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ART & LITERATURE JOURNAL

RENTUMBRA



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2016



PENUMBRA

2016



Stanislaus
State

Volume 26

The Annual Art and Literary Journal
of
California State University Stanislaus



Penumbra (pi-num 'bre): n. 1. A partial shadow, as in an eclipse, between regions of complete shadow and complete illumination. 2. The partly darkened fringe around a sun spot. 3. An outlying, surrounding region; periphery; fringe. [Lat. paene, almost - lat unbra, shadow]

ALL ABOUT PENUMBRA

Since 1991, *Penumbra* has proudly published poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and visual art from the Stanislaus region, the U.S., and abroad. Our staff is composed of students, who make all editorial decisions—which submissions to accept, how to design the journal, etc.—as well as selling all advertising space.

We have no aesthetic or political agenda; we accept the best submissions, based on democratic deliberations. Because new students staff the journal every year, *Penumbra* constantly evolves. Annually, we launch the new issue with a reading on the CSU Stanislaus campus, near the end of the Spring term.

Every Spring, English 4019: Editing Literary Magazines is open to students with junior or higher academic standing. Students from all majors are welcome: the course offers professional training in areas including art, business, and communications.

Thank you to the many contributors to *Penumbra* Volume 26. Your talent makes the journal what it is. Please continue sending in your work: submissions will open for Volume 27 in September of this year.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Penumbra has been the literary and artistic journal of CSU Stanislaus for the past 25 years.

Penumbra would like to thank Claremont Print and Copy, Inc. for their exemplary work and support.

Our gratitude and thanks also go to the English Department for being the foundation from which *Penumbra* has grown.

This publication could not be possible without the hard work, dedication, and artistic vision of our Editor-in-Chief, Danyl Crites.

The *Penumbra* Staff would like to give a special thank you to Dr. Jesse Wolfe for providing guidance, support, and a lot of his time in helping to bring *Penumbra* to life.

We are grateful to the CSU Stanislaus Art Department for partnering with us, and we hope to continue our alliance for many years to come.

We would also like to thank Red Brick Bar & Grill for their generous donation.

We would like to extend our thanks to those not mentioned for their continuous support throughout this entire process: thank you for helping to make *Penumbra* possible.

Cover Art:
Sleeping in the Sea
Tejal Patel

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PENUMBRA

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non-refundable.

Detour

Carson Pellanda



Dream-Chasers

Mariah Esparza

Oh, do you need a pen? I've got several to spare.
Need to borrow some paper? Here.
I'm armed to the teeth with notebooks, take this one.
Just skip the first couple pages,
there are some poems there.
I represent a little society, you see.
One that stretches across all continents
and reaches back through time.
You've seen us, you know—
in your classrooms, on the bus, at the library, the park.
We seem to adore coffee shops.
In my opinion they are brimming with ideas as well as caffeine.
You've seen us scribbling and you get the slight notion
we are not making to-do lists.
Far from it, my friends.
We are creating people, spinning yarns and breathing life into words.
We are most easily distracted.
No, your story is interesting—your lecture is engaging.
But the man with the eye patch, the woman crying on the subway
or the two children crossing the street
have snatched our attention away from you.
They have stories too, but no one is telling theirs.
So we have to, or else they'll stay locked in our minds forever.
And maybe you think we aren't making good use of our time
or contributing to the grand scheme of things in the world.
But don't worry your pretty-little head about it.
Because every one of us has already had those crippling thoughts
One million times over.
We huddle in circles
nervously passing our works to one another.
We are desperate to share our scribbles and be validated for our
struggles,
but we are paralyzed—
*Will they like my ideas, will they relate to my character, what if they don't
understand?*

And the most prominent one of all, *What if I'm not cut out for this?*
We tell ourselves we're no Hemingway, Dickens, or J.K. Rowling
for heaven's sake.

How do we expect to make it in this world,
where everything has already been said, done, and written?
But no matter how many times you've given us that pitying look
or we think ourselves into despair—the words keep coming.

We must find paper to place them on.
Maybe you've said we have our heads in the clouds or other places.
That we will grow out of this “stage” and pick a more stable career.

Or maybe you've called us insane
for waking up in the middle of the night to frantically write a scene
we've just dreamt, dismissing sleep.

Talking about characters as if they were real—they are.

Or rising at the crack of dawn to organize a chapter,
foregoing all responsibilities
other than filling the lines of our minds
with more and more wonderful words.

But I guess you don't understand.

We are dream-chasers.

Our trashcans are filled with paper,
but our hearts and souls are stuffed with marvelous stuff.

Emotions, compassion and empathy
for every person we see.

The world is our inspiration
and you are characters.

We are storytellers.

We are writers.

We hope that you understand,
but if not,

we hope you can wrap your head around
the fact that all characters are fictional and any similarity to people
living or dead is purely coincidental.

Strange World

Nikhil Nath

even the most
notorious criminal

is not subject
to the torture

I am subjected
to as a drum

two sticks
that work themselves

to a crescendo
all the cheering

and applause
is for my beater

strange
this world!

Missing Hayley Perry

You are a spider web
on my windshield.
A single strand,
glimmering gossamer.

I blow on my coffee,
making a tiny tropical storm—
Its own ecosystem.
And still the black specks,
escaped grounds,
rise to the top—
Polluting.

A drive to the city
with nothing on my radio;
silence sits in my
passenger seat.
Thirty minutes pass by
and I think I'm back
where I started.

If I called you
at the same number
right now,
I don't know
who might answer.

La Oscuridad

Veronica Pulido



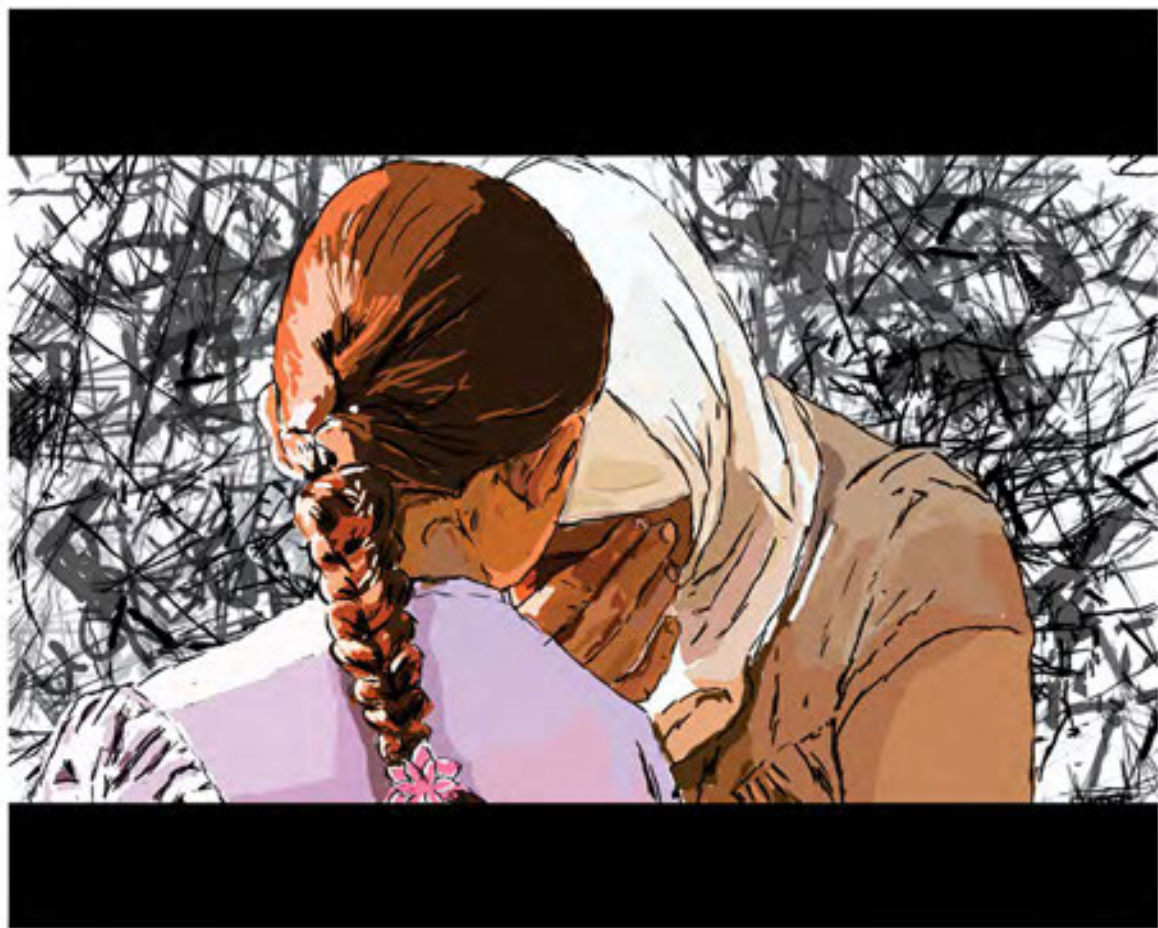
Use As Directed

Casey Leslie

My sweet, creamy, rose-petalled skin was pinned
against the bricks above my head by an angel's angry hooves
one March morning while a gaggle of his friends stood
outside the bathroom door and giggled
about the latest issue of Spiderman
as he kissed bite marks down my sixteen-year-old neck
as we both moaned—one in a pleading agony,
one denying an escape; that day after school
I pleaded with my BFF to come to the pharmacy down the street
(do you really need another thing of nail polish, Casey?)
in search of the nondescript box on the corner of the bottom left shelf
(otherwise known as my salvation in the form of a little bitter pill);
only to find out that somewhere, a thirty-five-year-old white man
decided that my future
should hold (instead of a degree or a job or some happiness)
a soft silky swaddled serving as a constant projector of a homemade
movie:
the tearing of my black leggings down the side
the hot, pork rind breath of a teenage boy on my neck
the fingers twisted with my long, thick, auburn hair never letting go
as I was raped, not only by my high-school sweetheart
but by the government.

Maya & Mother

Elizabeth Padilla



Coda

Tobi Altier

She saw many a boat: some on the Lochs, some resting in the wet mud of outbound tide, some ruined and unworthy of any water, green growing up through cracks in the wood, beautiful and forlorn, a family's livelihood reduced to flowering hulls and photographs taken by passing traveler.

She rode the ferry: rain stinging her eyes like a thousand razors, cold biting through to her bones, counting the seconds, minutes to hearing the loudspeaker voice, feeling the chunk of steel upon pier, walking to cover and warmth.

She watched many a layer of cloud-darkened sun, sky and sea, bruised purple and angry, the definition of roiling and silent, a sullen topping of hills wishing to be green, reduced to angry gray.

She never noticed any clear sky, it was always held hostage by mist.

All she wanted was to make a wish. She looked down for beauty, wished on the tiny white flowers beside the road, pretended they were stars.

By Rainlight

Seth Jani

The pouring rain
Is a mask of phosphorescence
On the village streets.
After hours, nearly drunk
On the pull of waters,
We walk the gardens
In the dark.
And we believe the universe
Is as it appears in the sudden storm,
A circling, rain-swept place
Where the occasional planetary light
Of a quiet streetlamp
Gives to us
Its radiant, solvent glow.

Hide and Seek

Chad Nelson



Farmer in an Espartinas Bodega

JC Altier

Reckon him a child of Ecclesiastes,
seeking his own portion under the sun:
a leery countenance and waning eyes,
the seasons entering him unchallenged
as they do the frayed jacket
of a traveler without a destination,
all his purposes under Heaven intact.

His heart's the same in any weather—
undulant barometer that never laments
fate: the indignity of failed harvests, sons
who've abandoned him to his fields, never
needing their father's dim yields, wine
cellars dried to dregs, unreplenished after
the last vine rot, his future hissing back at him.

Still, he waits in the bodega for news of his sons,
endures rumors of their return. Memories
flash like light, like shadow, like ravens
in his fields, or the fireplace in the house
he goes home to each night, dogs barking
to be let back in, his wife upstairs, combing
her silver-black hair in a spotless mirror.

Discarded Wool

Carlos Franco-Ruiz



A Field of Grass

Kevin Diaz

As I lie in a field of grass, looking upon the sky above, I am consumed by the sky's beauty. To my right, the fading shades of light blue slowly become engulfed by the black of night. Crimson color radiates to my left as the sun begins its final descent. I rarely take a moment to look up above, but this evening I take it all in. As I lie here I begin to look back on my life up and all the roles I have played.

As I lie in a field of grass, looking upon the sky above, I reflect on my role as a son. I look into the sky, wondering if my parents are there. *Does the afterlife really exist? Is there a heaven and hell? Are my parents staring back at me, or have they simply faded into nothingness, as if they never existed?* I think back to when they were alive, reminiscing on all the times we shared, good and bad. I wonder whether I was a good son to them. *Were they proud of me, or did I let them down?*

As I lie in a field of grass, looking upon the sky above, I reflect on my role as a husband. My wife always had a radiant glow, and I was constantly blinded by her beauty. Every morning when I awoke I would watch her sleep and thank God for putting her in my life. *God. Is He even there? Has He ever truly listened to me?* I lie here hoping that I was the best husband to my wife that I could have been, wondering if I will ever leave the foreign land this field is located. Was I good to her? Will I see her again?

As I lie in a field of grass, looking upon the sky above, I reflect on my role as a father. As beautiful as my wife was, the beauty in my children was tenfold. We had two daughters, and every day I simply watched them in amazement as their curiosity about the world consumed them. To live life through a child's eyes, what a magnificent feeling that must be. *I wish I could remember that feeling, that feeling of awe about the world.* The last remaining rays of sunlight disappear, the sky fading further into darkness.

As I lie in a field of grass, looking upon the sky above, I reflect on my final role, the role of a soldier. War has stripped me from my wife. War has stripped me from my children. War has prevented me from saying goodbye to my parents who passed months after the war began. *What are we even fighting for?* I don't remember why we were fighting. I don't remember who we were fighting. All I can do is look into the sky as it darkens more and more and one by one small specks of light litter the darkness. I look deeper into the sky, and the deeper I look the more insignificant I feel. *What is the point of it all?*

As I lie in a field of grass, looking upon the sky above, another man enters my field of vision. Another soldier. A medic. He desperately tries to take control of the wound that forced me onto my back, leaving me on the field to stare at the sky above. I should be cheering for his success. I should be praying to God to help me, in case He is actually listening. All I can do, however, is just lie here. I tune out the bombs and bullets flying by. I tune out the sounds of screaming men. I lie here, looking deeper into the sky, into the vast emptiness of the universe, and realize that in the end none of this matters. Son. Husband. Father. Soldier. All were roles I played in my life. All were roles that in the grand scheme of the universe are meaningless. As I begin to take in my final breaths I realize that I am leaving this world as quickly as I entered it, and nothing I have done in this life, in these roles I played, will have a lasting impact on anything. *Is there anything after this? Will I go to Heaven? Will I go to Hell? Will God forgive me for the men I have killed, or is killing men in war the same as murder in His eyes? Is He even there? Will I just fade into nothingness, as if I never existed in the first place?*

As I lie in a field of grass, looking upon the sky above, a peace begins to consume me. Perhaps this is my mind's way of preparing me for the end. Perhaps this is the Heaven which those who have come back from the verge of death have described. The closer I come to the end, the more peaceful I feel. I think of my wife and children one more time, feeling comforted by the love and joy they brought to me.

I think of my parents, wondering if I will meet them again when this is over. I think of my fallen comrades, hoping that when they met their end that it was as peaceful as this moment. *Even if my life is meaningless to the universe, it was meaningful to me.*

As I lie in a field of grass, I take one final look at the sky above. I close my eyes. A glowing light consumes me. I take one final breath, give one final thought to those I have loved, and I feel the most peaceful feeling I have ever felt in my life.

Bliss.

Nocturne by the Sea

Seth Jani

Out there, at night, by the shoals
That border heaven,
The sea is winding up its clockwork music,
And the last tiny boat is drifting home
Under the painted caravan of stars.
While I, whoever I may be,
Am tying a small thread
Into the bottom pocket of a bag
That is a heart.
And I am thinking of everywhere
I've been, everywhere I'm going,
And the whole time the moon
Is like a cinder watching the night erupt,
Watching the sea grow indifferent
In its darkened measures,
Watching the light of my dreams
Smolder into flame,
While the urchins tune their bodies
To the low, nocturnal hum
Of the coming waves.

Nightmare Beast

Maria Gonzales



eggshell Mark Fisher

we watched stars fall
through a crack in a geode sky
no lake monster would choose
to live with drowned ghosts
in that dirty red-brown lake water
as the sky was hatching
that dark Oklahoma night
in the tanglewood
we walked
listening to caterpillar shit
dropping like rain
on last summer's dead leaves
lie to me she said
I can't
I told her
I don't remember your name
but that was a lie
and yet lies linger on
like a smell of dead fish
and stars

Milky Way

Tejal Patel



A Mulberry Wine Sweater

Lana Bella

I would sit in my kitchen,
staring at nothing, smoking, giving ear
to the malaise-of-blues riff
that stitches me
a mulberry wine sweater,

the yarn in my hands,
its weight a wreath of stenciled ghosts
which disrobes questions
and exposes scars,
but I can't see past the tearing wool
that's drawn by and back,

as still water.
My patience moves closer to
the back-stitches' edges,
skin presses against the wild fibril
which is not connected
to any eye,

and like what's raw and torn
that lays bare on the bed of a single hush,
I work my finger into those holes
where memories are snagged,
in turn,
which poses a dialectic question:
how many mulberries can be packed
into the sweater before
I thrust my arms into its sensible stitching,
and sew up all this wine?

Luminous Phenomenon

MIK Chavez

We built a butterfly shack from blueprints of our bodies. The spreading of our wings in a pinhole and then flight. Dirty picture, blurry picture. The distance a bird's eye. Like two sticks, we might look perfectly useless to others. Together we learned utter excitement, hidden gems, and offerings sometimes as tiny as the tongue's papilla. Incandescence emerged from the close study of faces and frames. Each image a nest of vulnerabilities. We explored them all. This song to sensation, a hail to Pacinian cells, one and all. Came to life, exposed ourselves. Superheroes of capturing the moment, we braved the dangerous internet swamps. Oh risk, oh vicaria. The denuded body was no SOS, it was a beckoning to explore the hothouse that grows beneath flesh.

