27, 1974, then two days later died in her sleep. We can't know if she was dreaming when it happened, or what she might have been dreaming of. Perhaps the lyrics still trilled in her head, words like *sycamore*, or *sunbeams*, words that are fun to sing. As I study the song now, I see that the light melody actually rubs against rather insidious lyrics: the lover insisting, desperately, to be remembered after the night (or the relationship, or perhaps even her life) is over. It's an unrealistic demand, as if you could force yourself into someone's dreams; usually it's the other way around. Lately, I've been dreaming of my ex-boyfriend, a man I lived with nearly

twenty years ago. In the dreams, I'm always chasing after him, or perhaps it's the other way around. We weave down labyrinthine corridors, skim past witnesses who lurk in the corners. He's always just out sight. Sex simmers in the air: either sex we've had or are about to have. Or sex that has failed. Sex that wanted to be love. I wake in a panic, sure that I've done something wrong, an old reproach burning beneath my heart. I blink and I blink my way into the present day. Which is the lie and which is the truth? It was just a dream, I tell myself, thank god it was just a dream.

The message

Once, when I was fifteen, I dreamed I was following a woman in a white sundress through the aisles of a Thriftway supermarket. Her feet were bare, and I kept thinking how cold they must have been, how dirty their soles. I followed her because she reminded me of Roma Downey, the woman who played the main angel on *Touched by An Angel*—that heavenly ingénue. Monica was her name. I watched her every Saturday night instead of going out with friends. She had red hair and long, slender hands and an Irish brogue. I told myself I was reclaiming my spirituality, reexamining my agnosticism, but really I was just so attracted to her that I ached—a pang like hunger but deeper in the body. I prayed it would go away. I can laugh now and make jokes about how much I wanted to be “touched by an angel” in the literal sense, but not then. I couldn't have laughed then. In the dream, the woman turns to confront me in the canned food aisle, and I apologize, protest too much, say *I'm not actually following you*, and she raises one of her long, slender hands, places a finger over her lips, and says, *Listen*. Her hair is black, her accent distinctly American, and she doesn't look so much like Roma Downey after all—but I'm still drawn to her in a way I can't explain. *I have a message for you*, she whispers. *From God?* I ask, and she nods. Then, right then, my mother is calling for me as if over the loudspeaker in the supermarket, the way she did once when I was a lost child. I say, *Just a minute, Mom*, but I can't ever get back to the dream, and every time I pass that Thriftway in real life, I think of the woman, the possible angel, and what she might have said, what message she might have been sent to deliver if there really was a God and if he had taken an interest in speaking to me. Then, one day on the way home from school, I see the Thriftway is on fire. My father is driving, and I hang my head out the window like a dog, watching the firemen with their hoses, the futile spray. *Such a shame*, my father says, as if he knew already and wasn't surprised, as if he always expected the Thriftway to burn. For many days after, there is ash in the air, and I can smell the building in the distance, smoldering.

I thought it was

When the 1971 San Fernando earthquake hit, I thought it was a dream. It happened at exactly 6 a.m. on a school day, an hour before normally my mother would gently shake my shoulder and whisper sing: *time to get up, dear, rise and shine*. I felt my bed rolling, and thought it was King Kong, a figure I often dreamed about; he stood in my front yard shaking the olive tree, grabbing the fruits in large handfuls as I watched, or he lumbered toward me, swooping me up in his fist to set me in the high

branches of the ash tree. From there, I could see my entire neighborhood as if through a fishbowl lens, the edges of everything curved and distorted. I'd be frightened, but also exhilarated: to be have been chosen, singled out, by something so mighty. So on the morning of the earthquake, my sleepy mind conflated King Kong with the hand of the earthquake, tipping my bed like a see-saw. I woke fully to my mother's scream, and saw her blurred figure in my doorway. She wore a white nightgown that billowed around her like a halo. I wonder now how much is memory, how much is fiction, how much is still a dream. Memory often feels like a dream, with a dream's logic, blurred images hovering just on the edge of meaning. We stood huddled in the threshold because that's what they told us to do in the event of earthquake, though nowadays that advice has changed: do not stand in doorways, get under something heavy. Or go outside, away from falling buildings. Or don't go outside, stay where you are. Where I live now, we've been told "the big one" is likely to hit within the next fifty years. In the worst-case scenario, no amount of emergency water will save you. The common wisdom, like memory, keeps shifting, revising. You never know what to believe.

Bring me a

When she came to tuck me in, my mother often sang *Mr. Sandman, bring me a dream, make him the cutest that I've ever seen*. It was the same tune she played on the piano, lyrics we sang together as I perched beside her, learning the simple bass chords. But at night, a cappella in the dark, the song sounded different—less a cheerful ditty and more a bawdy ballad from that grown-up world to which I did not yet belong, might never belong: *Give him two lips like roses and clover, and tell him that his lonesome nights are over!* I always pictured the sandman as our mailman, Mike, skinny and reliable in his beige shorts and button-down shirt, a messenger bag slung across his shoulder. The sandman was bringing me an invitation to sleep, I thought, the same way the mailman brought invitations to parties, postcards from family at the shore. But then this: *Mr. Sandman, I'm so alone, don't have nobody to call my own*. My lip quivered as I slipped beneath the covers, turned over on my side. And I was alone, wasn't I, alone in my small, pink bedroom at the end of the hall, alone in my childhood without siblings or school mates or neighbor kids with whom to play? Mike told us once he had two daughters, Daisy and Lily, and one of them was about my age. I kept asking my mother where the flower girls lived, but she said they were too far away. Most of the mail that came to our house was for my mother after all. She paid the bills, clipped the coupons, answered all the correspondence with her elegant script. So when Mr. Sandman turned on his magic beam, it only made sense that she would receive the dream.

Life is but

There are more songs with the word "dream" in the title than you can count. Add in the songs that have "dream" in the lyrics, and it might very well be one of the most sung words in history, perhaps vying only with *moon* and *love*. The vowels in dream are actually rather difficult, requiring some modification to avoid a shrill "eee" high

up in the back of the throat, like the whine of a mosquito. But I suppose songwriters can't avoid it, that impulse to compare the beloved, or love itself, to a dream, given that love can be so unpredictable and refuses to play by diurnal rules. Even in our earliest lulls to sleep, dreams are thrust upon us: *Row, row, row your boat/gently down the stream/merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily/life is but a dream*. Sing this to a babe in arms and you impart one of the basic Buddhist tenets: that life, as we know it, is mere illusion. This song is often executed as a round, voices intermingling while vying off one another for dominance. You need to concentrate while singing a round, staying firmly embedded in your part while allowing the competing voices to fade into the background. Kind of like love I suppose: voices trying to meet and harmonize, while the lyrics drift out of unison. Rounds are supposed to create beautiful, textured songs—and they're often sung as part of team-building activities, to show that all voices have a part to play—but you can't really hear the totality of a round while you're inside it. You have a vague sense that the voices are intersecting beautifully, but if you stop to listen you'll lose your way and dissolve in nervous laughter. Whenever I sing *row row row your boat*, I imagine a fool jauntily paddling toward a waterfall. He can't see it (his back is turned) though the roar of the rapids rises in his ears. He keeps singing and singing, keeping time with his oars, while the boat tips over into the roiling froth below.

Capsize

When we thumbed through catalogs, my mother called the men she found attractive “dream boats.” If I was lucky and good and kept myself trim, a dream boat would someday paddle his way toward me. I pictured myself stranded on shore, waiting. When we watched *Lawrence Welk* as a family, my father often whistled at pretty Anacani, then grinned at me: *Wowee, isn't she a dream?* But how could I answer him, really? By then all the lullabies and bedtime stories had given way to alibis. I spoke in fragments, halftruths, always looking beyond and away. My friend left a Mariah Carey tape in my locker. *You have to hear this*, her note read. I turned the volume way down, pressed my ear to the tinny speaker: *Dream lover come rescue me*, bawdy Mariah moaned. *Take me up take me down, take me anywhere you want baby now*. In her little dream boat, pretty Anacani is always paddling hard. I am always standing on the rocks, screaming her name, but she never hears. Night after night, I wake in terror: both of us, in our own ways, bound for capsizes.

Les Miz

When Susan Boyle took the stage of *Britain's Got Talent*, no one expected her to succeed. She looked to be the butt of everyone's joke, with her wide face, bushy eyebrows, frumpy dress and clunky shoes. She said she wanted to be a famous singer “like Elaine Paige.” When the first notes of “I Dreamed a Dream” left her mouth, the audience surged with applause; the judges glanced at each other, flabbergasted, and one even started to cry. Was it the mismatch between body and voice that got to them? Or maybe it was just the song itself, its woeful depiction of the gap between

fantasy and hard reality. Now my father is dying in his hospital bed, and we've gathered around, playing songs on my brother's iPhone. It's late, and we've done a lot of work today: a DNR order, a Power of Attorney, a list of the myriad transactions that will need to happen upon death. He's tired, lying on his side, eyes closed, gripping my mother's hand. His face is soft, mouth slack. I ask him what his favorite song is, and he says, in a voice that no longer seems to be his voice, *anything from Les Miz*. This story, *Les Miserables*, is something of a cult in my family; my mother says it's her favorite book and my brother has seen the film 12 times. My parents saw the stage production in London, and they own at least three different dvds of the musical. I've never seen it myself, but I seem to know the songs by osmosis. My brother finds Susan Boyle belting out "I Dreamed a Dream," the dying mother singing of how dreams must always die, and what made life worth living before everything went wrong. It's not the most uplifting song, but somehow we're all still smiling.