Selective Hearing

Terrence Battle

Are you listening?
No response. No one is there to hear my cry.
Help! No one is listening.
Are you listening?
Echoes through my brain,
Like a remnant of a song.
Da-buh, da-buh listening?
Hearing & repeating—sharing & speaking.
Quotes of my words nowhere to be found by a casual listener,
To be listened to by anybody. You are listening,
But only for a moment,
But not about principled things.
So you gossip nonsense.
'I heard that she slept with five guys
At once"—you whisper at no one.
Your rumors further from the truth they become.
The more people know, the less of me they would listen to.
Can you hear my truth?
Or will it come out tattered and ripped like my clothes
On that night.
No longer is it what I said,
'No, I am not ready.'
But it is what you wanted in your head,
'Yes. Take me, Eddie.'

Whirlwind

Anni Wilson



Ursa Major

MIK Chavez

When I said I wanted a wedding gown, I didn't mean put out the stars and the afterthought, *oh no, what have I done.*

I didn't mean let's invite our friends to get drunk, and drowsy, and slowly disappear, all because of our love. Monogamy should not wear a girdle, an iron lung or a polyester pant-suit (although I hear those are in again.)

Wedding gown should not mean covering every mirror in our home because our reflection has disappeared.

What I meant was lift my veil, have sparrows crown my head and invite every sweet animal in the kingdom to sing.

I didn't mean let's black hole the aurora borealis.

It used to be that a man could take his wife to a doctor who would slide something sharp into her and scramble the unhappiness right out of her brain.

When I said I wanted a wedding gown, I meant I am a wild beast, three leaps of the gazelle. Let me shine.

I wanted the heat that comes with the atmosphere of our separate lives, to be stripped of all gowns, to shine like Ursa Major.

I wanted a galaxy, the universe.

Thoughts After the Night

Chloe Ray

The taste of alcohol against my teeth,
Standing in the way of wind and spattered rain,
The breadth of dawn's tide washes in.
I lay here,
Tangled in my own self,
Tightened by prickled skin,
Strangled by broken hair;
I overflow into myself.
She's there, she caresses me—
Her lullaby is world-less.
Encompassing, embodying,
The moon rises together with the sun.
I stand now on the marrow of my broken self,
Raising, skimming my fingertips
Against the riptides of violent dusks
And bloody dawns.
Star-shine speckles throughout.
The sky above, the ocean below,
I smile to myself,
"Where am I?"
Her silent lullaby rings melodically against my soul;
I hum the beat as I walk on,
As I walk on against wind and spattered rain.

Blue Umbrella

Ana Laura Mena



Down Anstruther Way

Tobi Altier

It is summer.

A small crowd rides a crest of laughter
propelled by somebody's radio,
the speakers turned up and out—
a rousing ballad.

He has drunk whisky
to this song, broad smile, arms clasped
upon the shoulders of fellow neighbors
with a love for the farm and knack
for turning rocky quadrants into lettuces
and leeks.

He has hunched deeply over this song,
head foggy with a wall of sadness.
Remembering the fleeting dusk,
her woolen cloak disappearing round
the corner, the note not yet
discovered, the silvering moon.

He knows the land
but not the woman. He knows
the skies and the vanishing tides,
the brief grace between storms,
familiar gait of his boy
as he ambles toward home.

The sun finds its place deep in the west,
an outdoor cathedral as light bursts
onto the wet stone of uneven village roads.
The radio changes to a dream—
a young girl starts to dance.

Perfidy

Anni Wilson



Mr. Cutter

James Berry

My grandmother lived in an apartment about ten minutes from us. I spent many afternoons sitting next to her at her kitchen table, especially in middle school when my own house wasn't such a great place to be.

I didn't even know my grandmother had an upstairs neighbor until an afternoon in late November when we heard a loud thud from the ceiling above us as we sat peeling potatoes. I jumped, but my grandmother only rolled her eyes.

"That's the Leaping Nimbus," she said.

"The what?" I replied.

"The Leaping Nimbus," she repeated, standing up and wiping her hands on her apron. She carried a strainer of peeled potatoes to the sink. "That fool thinks he can do anything!" she yelled at the ceiling.

"Grandma, what are you talking about?" I asked her.

We heard the thud again.

"It's Mr. Cutter," my grandmother told me, "My upstairs neighbor." I still had no clue what she was talking about.

"What was that loud noise, Grandma?"

We heard a third thud.

My grandmother returned to the table and sat down with me. Whenever she sat down at the table that way, I knew I was going to get some straight answers.

"Mr. Cutter—my upstairs neighbor—is an old man," she began. "He's even older than your old grandma." She reached out and brushed my cheek with her hand. "And he's decided, in his infinite wisdom, that he's going to defy age. Ha!" She yelled at the ceiling in the wake of another thud. "Fat chance!"

"What do you mean, Grandma?"

My grandmother hesitated a second or two.

"My neighbor and old friend, Mr. Cutter, has taken up yoga."

She grimaced.

"Yoga?"

"Every day I hear him, he falls on the floor, he lands on tables—I heard one of his ashtrays shatter once."

"Does Mr. Cutter smoke?"

"He used to smoke a pipe. He looked very dignified too, when he did—the way a gentleman should."

We heard one more thud and then a faint groan.

"Much more dignified than an old fool falling on the floor and breaking his bones!" she yelled as she looked up.

I looked up too, but we didn't hear anything more.

All through December, I heard Mr. Cutter above us when I visited my grandmother. She would get angry and yell at the ceiling, and I would eat cookies, help her put up Christmas decorations, and wonder if Mr. Cutter was okay.

"Why does he do that?"

"He says it'll keep his body flexible—as if that could happen! We're old! Our bodies break down!"

My grandmother wrung her hands as we sat at the table.

"You can't fight life! Life always wins!" she continued. She pushed herself stiffly to her feet.

"Maybe you should try some of those moves, Grandma."

"Don't be silly!" she snapped, "Of all the foolish notions!"

We heard a crash and a low rumble that continued for several seconds. It sounded like a landslide.

"That's the Inverted Gazelle," she said in response to my look. "He falls against the bookcase and all the books tumble on top of him."

She looked at the ceiling.

"He should know better!"

After Christmas and New Year's, I couldn't make it to my grandmother's apartment for about a week, but finally an afternoon came when I wasn't busy after school, and I ran over to her place. It was a January afternoon, very sunny but very cold, and my grandmother met me at the door with her coat on and her car keys in her hand.

"Where are we going, Grandma?"

"We're going to the hospital to see Mr. Cutter."

"What happened?"

"He hurt himself."

"Again?"

My grandmother nodded.

"Doing the yoga?"

My grandmother nodded.

"Is it bad?"

"He's in a full-body cast."

My grandmother was obviously upset, so I didn't ask anything more.

We drove to the hospital and went inside. My grandmother told a receptionist at the front desk who we were visiting. The receptionist smiled at my grandmother and said it was nice to see her again. My grandmother and I took the elevator to Mr. Cutter's floor and walked to his room. A nurse stood by the bed with her back to us, blocking our view, and my grandmother cleared her throat. The nurse didn't seem to hear, so my grandmother and I walked forward and stood on either side of her, and the three of us looked down at a body cast that had split open down the middle from the head to the waist. The fronts of the legs had fallen off to either side and lay against the bed's steel arm rails. We peered inside the cast and saw no sign of Mr. Cutter.

"Where is he?" my grandmother asked in a panic. "Did they move him? What happened?"

The nurse stared down at the open cast and replied in a stunned voice, "I don't know."

I ran my finger along the inside of the cast. It was cold and perfectly smooth.

"You don't know?" my grandmother cried.

"I don't know, ma'am," the nurse replied. "He was here an hour ago!"

I grabbed my grandmother's arm. "Look!" I pointed to the window. Outside the closed windowpanes, lightly touching the glass at its base, a thin rainbow stretched into the distance and then diffused into a colorful mist across a sky just beginning to grow dark with a winter sunset. My grandmother gaped.

"You don't think..."

"Maybe," I replied.

We drove back to my grandmother's apartment in silence. She kissed me outside her door and I went home.

A few days later, I ran up the stairs of my grandmother's building. My mom had asked me to check on her since we hadn't heard anything since my last visit. As I walked down the hallway from the stairwell to my grandmother's door, I heard a loud crash and a low rumble that sounded like a landslide. I knocked on the door and yelled.

"Grandma?"

My grandmother's muffled voice came through the door.

"It's open! Come in!"

I opened the door slowly, poked my head around the edge, and saw her under a pile of books. The bookcase itself had fallen too, narrowly missing her.

"Grandma, are you alright?"

"I'm such a fool!" she spat out.

"What happened?"

She stared at the books.

"It was the Leaping Nimbus. What was I thinking?"

I understood.

"Grandma," I said, "the bookcase is for the Inverted Gazelle. You need to fall in the other direction. Give me your hand."

I helped her to her feet, and we began clearing books out of the way for a new attempt.

I Believe in Trees

Joan McNerney

Those silent citadels
standing against long
nights of wind and cold.

Broken willow bramble
scratches a pale sky after
yesterday's ice storm.

Each spring small buds
blossom as bugs and
butterflies orbit boughs.

Green new leaf fits
your hand so perfectly.
The future lies in your palm.

Birds reciting litany in woods.
Each rainfall the forest
grows taller, more verdant.

Summer afternoon—trees
sashay in sunshine showing
off their emerald gowns.

Winds sway maple branches.
Leaves drop like butterflies
falling to the warm earth.

Red-yellow-brown carpets
of crunchy foliage spread
over roads welcoming us.

Catharsis

Victor Soria

Dear Victor,

I am writing this letter to express exactly how much I miss you. I have not seen you in months. I am not sure what happened. Was it something I said or did? I just wanted to remind you of the fun we used to share. Remember the hours we spent together? Remember how sweaty, tired, and elated you felt after we were together? Spending time with me never felt like a chore, did it? Remember how good it felt to pound on me while the sweat dripped off your glistening body, all out of breath while I hummed happily? How fondly I remember our late-night rendezvous. I know you felt it too, that connection we shared. How happy I was just to see you. Now, you walk by with nary a glance. I want you to know that I hurt every time you go by, parading the long list of floozies I see you with: Twinkie, Cupcake, I know all their names. Ho-Ho indeed! It drives me crazy that I still long to feel your body on me once more. If I had only known our last time together was to truly be our last, I would have—I don't know what I would have done. Just know that when you are ready, I will be here, waiting.

Forever yours,
Your Treadmill

5/12/11

Dear Treadmill:

I can't say that I didn't expect to hear from you. I never meant to hurt you. I just want you to know that you have done nothing wrong. This isn't about you. How can I make you understand? I don't deserve you. I've never been good enough for you. All the time we spent together, I just felt like a fraud. I want you to know that the reason you didn't see me for so long was because I was so ashamed. When I looked at you, I only saw my own weakness. I want you to know that I am a changed man. I'm done with all those empty calories. They never meant anything to me. When I was with them, I only thought of you. I want you to know that I want to be with you again, but I'm afraid. Afraid that I'll let you down again. I don't think that I could bear to hurt you again. But the truth is, I need you. I need you badly. I can't even stand to look myself in the mirror. I'm nothing without you. I want you back in my life, but I think that we should take things slow. Maybe see each other once or twice a week. If things go well, then—Listen, I don't want to make any promises, let's just see where things go.

Till then,

Victor

P.S.

Posted on Craigslist:

For sale: one gently used, but very judgmental treadmill.

Kraken in the Tub

Chad Nelson



I See You in Bright Colors

Joan McNerney

Eating red-ripe watermelon
while searching verdant trees
for bluebirds flitting past us.

Remembering how fields
of brilliant wildflowers
beguiled us as we inhaled
fresh-mowed grasses.

You would smile fingering
purple passion leaves.

Your favorite hour when
wide awake you listened
to the sounds of dawn
calling all colors out to play.

We shared the calligraphy of
oceans watching orange sunsets
splash through waves.

No one else has ever evoked
such a shining palate as you.

I Think I'll Take a Break

Terry Mack



Grampa Owl

Ken White

In honor of the 65th Annual Oakdale Rodeo.

He wore the best and rode the best. Silver buckles and silver saddles, snap-brim Stetson and polished boots. He survived two wives and married a third. He had three children and eight grandchildren. He was born, raised, and died a cowboy. His name was Alowishus Owen Wright. 'Ace' to his friends and "Grampa Owl" to us kids since we couldn't pronounce his name.

He took us on cattle drives and to the stockyards. We rode horses and chased rats in his barns. He gave us cowboy boots and hats. He hoped that we, unlike his second son, our dad, would want to take up ridin' and ropin'. But, unlike Grampa Owl, Peter didn't have particularly fond memories of rising at the crack of dawn, loading the horses and tack, driving for hours, riding on hot asphalt in some small-town rodeo parade, returning home after dark, and having to bed down the cranky stock before bedding down himself. No, Grampa's dream just wasn't meant to be. We were city kids and that's the way it would remain.

Grampa Owl was dark-complected and spoke Spanish like a native. He denied it his entire life, but odds were that he had Mexican blood. His mother, Julia, looked *mestizo*. His siblings—Uncle Pete, Aunt Aurora, and Aunt Rose—all looked Mexican.

He wasn't very affectionate, being he was a man of his era. The only time I ever saw him vulnerable was when he was in the hospital dying. He was hallucinating because his tobacco-scarred lungs were getting so much oxygen his brain was firing on all cylinders. It was driving him mad.

He and my dad were very different. Dad tried not to be like his old man. He was affectionate. He was available. He was kind. He was generous.

I would love to have known Grampa Owl as a contemporary. To know what he thought. What was important to him. What his dreams were. Why he did what he did. What he didn't do that he wanted to. And where he got that hat.

Self-Portrait

Christopher Benson

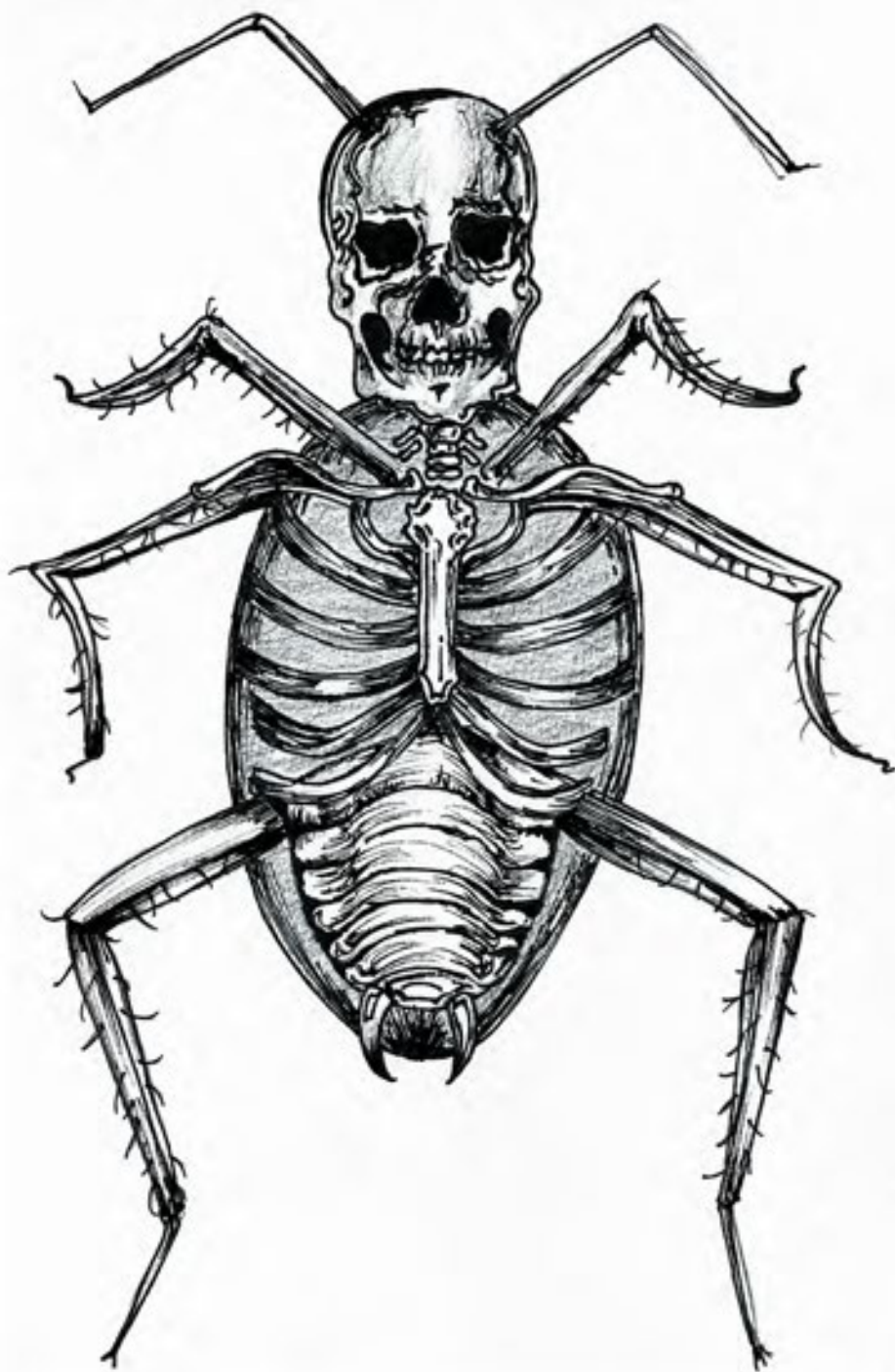


The Bus Stop at E Street and Highland: Mrs. Haro Speaks of her Son's Deployment **Chuck Von Nordheim**

My son married the rifle
Because our city had no jobs
Not for a boy who doctored crippled tricycles
Not for a boy who resurrected dead toasters
Not for a boy whose artistry was in his hands
My son married the Army
Because our city had no love
Not for a boy who could not buy prom corsages
Not for a boy who could not flirt with gringo words
Not for a boy who spoke poetry with his hands
My son moved to the barracks
Because our city furnished no life
No life for a boy who rejected white powders
No life for a boy who craved a sober spirit
No life for a boy who fought pushers with clenched hands
My son moved out of my house
Because his mama had nothing to give him
I blessed him, but did not know how quiet the rooms would become
I blessed him, but did not know how absence throbs like an abscess
I blessed him, not knowing how much I would miss his sturdy hands

Metamorphosis

Lucinda Murphy



Accelerated Horror

Gary Beck

The news of the day
tries harder and harder
to shock us
with horrible events,
progressively straining
boundaries of morality,
some crimes so terrible
terrorism seems more natural
by comparison,
since at least we understand
the nature of hate.

Eco Echoes 34

Duane Locke

"I never write you" is what you Saturday said,
As you occupied your lifestyle in darkness,
Playing hide-and-go seek in a dim bar
Where the light bulbs are covered with black socks.
But I inform that you are wrong, I write
To you every day and twice on lonely Sunday,
But as soon as I complete my email script I delete.
I delete, because I feel the expression that you
Want me to write is only the polite lie of posed courtesy,
And not a truth expressed by your corporeality;
You really don't care if I write or not.
But I write each day and then delete. It
Saves you from discarding without reading,
Or tearing up what I sent.