Watching *Magic Mike* with John Waters at the Provincetown Movie House

John Waters holds his disappointment

like a god blessing the room as if to say
this is what you call holiness, this sprawl of imitation
glitz, gawdy as a museum gift store paperweight?

Or, why look above when splendor
is all around us? The stickiness of bodies
a defiance to the pristine chill where we've taken refuge
from the July 4th mob, obscene

as a pool party sometimes. And I still can't help but feel
like we become close to Magic Mike by wanting him,
so I am the star of my own jump scene when I bolt
up from my seat and swivel like an Ambien-

stuffed piñata to read fortunes in the bottle caps
of liters of Mountain Dew. A star lives in our blood,
John Waters explains, extraterrestrial life hovering
around our mouths while we stay silent as Greek

statues at the Met. Look at this utopia: the stripper meets the girl
next door, and they have clean sex—*have* appearing
like one of Yeats's wild swans at Coole in my mind—
and he pays for everything, and no woman is getting

punched or strangled for being black.
John Waters, you are real to me as the desire
to hold onto something ungodly
in this theatre near the sea that scrubs the beach

like a street cleaning brush. Instead of wads of cash, you hold
garter snakes in your pocket, gold glitter
under your collar, and Vincent van Gogh's face
silkscreened over your heart.

Prop Mistress

For the kitchen scene, we bought a double-basin
farmhouse sink for \$450 online—and the walls?

So yellowed with forty years of cigarette smoke.
Teenagers have climbed in and out of joy

through the basement window for generations
and now pocket needles of blood-brown heroin.

How the gray-streaked towns, sleep
through the nickel-gray sleet of February.

How toddler sucks the life out of a thumb and waits by the door
of the Family Dollar in snowman pajama pants smeared with ash.

It was easy to buy this farmhouse, no longer on a farm
for the project. The kitchen hardly different from the 1960s.

What is a hard difference? How much is or isn't?
For \$300, we bought a GE fridge with that unmistakable silver handle

locking everything in. And we washed the walls
with pans of sudsy Dawn—wiped that vintage botanical paper down,

those olive-green leaves the size of six-week old kittens
with fronds growing groovy into a beige background.

(Five rolls of it: \$500.) Now all we need is a woman like me
to sit at the teal Formica table, her reflection warped

in the steel rib of a charred spoon while she counts stacks
of bills and rolls them up into her canary lingerie,

the kind you buy for a quarter
of your paycheck at Neiman's,

her blonde coifed bob like sculpted gelatin,
a little bit sinister in its precision, not one hair out of place

as she waits for the hand of the clock to stroke 3 pm:
her signal to smear matte cream

over the fresh bruise under her eye, stash her husband's
money in a drawer, throw on a \$200 robe

and greet the children as they tumble
through the door, asking why the house

smells like sugar, why mom looks like a fairy,
your eyes ringed and sparkly.

Women in Line

Praise the hands that make a beak, fingertips
to thumb, but not the *quack quack* two men mock

at us while my mother, sister and I talk about the lost
key these turquoise days of August.

That particular tenacity of yeast infections
from wearing a wet bikini all afternoon

inside the orange juice walls of the Dunkin'
Donuts I don't need to describe except for

the almost black chocolate moons
and stone-white vanilla rings that seem so easy

to taste anywhere, the starry pinched centers
of crullers whose glazed openings I'd penetrate

with my finger as a kid, twirling them like a prize.
The cashier, petite and Russian, who studied

at the community college, would be there
every morning while I waited for the bus, brewing

coffee and making small talk with Ray who spent
the night in an alleyway nearby. She was always

kind, even to the men who sucked on her name
too long, lurked around for a quick peek of her

breasts when she bent down to refill the dispensers.
Maybe this is where I learned to smile

when a man says you'd look better in something
tight. Praise my mother who knows this too when she

looks at the two men who are now pretending
to flap their wings. You can't buy pomegranate juice

at Dunkin' Donuts, one of the men jokes,
and I want to show him the full-on

scoby growing inside my swim suit,
tentacles of bacteria reaching out from this lacy

swamp, ask him to cure it for me by rubbing
the page of a dictionary with two stray hairs.

But women in line don't speak. We look away
like they're crayfish wriggling through the creamed

mud of a pond's edge—not cranes
opening & closing startled wings on the water—and have

been put there by hymens
and the press of an iron and the collective

voice of an audience that says, *You are not
onstage for us, so Shut Up.* Women in line

are not in line but on the merry-go-round
of mescaline these men swallowed together

before coddling their cocks in the lodges
of their baggy jeans and sneering, *Our heaven*

is Hellenic as rape. I had pitied them
because even now the heteronormative

dictatorship that lingers in my cochlea
like ear buds pushed in too far with bad music

whispers: *No girlfriends, lonely men.*
Revenge made an errand of me, hungry

for itself. *I thought I lost the key,* my mother said
reaching into the maw of her purse,

and for a moment I saw something other than
contempt sprawled across their faces—

the desire to have a woman
dig deep inside of them, to penetrate

and retrieve what they didn't know
had been lost.

Love Poem with Whip-its and HGTV

Call me sweetheart when you fiddle
with the hotel TV reception.

Kiss me like a scratch ticket
with one foil moon left to scrape

and I'll soak in the Jacuzzi of your ambivalence
sip from paper cups blessed with saved-up

spit, swallow you in my open concept living room.
Yes, I'm a sucker for HGTV.

Don't we all get off to granite counter tops?
Let me swish awhile in your curls. Call me crazy

but I'll slip two fingers into your bad caulk work
while we wait for the voiceover that narrates our suspense

like rare shimmers of sludge deep in a well;
you and me, two lovers huffing

a tank of nitrous
that never expires.

The Colonizer's Delusion

The meadow craves the sweet scent of skin where the morning
smolders, edging back as smoke carves the sun in two like an arrow.

I laid in wait for you. There was no need for weaponry. Only the hush
of snow protected you. But your vivid coat, the arch of your back speckled

with white, the gleam of your eye's refracted light caressed my vision
as a pang of hunger stabbed my stomach. She, too, laid in wait:

Hard beads of sweat lined her forehead, drenched her blankets.
She asked me only for this, only to find you, whether on a meadow

grazing on the remnants of seeds scattered by unsoiled hands
or on a street frozen in awe & drunk on sweet heady light.

We scanned over every unctuous bubbling roiling your pots carefully.
Eagerly she devours—coarse fat, timid meat, gleaming gristle.

Metatherapy

Somewhere in the ocean,
the water parts; a hole
spreads. And the tip
of a missile pushes
its way into the sky.

Somewhere in the gut
of the world, a bubble
pops; a shockwave
rattles core and crust.
And we tremble. We rock.

Somewhere behind
the ribs, a bubble
spreads; the blood
pops. And the face
of the father falls off.

Somewhere in the past
a boy turns off
the TV; the door
slams. His breath
reeks. And he punts
a body against the walls.

Somewhere in the needle
lies clots dislodged
by froth & bubbles. Pain
escapes. And a body
lies punted against the walls.

Somewhere in a rehab
a man takes off
his father's face; eyes
unravel. A silence
settles. And a wall
lies still against punted bodies.

The Other Tongue

This story starts with our girlhood
in summer. Mason jars and forests.
Bicycles and shotguns slung over
cartoon shoulders. Chewed straw,
sticky lips and sweat. Gibbous
moon hung; candle wax dried
over scales dyed in rainwater.
I watched her out the corner
stalk pitted streets before
she jumped the chainlink fence, skirt
flapping like moth wings. She found
me carving faces into wood, a weary fedora
framing wrinkled skin and gouged-
out eyeglasses, a pair of mouths
searching for eyes, a fish, a match-
box brimming with hooks.
My sense of humor was a bullet.
My apology was the same length
as my calico skirt. I could have held
her soft head with wool socks while
the fever flushed through her throat.
I should have shared her name, fused it
to my thighs, but where was the fun
in that? Better to foul our food.
Better to churn the butter of my body
into a creamy violet paste. Better
to make me crave loose vinegar, she said.
I watched an ocean of oil eat sparks
underneath the light of stars long dead
and engulf the silence the way candles
swallow darkness, islands of white flame
growing like newborn suns, my hands
& throat turning to smoke. A sweet
iguana's tongue snuck between
the pebbles that lined our punch-drunk
makeshift road where it bled into
the beachhead. The soft glow of fireflies
crept into the night sky like dust

dancing in the last quiet light of a closing
crypt. I found her body anchored
by the tide. Reminiscences glittered: small
scraps of moon cleaving away the fog
as jagged metal corkscrewed through her tongue.

The Couple is Present

Remember the night we married? I wanted to stand on our bedroom balcony and overlook the wreckage. The backyard like an abandoned carnival, littered with wind-swept tents. Lit by half-strings of Christmas tree lights and paper lanterns crushed by the breeze. You, in your white silk dress and smudged makeup, you wanted to sleep. But I had to look out over that scene. At the DJ spinning his last song for guests refusing to go home. I stepped outside, and a plague of black insects swarmed in, clinging to the bedroom ceiling. You shouted for me to close the door. But by then it was too late. I spent an hour standing on our bed, killing gnats with a tissue, left soot-colored scars in their place. Later, we fell asleep beneath them. Scars like stars. That very first night was a curse.

On March 30th, 1988, performance artist Marina Abramović embarked on a journey across the Great Wall of China. She walked towards her lover, Uwe Laysiepen, another performance artist known simply as Ulay. The two had planned the walk eight years earlier, when they were living in Australia among the Aborigines. There they learned that the Great Wall was the only man-made structure viewable from space.