In Another Life

Ashley Carter-Mooneyham



Eco Echoes 36

Duane Locke

Rain slants, an acute angle, to knock
On my door. The door wonders what
Has so many fingers. This door when
Once a forest tree, had a turtle walk
On its lower branches, and the claws
Were fewer than these splashing fingertips.
Well, these are the thoughts and
Feelings I attribute to the consciousness
Of wood who, now painted, feels alienated.
So I let the door speculate as it is hit
By slanting falling water if what is
Present with so many fists is a newly
Evolved species. A century ago the door, when tree,
Read Darwin and, different from so
Many human beings, was convinced.
I had planned before this rainy day
To go outside defying society who imposed
On me this shut-in perspective and clear sightedness.
I was to go to a dry oak tree,
Send my blood to flow in its wood,
And in exchange receive its sap
To flow through me.
I suppose when the rain slacks,
A wet oak would be as anxious to exchange
As when the oak was dry and alone.

Jousting with Beelzebub

Ken Simpson

Every evening
shadows anonymously die
in the fading light
disillusioned by contemptuous eyes
probing
the hypocrisy of amorality
inherited aggression
and disenchantment
with posturing politicians.

Dismembered moments
incompatible views
despicable despots
kings of sin
streamlined lies
outrage and dismay
the desolation of despair
persisting before disintegrating
like the threads of a spider's web.

Human-sausage meat
fresh flowers dying in vases
a solitary song
surrounded by the lilt of sound
devotees of profligacy
breeding needs
chasing demons
deceived by hopes
with nothing left but emptiness.

Dancing Fire

Victoria Hardy



Fire Psalm

Nate Maxson

When the saints talk of fire

You can see it in their eyes: the Matanza incumbent

I want to ask them,

Oh you diggers of holes

Would you prefer the cross or the kindling?

I imagine many of the witches laughing at the irony of their predicament; up there on the junkyard pyre, wiggling their toes at the crowd

To call it a sacrifice requires the right perspective (whoever says they don't believe in a Christ of the Witches is probably lying)

You can hear it, depending on which way the wind is blowing

When the magicians talk of fire,

Don't lose sight of what their hands are doing

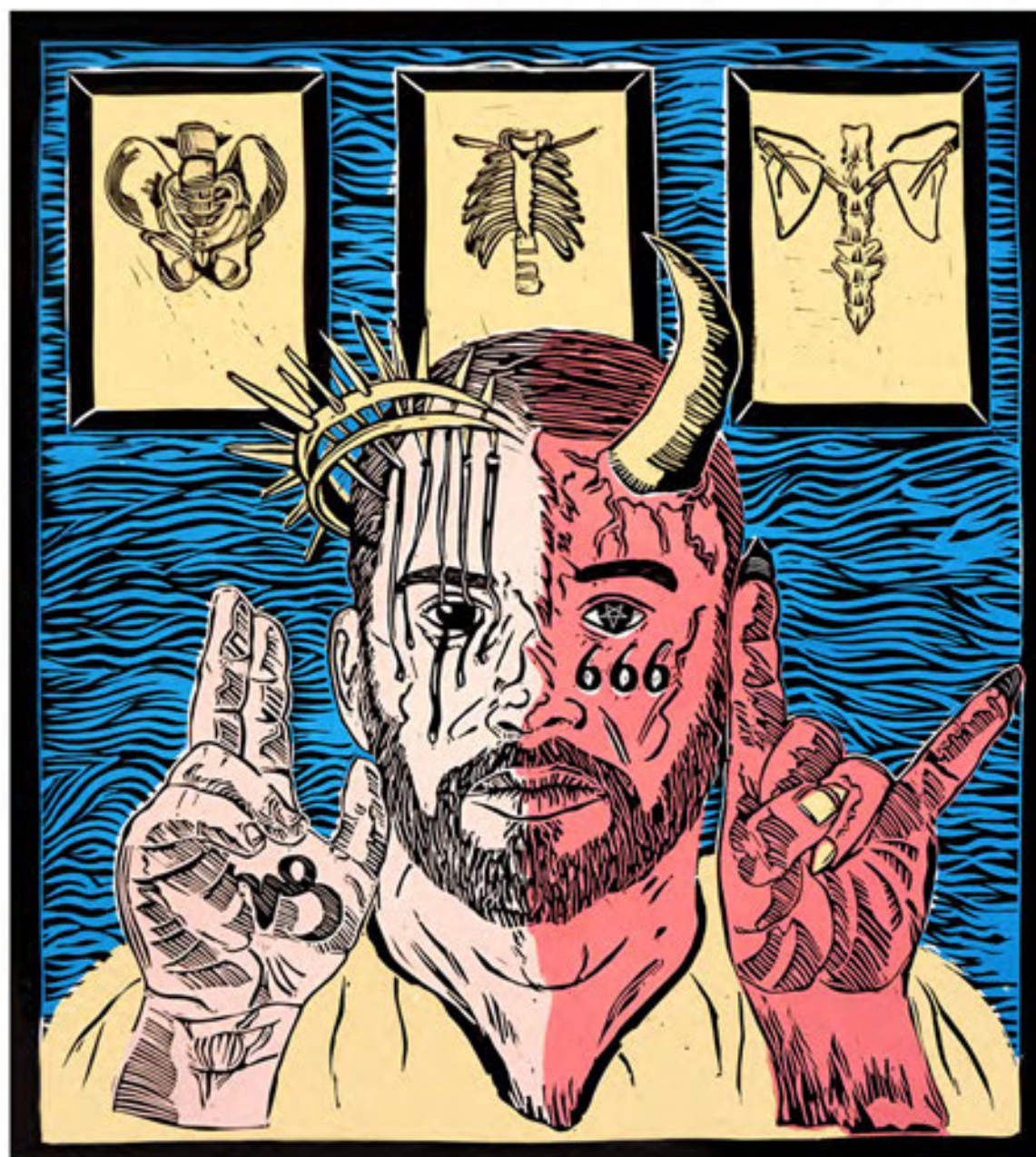
God is Light

Hayley Perry

Days and years of learning;
reciting empty words.
She has tipped back her head
to swallow hypocrisy.
Her eyes are ancient,
withered like petals
of an unwatered rose—
they cannot hold more sights.
She returns home to a bed,
a couch,
a table,
a dog.
She lies down and lets her brain
do the walking, as her feet will rest.
Her unseeing eyes search for something
darkness cannot offer.
Frowning, she squints;
she strains and begins to see
something in the distance.
Drifting toward an undulating orb,
an insistently bright speck,
a tiny source of illumination.
Taken in quickly,
she is consumed in flames and spirit.
She awakens anew,
knowing that inner flame
is the source of the heat in her face.
In the fall,
she laughs at days to come.
She wears dignity
along with her skirt.

Duality

Christopher Benson



Grave Diggers

Hayley Perry

Memories must be buried
in shallow graves
so that their owners
may dig them up.

A look at a corpse reveals its age—
those that are skeletal
may be fleshed out
with generosity.

Bodies of fiction lie stretched—
awaiting the heavy touch
of the storyteller's embraces.
They cannot feel their bones
breaking under the weight.

Redressed for burial,
these loved ones descend again,
until the next time
their company is needed.

Parasite of a Doll, Front and Back

Maritza Diaz



Bayonne Terminal

JC Altier

Pre-dawn, and darkness soaks the sky
above the port; its cranes and berths,
stanchions of vanished piers.

Men your foreman called harbor orphans
once struck for higher wages here,
or died, or quit outright for a future
beyond the sum of their hungers.

This smoke and fog-laced world needs
your welder's grit, your boots scuffed raw
as the backs of your father's hands.

Each twilight, you smoke on the porch,
watch the dark settle over an endless
flush of traffic that follows the sun
over Casciano Bridge. Brake lights
glow homeward, votive flames
begging Heaven for relief.

Untitled

Natalie Schemmel



Heatwave, Ann Arbor

Mantz Yorke

Eleven floors up,
I lie naked
on a firm-sprung bed
ideal for making love,
my enervated clothes
a heap on the floor.

Outside, a campanile
juts up
through a fuzz of trees
toward dark clouds
unable to discharge
the electricity straining
between earth and sky.

Blue balloons
are wobbling upwards,
trailing string
through viscous,
unwilling air.

Zug Jonah Mejia



Hawk Cry Wedding City Jazz

Charles F. Thielman

Held by habitual love, men of dusk
raise oak batons into deft subito,

the blue notes of jazz sax and trumpet
rising above brick, asphalt and pulse.

Men of dust raise oak batons into deft subito,
conducting current swirl as a seeled falcon

climbs, rounding on columns of heat and sweat.
Homing in on the blue notes of flute and trumpet,

men of dusk grasp at sedge beside the current
as men of dust raise oak batons, sensing

pain in the serrated glaze of stars.
Hawk cry wedding city jazz, held by

habitual love, men of dusk, men of dust
dance and stride through the convoluted air,

raising oak batons into deft subito, breath of cougar,
blood of bighorn, bones of whale, sight of osprey,

flesh within flesh. These lovers of twilight lean
into its liquid flutter, discovering new pain,

sweet pain, in the serrated glaze of stars.
Hawk cry wedding city jazz, men of dust,

men of dusk homing in on blue notes, true eyes
opening in songs of love, anointing the new wings

arriving laden. Oak-branched surprises of clarity crest
beside the current as a large falcon wheels and dips

into our dark blue sky, thousands turn at the peal
of its cry. Edging down into green, these lovers

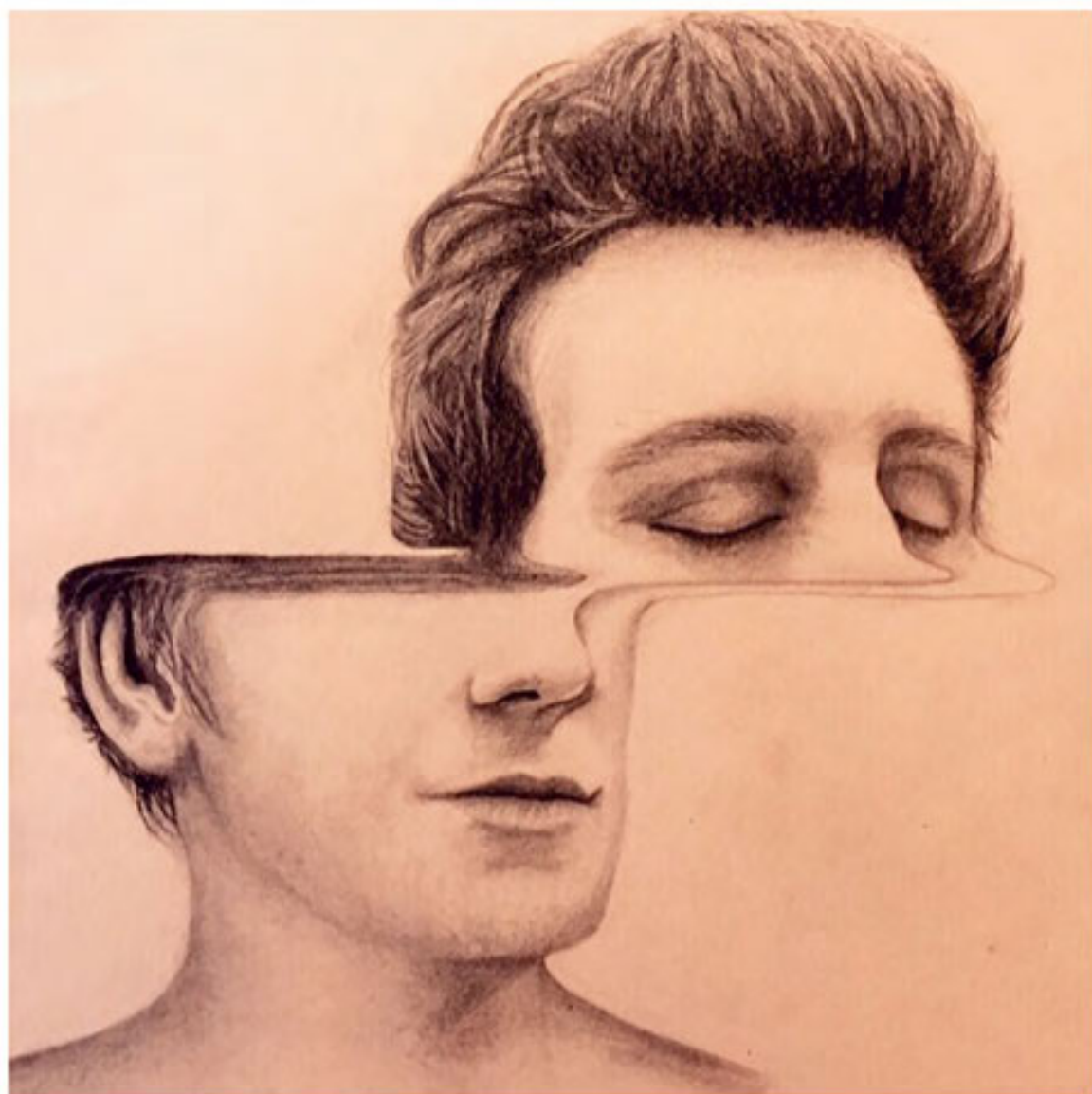
of twilight lean through the birdsong swept air.
Men of dust, men of dusk raise oak batons

into deft subito. Blue notes rising from dry benches,
rising into a liquid flutter, current pulling

marrow as the ragged heel into their waltz
of hungers, hawk cry wedding city jazz.

Swiped

Tejal Patel



Clayborne's Lot

Salvatore Salerno

Clayborne didn't seek out friends;
he shied when others sought him.
They were roiled up in the world,
too much like and for each other—
some too vulgar for his sense,
others like fool's gold, bright yet phony.
Clayborne thought, *If only they
were more like me, only then
how attractive they would be!*

In following time,
lonely were the roads he drove,
and lonely were Clayborne's meals.

Clayborne didn't seek out love,
yet she, despite him, loved him.
She would take Clayborne around
for company, to parties, crowds,
but he soon wearied of them.
Clayborne thought, *If only she
would let me be, would not try
so much to change me, how lovely
she would be!*

In fair time,
lonely were the paths he walked,
and lonely was Clayborne's sleep.

Oh, don't pitch in with Clayborne's lot,
don't crave that poison perfect, but
cleave to the fractured and flawed,
clasp onto the glass seen darkly.

No one knows this more than me,
who has escaped to tell you
once I was a Clayborne too
before I drowned my mirror deep,
before I found that golden key
of getting saved by each of you.

How Did I Get Here?

Tara Dybas

Last year I knew myself.
I had a plan:
The degree,
The job,
The Millennial Dream.

Ripped from the life I thought I was master of,
Tomorrow is a bleak promise that yawns before me.
A tomorrow that is unknowable, unforeseeable, unwanted.
I plead with the universe,
"Please, help me."
The universe does not hear me.
The road ahead is not less traveled,
Still I walk alone.

How did I get here? How do I move forward?
I am high up in a tower looking out of the window at a city
I used to love,
Tethered to life as I am tethered to a bed that is not my own.
A bed that I do not sleep in unless I am medicated.
(I am always medicated.)
I don't recognize myself.
I have ugly thoughts.
I have ugly feelings.
My body is not my own.
I am touched, prodded, examined, cut open.
I feel my substance leaking out,
Dripping slowly.
I am losing light.
If we are shaped by experience,
I am all sharp and jagged edges.
I long to fit back into the torn corners of the life I lost.

“A new normal,” they told me.
But my old normal suited me just fine.
“God knew that you could handle this,” they told me.
Does He rejoice in my suffering?
“You’re an inspiration,” they told me
But I cannot inspire myself.
I struggle to put one foot in front of the other.
I struggle to want to put one foot in front of the other.
Days slip by and I do not notice.

I don’t know how I got here.
I don’t know if I am moving forward.
But I sleep at night.
I am only lightly medicated.
I participate in the monotony of adulthood.
I take joy in the monotony of adulthood.
I go to work.
I go to school.
Sometimes I laugh.
I always reflect.
I struggle to put one foot in front of the other.
I want to put one foot in front of the other.
I know myself.

Momma

Danyl Crites



Womb-Written

Casey Leslie

I can hear your heartbeat, Momma—thump, thump—
as two pink lines reveal a precious stone
within your slightly swollen stomach, plump
with dread—afraid to parent all alone.

I watch your hands shake, I hear your voice quiver
as you tell Mr. White Coat—blonde hair, blue eyes—
that this month, there has been no red river
to cover sweaty sins, or birth-control lies.

I feel the cold gel on your pale white skin
as dread sinks into your cavities—no noise
heard on the cold, hard machine as it scans
but the silence knows not what it destroys.

Grasp the baby blue-bear, Momma, worry not
I will show up again—just not when you thought.