Both felt a spiritual connection to the Wall. Parts of it were built as early as 7 B.C. to protect China from foreign invaders. But it was more than a defense. Abramović called The Wall a “metaphysical construction,” an artistic reproduction of the Milky Way on Earth. Abramović and Ulay thought it would be the perfect place for their impending wedding. They planned to walk separately across the 2,500 kilometers of the Wall, Ulay leaving from the Gobi desert, Abramović from the Yellow Sea. They would meet in the middle and marry.

But the red tape of the Chinese government prolonged approval of their project. It took eight years for the artists to get permission, and by then, their relationship,

which had been the focus of so much of their collaboration, was done. In the end, the project, now named *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk*, became a journey of dissolution, rather than connection. It became a ceremony for letting go. The couple decided that, rather than marry, when they met in the middle, they would instead turn and leave each other forever. Each step brought them closer to this inevitable parting. Each mile became a meditation on loss.

There is no comparable ceremony in our culture, which celebrates coupling with vows and parties and pictures, but offers no such rituals for saying goodbye.

This is a photograph of the Great Wall of China:



This is a photo from my wedding day:



It's one of the few I have that I'm allowed to use. The rest are owned by the professional photographer we hired. All the books said, if you're going to spend money on anything, spend it on the photographs. You'll want them for the rest of your life. They will be your most vivid memory of the day. My ex-wife, Heather, took the photo. It doesn't show much, just the white and pink peonies we had on every table and

in our bouquets. She added the yellow tinge with a filter after the fact. Heather took photographs throughout our relationship, and because most of them transferred to my computer while we were still married and living in the same house, I have them, too.

Heather often texted me her photographs, as well. Wild, vibrant shots she would take of lavender or green nature. Filtered selfies that caught her at her prettiest or most supplicant. Many of these became desperate acts, once I'd met someone else and she suspected me of cheating. These photographs said: *Don't forget me* and *Look, I'm beautiful* and *Remember, I need you*. While these images were meant to keep me closer, they only succeeding in pushing me farther away. No matter how beautiful she looked, I never wanted to look at them. They stung me. They reminded me of my failings. Again and again Heather told me, *you broke our vows*. The photographs were memories then, but not of something I had or was keeping, but something I'd already lost. Something, in fact, I'd willfully thrown away.

Every day Abramović walked the Wall, she reconsidered her situation. She was an artist known for exacting inhuman cruelty on herself. In one piece, *Rhythm 0*, she lay passively on a stage, inviting audience members to do to her body what they wished.

Seventy-two objects were at their disposal, including a whip, a scalpel, even a loaded gun with a single bullet. For six hours, she endured pain, pleasure, and humiliation at the audience's hands. Moments of terror when one, then another, picked up the gun and pointed it at her head. In another piece, *Rhythm 5*, she almost died from carbon monoxide poisoning after she dived inside a large burning star. She survived all this, and was said to be able to endure any pain, except that of being left.

To fully comprehend the deep grief of her and Ulay's parting, it's essential to understand their beginning. Abramović was married to someone else on November 30th, 1975, the day she met Ulay in a café. They had the same birthday (November 30th); both had torn the same day from their diaries (November 30th); and both had been fixated in their art on knives and self-mutilation. There was an instant connection. They left the café and went back to Ulay's house, where they stayed in bed for a week and a half, merging themselves together. Finally, Abramović returned home, but was so distraught over leaving, she could barely lift her head.

Soon after, Abramović left her marriage and ran away to join Ulay. They formed a collective known as "The Other," exploring the concept of a "two-headed body," the conjoined twins they felt themselves to be. In one performance, they held each other and pressed their mouths together blowing the same breath back and forth until their oxygen was so depleted, they passed out. In *Relation to Space*, they ran across a room, crashed into each other over and over, trying to merge into one being they called "that self".

These acts may seem extreme or histrionic, but they illustrate the intense interconnection the couple felt. The connection, perhaps, many couples feel. Like the dragon seen from space, the Great Wall, their relationship rose and broke along lines of unseen energy, flowing between them. Walking towards each other, entirely on foot for a period of ninety days, was the least of the physically grueling things they'd endured.

My wife and I didn't meet in such dramatic circumstances. We didn't share a

birthday or any other coincidental similarities. If these were the telltale signs of fate, then fate was missing.

Like many couples, we met online. Our first date was at a bar in my small town of Oconomowoc, WI. The bar was nothing like the other hardscrabble taverns in town, which smelled darkly of aged smoke and seventy years of spilled Pabst Blue Ribbon. This was a new martini bar called Splash. Inside, you could've been in any large city, Los Angeles or New York. The chairs were deep and plush, velvet gem tones you could sink into, and feel you were someplace else. There were silver high top tables and black leather low ones. I huddled around a small two-top in the back while it poured rain outside. Fifteen minutes went by. She was late.

Looking outside the window, I could just make out a woman, bent forward inside her jacket, the collar held up against the rain. She walked into the bar, soaked. She looked mostly like her picture. After introductions, we ordered drinks.

She kept drinking.

A martini. Then wine. More wine after that. There was no way I could keep up. The alcohol seemed to help her feel more comfortable. Besides it was a bar. A first date. I wrote it off as typical, given the situation.



This is a photograph Heather took as our marriage dissolved.

We were renting a large house almost like a country estate in a Milwaukee suburb. The back porch looked out on a half-circle of land that stretched to thick trees, fronted by a dull, stagnant pond. Around the property lay large piles of uprooted branches, sticks, discarded limbs and leaves. Heather began photographing and then Photoshopping these piles, making the blacks darker and the grays pinged with light so that the branches looked lit from within. She would return from a walk and show me these photos, flipping through them quickly on her phone.

After our divorce, I asked her what they meant.

She wrote back what felt like a poem:

The bush photos captured my feeling of disintegration. abandonment.

It became a symbol to me, almost an extension of me. the brittle branches, and decaying leaves.

i imagined it wailing, its sobs being thrust into the earth

this was during the time i realized you were having an affair.

the house in waukesha.

the fights. the secrets. the lies. the sorrow.

i felt you leaving me

i felt like i was dying

perhaps why i obsessed about this bush. studied it from every angle.

it was a reflection of my emotional life

it embodied my loss

the grief of something once alive and beautiful

now discarded

There's a video online of *The Great Wall Walk*. It was shot as a documentary by the BBC. You can see it on YouTube, grainy, lined, palsied in the way VHS tapes are when they fall apart. If there was sound that accompanied the film, it's no longer

audible.

Abramović doesn't appear for a full nine minutes, during which time the filmmakers show images of the Chinese desert: an old man and woman sitting in a barren landscape, staring at brown mountains; small huts with goats and pigs, rooting in the mud; the slow scan of the terrain, where a thin silver river glints like loose dimes in the late afternoon sun. Finally, we see Abramović standing by the coast where the Great Wall crumbles into the sea. The ocean, unlike the land, can't be fenced off or claimed. Like Abramović's love, it's untamable.

Abramović turns in profile to the camera. Three men outfitted in traditional dress approach from behind the Wall. The film cuts to fabric, lingers on thick yellow brocade and black silk, stitched with magnificent dragons. Was this material meant as a wedding dress? The image dissolves into the sea. The viewer remembers what we're here for. Abramović will walk. Neither the dress, nor the marriage, is waiting for her at the end of the journey.

This is an image of Abramović on the Wall.



Abramović and Ulay had much different treks. Both had planned to sleep on top or beneath the Wall, sheltered by it in small crevices that exist along the way. Only Abramović was able to do this. Ulay was often escorted to hotels, where he slept in comfort. When I was first told this story, it seemed unfair, a result of male privilege. Ulay was taken by the Chinese government as an honored guest, while Abramović was left to fend for herself.

But reading the details of the trip, they reveal that Ulay had his own struggles. Authorities picked him up every night driving him to better accommodations, but often times these hotels were hundreds of miles away. He would arrive exhausted, only to sleep for a few hours, and then turn around and return in the early morning hours the next day. Neither knew what the other was experiencing. If they were still on the Wall. If they'd been diverted. Or if they'd given up. The two proceeded on faith alone towards the other, connected only by the promise made that they would meet and then part once and for all.

Another one of Heather's photographs.



This brittle flower holds in its center a small lump of snow. Looking at it, I notice something for the first time. In all Heather's photographs, you can just slightly blur your eyes and the nature falls away, leaving abstract lines and shapes like smatterings on a canvas.

I wonder to myself if this is her intention.

I wonder if a walk can be a work of art. I wonder if a marriage is.

Mostly I wonder about failed marriages. Are they failed works of art? Does art or marriage tell you more in its failing, in its falling apart?

Heather explains this photograph:

i was so cold this day. i walked in the yard for hours, and collapsed to my knees.

i cried wildly.

my drinking had spiraled into a bad place.

i was trying so hard to deaden my feelings.

winter permeated every part of my being

you had stopped touching me

i felt so alone in our relationship

i saw this small fragile flower trying to hold the weight of the snow.

i felt small

unseen

i looked through our wedding photos that morning

i was frozen

Reading this, I remember the wine glasses. This bent over flower has the exact shape of a glass of wine. White wine, the color of snow. Heather's favorite.

In her book *Drinking: A Love Story*, Caroline Knapp writes about watching longingly as a waiter walks by with a glass of white wine destined for another table. Cold, translucent, the glass sweating droplets, chilled by the icy, straw-colored drink. Knapp sees this in her sobriety, and compares it to watching an old lover pass by, the

twinge of heartache and want still present as a physical ache in her breast. Desire is a thing that doesn't die off quickly. Doesn't melt away like so much snow.

I remember waking in the morning and finding wine glasses hidden here and there around the house. One by the sofa, half-filled and forgotten. Another by the fireplace. And, of course, one on the kitchen counter near an emptied bottle of wine. When confronted, Heather would admit only to the most obvious one. If I brought up the others, she'd blanch and change the subject. No one wants to be told they drink too much. No one wants to be caught out doing what they're trying desperately to hide.

When I met her, this other woman, my reaction was much more akin to Abramović when she met Ulay. Did the two of us cling to each other, passing back and forth a single breath? No, but we might have, the way we talked endless hours, spiraling out a constellation of words. Did we crash our bodies over and over into each other, in an attempt to merge to one self? No. But we made love secretly, furtively, in hotel rooms, in cars, at home. The end result was not a merged person, but a new relationship that ultimately could not contain within it the past.

Abramović is a controversial performance artist because she believes that performance art can be redone. That is, reenacted. For purists of the form, performance art is temporal – of a specific time and place – and autobiographical – originating from and leaving its mark on a specific body. Take for instance Chris Burden, a performance artist who in 1971 ordered his hand shot off with a rifle. If this piece were to be replicated for the sake of re-remembering Burden's performance – giving others the opportunity to see and experience the sensations, thoughts and feelings watching it brings – does it truly recreate the original act or is it a mere simulacrum, no greater than a photograph or any other reproduction?

Abramović thinks maybe it can recreate the original.

She's proposed opening a space on the Hudson River that will offer redox of

significant performance pieces. In 2010, she received a retrospective at MOMA called *The Artist is Present*, which featured many such reenactments of former performances, including many she did with Ulay, with other actor/artists performing the parts. A new piece of the same name was also debuted at the show.

In the work, Abramović sat in a gallery at a table with two chairs. She was dressed in a long gown, her black hair pulled to one side. Visitors were invited to wait in line and sit opposite the artist. Each time, she would put her eyes down, gathering herself for the interaction. A patron would step up to the table, sit down, and wait for her to look up. The visitor could stay as little or as long as he liked, but the artist never said a word. Abramović simply stared into the other person's eyes.

Several people cried, at this interaction, tears rolling down their cheeks. One viewer sat for an hour and forty-five minutes, but later said sitting felt out of time. *The Artist is Present* raised questions about voyeurism of an artist's body (or body of work), which in Abramović's case has so often been on display. In looking at the artist and having her look back, however, the viewer was also seen and made a part of the spectacle. Queuing visitors watch both people, not just the artist. While many described *The Artist is Present* as powerful, joyful, maddening, obtuse, the part most everyone remembers is when Ulay showed up.

He waited in line along with everyone else. Now an old man with deep circles beneath his eyes and a shaggy gray beard, no one recognized him. The two had rarely seen each other since 1988 when they parted on the Wall, twenty-two years before.

When Abramović raised her head and saw Ulay, a note of recognition like a quick flight of birds flew across her face. They stared into each other's eyes. In Ulay's, you can see what feels like remorse. He's threadbare and there's something pathetic about him, something lost. I wonder when I watch him about the regret he feels or if he's simply playing a joke. He looks like the very archetype of a trickster.

In Abramović's case, there's no wonder. She cries. For the first time in what would be ten weeks of sitting as long as eight hours a day, she breaks concentration.

She's no longer an observer or blank mirror museumgoers see themselves in. She is, in short, no longer the artist. She's a human being. Ulay is her mirror. The reversal is instant and acute. A ripple runs through the crowd watching. Many guess Ulay's identity, once they see Abramović weep. Flashbulbs pop off as hundreds of photographs are taken, marking their reunion.

Abramović smiles. She reaches across the table and takes Ulay's hand. They embrace. Certainly this moment, so indicative of time, place, history and relationship – can never, ever be remade. It's an accident of art. A rupture. Chaos. Life.

Remember the night we married? You shyly revealed yourself to me in your wedding gown, while the crowd gathered below. We picked a moment to show each other ourselves prior to the wedding. They say that's bad luck, I suppose.

Afterwards, we lay in the quiet, visiting family members asleep in different rooms. Darkness fell throughout the house. You turned over and I held you, my front pressed to your back. What was there to stay awake for? The past was over. The future lay ahead. Of this infinite moment, there is no picture. Only the one left in my head.

4 Years, 471 Miles Later

Every stroke of a paddle
the ripple of longing.
Here pictograph spirits
ochre and ancient
dance across moving water.
Hegman Lake too will disappear;
nothing new to be found.

We are in memory of *noodin*—
yes, wind carries each howling,
carries us, *ma'iigan*, *ajjaak*.

Water songs still rise and echo.

Kimberly Blaeser and Amber Blaeser-Wardzala

Choose a Side in the War

In the static of telephone wisdom
and cramped postcard graffiti,
you blow me reminders:

How I am no daughter of Eve
wear no inheritance of small greed—
our hungers, you say, have always been larger.

How in the place where water and sky meets
we become the snatch of eagle's claws
leave trace or map—this skeletal memory.

There, you say, the ancient rain
wipes away disguises.

Yes, we live lonesome; we live joined—
each breath, collected and transposed.

The Timbre of Astral Voices

Ledge rock nights we swim soul deep in stars
moved by a sky of lights already switched off.
In another place we too are cold darkened bodies
but laud the streaks we leave in our lonely wake.

This brilliant blaze we paint with our limbs
trembles at last into holy nothingness,
leaving a clean canvas of neither water nor sky—
this place where stories began no space of opposites.

Ancestral whispers, tiers of Anishinaabeg sky—
our seasons filled with Wintermaker, *Mang*,
Ojiig and *Mooz*—celestial tracings of tribal light,
mythic bodies. Our lips, too, mouth a song of survival.

Art(I)Fact

I sit in the back of the bar that looks like a library, mimicry to the Disney degree. Cigar smoke – still permitted indoors in 90’s New York – curls up past the leather volumes, the leftover anthologies, and dusty hardcovers pulled from a bargain bin. They made their way here, not meant to be read, just serve as background decoration. Creating atmosphere; what the filmmakers call *mise en scene*.

From behind my dark wood table, I see the young bartender mixing a drink. I sip gin martinis, very dirty, leaving one olive for the last, perfect bite, salting the glass. In the corner, on a makeshift stage, a three-piece plays jazz. Snare drum, scuffling with one of those wire whisks, scratching the skin like a cat’s prickled back. There’s a stand up bass and another instrument – I can’t remember – memory has painted the picture the dim colors of the past. That’s how memory works, or doesn’t work, as the case may be. Now that drum is just an artifact. That martini, too. The cigar smoke, which can no longer be seen in that bar or anywhere on this side of the millennium, is most indicative of this lost time. The drum can be reskinned. The martini, like a song, remixed. But the cigar smoke has – well – gone up in smoke.

Who am I to laugh at artifact? I’m currently working with some kid who collects video rental stickers. *Video rental stickers*, like the ones that used to denote genre or give gentle commands like, *Be kind, rewind*. To him, these are artifacts of a forgotten age. To me, they’re commonplace. Things that fell off of me and my time like loose lashes I never saw drop from my eyes. This is how history works. All that live it, forget it. Those that didn’t, fetishize it. Put it in an album or jar. In the end, I expect my body to be the same. I’m as much a relic as those labels. But before you stick me on the shelf, remember: *Be kind. Rewind*.

*

I want to touch them, but they are behind glass.

The inks are faded: a few shelves of posters, pamphlets, flyers labeled *Gay is Good - Homophile Activism Before Stonewall*. I’m at the doctor’s office waiting to be seen. Apparently I’m the invisible middle-aged woman; it’s clear in the way the receptionist calls me, “Ma’am.” Everyone else is young, and male, and from the looks of them, clearly marked as queer. I am used to being read by strangers as straight;

now I am not just mis-marked straight, but sexless.

I wrap my Lands End coat more closely around me, feeling both conspicuous and utterly unworthy of notice at the same time. There is a massive, brightly colored art installation on the wall of the main hallway. It asks a question: what is love? Giant, hollow, clear plastic letters are waiting to be filled. On a shelf nearby is a box of brilliant note papers-yellow, hot pink, acid green, inviting the poetry of the passing stranger. I want to jump up and shout for joy, for the intentional space that's been created here – a space that says queer people exist, our stories matter – and yet at the same time, I feel like an outsider because of my unremarkable middle-aged blandness.

The Before Stonewall display beckons, but the nurse might call my name at any minute and I don't want to be distracted. So I gaze at them from my seat. Each item has the weight of history -you can see it in the creeping ochre of the papers. No bright colors here. When I look at the pamphlets, in my mind I can see the people who printed them. The secret meetings, the arguments over wording, over how much is too much, over who is not being bold enough, the crushes and the rivalries and the police.

The history under glass makes me aware of how invisible that history usually is. How invisible I am.

What you can't tell by looking at my gray-threaded bob and my sensible snow boots, is that somewhere in my basement is a plastic Tupperware box - a tiny archive of my 90s lesbian-feminist self. There are buttons with an eyeball that say WAC IS WATCHING and "Women's Action Coalition/Patriarchal Demolition;" flyers from rallies and marches, and my personal favorite, a sticker that reads: "Feminist witch working to advance the lesbian agenda." Despite these labels, I've always struggled to be recognized as queer.

What is worthy of preservation? My daughter kept a shoebox full of shiny wrappers. I labeled the box CLEAN WRAPPERS, but I knew, if she didn't, that it was her box of garbage. But if someone has only been alive for three years, perhaps the memory of the taste of chocolate is rich personal history held by a flattened piece of silver foil.