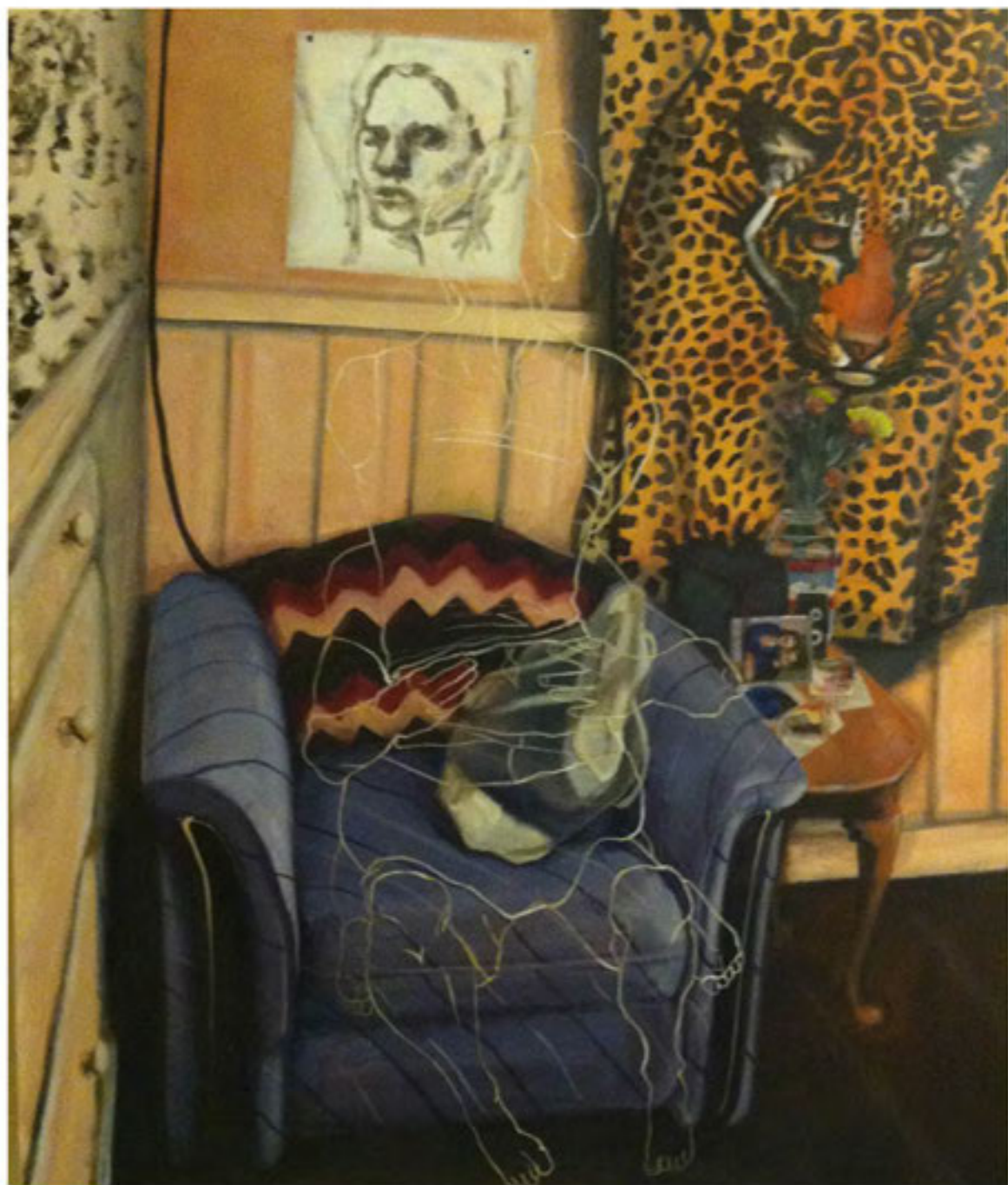
The House on Monterey Ave. 1

Natalie Schemmel



The House on Monterey Ave. 2

Natalie Schemmel



Lost Child

James Weaver

Little one,
the torn up planks lying on the dirt of your broken home
won't patch up the scars in your heart.
Instead, construct a cross, treat it like an instant messenger,
and hope God replies to your emails about how you want a
parent to love you.
Pray for the basic necessities: food, shelter, a hug, guidance—
like a bear does to its cub, showing its worth and allowing it to
love again.

While your neglectful parents are filling their own addictions,
the street names are looking more like Mom and Dad.
Rough in context, but you are wild,
learning the lingo of thugs and bandits of the night.

You have become a lost child, and this world is Neverland.
Never giving you an option to succeed and
never criticizing the wrong choices that you constantly make,
dancing with the creatures of misfortune,
using the same negligence to the world
that your parents taught you.

Let these words become the hot cocoa you need when your heart
is frozen shut.

Let this poem be the wake up call to a mind that has been
dormant for so many years,
so you can love yourself and teach those who were supposed to
teach you
a lesson.

Always Sunny Angelique Limatoc Arnold

We say she's an ornery, old coot.
Strutting through the house
on her good days,
her hind legs low,
bearing the weight
of seventeen years.
She sees us only
as familiar shadows,
an unhindered routine
of food and blankets,
blankets and water,
the after-shower bones
penciled into her contract,
her odd treat for our cleanliness,
expected and given.
We lift her up on the bad days
and she greets us
as kind strangers,
the fullness in her eyes
ever consistent.
We tell her it's okay to sleep.
Those dreams are earned.
Her eyes settle
into the deepest of slumbers,
legs pushing air
into the sprint of chasing
youth, a subtle smile and woof.
So heavy into happiness.
She does not know the kiss
on her forehead,
the tears I wipe away,
my selfishness still not ready
to say goodbye.

My Father was Never the One I Feared Dying

Summer Krafft

The first time my father said he was dying it was in a letter to my mother when I was five. He wanted more visitation, he wanted me to live with him—if he wanted to be anything before he died, he wanted to be a father.

This was a year after him turned thief in my summer bedroom.

When I was eight, he was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. No surprise, the man had spent his entire adult life indulging: In breads. In sweets. In three packets of sugar in his coffee—in booze. By the time I was born, my father had been sober for ten years, but he will always be an alcoholic.

My father was never the one I feared dying.

The next year in June, when my mother had heart surgery, he refused to let me postpone my visit to the New York house. "It's best for you to be here," he said. I had been scared silent for years by that point—I did not protest—just bit my nails down to bloody and choked back tears and sick acid rising from what it meant to be his daughter.

The summer of my mother's surgery, I was a ghost: pale-white skin, shallow-breathing chest—always biting my lips or my cuticles or the insides of my cheeks. It was like I was testing how much blood I had in my body, how much I could get to come out, scab over, and then bleed again. I was a walking wound, and he couldn't see it. He didn't know how I fantasized about the sharp kiss of scissors or his razor blade against my skin. I told no one—it's what haunted girls do.

The day of my mother's surgery, the one that could have killed her instantly if the doctors singed *just a little too much* of the malfunctioning muscle of my mother's heart, he forced me to sit on his lap—stroked my hair, the bare skin of my thigh—his hot breath on my ear.

"I know you're scared, baby." *Baby*. It was what she had always called me. My stomach churned.

"If anything happens, you can just come live with me."

I swallowed a sob. I tried not to tremble because he would feel it and take it as a betrayal.

"They'll call you as soon as she's out," he said, kissing my cheeks and squeezing me around the chest. I went to my room, I did what I always did: buried the self I was in that house in a book,

absent-mindedly stroking the fur of one of our huge dogs.

When the phone rang, my heart leaped into my throat. I sprinted into his bedroom, where the nearest phone was—I'd never moved that fast. "Mom?" I wailed into the receiver.

"Baby," she said in a soft voice. I could hear her smiling, tried not to sob—I was so afraid I'd never hear her voice again. It was the one thing my father had ever been right about.

I heard his heavy footsteps trudging up the stairs. "Just a second," I whispered, turning around to see him leering in the doorway.

"Go take the call in the kitchen." He wouldn't let me speak to her privately. He wanted to hear what I said. He wanted me to know that he could hear me. My blood raced.

"Mommy, I have to go downstairs. Hold on. I love you. I'm so glad you're okay." I kept every muscle in my body flexed as I walked down the stairs, through the living room, past the bathroom, and into the kitchen. I heard him lumbering behind me, but I did not look. I did not blink. That whole summer, I was posed for a fight.

He listened to our entire conversation.

"They think they got it, honey. We have to see what happens, but I should be alright. I love you too." I let out a whimper and kept my jaw clenched.

I just kept muttering, "I love you, I miss you. I love you, I miss you."

Two days later, the phone rang again. I did not rush this time. My father answered. It was my mother, still in the hospital. "Baby?" Her voice sharp this time. I couldn't say anything, but she must have heard me breathing. "It's back. I had an episode today. I'm going to have to have another surgery." I could hear her trying not to cry. I collapsed this time, a girl gone statue, falling like a stone to the tile floor of the kitchen. "I love you," she said shakily. "I'll call when I know more." She got off the phone, still so motherly and unshakable, that she would not let me hear the voice of her heartbreak.

I would not see or hug my still-alive mother for another six weeks that summer, because my father demanded the full visitation he was legally entitled to. I was only allowed to talk to her for ten minutes a day, between four and seven p.m. *Rules were rules.*

My father was never the one I feared dying.

My mother would have two more surgeries in the next ten years. One, just months after the first, she made me stay home with my grandmother, but my grandmother held me tight and let me sleep in her bed the whole time my mother was gone. The second I was an adult, grown enough to go stand in the hallway of the hospital, badgering every nurse who passed for word any on my mother—my mother's heart, my mother's life. It was determined it would not be the last surgery. In all likelihood, due to the violence and scars left in her body from the bullet now forty years past, she would need surgery every decade on what remained of the shot, and scarred, and healed, and wound-re-opened life.

My father was never the one I feared dying.

When I was fifteen, going through a body battle of my own, my guts wanting to come up and out every day because I-don't-know-why—my father called to say he had been diagnosed with Chronic Lyme Disease. He must have been bitten by a tick in the seventies, and never been diagnosed, therefore never treated. Now it's too late.

I'll just have to live with this."

Okay, I thought, "Is it dangerous?"

"Every case is different. For now, it's just unpleasant and scary as hell." I couldn't sympathize with him. I had to be brave in my own un-named illness. I was fifteen. Fifteen-year-olds are not supposed to be that kind of sick. I'd been brave since the day he became my father. He could afford a little show of courage.

My father had never been a brave man, or honorable or valiant in any way—he knew best how to victimize and then claim victimhood.

Years into his old age and illness, he had a stroke. I was not there to see it. I had not been there in years. When I finally went back, tricked into thinking that something was actually wrong and doing the good-daughter duty—his was spine bent, his left leg dragged, his eyes had gone milky. Even then, when he couldn't muster his sentences most of the time, he managed to maintain his sharp cruelty—not even illness could soften him. Not even a stroke and a daughterly-show-of-kindness could make him kind.

That's when I left. That's when I left everything it meant to have been born to him or from him in the first place. That's when I claimed a life of my own, realizing there was not room for his words and me having any hope of a self.

Nearly a year after I left, I got an email from him claiming he had cancer—Melanoma.

I did not respond to the email. I had already walked away. I had already chosen my life.

My father was never the one I feared dying.

Haunted Danyl Crites



I Blame You

Danyil Crites

"It's all your fault," you say
while kicking down fence posts
and throwing plastic chairs in the pool;
Taking yet another gulp of Jack.

"Why do you do this to me?" you ask
while turning up Iron Maiden so high
you couldn't hear my reply;
Sucking Nitric out of a big red balloon.

"Why am I not good enough?" I ask
lying on the cold tile floor
hoping you wouldn't hear me;
Sobbing softly on the bathroom floor.

Breakfast with My Father

Nathan Long

My father pours pale-orange liquid into my glass, then sits down beside me for breakfast. It takes me a moment to determine that the liquid is orange juice, a watered-down concentrate sale brand he's disguised in a plastic tortoiseshell pitcher. In front of us are our plates, each with two links of sausage, scrambled eggs, and white toast, soaked in melted margarine. He then remembers the coffee, gets up, and comes back with two mugs.

I can tell he's trying to make this meal nice and I wonder if I'm the first visitor he's ever served breakfast here.

"Is that enough?" he asks.

"Plenty," I say and start in on my eggs while he is still unfolding his paper napkin. I hate to eat cold food.

We usually see each other once a month in the evening, when I take him out to dinner—a new restaurant every time, so that at least we have the food and ambiance to talk about on the car ride home. But last week, after Valentine's Day, he said he wanted to take me out. I thought it might be out of his budget, so I talked him into breakfast, and finally into just making it at home. "I never spend any time in your place," I told him.

"I rarely spend time in yours," he said.

"That's not true," I said. "You come over for Thanksgiving and Christmas." I didn't mention Easter, which Steve and I started making big meals for, so Dad could come over in the Spring.

"Well, why would you ever want to come here, Aaron?" he asked.

"It's just an apartment with no view."

"It's your place, it's where you live."

"But it's nothing," he said.

At the time, I wondered if that was a subtle dig at me; I'm the one who picked out the place. Dad moved into this apartment three years ago when he got out of the hospital after a fall and couldn't manage the steps in his old house anymore. He didn't get much for the house, so he couldn't afford anything fancy. Steve and I offered up our basement apartment, but Dad refused, wanting to remain independent. I was relieved, really, but I had to at least offer.

I finish my eggs quickly and sense everything else has already grown cold, so I pause and look around at the blank walls of the “living area,” as the salesperson called the small space by the front door. Mom, who’s been gone almost ten years, never would have lived with this off-green paint and curtain-less windows. Dad could at least have put up some art from the old house, or taken the spare rug Steve and I offered him last year. We even tried to buy him new dishes, but he refused. So now I eat on a pattern Mom picked out over twenty years ago, scratched and chipped, but at least familiar.

I take a sip of coffee, which the skim milk has made murky, and decide that I’ll stop by Starbucks on the way home. I try to stay positive, knowing Dad’s done what he can. “Tastes good,” I say, finishing a sausage.

“I hoped you’d like it.” Dad smiles, that trace of boyish good nature still in his eyes, though he’s over eighty. I notice then that he hasn’t even started eating. I watch him slowly pepper his eggs with the concentration of a monk making a sand mandala. With the same attention, he pours just so much sugar and milk into his coffee, as though the concoction might explode if the proportions were off by a gram.

I take a small bite of toast, trying not to stare, but I can’t help noticing how the cuffs of his sleeves have wispy threads, how a buttonhole is torn. He usually shaves for our dinners and dresses up in one of the shirts I’ve given him for his birthday or Christmas, but this morning, his cheeks have stubble and he wears old clothes, with a robe over his shirt and pants. It’s the red velour one Mom and I got him for his sixtieth birthday—before I even met Steve. It used to make Dad look regal, but now, with the tiny ropes of thread hanging down, he looks like he lives on the streets.

“The robe’s looking old,” I tell him.

“Well, it’s drafty here. I get cold.”

“Okay, but I should buy you a new one.”

“But this one works fine. I like it.”

I realize that this is how he now lives—this is who he has become.

“All bachelors revert to being cavemen,” Steve once said, explaining the pile of dishes he’d accumulated when I came back from a conference.

At one time my father was a respectable office worker, a clerk for the city. He did not have pretensions of greatness, but he dressed neatly and went to work dutifully. He bought a new car at the start of each decade and did his own house repairs, keeping the split-level he and Mom bought looking clean and orderly, though a little outdated. Now he has no car, no house, no wife—nothing really to care for. Now he has become—if I'm honest with myself—a dowdy old man. He's someone I would avoid on the street—except that he is my father.

There but by the grace of God, I think, realizing this could be me in thirty years—or less. If I were reduced to so little, if I were plodding out my days alone, like Dad—eating bland food, watching TV shows every evening, and playing endless games of FreeCell—if I had to pass the gray hours alone in an efficiency apartment like this, I would find a way to end it. I would write a living will that instructs—*do not resuscitate* and purchase a large bottle of sleeping pills.

"Are you okay, Aaron?" Dad asks, setting down his knife.

I realize that I have stopped eating. I have been staring at a place somewhere between his plate of food and his body, at a patch of dirty, cream-colored carpet behind him that suddenly comes into focus.

He himself has not even started his meal, having just finished spreading jam evenly over his toast and cutting up his sausage links into neat bite-sized pieces. I've noticed from our evenings at restaurants that he likes to get all his knife work done before taking the first bite. It's a bit unnerving, watching his food go cold. And now he has asked this question—"Are you okay, Aaron?"—rather than start his breakfast, as though the pleasure might be amplified by being endlessly postponed.

"Fine," I say, unconvincingly. It's hard to spring back from thinking about suicide.

Dad nods and examines his plate to make sure he has completed the work at hand, then finally lifts his fork with its first bite of egg. He chews slowly in the silence, swallows, then asks, "Is everything okay with you and Steve?"

"Everything's fine, Dad," I say. I smile, thinking of the years I resented him for not accepting me and who I loved. His was always a

quiet disdain, never showy. That evening over twenty-five years ago, when I confessed I was attracted to a male high school friend, Dad stood silent in the living room. I could tell he was holding back angry tears. "I can't say anything right now," he finally said, then walked quietly out of the room, leaving my mother to comfort me.

It took Dad years to become this comfortable with my life, with my partner, to say Steve's name and ask how things were between us. It's only by hearing the concern in his voice as he asks about us that I recognize just how much work he has done. It's been so gradual, I haven't exactly noticed. It's easier to hold on to the idea that the relationship is lopsided—that Steve and I are the generous ones. There's a pleasure in thinking that way. But now I see how Dad surrendered many long-held beliefs, let them go like paper planes to the wind; what he has given me is invisible.

When Dad first moved into this apartment, he often seemed depressed, calling "just to chat." "You know, you could have moved into our place," I'd say. "You would've had company all the time."

"I don't want company *all* the time," he'd said. "I just thought it would be nice to talk for a while."

What he usually meant by "talking" was complaining about the noises in the apartment, the stuck key, the leaking window which maintenance had yet to fix.

"Give it time," I'd tell him. "You'll get used to it."

Now as I look over at him, chomping on a piece of sausage like an old goat chewing cud, it strikes me that he has done just that—adjusted to this tiny space, just as he has to my life. I take another sip of tepid coffee and I tell myself that while I couldn't bear this life, he has managed to do it, somehow with pride. I see that I am not that strong or flexible.

"You sure everything is all right?" Dad asks, pausing with empty fork in hand.

"Yes, yes," I say. I have spaced out again.

Dad nods, though he can't help frowning a little; he knows I'm lying but has learned it's best not to insist. He looks a little sad—for the first time this morning.

"Really, things are good," I say, trying to sound chipper, though now suddenly something does feel wrong. I raise my mug to my lips

again and look deep into the murky liquid.

Dad smiles. He isn't going to push the subject. "So, what exciting things are you two up to? Do you have travel plans this summer?"

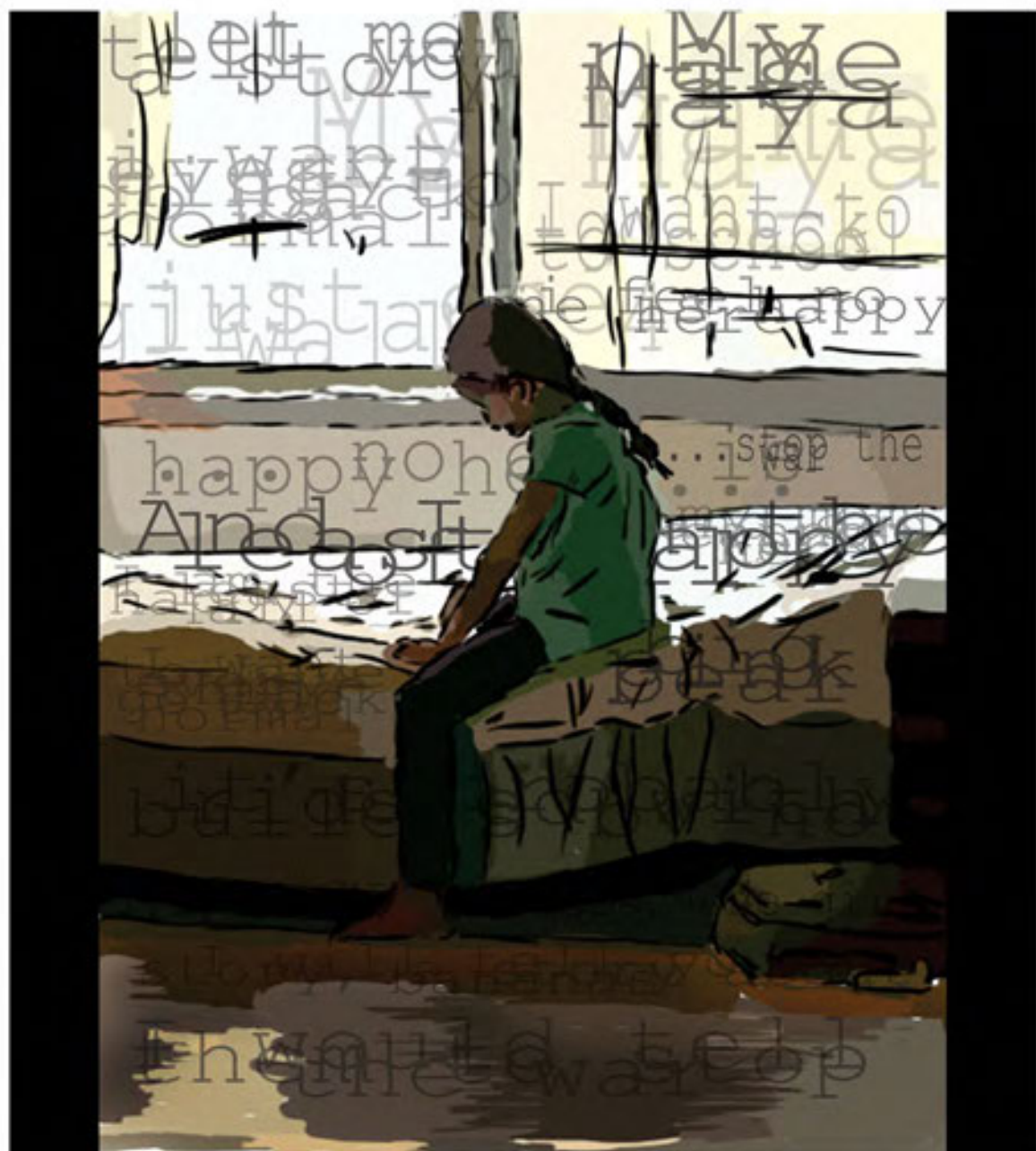
It's a standard question, one he often asks, though I suddenly don't want to talk about Steve and me, about what our plans or travel. I feel a little embarrassed by all we have, all we haven't shared with him. But I can't think of anything else to say.

I look down at my plate, which is almost empty. I take a sip of juice, then another bite of toast. It's just a breakfast, I tell myself; still, I can't help but think I'm messing it up.

Dad doesn't push me. He simply nods and goes back to eating. I appreciate this more than anything. As we both chew in silence, I imitate his pace. I don't let myself swallow before he does. I try to simply feel the food in my mouth—to taste whatever it is I can.

I Would Tell Them To Stop The War

Elizabeth Padilla



Borrowed

Mariela Gonzalez

I was given a gift when I appreciated nothing
Young and naïve I understood not
What one day you would mean to me

All too quickly you were lost
In the midst of the laughter,
And all the time lost

One by one they all started to fade
Although we were all a call away,
We all grieved but with no trace

There is only one that connects me to you
But with no meaningful encounters,
There is nothing to do

I met him four years later in the form of another
A gift of friendship, I thought
Another chance to not take for granted each other

How foolish to think it would be mine
When you were once in a lifetime,
A borrowed moment in time

The Last Sight of You

Cynthia Uriarte

You stood there
Begging
Beating your hands against your chest
Expecting me to forgive you.
Little did you know I was stronger in mind and heart.
You screamed
Calling me every name in the book
Expecting me to drop to my knees and take you back.
With sorrow in your eyes
With tears running down your face
You dropped to your knees and pled in the sweetest possible way,
"Things will be better this time. I will be a man you deserve."
But possessiveness never goes away.
I shook my head no.
You stood tall
Looking stronger with fire burning in your eyes
Red as hell
Backing me against a wall with the force of your body walking closely
in front of me
Shouting at the top of your lungs.
As I calmly said, "Let me leave."
I knew my words could no longer reach you.
I tried to push my way through.
You blocked me instead.
A cold look crossed your face.
I stood expecting a blow to my body in some way
Expecting my life to possibly end in any of those moments
But I held my ground and showed no fear.
For if I were to die, it was only meant to be, but nor would I have
gone down without
A good solid fight.
You punched the wall next to my head
Leaving a hole
Causing my heart to jump

But my face remained expressionless.
Emotionless.
A door opened as a neighbor walked in.
You grabbed my arm
Attempting to drag me upstairs to your apartment
Instead I yanked my arm back
To only run out with natural instinct.
I heard you screaming to the top of your lungs over and over again.
I continued running with no thought of looking back.
There was no looking back.

I Think We've Reached Our Quota

Jamilee Cook

It was on Tuesday night, well past ten, when Charley stumbled into the kitchen, whiskey on his breath, and said I was about to be a sister—again.

The microwave timer dinged in the background. I turned to release the door, grabbed a paper towel to protect my fingers from the heat of my Hot Pocket, and sighed.

"You can tell Mom; I'm not doing it this time, Charley."

"Where'd you get off calling me Charley, anyhow? I'm your father for Christ's sake."

I ignored this and pushed the microwave door closed. How strange, I thought. No stomach lurch, no hot-hands, no watering eyes: nothing, except the tingling remnants of an irritation I long ago learned to tolerate. But Mom—Mom was going to be a different story.

I took a bite of my Hot Pocket and walked down the hall to Mom's room. I could hear Charley banging around in the kitchen, looking for the bottle Mom hid, I'm sure. A glass broke, and a muffled "shit" resonated down the hardwood-paneled hall.

"Mom, Dad's home," I called as I walked by her bathroom.

"Baby, come back here for a second, come talk to your momma."

"I'm busy, Mom."

"Goddamnit this is important, Chrissy!" I hated when she called me Chrissy. Begrudgingly, I backtracked and stopped at the doorframe of her bathroom. She was curling her dark locks for the night shift, and I noticed a rip down the side of her stockings. The diner didn't have high standards, fortunately. "What, Mom? I got stuff to do." I crossed my right ankle over my left in the doorway, waiting for the inquisition.

"Has your father been out with that hussy again? I heard the bastard banging around the kitchen cabinets. I'm sure he's drunk. And your sister is sleeping again—goddamnit!" She held the curler too close to her roots—steam rolling from the barrel as she exclaimed.

"He's been drinkin', yeah." I turned to go.

"But has he been fuckin' around with her again? Answer me, Chrissy!" Her voice was shrill at this hour and I wanted nothing more

than to finish my snack and go to bed.

"Yeah, I think she's knocked up again, okay?"

"THAT SON OF A BITCH!"

"Night, Ma."

I locked my door that night and made sure to crack my window, just in case Mom turned the heater up again. I woke up late the next morning and found Charley passed out on the couch. He looked cold, so I reluctantly pressed my index finger against his neck to check for a pulse. He grunted. Alive and kicking. I went to the kitchen for some coffee and noticed the Honda wasn't in the driveway. Mom should be off work by now—maybe she pulled a double.

Coffee in hand, I knocked gently on my sister's door. "Cass? Cass are you awake?"

The muffled sounds of the TV were the only response. I figured she must be sleeping late again. Not that I paid close attention, but it sometimes seemed like Cass could sleep for days. When I woke up, she was still asleep, and when I turned in for the night, she had been in bed for an hour or more. I mentioned this to my mom once, but she brushed it off. "The girl's tired, Chris. Leave her be."

Over the summer, I saw my older sister only once or twice a week—I was convinced she sneaked out to smoke again. She and Charley didn't get along, but I chalked that up to the strained stepfather/daughter relationship. Charley and I were blood, but I more than understood her resistance. He was a piece of work. If he wasn't drunk, he was high. If he wasn't drunk or high, he was asleep.

When I was five or six, there was a big fight between Cass and Charley—so big that Mom moved us to her sister's. It smelled like tomato sauce and baby powder at Aunt Libby's. I couldn't wait to go back home, even if I did get tired of Charley's episodes and Mom's bickering. We only stayed a week, but Cass refused to go back. She stayed with Libby until I was seven or eight, when the court forced her to come home.

Cass was Mom's first, and then Charley came along. I'm Mom and Charley's only kid, but Charley's got others. I've got a half-brother who's a couple years older, and another sister that's five. I think we've reached our quota for bastard kids.

"CASS!" I banged on the door again. I needed a ride to band practice

and I wasn't about to ask Charley. I could still smell the whiskey on his breath when I checked his pulse.

No answer. I marched down the hallway to Mom's room and opened the top drawer of her old oak bureau where she kept her unmentionables. At the bottom of the drawer in a Ziplock baggie was a spare set of keys; I grabbed the ring and marched back to Cass's room.

I took turns rotating each key in the lock until finally, on the third try, the lock clicked open. I slowly pushed open the old wooden door, giving her ample time to rearrange herself if she was indisposed, or if some boy had snuck in for an impromptu sleepover. I heard no movement, so I swung it forward and saw her passed out on the bed.

"Cass, for Christ's sake, it's noon. You're not eighty. Get up!" I lightly shook her shoulder, but she didn't stir. "Cass!"

I noticed a prescription bottle on her nightstand with Charley's name printed on the label.

At that moment, I heard the Honda pull into the driveway. I pressed my hand to Cass's cold forehead, and walked slowly to the front door to meet Mom in the foyer.

Dreams I Have in My Head

Brandon Epperson



A Crepuscular Moment

Vincent Tomeo

Twilight bursts into the colors of bright pumpkins
Orange-golden blended aura
Cruising across the horizon
Like caterpillars transformed into twinkling butterflies of light

Testosterone evening glows bright
Playing tricks, an existential night crawls

A Beginning

Stefani Shea-Akers

In the far reaches
Of the galaxy, the long-reaching arms of life found you
Curved your limbs
Rolled you over and marked you for fate
And let you rest in waiting until your number was called

You spoke the languages of stardust then
Geometry, elements; such
Mysteries played no dialectical games
Knowledge and being melded, sharpness and sound
You could see
No separating extremities
Or monikers of distinction
Only sweetness and light
Etched into your beating depth

Let you hold the weight of the universe in your hand
Let you reach into that palatial unknown
Let you bear the fruit of your ancestry

Let you sing with the stars

Metaphysical Crises at the Kitchen Table

Maicel Barsoum

I'm just a little cube of NaCl
But not always
Sometimes I find myself being dropped in a glass of water
The water to me is like an ocean of ideas and imagination
And once I'm in I can feel myself being broken apart
The molecules of my imagination are pulling my physical body's
molecules
It's as though I'm on the edge of non-existence
Awake and Asleep
And then I am completely dissolved
Enveloped in a different dimension
Surrendering my physicality astray
My colors of reality melt away
Like a ghost I am transparent

Invisible
Like a whisper to the winds

I am gone.

For You, At Sundown

Seth Jani

Radiant, like the birth of matter
In the furnace of stars.
Surefooted, like clouds adrift
On the tops of houses.
Evening comes down, and the meditation
That is our life
Closes its wings for a pause
In the wind's progression.

Every night is like this,
A break in the glass of morning,
Dark shrapnel in the fiery light
That leaves a tear for dreams to enter.
And whether in the city or the country,
Shadows in the form of birds
Carry bundles of prayer from the east
And drop them into our mouths, one by one,
Like beads of flame.

Cracked

Tejal Patel



Explorers and Scientists

Jen Corrigan

When you
were young,
you
and your brother split open a girl
in your treehouse. She peeled back
her clothes, pushed apart her blushing
petals, inviting you.
You
took turns dissecting her with
your eyes,
your hands.
You
made feast of her body, her
supple skin cracking beneath
your fingertips.

One, a million. One, a million.

The Victorian sensibilities couldn't admit
that children are sexual,
that they exist on a purely primitive plane
in a Freudian, animalian sense,
hard-parted bodies mounting one another.

The treehouse-girl
wasn't me.
The treehouse-girl
was me.

For I
too,
once served as Magellan's playground
when the neighbor boy lured
me beneath the porch steps. He put
me in a petri dish and
christened me as his specimen.
I was data beneath the discerning
eye of a fledgling anatomist.
I was deaf and dumb as a
pinned insect.

I was punished
for stealing his bag of pinecones.

A Study in Whimsicality

Maicel Barsounn



This is Just to Say

Heaven Lindsey-Burtch

I have swallowed the yellow from your color spectrum,
Which you needed to see the sun.
Forgive me, I simply wanted to glow.

You, in turn, took my multiverse,
Which I needed to endure the exponential cycle.
You dropped me in the here and now.

Forgive me for asking for forgiveness,
Stammering out sentences between gentle kisses.
I forgive you for the silence, it's actually quite nice

To sit beside you and read about the highest man
Who fell in love with the moon,
Who all along reflected light.

Heraldry

Lana Bella

parting the currents,
I hunt for lost pearl where tales of sunk ships
swim among fish guts
and centuries-old heraldry,

sinking in a pulling mud so soft
it could be quicksand,
I cannot see my feet through the air's tinted glass,
even though I am holding the moon over
the night water,

the pool here stirs a trail of briny sea
that draws close then back,
while my breaths,
caught in the funnel of murk and dust storm
that prowls in the open shadows,
like metallic poison seeping inside the blood stream,

midway across,
I pull my seat onto a stone,
sensing the bed of grass playing hopscotch
about my ankles beneath the fluid fold,
then one side of the conduit
negates the other,
because at some point when the illusion gains speed
while the dark gallops overhead,
I become just another reflection
in the water—

Fragile

Leticia Hernandez



The Scorpion and the Oleander

Jacqueline Hollcraft

Mind the scorpion, sinister;
the ominous, eight-legged predator
whose segmented tail
holds vile venom,
who viciously assaults
with the forward curvature and pang
of his violent stinger.
He exudes ugliness, both dark and fluorescent.
His paralyzed prey lie helpless
before his pincers and palps.
All who encounter him
acknowledge the threat—
his very image signifies evil.
He scurries in every system,
avoiding only the harsh purity
of arctic air.
Beware

the oleander, opulent;
whose evergreen stems splay outward,
whose sweet-scented blooms cluster
upon leaves like the almond's,
whose large, red root
holds the aroma of wine.
Her downy seeds release
upon the splitting of her tubing fruit,
a narrow capsule sprouting into
delicate petals of pink, red,
and white.
She looms large and blooms resilience,
overcoming even radiated air,
ensnaring all.
She fools with her false flowers,
concealing the toxicity in all her parts.
Take heed,

for both venoms sicken and subvert;
whether through assault or swallow,
both poisons weaken and wane.
And if uninhibited or unaware
of specific species or defined dose,
man's mingling with the scorpion or the oleander
proves fatal either way.

Two Prisons

Michelle Matthews

Her voice was kind—the same—
and she did not mention the
walls of time built between them,
inquiring only of today.

Today was good for him,
a welcome change
from when it stood mercilessly still,
relentlessly reminding
him of one unfortunate choice.

He told her how hard he'd searched
for her last letter—with a bleeding
honesty that was not the old him—
hoping to find a clue where she might be,
that too many moves defeated him.

He marveled at how much had changed,
how much he had to learn,
how much easier and
complicated things had gotten.

There was little else he could say of the
ten years he'd been sleeping,
companionless,
time traveling to a single point in time
each night.

Pausing, he let silence be her prompt,
her lips parting on cue, hesitating, uttering no words.
Both knew her journey was different, linear,
not always taken alone,
but he wanted to drink in all missing time—

every last sip—until it was the future again,
not realizing that, for her,
there was only the present—
an awkward gift that wasn't
the size or color she hoped it would be,
hanging on her like the castoffs of childhood.

Painting From the Unconscious 2

Carson Pellanda



Grand Phoenix

Lucinda Murphy



Nothing is Permanent but Death

Michelle Hartman

the freshly nominated candidate
takes the podium
dapper in a new Hugo Boss suit and blood-red silk tie.
at his back
shadows is too elusive a term
implying the absence of light
more echoes
living memories
cast by something
now twisted and withered
soldiers with thousand yard stares next to exposed brain tissue

angry rush of engine wind from spy drones

swish of chemicals dropped on corporate farm crops

birds struggling in thick atmosphere

women that hung their children from closet bars

children they were forced to bear

stolen winds trapped by high rise buildings

drunks staggering, crying over bodies only they can see

bees looking for flowers

*old people looking for food and strays
seeking dry shelter*

*children with light seeping through bullet
holes in jumpers and polo shirts sporting Disney Princesses and Batman*

they stand behind him now
all the shades of his deeds
all the hidden truths
seen only by keen discerning
angry as they have always been
but patient
very, very patient.

November 13, 2015—Paris

Ingrid Saavedra

Today I missed work to see a concert.
It's been so long since I've seen live art.
My mum calls it trash, but metal is quite explosive.
She says it's violent, I say it's just showbiz.
I am so happy to let loose, though the law I still abide.
I pass a man with a vest, he smells of nail polish and peroxide.
I painted my nails black earlier today in preparation.
Tonight I will rock out with no hesitation.
My new-found liberty, I express in the concert hall.
I forget my cubicle, the bills, and my brute neighbor Paul.
I find my seat near a girl who must be at least twenty.
I scraped away to buy this seat, but there were so many.
"Check, check, check" I hear along with drums.
I anticipate booming, not just these static hums.
It begins with the guitar, the drums, and the voices.
I am mesmerized by their tight outfit choices.
It began so quickly and soon I was screaming to a tune.
Then I heard *bang, bang, bang*. A popped balloon?
The pyrotechnics were fiery, red, and quite hot.
I felt the burn from the cheap seats that I bought.
I heard crying and screaming from where I stood,
Strange—the song wasn't *that* good.
I heard banging, popping, and "Allahu Akbar!"
Is this part of the show? This is too far!
The girl next to me is crying and falls to her knees,
I drop to her side as she screams and pleads.
"I love my mom and dad, Je m'appelle Andy."
I cry for the young stranger beside me.
I do not dare move for fear of fiery bees.

Something grazed me,
I dropped my head and it bounced
In a pool of something I will renounce.
I saw red blasts fired.
I can taste the iron.
My mom, my cubicle, my bills, and Paul—
All at once I had none at all.
My will to live,
My will to love,
My will to pray for peace,
It was all stolen from me.
In the search for liberty,
Bataclan was my reverie.