*

Garbage, then, is in the eye of the beholder. One woman's junk is another woman's history.

Labels, stickers: where are we going with all these self-determinations? My life, your life, like a VHS sticker, like a handmade poster, like a pin stuck in your collar at a rally or march. We find these ways to declare ourselves, but they don't stop us from slipping into obscurity.

I'm going to take a minute here to discuss Weezer. It took the rock band Weezer remaking a 1982 pop song to become relevant again in 2018. As of this week, February 23, 2019, Weezer's *Teal* album, which includes Toto's "Africa" and ten other remakes mostly from the 80's, is currently number 27 on the Billboard chart. Suddenly, Rivers Cuomo is staring at me, stunned, from the back of the New York Times Magazine, behind the puzzle. Listening to the album, I try to unlock a puzzle of my own: why? Why do we want to relisten to the songs we can hear on any Muzak station, the gentle hits of the 70s, 80s, and 90s? It's as if somebody made a mixtape of all the songs we longed to hear again – just not by the original artists – but by an alternative band we'd all but forgotten existed.

I place this squarely in the range of nostalgia, remade. The album skips a beat. The needle moves. Toto sings *Africa*, and it's trash. Weezer remakes it, and it's born anew. This is one of the powers of art, but also of memory. We remake and reuse. Everything old is new again.

When I think about it though, Weezer has always been a band built on redoubling. One of their earliest songs played upon the myth of Buddy Holly. Said we were a cool couple because, I was "just like Mary Tyler Moore". In another song, Cuomo romanticized his garage, covered with posters of Gene Simmons, Ace Frehley, and Peter Criss. Cuomo and I, we're from the rerun generation. We are from the first self-aware age, Generation X. But of course, all generations are self-aware. We were perhaps self-aware that we were nothing but a remake. We had no Buddy Hollies or Mary Tyler Moores, but we remembered them from TV. From the beginning, we were just a replication. We were Tron, stuck in the machine, and we knew it.

An artifact is an object you can hold to know a time, a place, and a person. But the artifact itself is slipping. No time is ever just itself, but is happening simultaneously. Is referring to more than just one thing at once.

Take the movie *Somewhere in Time*; it's a great example. Christopher Reeve travels back to the turn-of-the-century from the 1970's by wearing a period suit and hat (artifact 1) and indulging in self-hypnosis. But he's quickly swept back to the future by finding a 1979 penny (artifact #2) in his pocket. Time is not stable. Artifacts are not objects, they're doors. Where you end up, depends on how and when you grip the handle. In a minute, I'll tell you a story about Sylvia Plath. You'll see what I mean.

*

Pick up the small clear plastic shoebox full of feminist ephemera. Put your hand on the handle. Open the door. Find yourself walking down Foster Avenue in Chicago on a cold March in 1994, bleached blonde buzz cut, heavy Doc Martens

shit-kickers, black motorcycle jacket. A small, frail elderly woman is struggling with her car – the memory here gets fuzzy – was it bags? A flat tire? Stuck in the ice?

Let's make it bags. "Oh young man!" she cries. "Sir! Can you help me?"

A tingle filled my body. "Of course," I said, hurrying to her side. When I got there, she saw that I was not a boy at all. She was disquieted and apologetic. "I don't mind," I told her. Secretly I was a little thrilled. I had cut my hair, donned the requisite Docs and motorcycle jacket because I wanted to be seen and known by my tribe. When I marched with Queer Nation we would shout, "We're Here! We're Queer! We're Fabulous! Get used to it!" I wanted to be visible to the people who I felt the most kinship with. I wanted them to look at me and think, "She's here. She's queer. She's fabulous." I wanted to cover my body with those political stickers so I could be read accurately.

Last week my daughters were discussing Doc Martens. I decided to educate them on the various types. I owned the ankle boots, the oxfords, and even a pair of T-strap Mary Janes for getting fancy. "And where are all these boots NOW?" begged my thirteen-year old, member of the nineties fetishizing club. They are gone. I donated them all about six months before nineties retro footwear became all the rage. She has a pair of contemporary knock-offs, but she will never set foot in my original Docs and march in my shoes. If she could, would they walk her right into my past, where she would find an angsty twenty-something trying to become herself?

Tonight she's wearing a political t-shirt and refuses to wear a coat over it, even though it's freezing rain out. It is neon yellow with bold black letters announcing, "Why be racist, homophobic, or transphobic when you can just be quiet?" Her friends all have the same shirt. I admire the ally spirit, but I don't quite get the "be quiet." I spend an unreasonable amount of time parsing it in my mind, putting in new, more powerful phrases (*you can be decent...be human...not be an asshole*) but I completely understand why she doesn't want to wear a coat. She wants to be seen, and known. She doesn't want to be mistaken for someone she's not. She's wearing her sticker.

Her sister is absolutely wearing a coat. She owns so many – most of them vintage knock-offs. Her newest acquisition is a long emerald green trench coat swiped straight from the pages of Virginia Woolf. She spends hours online looking at old makeup and fashions. Her eyes go dreamy when she dons one of her dresses – nipped waist, pleated skirt, crinoline. She stands in front of the hall mirror and twirls. In her mind she is traveling backwards in time, a time she imagines as more refined than this one. She wears antique cotton gloves, as if perhaps they can

transform everything she touches to a place she longs for, a place she's never been.

The Africa of Toto's song isn't a real place. You can't see Kilimanjaro from the Serengeti. Toto was a band of Los Angeles musicians writing about the idea of Africa. They had never been. Africa in the song is magical, untouched, "waiting there for you." The real continent has of course been touched by many colonial hands. The chorus swells, ignores real history, sings longing for a time and place better than the present, where you can reinvent yourself, washed clean. It's the perfect tune for a cover album. Listen to the song and perhaps you'll find me, in a pair of hole-riddled Keds, walking towards the nineties and my first pair of Docs. Or perhaps you'll find whatever you want to be there. It's your door handle. I bless the rains.

*

In a literature class I took my last year of school, the professor taught stories as historical insight. He taught artifact: the novel itself is an artifact, he said, of the time it was published, and any references throughout could be investigated to understand that time. Perhaps it was less a literature class than history, but no matter. I like a good investigation. I like donning my floppy hat and khaki pants and being an archeologist like Indiana Jones, rather than just a reader.

I chose the book *The Bell Jar* as insight into post-World War II America. (See how I said I would eventually discuss Sylvia Plath; here, just now, you've slid backwards and forwards in time, in this essay.) But rather than chew on the traditional interpretations and deconstructions, the professor asked us to grab on to one artifact and understand it, as a way of illuminating the book.

For me, that artifact was ECT, what at the time was called electroshock therapy. By studying it, I learned that ECT wasn't just an artifact, but a gendered artifact; it told the truth of gender throughout the ages. It is fact that women have received ECT two to three times as often as men, and continue to do so, regardless of diagnosis. This is still true today, although as of the mid-90s, 95 per cent of doctors who prescribed ECT were men.

Keep in mind that during WWII, women were needed to work outside the home in physically demanding factory jobs while men fought overseas. Labors that, in the past, they'd been told they were too weak to perform. During the war, government advertisement recruited women with slogans such as, "Can you work a mixer? You can use a power drill!" As a result, 19 million women held demanding jobs during the war; but once soldiers returned, women were expected to return home. It turned out you couldn't put baby back in the bell jar. Returning to the boredom and numbing and yes insanity of the domestic sphere made her go a bit mad. A method of subjugation was required.

Electroshock therapy was also a shadow story for the electric chair. Do you remember how the novel opens, with the Rosenberg execution? Plath writes, “The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that’s all there was to read about in the papers.. I couldn’t help wondering what it would be like to be burned alive all along your nerves.” By the end of the book she has experienced just that, electroshock, the burn along her nerves. Like the Rosenbergs, she has transgressed, and must be punished.

This is all very interesting interpretation of the book, you might say. It is a notable insight into history, feminism, the horrors experienced by women. It’s perhaps not what you learned in high school, that Sylvia Plath was mad, that the book is just a giant prologue to the time in England when – left alone all day with her children while her poet husband enjoyed success – she stuck her head in an oven, finally ending her torment. Of course, it is well known that husband later burned a great deal of her poems, so that the paper’s ash – like the ash of her body – is also an artifact.

Now you can never read the book in the same way again, and that, after all, is the point. The artifact of the book is slipping. The artifacts mentioned in the book are similarly unreal. Sylvia Plath herself can no longer be said to be one thing, but like an unstable electron shaking inside a cell, she’s shedding, she’s molting, she’s changing history, right now, with us, as we are, but will never again be once we have reached

The End.

I want to know what objects will be used to define me.

I want to know the artifacts.

I want to know what words will finally be sung in my honor.

I want to accept I won’t be there to hear them. That they will mean little.

That no one will understand.

I want to know that the coat, and the shoes, of my daughters and ancestors, will not be mine. They will also discard them. History will take place. And continue to be – always – lost.

Wind Chime as Light

bells, wind, glass, orchestra
illuminate, shine, glare, luster

Like a glass hand, a cluster of icicles
sistering song, we grip the air, sound
ferried across shadow, across
a field of stones, frozen and hard.
Welcome or warning, this clinking whisper
reminds us of lost stars, burning so hot
they forget they are gone, their heat
its own cry, what claims us, wants
to be held against darkness. Sight
becomes touch, gaze as immortality
grasping back. We reach for it, hold
the ice-burn, palm atmosphere even as
we feel its reverberation settle, even echo
echo in wind, flashes of the future past,
shadowed movement and glint, an end.

Hammer as Quilt

mallet, beat, shape, pound
cover, throw, spread, comfort

We bury our feet into hills of sand, this desire for mountain
unmoved by the shifting of our feet, tectonic plates that threaten
stone toward dust, that disrupt the rhetoric of the lake, all pulse

and pounding. What will be forged in the shoreline, where water
presses against what we've built, this mandala of our body, ready
for wear and loss. Maybe destruction is neutral, like a wave,

like gravity. We have always been waiting. We have always been
drawing lines into shrouded ground, forming a language that speaks
in symbol and chalk. This is how we build what we imagine

holds warmth, its force and weight spreading wide. This is how
we ignore the signals of our body, the pull of the world beyond
straining the patchwork of fabric and seam, until even boundaries

seem to tear. The next summit and then the next, one grain
compressed into another, again, again.

Morning flares. We begin.

Kristina Marie Darling and Chris Campanioni

To suppose, to lay down tentatively, to hold, to have a position of, to say I did it for the fantasy, & for the memory, & for the viewers across the screen (the viewers out there), there are certain faces

There are certain moments in the underground

There are certain expressions I'd like to see in the underground, on the faces of the passengers moving through me just as I am moving

Through the city, for pleasure & for passage, & for the inevitable pause within a station's stop, the rasping announcement (a moment

In which I am forced to stop composing, so as to get off, unless I delay

My own arc, to stay on & ride another) Not to be
The bullet but the shot—

The city, the boredom, the beautiful body of being at the same time

Over & under everything

(I stay on & keep

Moving; I even
Repeat myself, once
More turning
Fantasy into memory into a view
To a kill: it is my only
True dependency)

What I wouldn't do to re-live the last moment from the tomorrow of today, to see the face at the height of climax, an expression of shock & disgust & sure silence; an empty expression; a face emptied-out of all thought & feeling, to be filled in or up again later, saying softly it is what it is I am what I am & you remember hope of a new feeling strange flesh the mouth & lips dim room pants rip quick & silent coming another scene in the shallow end where I am still waiting, I am still waiting, I am still waiting to

Descend becoming what it was I would
Never be some unspoken
Satisfaction where there is a pause, hold
The pause I would like you
To keep going

First thing I look for is my own face in the mirror of others for want is said & want is
said in so many ways

2:45PM

Saturday, January 27

Kristina Marie Darling and Chris Campanioni

[PART SECOND] I am trying to explain to you the difference between a bullet and a shot: it's not the velocity, but the impact of one body striking the other. A tear at the edge of the tablecloth is the first sign that violence also lives in this set of rooms, its presence made visible in the () that appear in each of your textbooks, the faces of dead presidents filled with light. Which to say: there are men who overuse the word *pleasure* & they are easy to pick out in a crowd—

Of course, when we started making the film, we didn't know. The audience was smaller then. & no one had taken their first steps into the underground, let alone a walk to the train station at night, stuttering in the empty street.

Now the script goes on & on. What comes first, the feature film in the mind or the film outside of it. Take your time answering. Remember to bring a bouquet for that woman who assembled each of your elaborate two-story sets.

& I shouldn't have to remind you: When plucking a flower, no one keeps the thorn.

3:25PM

Saturday, January 27

Passion for Solitude

after Cesare Pavese

I'm drinking cabernet by the sad doorway
because the moon is already lost, already

missing. Who's going to organize the tides?
Probably the women because who else keeps

showing up to do the invisible work, the sweeping
of the shore, the tidying of the stars that no one's

allowed to touch except the raccoons and porcupines
with their nimble, with their nibbling of the rinds.

Half a dose of silence, half a dose of still. All my fears
are blankets I lie across, are the leaves that keep falling

after a storm. All things in this afterlife, I can hold them,
the dead grasses beside the roadway, a shingle,

a plastic bag. Still I see a doorway in the branches,
want to open into it, open like the coldest night

in thirty years, like a coyote who speaks icicle,
speaks hunger through the broken willows.

Far and near, dark and yet these few stars having their say
despite the heavy clouds. Companionable rodents and canines,

they remind me I can walk for hours uphill in the deepest snow.

BIOGRAPHIES

The word "BIOGRAPHIES" is written in a bold, yellow, distressed font. A thick, blue diagonal line with a white speckled texture cuts across the letters from the bottom-left to the top-right.

POETRY

Benjamin Niespodziany

Benjamin Niespodziany works in a library in Chicago and runs the multimedia art blog [neonpajamas]. He has had work published in *Paper Darts*, *Fairy Tale Review* (forthcoming), *Hobart* (forthcoming), *Cheap Pop*, and various others. He is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Ecuador, 2011-2013) and still remembers a little bit of Spanish.

Anna Maria Hong

Anna Maria Hong is the author of the novella *H & G* (Sidebrow Books), winner of the A Room of Her Own Foundation's Clarissa Dalloway Prize, and *Age of Glass*, winner of Cleveland State University Poetry Center's First Book Poetry Competition and the Poetry Society of America's 2019 Norma Farber First Book Award. Her second poetry collection, *Fablesque*, won Tupelo Press's Berkshire Prize and is forthcoming in early 2020.

Rachel Mennies

Rachel Mennies is the author of *The Glad Hand of God Points Backwards*, the 2014 winner of the Walt McDonald First-Book Prize in Poetry and finalist for a National Jewish Book Award, and the chapbook *No Silence in the Fields*. She lives in Chicago, where she teaches at Loyola University, and is a member of AGNI's editorial staff.

David Welch

David Welch is the author of *Everyone Who Is Dead*, and has poems recently published in journals including *Free Verse*, *Greensboro Review*, & *Pleiades*. He lives in Chicago and teaches at DePaul University where he is Assistant Director of Publishing & Outreach. Visit him virtually at www.davidwelch.me.

Alex Mouw

Alex Mouw's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Colorado Review*, *West Branch*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and elsewhere. He also writes nonfiction and literary criticism, which have appeared in *Ruminant* and *Christianity and Literature*, respectively. He lives in Saint Louis.

Erin Lyndal Martin

Erin Lyndal Martin is a writer based in Blacksburg, VA. Her poetry has appeared in *Gigantic Sequins*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, the *Collagist*, and elsewhere. She's on Twitter at @erinlyndal.

Devon Balwit

Devon Balwit's most recent collection is titled *A Brief Way to Identify a Body* (Ursus Americanus Press). Her individual poems can be found in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Apt* (long-form issue), *Grist*, and *Oxidant Engine* among others. For more, see her website at: <https://pelapdx.wixsite.com/devonbalwitpoet>

Lindsay Illich

Lindsay Illich is the author of *Heteroglossia* (Anchor and Plume, 2016), *Rile & Heave* (Texas Review Press, 2017), which won the Texas Review Press Breakout Prize in Poetry, and *Fingerspell* (Black Lawrence Press, forthcoming 2020).

Tim Carter

Tim Carter lives (happily) in Syracuse, NY, holds an MFA from Syracuse University, and works at a theater company that partners with Syracuse city schools. Find more poems in *Birdfeast*, *Diagram*, *Radar*, and *The Matador Review*.

Angie Macri

Angie Macri is the author of *Underwater Panther* (Southeast Missouri State University), winner of the Cowles Poetry Book Prize, and *Fear Nothing of the Future or the Past* (Finishing Line). Her recent work appears in *Quiddity*, *The Southern Review*, and *Tupelo Quarterly*. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she lives in Hot Springs. Find her online at angiemacri.wordpress.com

Emily Ellison

Emily Ellison is a second year MFA poet at Texas State University, where she also works as an Teaching Assistant for their English faculty. Her work has appeared in *Southword*, *After the Pause*, and *Haiku Journal*, and is upcoming in several places. Emily lives in San Marcos, Texas with two cats and an abundance of plants (withering at the moment).

Mateo Perez Lara

Mateo Perez Lara (pronouns: he/him/they) is a queer latinx originally from Bakersfield, California. He received his B.A. in English at CSU Bakersfield. He is currently working on his M.F.A. in Poetry at Randolph College in Lynchburg, VA. His poems have been featured in *Orpheus*, *EOAGH*, *Empty Mirror*, and *The New Engagement*. He is an editor for *RabidOak* online literary journal & Zoetic Press.

Rukmini Kalamangalam

Rukmini Kalamangalam is a page and performance poet from Houston, Texas. She is a current freshman at Emory University. In 2018, she was named Youth Poet Laureate

of the Southwest as well as Houston Youth Poet Laureate. Her poem, "After Harvey," was set to music by the Houston Grand Opera. She has been published by *ABC 13*, *Blue Marble Review*, *Da Camera Museum*, *GASHER*, and *Tilde*, among others.

Irène Mathieu

Dr. Irène P. Mathieu is a pediatrician and writer. She is the author of *Grand Marronage* (Switchback Books, 2019), which won Editor's Choice for the Gatewood Prize and runner-up for the Cave Canem/Northwestern Book Prize, *orogeny* (Trembling Pillow Press, 2017), which won the Bob Kaufman Book Prize, and *the galaxy of origins* (dancing girl press, 2014). Irène is on the editorial boards of *Muzzle Magazine* and the *Journal of General Internal Medicine's* humanities section. A member of the Jack Jones Literary Arts speakers' bureau, she has received Fulbright, Callaloo, and Virginia Center for the Creative Arts fellowships.