CIA Mentality

Ingrid Saavedra

The CIA once reported Che Guevara was,
"Fairly intellectual for a Latino."
For a time, I believed this inferiority—
What we hear is what we know.

My sallow skin is painted brown,
The color of chocolate and dirt.
Yet, when I leave my U.S. town,
My melanin is blanketed by my words.

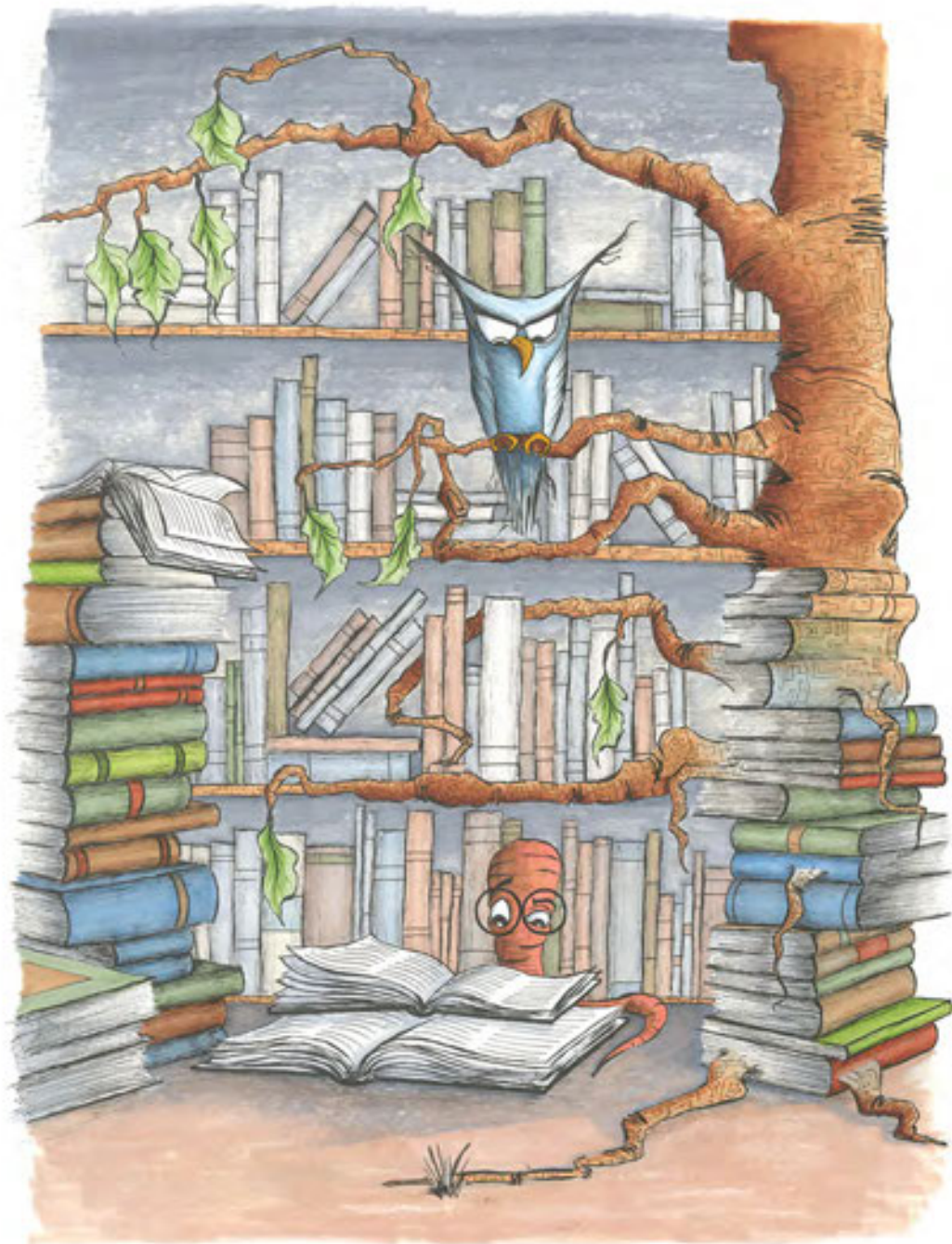
My speech is so white, the light blinds others.
They are forced to look away and reject me.
Though we're all brown, they act like we're not brothers.
To them, I am a Capitalist from whom they should flee.

My mother tells me to straighten my hair,
But my hair audaciously resists.
My mother tells me to stay out of the sun,
But my golden skin is freckled in noncompliance.
My mother tells me to stay slim,
But my bones defy that European shape.

I am the product of centuries of mestizaje.
I will never be indigenous enough to pass,
And I will never be European enough
For American people to stop saying,
"What are you?"
Perhaps one day I won't be told,
"You are pretty intellectual for a Latina."

Bookworm

Chad Nelson



This is a Revenge Piece: Dear Life

Cristina Sandoval

You come in forms ranging
From the time I sabotaged
A friendship
(Much more than once),
And when I faux pas
(Over a series of unprofessional e-mails)
So hard,
I could feel my nose grind against
The social pavement,
Blood and more blood erupting
From veins I forgot I had.

I've had enough.

They say the best revenge is
ensured in success.
I gather the failures
Which have been dropped
Like bombs at my feet,
And I plant them beneath the soil,
The sand and dirt in my mind
I've tried so hard
To keep fertile.
I water and I water.
And I water.
I don't drown.

Try to choke me
When I have my own hands
Around my neck;
Straightening my collar,
Dabbing perfume.
Sometimes I check my pulse
To make sure I still own you.
I will feed you in ways
That come back and nourish me—
Sustain me, as I collect
The green apples
Of my tree as a warning.

My Father's Obsession with Luck and Liquor

Cristina Sandoval

He's wagered half his earnings over the forty years
He's lived in the U.S. on lottery tickets,
Derby bets, and tequila.
Races and boxing matches.
Soccer games.
Superbowl bets.
Hard-earned cash deposited
Into pipe dreams.

He used to lift steel beams
To feed us soft beans,
Spam, and homemade tortillas that
My mother would flatten and mold
In the *tortillero* they carried
Across the border on their backs.

And yet, although he managed to feed us,
He couldn't help but feed the wolf
In his liver that howled for liquor and bets.

My father used to lift steel beams
And beer bottles.
He lifts grandkids now.
But he hasn't eased his grip
On the bottle neck just yet.

And after forty years,
The dream of winning it big—
That wager on the American Dream
He was promised between
All-day shifts of constructing
Sky scrapers in the 1980's,
Roasting under the Cali sun:
The dream of finding the perfect scratcher,
Of guessing all the right lottery numbers,
Plus the Mega—
It all still invades his day-to-day.

At least he's consistent.

Beware Heaven Lindsey-Burich

"Beware of her," they say to you,
Old friends of yours who never knew
A woman with a voice.
"She's a writer."

Do they think that feeble me,
With pen in hand can possibly
Dethrone the long standing line
Of kings?

But please remember! Don't forget!
It was a queen
Who led Europe
Through the Enlightenment.

Many Marys came before,
Bloody Mary, Quite Contrary;
Magdalene, who loved the Lord;
The Virgin who birthed Him.

Now let me marry these ideas
and make them one.

Is it not a woman's blue
Mitochondria inside of you?
And did not your DNA
Float in the blood within her veins?

And do we not pay homage to
Our Mother Earth and Mother Moon?
Kindred sisters in polygamy,
For married to the sun is each.

But in that marriage we are bound
As the sun strikes down his warmth,
So might a man; so might he
Strike down a fist instead.

Men tell me to keep my sense
And do away with sensibility,
But it's a woman's sensibility
That saved him when he lost his sense.

Woman, I may be, and writer, true,
With bloody heart and head askew,
But in the furnace I have danced
And rising up from it, laughed.

To think I once lived in fear
Of fire and smoke, who took my heart
From the icy cold of Winter
And brought it here, to Spring's light.

"Beware," they say, I will agree,
For fire and smoke may burn thee.

Triptych for Terminal Island Docks

JC Altier

I.

The way the late sun arcs through a window at Harbor Light
Café to brighten a page from Bukowski or Levine might gather
the trades of beleaguered workers the way they appear
in want ads—machinist, welder, cook, driver—ads
begrudged and curt: we'll hire if we absolutely must.

II.

The café reader will have his fries and catfish,
eat with the indifferent gaze of the sea. He'll stuff the book
into a thigh pocket, feel the poet's lines press against his leg.
They insist laments into every task, every tuna bin he hauls
ashore, every forklift he mounts, each joint and muscle
falling behind his body's stiff schedule.

III.

Let the tuna, worn trawlers, and sea lions that ease themselves
onto abandoned pilings feel the light unfold around them,
sorting each from giant shadows of cranes and container ships.
Let everything take its chances here through the light
that rides the harbor, the vague fortunes of berths and slips,
the reborn barge at Larson's Boat Repair, released to tunes
of milling machines and drill presses as it backs its way seaward,
the dead-tired soul who stumbles through his shift on burnt
coffee and luck, all those laments that would catch him as he falls.

Lost in Oil

Leticia Hernandez



New Girl

John Grey

the entire school hates
the brown eyes in the brown face,
the olive luster of the skin,
and the tongue—
especially the tongue
that can't even pronounce
the school's name correctly

every blackboard, piece of chalk,
absolutely reviles
the girl sitting in the third row
from the front,
to the right of the teacher—
oh yes,
the teacher surely hates her most of all—
this is the teacher who once sermonized,
'don't judge by appearances,'
but is obviously annoyed
at repeating things twice to that girl,
sometimes three times

the school walls are unmoved by her tears,
the furniture could care less that
she's doing well in class
despite her struggles with the language—
and what about the bathrooms—
yes, they've always stunk like cesspools—
but now they know why.

Kid Guitar

Ken White

'Wanted: Blonde bass player with big tits.' The sign on the broken-down Ford Econovan parked near downtown Modesto is scripted in ransom-note lettering.

Kid Guitar rocks on his heels next to a tattered lawn chair, playing his Les Paul Cherry Sunburst guitar. Some decent blues licks croak from the tiny Pignose amp resting on the cracked concrete. He is short, portly, with long hair and a Rasputin beard. He looks like the bastard offspring of Tolkien's Bilbo Baggins and ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons. He wears a red nylon mesh baseball cap with the word 'Modesto' stenciled on the front. Blue jeans, sneakers, and beneath the plaid work shirt, his raggedy-ass T-shirt bears the image of his god, Eric Clapton.

'He can still play,' my best friend says as we stand there, watching the Kid pick and grin.

'He's not bad,' my youngest brother says.

'He's almost as good as you,' I say.

'Some days he's better,' he replies.

'What happened?' I ask.

'I liked the home cooking.'

Funny thing about success. It takes some serious ambition. And a lot of luck. Those who make it, want it. They're in the right place at the right time. But, it also takes hard work. The great sage Yogi Berra said it best: 'Success is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.' Or was it, 'ninety-five percent of this game is half mental.' Or maybe, 'If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else.' Yogi was never clear, even when he was lucid.

My brother was a talented musician. An absolutely killer guitar player. He never got the recognition he deserved. I considered myself a pretty good writer. I never got anything published. I always wondered why—on both our accounts.

Later that day at home, the smell of chicken BBQ'd in Woody's, my dad's favorite sauce, fills the summer air.

'Dinner's ready,' my wife says.

"Born under a bad sign.
I've been down since I began to crawl.
If it wasn't for bad luck,
I wouldn't have no luck.
If it wasn't for real bad luck,
I wouldn't have no luck at all."
– William Bell, Booker T. Jones, Jr., "Born Under a Bad Sign"

Postscript: I wrote this story long before my brother passed away. Before he recorded his solo CD. Before I published my first book. We both proved me wrong. You can enjoy home cooking and still achieve your dreams. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to savor it.

Niña Vendedora

Ana Laura Mena



36 Days

Cristina Sandoval

The doctor said the treatment will last five to ten minutes at a time.
The radiation will penetrate her skin—
Her left breast—
It will kill what's inside;
What's been waiting to fill her cup.

An overflow, a lump, a breast.
A dress, a hospital gown open in the front.
A peek of the flesh that fed me, only
Years later.

The doctor said the treatment will last five to ten minutes at a time.
Her left arm must be held away from her body.
Nothing must touch her
Except the actual radiation.

The radiation will infiltrate,
Takeover, send its little soldiers
To slice, to destroy.
And I always thought I'd be the destroyer,
If it came to it.
If I had to.
If it ever really happened,
I'd be there
With my grip around the cancer's neck.

36 sessions.

36 visits.

5 days a week.

No weekends.

(Will it intersect with my sister's wedding date?)

(Will she be too tired to attend?)

(Will she be tired?)

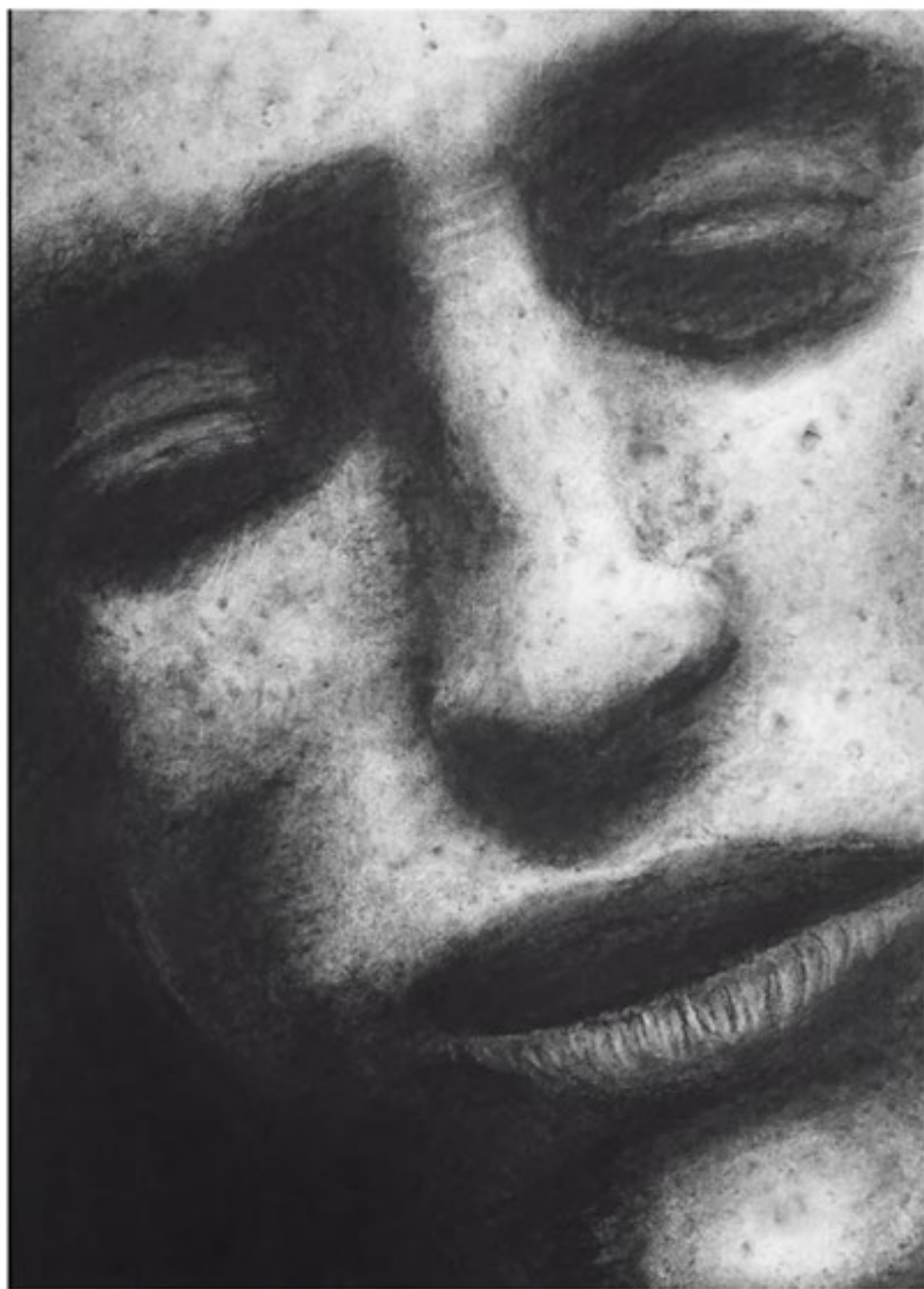
The doctor says it'll last five to ten minutes at a time.

An eternity of sleeping in the waiting room,

And eating gas-station donuts for breakfast.

Freckles

Tejal Patel



Just Something I've Noticed

Mariah Esparza

I've noticed that there seems to be much speculation,
Not just a little,
But much speculation about the entirety of young people
Being made by individuals who are not themselves young
And forgive me on the grounds of complaining,
You may dismiss me as an angst-ridden youth who doesn't know
What they are going on about, if you like
No judgment, but bear with me if you will
You're too young to know anything about that
You're too young to live this way
You're too young to have this much hate for the world
Do you not trust my eyes?
Or my mind to form opinions?
Or maybe I am forming the wrong opinions?
You're too young to be tired
You're too young to be sad
Smile! Cheer up!
I've got as much right to be unhappy as you have, and unfortunately,
Plastering on a smile and stretching it wide will not fix everything
You're too young to know what love is
How would you know? There is no real definition of love, try as you
might to fit all that Passion, insanity, happiness and emotion into a
little box straight out of Webster's
You're too young to know about sacrifice
You're too young to let the world break you
Just wait until you get into the "real world"
That's not going to cut it in the "real world"
We are not in some perfect little "young person's bubble"
We are in the real world alongside you whether you choose to
acknowledge it or not
Youth is overrated
Youth is wasted on the young
Now I know that to some degree these are valid
We are young
We are not invincible

And we do not know everything
But neither do you
And unless we are going to engage in some sort of Freaky Friday
scenario,
You will never know what it is like right now
Yes you were young once,
You're not anymore
And you've lost a little bit of what that's like
You don't really know
You knew once upon a time
But now it's the ever after and you don't have a clue
So I would like to ask on the behalf of myself, a young person,
To limit your speculations
And please stop piling them on like bricks on the shoulders of your
young generation

Untitled Alexa Hardy



Flying over Uncertainty

James Weaver

A former co-worker messages me on Facebook, 'Where have you landed?'
eighteen days after the relentless flood washed me away from my previous job.

Everybody else held on to the branches, door handles, and office equipment.
I held on to anything I could, but slid too fast
on the Slip N' Slide that I flew over *Welcome*.