Jason Koo

Named one of the "100 Most Influential People in Brooklyn Culture" by *Brooklyn Magazine*, Jason Koo is the author of three full-length collections of poetry: *More Than Mere Light*, *America's Favorite Poem* and *Man on Extremely Small Island*, winner of the De Novo Poetry Prize and the Asian American Writers' Workshop Members' Choice Award for the best Asian American book of 2009. He is also the author of the chapbook *Sunset Park* and coeditor of the *Brooklyn Poets Anthology*. He has published his poetry and prose in the *American Scholar*, *Missouri Review*, *Village Voice* and *Yale Review*, among other places, and won fellowships for his work from the National Endowment for the Arts, Vermont Studio Center and New York State Writers Institute. An associate teaching professor of English at Quinnipiac University, Koo is the founder and executive director of Brooklyn Poets and creator of the Bridge (poetsbridge.org). He lives in Brooklyn.

Tarfia Faizullah

Tarfia Faizullah is the author of two poetry collections, *Registers of Illuminated Villages* (Graywolf, 2018) and *Seam* (SIU, 2014). The recipient of a Fulbright fellowship, three Pushcart prizes, and other honors, Faizullah has also been featured at the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh and the Library of Congress. In 2016, Faizullah was recognized by Harvard Law School as one of 50 Women Inspiring Change. Born in Brooklyn, NY to Bangladeshi immigrants and raised in Texas, she currently teaches in the Writing Program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago as a Visiting Artist in Residence.

Eric Sirota

Eric Sirota is a spoken word poet and do-gooder lawyer living in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he supervises law students providing free representation to veterans. His work has been featured by *Button Poetry*, *FreezeRay Poetry*, *RubyHornet*, *White Wall Review*, and elsewhere. You can't miss him. He's the tallest Jew for miles.

Patrick Sylvain

Sylvain is a poet, social and literary critic, and photographer. Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Published in several creative anthologies and reviews, including: *African American Review*, *Agni*, *American Poetry Review*, *Aperture*, *Callaloo*, *Caribbean Writers*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Magma Poetry*, *Transition*, *Ploughshares*, *SX Salon*, *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*. Sylvain's academic essays are anthologized. Sylvain received his B.A. from the University of Massachusetts, an Ed.M. from Harvard; and received his MFA from Boston University as a Robert Pinsky Global Fellow. Sylvain is on faculty at Brown University's Africana Studies. Sylvain is also the Shirle Dorothy Robbins Creative Writing Prize Fellow at Brandeis University. His poetry chapbook, *Underworlds*, is published by *Central Square Press* (2018), and Sylvain also forthcoming publication with *Beacon Press* (Essay, 2020).

Rhosalyn Williams

Rhosalyn Williams is a writer, waitress, and teacher. She was born in Wales, grew up in Florida, and currently lives in New Hampshire, where she earned an MFA from the University of New Hampshire.

Andrew Miller

Andrew Miller was born in Fresno, California. His poetry has appeared in such literary magazines as *Laurel Review*, *Spoon River Review*, and *Iron Horse Literary Review*. In addition, Mr. Miller is the author of *Poetry, Photograph, Ekphrasis: Lyrical Representations of Photography from the 19th Century to the Present* and the co-editor of *The Gazer Within*, the Selected Prose of Larry Levis. He lives in Copenhagen, Denmark, with his family.

Ella Bartlett

Ella Bartlett (she/her/s) is a writer currently residing in New York City. She studies psychology and English at Barnard College and is currently working on a translation from French, which is part of a deeper curiosity about weirding language. You can find her work in *decomp magazinE* and *Necessary Fiction*, and follow her on Twitter @ellatheRewriter.

Sally Ashton

Sally Ashton is editor in chief of *DMQ Review*, an online journal featuring poetry and art. She is the author of three poetry collections, and a fourth book, *The Behaviour of Clocks*, just released in 2019. Ashton has taught at San Jose State University and numerous workshops, and is assistant editor of *They Said: A Multi-Genre Anthology of Contemporary Collaborative Writing*. Recent work appears in *Rattle*, *Brevity*, *Poetry Flash*, *San Pedro River Review*, and *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

ARTWORK

Laura Christensen

Laura Christensen's art has been featured in galleries and museums, including Kidspace at MASS MoCA, Bennington Museum, and Simmons College. Recently, she invited thirty top-notch authors to write in response to her work. The resulting anthology, *THEN AGAIN*, is available on Kickstarter only through April 30: <http://kck.st/2YFdt3Z>

Artist Statement

Vintage photographs are the basis of my art - both canvas and inspiration for my painting. By the time I find them, the original chains of personal connection have broken. Subjects are freed to become characters cast and costumed, players in other stories that form fresh bonds with new audiences. When I paint, I cancel parts of images and conjure new illusions. Trying to create seamless images that combine past and present, photograph and painting. Apparitions of those who posed for a camera are still visible, but transformed, and performing fresh scenes of pathos and humor. Please find me online at <https://laurachristensen.wordpress.com/>

Delano Dunn

Delano Dunn (b. Los Angeles, CA) received his MFA in Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Through painting, mixed media, and collage, Dunn explores the questions of racial identity and perception through various contexts, ranging from the personal to the political, and drawing from his experience growing up in South Central LA. Delano Dunn currently lives and works in New York City.

Gabe Brown

Gabe Brown is a 2018 recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Painting and a Sustainable Arts Foundation Award. She is an Adjunct Professor of Painting and Drawing at Fordham University and SUNY New Paltz where she has received three Merit Awards for Professional Achievement. She lives and works in Kingston, New York.

Artist Statement

Art is like magic, an illusion created by the force of humanity. Our choices in life can be amazing portals for adventure. For me, these possibilities present themselves through the process of painting: researching potent images, configuring them on canvas, and struggling to imbue them with a sense of myself and my own wonder at the enormous complexity of the world. I seek a better understanding of truth in nature with constant comparison and evaluation of opposites. Using a visual vocabulary derived from a world that often goes unnoticed, everyday events such as conversations between birds, forces that drive water, or the cellular structure of plant life, I begin to reinvent reality. The concerns that arise from this process reveal themselves to me as subversive dualities existing in both the natural world and

the man-made. When we consider something in a new context, having unearthed the intrigue that lies just beneath the surface of the seemingly simple, the original meaning is altered and brought to a new level of consciousness, creating metaphor. In this way, I can see, and show, that the natural world is not unlike our own man-made realm, an alternate universe filled with an active power to recognize desire, temptation, and frailty.

FICTION

Cecilia Pinto

Cecilia Pinto is a writer whose work has appeared in a variety of publications. She is delighted that her story has found a home here at *Jet Fuel Review*. She feels as if her heart were a blossoming flower.

Tara Isabel Zambrano

Tara Isabel Zambrano works as a semiconductor chip designer. Her work has been published in *Tin House Online*, *The Southampton Review*, *Slice*, *Triquarterly*, *Yemassee*, *Passages North*, and others. She is Assistant Flash Fiction Editor at Newfound.org. Tara moved from India to the United States two decades ago and holds an instrument rating for single engine aircraft. She lives in Texas.

Ethan Plaut

Ethan Plaut lives on a three-generation farm in rural eastern Maine. His writing has been published in *Ecology Law Quarterly*, *Wabanaki Legal News*, *Every Day Fiction*, and *Glass Mountain*.

Tyler Womack

Tyler Womack played indie rock in Austin before moving to Brooklyn to work in advertising. He now lives in Northern California, where he writes about hipsters growing up and the tragedy of creative employment. Tyler's fiction has appeared in *Across the Margin* and the *Corvus Review*.

Maureen Langloss

Maureen Langloss is a lawyer-turned-writer living in New York City. She serves as the Flash Fiction Editor at *Split Lip Magazine*. Her writing has appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Little Fiction*, *Sonora Review*, *The Journal*, *Wigleaf*, and elsewhere. Her work was selected for the 2019 Best Small Fictions anthology and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. You can find her online at maureenlangloss.com or on Twitter @maureenlangloss.

Steven Hartz

Steven Hartz grew up in Northern California. He became, in the following order:

an English major, construction worker, maid, ski bum, dishwasher, arborist, scientist, software designer, corporate hack, and finally, writer of stories. His work has been published in *Underground Voices*.

Wendy Wimmer

Wendy Wimmer is a Believer Magazine fiction fellow at Black Mountain Institute/ University of Nevada Las Vegas. She is the fiction editor of *Witness* literary journal and the founder of UntitledTown book and author festival in Wisconsin. Her work has been published in *Barrelhouse*, *Blackbird*, *Per Contra*, *ANMLY*, *Drunken Boat*, *Paper Darts*, *Non-Binary Review*, *Salt & Syntax* and more, as well as nominated for multiple Pushcart Prizes, AWP Intro to Journal and Best New Voices. Her short story collection was recently named a semi-finalist in the Hudson Prize. She was most recently a featured reader at Believer Fest 2018. She lives in Nevada but her heart remains in the Midwest.

Hannah Han

Hannah Han is a high school student from Los Angeles, California. She has received recognition for her work from the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers and is the editor-in-chief and co-founder of the online literary journal *The Stirling Spoon* (thestirlingspoon.com).

SPECIAL SECTION: COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Kimberly Quiogue Andrews

Kimberly Quiogue Andrews is a poet and literary critic. She is the author of *A Brief History of Fruit*, winner of the 2018 Akron Prize for Poetry, and *BETWEEN*, winner of the 2017 New Women's Voices Prize from Finishing Line Press. She lives in Maryland and teaches at Washington College.

Sarah Blake

Sarah Blake is the author of *Naamah* (Riverhead Books) and two books of poetry, *Let's Not Live on Earth and Mr. West* (Wesleyan University Press). Recipient of a Literature Fellowship from the NEA, Blake's work has appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Catapult*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*.

Carol Guess

Carol Guess is the author of twenty books of poetry and prose, including *Darling Endangered*, *Doll Studies: Forensics*, and *Tinderbox Lawn*. A frequent collaborator, she writes across genres and illuminates historically marginalized material. In 2014 she was awarded the Philolexian Award for Distinguished Literary Achievement by Columbia University. She teaches at Western Washington University and lives in Seattle.

Rochelle Hurt

Rochelle Hurt is the author of *In Which I Play the Runaway* (Barrow Street, 2016), which won the Barrow Street Poetry Prize, and *The Rusted City: A Novel in Poems* (White Pine, 2014). She's been awarded prizes and fellowships from *Crab Orchard Review*, *Arts & Letters*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Poetry International*, *Vermont Studio Center*, *Jentel*, and *Yaddo*. She is Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at Slippery Rock University, and she runs the review site *The Bind*.

Virginia Smith Rice

Virginia Smith Rice is the author of the poetry collection, *When I Wake It Will Be Forever* (Sundress Publications, 2014), and a poetry chapbook, *Whose House, Whose Playroom* (Dancing Girl Press, 2017). She is poetry editor at *Kettle Blue Review*. Poems co-written with Christine Pacyk appear in *They Said : A Multi-Genre Anthology of Contemporary Collaborative Writing* (Black Lawrence Press, 2018) and are forthcoming as a chapbook, *The Internet Confirms How They Broke Down The Door*, published by *Dancing Girl Press*.

Christine Pacyk

Christine Pacyk is a poet and educator living in the Chicago Suburbs. She holds an MFA in poetry from Northwestern University. Her work has been published in *Jet Fuel Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Crannóg Magazine*, and *Zone 3*, among other journals.

Denise Duhamel

Denise Duhamel's most recent book of poetry is *Scald* (Pittsburgh, 2017). She is a Distinguished University Professor at Florida International University in Miami.

Barbra Nightingale

Barbra Nightingale's latest book, *Alphalexia*, was published with Finishing Line Press. She is an associate editor for the *South Florida Poetry Journal*. Barbra lives in Hollywood, FL.

Brenda Miller

Brenda Miller is the author of five essay collections, most recently *An Earlier Life* (Ovenbird Books, 2016). She also co-authored *Tell It Slant: Creating, Refining and Publishing Creative Nonfiction* (Third Edition forthcoming Summer 2019). She co-authored *The Pen and the Bell: Mindful Writing in a Busy World*, with Holly J. Hughes. Her creative nonfiction work has received six Pushcart Prizes. She is a Professor of English at Western Washington University, and associate faculty at the Rainier Writing Workshop.

Julie Marie Wade

Julie Marie Wade is an associate professor of creative writing at Florida International University. Her most recent collections are *Same-Sexy Marriage: A Novella in Poems* and *The Unrhymables: Collaborations in Prose*, co-authored with Denise Duhamel.

Tyler Mills

Tyler Mills is the author of two books of poems, *Hawk Parable* (winner of the 2017 Akron Poetry Prize, chosen by Oliver de la Paz) and *Tongue Lyre* (winner of the 2011 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award, chosen by Lee Ann Roripaugh). Her poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, and *Poetry*, and her essays have appeared in *AGNI*, *Copper Nickel*, and *The Rumpus*. The recipient of residencies from Yaddo, Ragdale, and the Vermont Studio Center, and scholarships/fellowships from Bread Loaf and Sewanee, the Chicago native is an assistant professor at New Mexico Highlands University, editor-in-chief of *The Account*, and a resident of Santa Fe, NM.

Kendra DeColo

Kendra DeColo is the author of *My Dinner with Ron Jeremy* (Third Man Books, 2016) and *Thieves in the Afterlife* (Saturnalia Books, 2014), selected by Yusef Komunyakaa for the 2013 Saturnalia Books Poetry. Her poems and essays appear in *American Poetry Review*, *Tin House Magazine*, *Waxwing*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *VIDA*, and elsewhere. She is a recipient of the 2019 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Creative Writing and has received awards and honors from the MacDowell Colony, the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, the Millay Colony, Split this Rock, and the Tennessee Arts Commission. She is co-host of the podcast "Re/Verb: a Third Man Books Production" and she lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

Matthew DeMarco

Matthew DeMarco lives in Chicago. His work has appeared on Poets.org and in *Ghost City Review*, *Landfill*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Sporklet* and elsewhere, and is forthcoming from *Glass* and *The Swamp*. Poems that he wrote with Faizan Syed have appeared in *Dogbird* and *They Said*, an anthology of collaborative writing from Black Lawrence Press. He tweets sporadically from @M_DeMarco_Words.

Faizan Syed

Faizan Syed, MD is a poet and psychiatrist based in Queens. He was awarded the Folger Adams Jr. Prize and the Graduating Poet's Award from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Faizan's work has appeared in *Montage Literary Arts Journal*, *MACE*, *Newtown Literary*, & *Empty Mirror*, and is forthcoming in *Cosmonauts Ave*. One can find him on Instagram @drfaizansdreamery.

Laura Jones

Laura Jones is the editorial consultant for Mondo / Alamo Drafthouse, and a journalist currently writing for *The Austin Chronicle*. Her nonfiction essays have appeared in two anthologies and literary magazines like *Creative Nonfiction*, *Fourth Genre*, *The Drum*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, and *Foglifter*, to name a few. A book she edited for Mondo, *A Field Guide to Evil*, comes out nationally in October 2019. Her newest project is an anthology devoted to the 1987 CBS series, *Beauty and the Beast*. She lives in Austin, TX.

Heather Jones

Heather Jones is a RN and accomplished photographer. She is new to nonfiction collaboration, but prior to her nursing career, she pursued poetry, painting and the visual arts at Naropa University. She lives and works in Milwaukee, WI.

Kimberly Blaeser

Kimberly Blaeser is the author of three poetry collections—most recently *Apprenticed to Justice*; and the editor of *Traces in Blood, Bone, and Stone: Contemporary Ojibwe Poetry*. She served as Wisconsin Poet Laureate for 2015-16. A Professor of English and Native American Studies at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, Blaeser is also on faculty for the Institute of American Indian Arts low rez MFA program in Santa Fe. Blaeser is Anishinaabe, an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and grew up on White Earth Reservation. A fourth collection of poetry, *Copper Yearning*, will be released from Holy Cow! Press in fall 2019.

Amber Blaeser-Wardzala

Amber Blaeser-Wardzala is a Creative Writing and Studio Arts student at Denison University. Her poetry and photography have been included in several regional publications and her short fiction piece “Realism” was adapted for an orchestral performance. She has been involved in various theatre productions, appearing on stage from Albuquerque to Milwaukee. In summer 2019, she will join an ensemble to adapt and stage *Nahoonkara*, a novel by Peter Grandbois. Amber is Anishinaabe from White Earth Reservation and grew up in rural Lyons, WI.

Anne-Marie Akin

Anne-Marie Akin is a Jubilation Foundation Fellow and a songwriter for the National Lullaby Project. Her work has been published in various journals including *The Bitter Southerner*, *About Place*, and the anthologies *The Buddha Next Door* and *THEY SAID: an Anthology of Collaborative Work*. She teaches at the Old Town School of Folk Music, and creates music and literature experiences for very young children on Chicago’s South Side.

Amy Ash

Amy Ash is the author of *The Open Mouth of the Vase*. She is an assistant professor and director of the creative writing program at Indiana State University.

Callista Buchen

Callista Buchen is the author of the chapbooks *The Bloody Planet* and *Double Mouthed*, and the full-length collection *Look, Look, Look*, forthcoming from *Black Lawrence press*. She is an assistant professor of English at Franklin College.

Kristina Marie Darling

Kristina Marie Darling is the author of thirty-two books, including *Look to Your Left: The Poetics of Spectacle* (Akron Poetry Series, forthcoming in 2020) and *DARK HORSE: Poems* (C&R Press, 2018). She currently serves as Editor-in-Chief of *Tupelo Press and Tupelo Quarterly*, an opinion columnist at *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, a staff blogger at *The Kenyon Review*, a contributing writer at *Publishers Weekly*, and a freelance book critic at *The New York Times Book Review*.

Chris Campanioni

Chris Campanioni's new book, the *Internet is for real* (C&R Press), re-enacts the language of the Internet as literary installations. His selected poetry was awarded an Academy of American Poets College Prize in 2013, his novel *Going Down* was named Best First Book at the 2014 International Latino Book Awards, and his hybrid piece "This body's long (& I'm still loading)" was adapted as an official selection of the Canadian International Film Festival in 2017.

Martha Silano

Martha Silano is the author of five books of poetry, including *Gravity Assist*, *Reckless Lovely*, and *The Little Office of the Immaculate Conception*, all from Saturnalia Books. She also co-authored, with Kelli Russell Agodon, *The Daily Poet: Day-By-Day Prompts for your Writing Practice* (Two Sylvias Press, 2013). She teaches at Bellevue College, near her home in Seattle, WA. marthasilano.net.

Kelli Russell Agodon

Kelli Russell Agodon's most recent book, *Hourglass Museum* (White Pine Press), was a Finalist for the Washington State Book Awards and shortlisted for the Julie Suk Prize in Poetry. Other books include *The Daily Poet: Day-By-Day Prompts For Your Writing Practice* and *Letters from the Emily Dickinson Room*. Kelli is the cofounder of Two Sylvias Press and Co-Director of Poets on the Coast: A Writing Retreat for Women in Washington State. www.agodon.com / www.twosylviaspress.com