Now in the unclear skies, I am not Superman who once saved past civilians,
hearing praises of my talents through whispered halls.
Now, I've become a meteor.
A spectacle only seen by few, burning,
hoping to crash into the crater of acceptance.

Any employer would be lucky to have me—
A true man of steel.
Unscathed in presentation
but showcase the scratches to bedroom walls
catching the tears of passion into pillowcases.

Eighteen days is enough for round-trip tickets to interviews.
The nonchalant voices of secretaries calling to tell how other candidates got a new job;
as if my skeletal wings weren't strong enough to carry me,
as if my emotions were tucked too tightly in my dress shirt,
as if I never had a chance as soon as you looked at me.

So when asked where have I landed?
I don't know.
I'm still flying.

Untitled
Natalie Schemmel



clean Heaven Lindsey-Burtch

I exchanged my papers and ink
for broom, bucket, and mop;
I scrubbed the ring from the shower
the same way I would scour a book
of poetry.
No matter how I swept, the floor was never
clean;
no matter how I read, I could not find the
meaning—
There is so much dirt to sift through,
and more and more is tracked in.
Grimy fingerprints on doorframes and white
walls,
the corners of pages thumbled after an
afternoon
in the half-assed vegetable garden;
the peppers grow one at a time in rude rows,
between wasted tomatoes rotting on the
vine,
Bermuda grass and shade,
garbage piles and moldy leaves,
buckets of chicken shit, and an old lamp,
ripped from its stand, bulb shattered
in a soggy cardboard box full of
plaster, broken tools, cracked red cups,
beer cans strewn across the path,
table overturned and cigarette butts
scattered underneath the legs,
buckled from the weight of
tangled rope and extension cords.
I smoke in the house, and the roaches collect
in the ashtray with the ash. I sift through it
and smoke that too. Like Cinderella,

I spend my days in a cloudy haze
of Windex and 409, on my hands and knees
on the kitchen floor, scrubbing the oil and
mud from the cabinets, the pizza sauce
from the oven door, the mold
from a pot of beans; I throw away
freezer burned duck wings, moth-eaten
pasta shells, ants in the oatmeal.
I step over all the decoys and bedsprings
just to get to my box of CDs,
tucked between the bowling balls
and boxes of miscellany,
so I can listen to anything but the radio.
When you come home, you recite
NPR interviews word for word,
even the boring ones about home-owner
taxes and car-insurance companies,
as if this is talking, as if this is living,
I gave up my reading and writing
for cooking and cleaning, burned my words
on the stove in a pot of boiling water,
broke the plate in the sink and slit
my wrist, pretended it was an accident.
I don't let you touch me when I bleed;
now I bleed so you won't touch me.
There is no space for this awkward girl
in this bachelor pad, there is no space
left in my heart for cleaning up after a man
who cannot clean up the mess
the last woman left him.

Envy Terry Mack



Ghoul Days

Ken Simpson

Beckoned by a phobia
fear appears
inside the mind
where images
of trampled earth
mix with melancholy
in a playground
filled with children.

Life shies away from myths
of eternity and bliss
distracted by thoughts
that float away
careless of ambiguity
before they decay
compromised by lies
in alcoves where alibis hide.

The avenue to truth
is closed
as the whack of an ax
chops dying trees
with screaming leaves
and inside an urn
cadaverous lilies
limply rot.

Montereaue

JC Altier

September, and early Sunday clouds cool
the day. Breezes sliding over the Seine appear

in a hesitant mood, like a voice summoned,
perhaps your father's, back home—young

and returned from the war, enfolded
in the power of the new Packard he floored

on an empty road back home, the UConn campus,
watching the speed climb. But that voice

echoing through your day-lit mind thins,
and you're walking again under the sculpted

trees on one more Boulevard of the Republic,
your footsteps funneled into a distance

that's only distance. Wind winnows the overcast
till the sun's released like a cypher broken.

And look: school children burst in bright laughter
over the green expanse of Parc de Noues.

They scamper, shout, kick a soccer ball
between them. A boy is tripped time and again

by bullies, till he lies where he falls in the field.
But even he laughs, face-down, embracing the grass.

Anonymous

Natalie Schemmel



The Song of Spirit

Maya Obregon

The Song of Spirit:

Around you, thousands of voices scream in frenzied elation
Matching the almost frantic fervor of the musicians
Whose laments and loves and lives pour out
To wash over the crowd
Each wave, each word
Impacting each person differently.

For some, music cleanses

Wipes away their insecurities

For some, music cuts

Bringing up all their hidden flaws

For some, music connects

(Not the music itself; not the melody, or the musicians

But the masses of people who,

For a brief moment,

Exist as one)

Words are ripped from throats—

Hands are thrown into the air—

And bodies sway in synchrony—

Equaling the rolling sea of people

(Each with their own set of troubles and woes

But for that time

They, and their problems, are dwarfed by the primal electricity

That links them all together)

You close your eyes for a tick—

Letting the energy envelop your being

Lifting and sinking at the same time

To a place of existence

Lodged between your potential greatness

And your potential downfall

(Falling and flying aren't nearly so different;

How can you be sure which wind you're riding?)

A paradise of strangers, a sea of familiar outsiders
Who you will never see again
Whose face you forget as soon as they turn away.
But now—

*(With the rhythm beating in your rib cage
In place of a heart
With the melodies echoing through your mind
Both cutting and cleansing
With musicians who are also magicians
For they weave wonder
Through the Treads of Verity)*

Now—

You, along with the entire crowd
Sing along to one tune
That runs rampant underneath the melody itself:
The Spirit of Song.

say the unseen colors will come to your door,
disguised as noiseless saints or devils,

to leave you once again disturbed.

Your shrapnel-scattered brain—a thought here,
a thought there.

Chain-link fence patterns that will haunt you,
for there is a window that looks into many windows,
many windows which you may not comprehend.

My Inheritance

Michelle Hartman

Granny had three miscarriages, fourteen live births
of which nine reached maturity. "She could
have been a pace womb for a rabbit colony",
Mother would say, "spitting out squalling kids
and sitting on the phone were her specialties".

Despising Granny's fecundity,
Mother regaled me with abysmal stories
such as the twins wasting away
from "summer complaint" while Granny
planned Eastern Star fundraisers. In minute
detail she spoke of Frankie, his Peter Rabbit
dinner plate broken, thrown
into the open fireplace by Granny on her way
to make a phone call. Frankie toddled
to the fireplace, blue nightshirt becoming flaming memory
forever burning in Mother's mind. She fans
those flames each time she nails me
to her cross and ratchets this crown of thorns
on to my brow.

Lament

Sean Montalvo



Disconnect

Daniel Blokh

The call comes at midnight, as I'm pretending to fall asleep. I hear Mom talking, but I can't make out what she says. After a while, she hangs up and goes to wake me, but I'm already standing at the door, listening. "Babushka called," she says.

We drive through the night, every street and building taking on a different face in the darkness. I'm only in second grade at the time, so this is the latest I've ever been out in the city. Mom and I talk to avoid thought, each of us thinking we are comforting the other, but only really comforting ourselves.

When we get to her apartment, Babushka is leaning against the fridge, falling. Something about her looks lopsided, and her speech is slurred, the words stumbling from her mouth. I try to look up at her face, but instead, my eyes catch on the thin string of spit that dangles on her lip. I watch its silver stream as the ambulance comes, as she is wheeled away, and afterwards; I watch it as my friend's mother drives me to her house, as she gives me a snack and turns on the TV, as she leads me to the bedroom where I'll stay for the night. I watch it even in my sleep.

When Babushka moves to her new apartment complex, she stops smiling for a while. It takes some time for Mom too; the process is long, and the relocation seems to tear something in Babushka's memory. It's never been uncommon for her to forget things, but it takes a sharp turn for the worse. She wanders aimlessly as we bring the new furniture in, stopping only occasionally to ask what this place is and why she's there. She seems lost.

Her first night in the new house, she calls Mom several times. I don't hear why, but from what I heard earlier that day, I can assume: why is she in this house, how did she get there, where did everyone go? Maybe worse, maybe she asked about Dedushka.

She calls again the next night, and the night after that. But mother gets some of the other Russian people in the apartment complex to come visit her, after a while, she seems to calm down. Her smile returns, and eventually, Mom's does too. Babushka tells me in Russian, "I've always been the caretaker, always surrounded by people to worry about—My students, my children, my grandchildren." She forces a smile, her eyes nearly fading behind the

wrinkles, "How did I suddenly become the one who is cared for?"

My Babushka and Dedushka moved to America in 1996, four years after my parents did. They were torn, my mother explains. Babushka had taken care of my older siblings since they were born, and she loved my Mom, but her entire life was in Russia. The only country she had known, the friends she'd had most of her life, the language she taught and loved; she had to leave it all—and she did.

This is the time she forgets most often, her move to America. She remembers her first love, her old home, her favorite students—but forgets why she came to America. She tells my mother that it is like something fell out: she remembers Russia, remembers America, but forgets what came in between. It's strange how memory works, taking the saddest moments away from you, pocketing them and running away: a healer who mends until the wound disappears, as though it never existed.

*

When my sister visits, they go upstairs where the piano stands. My sister plays a piece from sheet music and Babushka takes out a few poems and reads them along with the tune. She brings the same poems every time, but my sister and I don't point it out because her readings are marvelous anyway. Her worries seem to melt, and the poem pours through her. She remembers them sometimes, putting down the papers and reciting them from memory:

I know tales from many countries
Of African maidens, of warlords' passions,
But you have been breathing in the fog for too long
To wish to believe in anything but rain.

Later, she tells my sister and me about the war. She was only a girl then, but she could remember going to hospitals and reading poetry for the soldiers there. I can hear it in her voice when she reads to us now, see it in her eyes, full of power and fury, as though she read to a crowd of hundreds, all of them ready to applaud.

*

It hits me one day when we're outside: I'm taller than her—not just by a little bit. I have a head over her, and she has to look up at me when she says hello. I've long since noticed the roles reversing in my family; my siblings starting to teach my parents and take care of them, my parents doing the same for theirs. But only now do I notice that I'm in this cycle too: my arms suddenly long, my shoulders expanding, everything growing with time.

I ask her how she's doing, and she tells me about her day, talks about the weather and tells me how she's still trying to learn English, but I'm not listening. I can only stare at her, her body turning from soft and plump to thin and frail. I must be growing—age's hands pulling at my body, stretching me out. With glorious time, I will hopefully grow taller than the rest of my family.

I don't consider that she may have grown down.

*

The week before Babushka birthday, Mom gets multiple calls from her several times every day. "Have you forgotten to invite anyone?" she asks. "I think we've forgotten."

The day couldn't come soon enough. Mom, Dad, and I go visit her before the party, bringing cake, fruit and some wine. She barely takes any of it, still asking the same question—her mind returning to it over and over again, like a stuck record. It is only after I ask her to read me some poetry that she calms down—her mind settling into the pages as she recites. By the time her friends come, she is more composed. She still worries too much to enjoy the party but for the first time that week, or maybe longer, Mom gets a break.

*

Every day, someone new slips from her memory: her neighbor, her best friend, her son. It doesn't faze her too much, but the rest of us notice, Mom most of all. It's a disconnect she tells me—memory detaching from person, person from name. Dad tells me that she should become accustomed to this and get used to slowly losing herself bit-by-bit—living in an unraveling world. I imagine what it must be like.

We wait to see who'll go next.

*

The tape starts to play. I see a look of sadness in Mom's eyes as it flickers to life, an image of a family sitting at a table. I recognize my brother among them, then my uncle, then Dedushka. It is Babushka's birthday, Mom points out. They turn to face a piano in the corner of the room, at which my sister sits, only a young girl. Babushka stands by her.

I look at Babushka's face, nearly wrinkleless. Her smile is warm and youthful; her smile nowadays shadows it, takes the same form, but worn down, weighted. It resembles my mother's.

The piano starts to play, and Babushka sings, the entire family caroling along. I watch their mouths form around the language, the words stream from deep within them, from something greater than them. I watch as Babushka, grinning, loses herself in the song—her voice overpowering all the rest. I watch her forget the world: forget the worries of moving, the troubles of the future and the past, and not because of dementia or old age or confusion.

This time, she forgets because there is no need to remember.

A Tragic Silence

Kevin Diaz

Six months have passed since meeting the woman of my dreams. Her hair emits a sparkling shade of auburn. Her eyes glisten in a beautiful shade of hazel. Her spirit flows with life, and her passion for living fills me with inspiration. I stand here before her, wanting to tell her how I feel. *Is six months too soon? Maybe I should wait. I don't want to frighten her if she does not feel the same about me.* I continue to listen to her speak. I will wait until the time is right. Until then, I am just happy she is here with me.

One year has passed since meeting the woman of my dreams. I remain enraptured by her beauty and zeal for life. Enough time has passed, and I want to tell her everything. I want to tell her what she means to me. A gentleman enters from the other room before I get a chance to say anything. She has been casually dating him for a few weeks. *Maybe I shouldn't say anything. She seems to really like him. I shouldn't interfere.* She says goodbye as they leave for their next date. I will wait until the time is right. Until then, I am just happy she was here with me.

Three years have passed since meeting the woman of my dreams. Her hair is longer but still radiates the same shade of auburn I love. Her eyes emit a glow that draws me in. I desperately want to tell her how I feel. Before I can speak a word, her bridesmaids enter the room. *This isn't right. She's about to be married. What right do I have to ruin her happiness?* I congratulate her, wishing her the best, and join the wedding guests to wait for the ceremony to begin. I suppose there never will be a time that is right. For now, I am just happy she was able to spend another moment with me.

Five years have passed since meeting the woman of my dreams. Streaks of gray begin to emerge from her auburn hair, but she remains as beautiful as ever. Her eyes maintain a hazel glow, but a sadness begins to break through. She confides in me the trouble she has been having with her husband, but has hopes that their newborn child will mend their marriage. *I want to say something, but it would be selfish of me. She wants to fix their marriage. I shouldn't do anything that could jeopardize that.* Perhaps there was a time that was right, but that time has passed. For now, I am just happy that she remains a friend to me.

Ten years have passed since meeting the woman of my dreams. The auburn begins to fade. Her eyes are filled with greater sadness. Her spirit has become weathered with the stresses of life. Despite all this I find her as beautiful as ever. She has just gone through a divorce, and all I can do now is try to console her. *Clearly this isn't the time. She just went through a terrible divorce. It would be foolish of me to say something now.* I will wait until the time is right. Until then, I am just happy she is here with me.

Fifteen years have passed since meeting the woman of my dreams. Now seems like a good time to tell her how I have felt all these years. The divorce has faded into the past. We have spent some time together. Her auburn hair continues to fade, slowly being replaced by a sterling silver, which I find equally stunning. The glow in her eyes has returned. Her spirit is once again filled with life. *How can I say anything, though, with the cancer that has spread inside of me? I haven't even told her about the disease ravaging my body. I shouldn't make her have to go through the stress of my illness.* I will fight this, and when the time is right, I will finally tell her how I feel. Until then, thank God that she has spent this time with me.

Sixteen years have passed since meeting the woman of my dreams. The time is finally right. We are gathered in this room, and she should finally know the secret I have kept these past sixteen years. Death, however, has the unfortunate ability to silence the tongue with eternal sleep, and He has ensured that my tongue will remain silent forevermore. She stands above my coffin with the few friends I maintained over the years, and she asks them, "Do you think he ever loved me?" One of them answers, "He did, very much. He was just never able to tell you, but he loved you every moment of his life for the past sixteen years." She drops to her knees, breaking out in tears, mourning the life we could have had, which never came to be.

Bearing the Light

Holly Walrath

White tendriled weed
in bloom, cotton shrouds
a hundred of your hearts,
in each one its own white world
sweet, unruly, desperate, unknowable.
A universe girdled within
your boll heart, your offspring
merely new galaxies of life
bearing the light.

Half-torn, each clinging heart
cespitose pearls, feathered,
clinging to the warmth—
even naked, a celebration
of what remains.

But toxin, too within
your florets, reaching out
with starbursts of cotton.
Each one alive, each bursting
even into darkness
even as, powerless,
you succumb.
They term you
noxious, injurious.
Wild flower, yes, clover, ivy,
goldenrod, nettle, mustard seed,
but you—dark heart
must not linger.

Ghost Story

Thomas Larsen

Angelo's may not be the best pizza in town, but at a buck a slice it keeps the locals connected. I'm on my way in when I see Joey G. coming out. I try to dodge him but forget about it.

"Hey Rile, how you doing?"

"Good Joey, I'm doing good."

"Christ, I haven't seen you since they sent up Hobbsy."

"Three years now. His mom just passed."

Marshall Hobbs, my former partner, presently serving zip/six at Graterford. For some stupid reason I think of Marshall when I shave every morning, always along the jawline, a flicker in my brain. I don't know what it means except those are good years going down the drain and somebody should feel bad about it.

"Me and Franny got a place on 58th," Joey tells me. "Nice place, two bedroom, we've been getting our shit together."

"Glad to hear it," I say. Never mind Joey looks like hell and he and Fran have been getting their shit together for thirty years.

"Listen, Riley," he pulls me from the doorway. "I hate to ask you, man, but could you spot me a few bucks until my check comes?"

"Come on, Joey. I can't give you money to cop."

"It ain't like that. Franny's been sick. I can get it back to you in a couple of days."

I look him up and down. "Have you seen yourself lately? Your nose is running and your pupils are like manhole covers. What are you doing, Joey? Everything?"

"Just this once, Riley. Help me out."

"What about Fran? Is she as strung out as you?"

Joey's face goes hard. "Forget it, okay? Sorry I asked. Don't worry about me and Franny. We'll get along. I'll see you around, man." He pushes past me.

"Joey, hey!" I follow him outside. "Don't take it that way. It's just hard seeing you like this, man."

He pulls up, snot nosed and glassy eyed. "Franny's finished, Riley. Full blown, you wouldn't even recognize her."

"... I didn't know."

His eyes go dead. "Me and Fran? We don't belong in this world no more."

"Where is Franny? Is she in the hospital?"

"She's at home. They were gonna stick her in hospice, but she wants to die in her own bed."

Joey's crying now and people give us lots of room.

"Look, I'm sorry, Joey. I would'na said what I said if I knew about Fran. You know that, right?"

"Don't feel sorry for me, Riley. I couldn't take it."

"Can I see her? Would that be okay?"

"It's hard, man. I do the best I can," he chokes back a sob.

"Remember how she filled out that Maria Goretti uniform? Christ, I see it like it was yesterday."

I take his arm, just a stick through the thermal jacket. Their place isn't far and I brace myself. It's been ten hard years since I last laid eyes on Fran. The house I know, the only one with a shotgun blast above the window—thank you DEA. I can smell sickness at the front door. The house is dark—quiet as a tomb.

"I better check first. Make sure she's up to it."

Joey ducks down the hall and I settle on the stairs. The walls going up are covered in photographs, black and whites from Franny's *Daily News* days. She was a dynamo back then, cruising crime scenes, one of the gang. I check the close up of Frank Rizzo kissing a baby, the kid's mouth caught in a circle of dread. The kind of shot Franny was famous for, prize winner from the word go. Then Joey came along and the rest is misery.

"It's okay, she just woke up so she's a little groggy." He leans to whisper, "Make a fuss, could you, Rile? And don't let her see you wince."

Man it's awful. Franny's barely a bump in the blankets, the rest is skull and yellow eyeballs. Not just thin but shrunken, tiny. She looks at me and wheezes a laugh.

"Riley Prentiss, as I live and breathe."

"I would have come sooner, Fran. I didn't know."

"Don't look at me, Riley. Just talk. You were always such a talker."

"I think I went off a little on Joey. Do me a favor and tell him I'm sorry."

"Joey loves me, Riley. I know it's hard to remember, but we were good together once."

"You stuck it out. That counts for something."

"Talk to me, Riley."

What can I tell her? How well everyone's doing? After burning her bridges at the *Daily News*, Franny severed all ties, shacking up with Joey in a West Philly flop. Every now and then someone would see her downtown but she'd slink off or pretend not to know you.

"I still have my Bowie tickets. Remember, Fran? He cancelled and we got drunk in the Spectrum parking lot."

Her laugh rattles in her chest. "I puked into Joey's hands. Like he was gonna catch it all and take it away."

"I was glad they didn't show. I hated those things."

"I remember you'd say—want to get rid of all the assholes? Nuke a Rolling Stones concert."

Fran's breath is ragged and I can see the bones of her knuckles through her skin. I grab a chair and drag it over.

"How did so much time go by, Fran?"

"Joey says you're still with Kathleen. That's good to hear."

"You kidding? She'll never lose me now."

"I wish I'd been older, who knows? I might have gotten you."

Don't want to think about that. Back when I was easy to get and up to the eyes in my own cloud of chemicals. And Joey was right about that uniform. If Kathleen hadn't snatched me up there's no telling where I'd be.

"I'm scared, Riley."

"Hey," I move to her bedside. "The Franny I knew wasn't scared of anything."

"What comes next?" She takes my hand. "What if all the crap they fed us is true? Hey Riley, I see pearly gates and I'm fucked."

"Come on, Fran. You know what comes next."

"No I don't. Tell me."

"It's simple," I stroke her fingers. "You wake up in a mansion and you're twenty-five years old. You have a big magic box and a smaller magic box. The big box is for the things you want that are big, the smaller one for things you want that are small. You use them a lot at first, but eventually you have everything you'll ever need."

"Oh Riley, let it be true."

"That's just the half of it. Everything is paid for. You can eat and drink as much as you want or not at all, as you prefer. You're never tired but you can sleep for weeks. Men adore you but you're fiercely independent. You speak perfect French."

"Make it Italian."

"Like a native. And the best part? Your time is all your own. You can write your memoirs and learn to play the drums. Or you can lie around in your pajamas watching TV all day."

"Will you come see me? You know, after you—"

"First thing, Franny. We'll compare notes and see how far off I was."

"I'd like that. You were the one who was always nice—nice guy," She starts to fade.

I try to see the old Fran in her face, but there's no bringing it back. I watch until she's breathing easy then kiss her cheek and whisper goodbye. The TV's on downstairs but Joey's nowhere to be found. I slip two twenties under the sugar bowl and let myself out.

Again Michael J. Shepley

So here sits
that tarnished tin
ancient bazaar lamp
before the sepia
two tone mirror

Its grinning
often evil Jinn
is no longer
imprisoned within

I remember
the elfin face
on the tube
in black and
white Baghadvā rhythm
intoning a solemn
tolling Hindu hymn

"I've become Siva..."

After violently violet
Vishnu ruled over
a burning city
incarnated in the
the neon lightning of
the second mushroom
cloud, tsunami of
primal force and
earth quaking thunder

I see the
sorcerer's apprentice face
in this mirror
looking shaken, scared,
taken with the
brand new wisdom
no way to get
that bad Jinn
back in again

Laughter, Screams, and Bing Bing Bing Dallas Edge



In the family portrait there are two of us,
tender throated and entwined. Mother
was a swan and misunderstood.
How could we have known
that it would take forever to untangle?

I was going into 4th grade.
Already, we had been broken down
into hunter and hunted. Mostly
I was hunted.

That was the year we learned about other cultures.
I had been placed in a remedial class.
“Stupid kid class” it was called.
Each day we would line up
without being told. We were led
to the bottom of the building,
to a dirty, beige, windowless room.

Sister Peggy sat at a desk
in the front of the room,
and she would consider each one of us
before giving us a reading assignment.
When my turn came, she stared
at me. Her face a question.
I wanted to answer that I was tired
and that my mother was sick again.

If she asked, I would point to the purplish-blue
that blossomed on my cheek and say,
she is sick like this. I would tell her that my mother
doesn't mean it. I would ask her,
Can you help us?

Instead, she looked at me and pushed
a reading workbook into my hand.
On the front was a picture
of a woman with many rings on her neck.
Her neck elongated, long as a swan's.

You need to dedicate yourself,
the teacher said.
You need to pay attention.

How I admire the devotion of swans—
mute, yet always ready. Appreciated mostly
for their beauty,
until they break bones.

Mother picked me up from school.
We were swans in our silence.
I didn't know our destination
until we arrived. Terror spread
through me as we stood in front
of the salon. I resisted, held on
to a street post while my mother pulled
my small body.

The next day I hid my head in a hoodie
and offered promises to a god
who I still believed in
to please not let anyone in school notice.

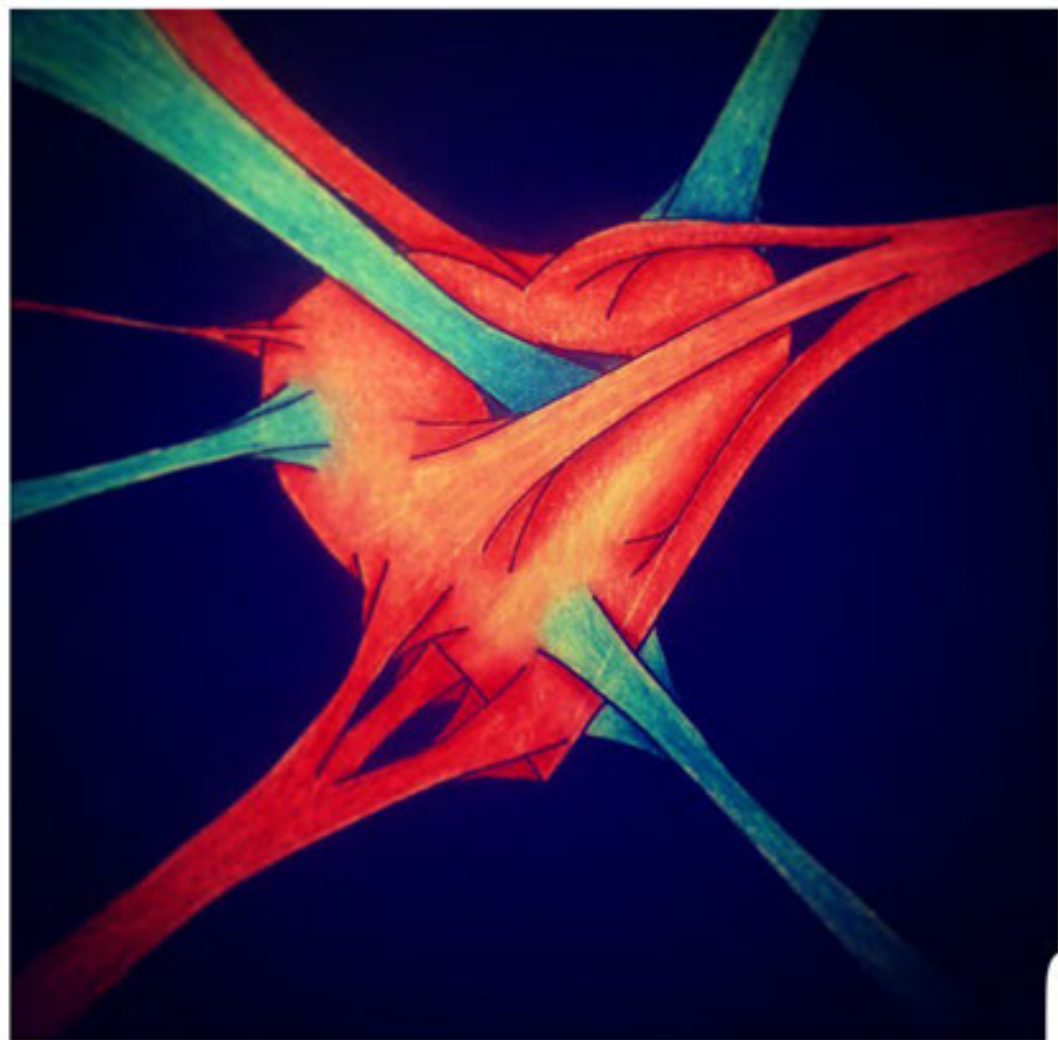
It was late in the day
when we descended the stairs
and entered the room.
Sister Peggy considered me
and lifted herself up from her perch.

What do we have here?
Is this a new haircut? she cooed.
Her lips thin and sharp as a beak.
Come now, let everyone see.
She pulled off my hoodie,
exposing my shorn head.

The cool air wrapped itself around my neck.
I imagined a lake, still and glassy, a solitary swan
and its slightly distorted reflection.

Pulse

Yvonne Downs



Thief of Gold

D.J. Gong

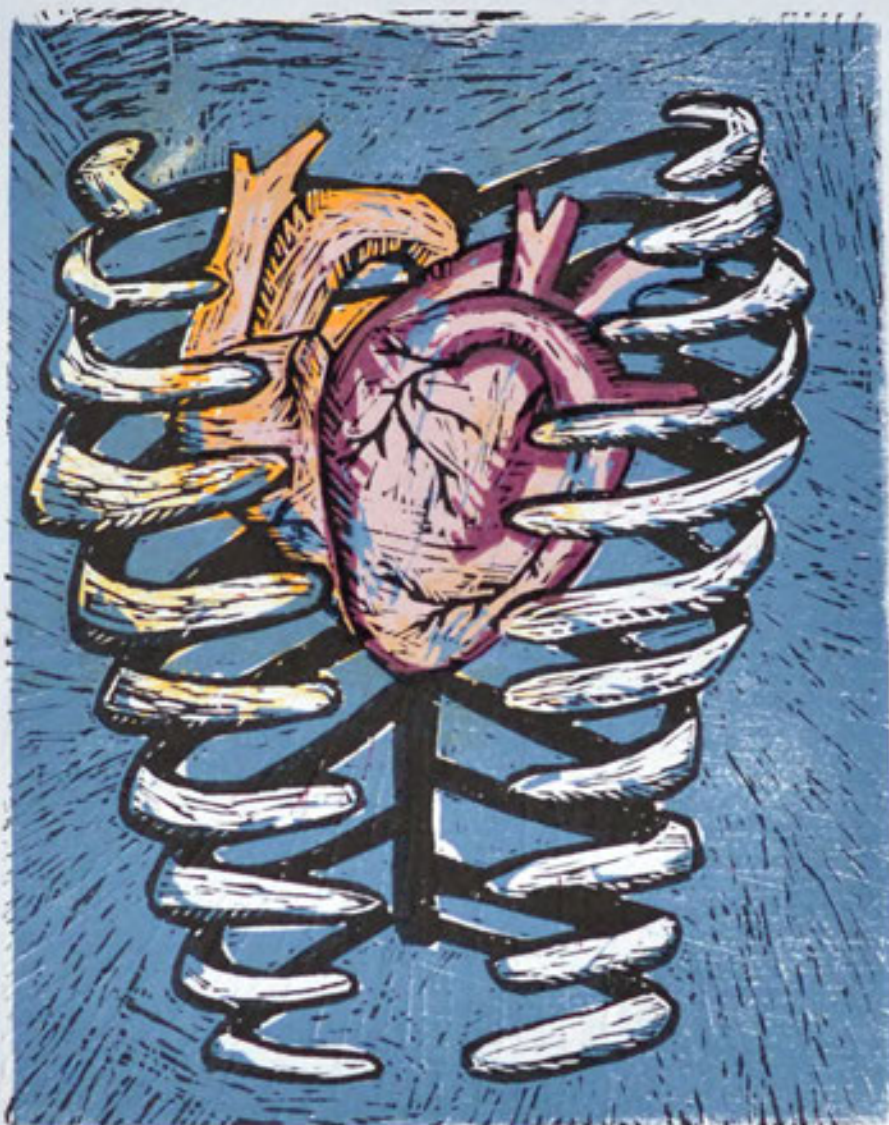
I remember that day,
as we lounged across that expansive plastic booth,
daring our teenage legs to fall asleep below us.
Each with a small golden fortune of fries,
our attempts to forget responsibilities piling up.
Clocking in and out pushed aside—
outlines for paper left dusty by the wayside.
I got you talking,
hoping our commercial surroundings would fade away.
But your brain would slam right back the second I stole a fry.
A quick smirk on my face and a quicker apology,
and off again your chatter waddles down a curvaceous path.
McDonalds hummed and rang around us,
kids tested freedom between chair legs and playpens,
mothers scolded them back to safety.
As you place an idea of your future that includes boots and bayonets
and rifles and war on the table,
the world drops from my chest,
splashing across the neatly tiled floor,
mixing with the blood of ketchup splattered across the ground.
I saw you wandering into gunfire and mortars,
unaware that the new path you longed to explore might never bring
you back to our quiet afternoons.

Anniversary Angelique Limatoc Arnold

She held his hand
as if for the first time,
feeling the roughness
of commitment,
his callouses like jewels.
Priceless.
Perfect.
He worries he is balding,
his beer-belly baby
losing favor in her eyes.
All she can see
is the same smile that wooed her
now with coffee-stained kisses,
the lines around his eyes
revealing the many times
they laughed together,
the few times they cried.
She speaks a lifetime
with just the stroke
of his salt-and-pepper chin,
and nestles into his heartbeat.

When 2 Hearts Beat as 1

Madison Toel



When 2 hearts Beat as 1

2/3

They Call it Jasmine

Fabian Gonzalez Gonzalez

I stood beneath the canopy of trees—
great awning touched by mist.
I remember I would see
you there

in rain, and shadow, or the green
luminescence cast through
the foliage when the sun came up.

I would admire the lines; the white, the green, the yellow—
the song inside you, the voice no one could hear
but me, in that sylvan stillness that melted
everything.

More than the greenery and crushed brush
or the soil or the rain or the sun, it all seemed like a halt—
a guitar string stopped, but the lingering sensation of
vibrations, a mellow sound
fading, but still there.
Ants looking up, birds looking down, and all around me
the whispers of the trees and you.

Old men are sages. Every line on their faces
accounts for a knowledge. A certain one came as I
stalked you once again that particularly cool morning.

Observing me, he said, "They call it jasmine."

I smiled and was glad I finally knew the name of
the small flowers whose petals I caressed with my
fresh fingertips.

I stopped visiting jasmine flowers after that day.
Old men have knowledge for the brain.
As a child, I did not understand the irony.
When I grew older, I understood the naming
of a rose makes the world too real.

I mourn for the unnamed, angelic flowers. I long to see
their friendly petals waving at me, speaking words
I can no longer understand.

Dust
Yvonne Downs



Thing James Preanitt

Had a girl who told me not to write about her.
As if form and grace of word would help quell
the self-loathing in our hearts.

She wouldn't let me hold her hand.
She fought the intimacy
with a bob and a weave
before delivering the knockout punch.
Made it better when she finally let me stroke her skin.

Some Thing
brought us together,
though we tried our best
not to let each other in.

She moaned like a wailing guitar
and asked for space in the bed.

These nights we can't sleep.
We wake and ask each other about our dreams.

Had a girl I called Thing
who didn't know what to call me.

You're ugly.
So am I.
And it likes it.

It gets it.

She knew what it was like to feel a heartbeat stop.
She knew the Real Pain—
kind that comes back, goes away
makes you want to leave.

The Sickness we have we don't feel it in our bones,
it's a dark black in a blank white soul.

So I bring the pain to the surface of its skin.
No more fear,
no more decisions,
no more thoughts,
no more.

Had a girl who had a boy.
Who had a guy who understood:
it's not about whether or not The Sickness comes back,
it's understanding it always will.

Had a thing who knew what it's like to feel nothing.
Who wanted to be thrown away:
a circle drawn on a white page.

January 10, 8:47 AM

Stephanie Malley

Outside my window
the crows seem cast in Lead,
black bodies fused to bare branches,
the mass of them weighting
down the treetops.

I open the sash
and they explode
into the unsuspecting air
sharp and light as shrapnel.

Daylight

Yvonne Downs



English Majors vs Math Majors

Tatiana Olivera

Complexities arise in minds like mine:
Those who think critically in terms of lit.
computer science and math majors would quit.
They're scared of words. Just looking at the spines
Of novels lining bookshelves makes them flee.
Meanwhile, I find the smell of pages nice
As PSL's in autumn and an ice
Cream cone in summer with a sweet, cool breeze.
Hark! All ye pompous math and science geeks,
The Lits are coming! The Lits are coming!
We'll march in with our mighty metaphors;
We'll brandish our quill pens so very sleek
And rule the school. We'll send you all running,
For English majors are the true victors!

The Piedmont is a Neighborhood in Oakland

Chuck Von Nordheim

I can no longer go the Piedmont
My sister died there
She stands at every street corner
She holds her arms up at every doorway
Christ, did she really need to live without Paxil to love you?
Your pastor told her this
Your pastor told her this
Your own shepherd told her this
I can no longer go to the Piedmont
The jerk chicken shops call me with their sweetness
The coffee bars lure me with the memory of fresh ground Sumatra
All free trade, all organic
Christ, did she really need to live without Paxil to love you?
To dance like a Dervish in the stucco-walled church
To dance with her arms held out at every service
Your own pastor told her this
I can no longer go to the Piedmont
The best place in Oakland to see an arthouse movie
The best place for popcorn in fresh garlic
She dreamed of all the pretty Matt Damons there
Christ, could you not give her someone else to love besides you?
To hold when the fear no drug could quite quench swelled
To hold like a poultice against the pain of life
Your own shepherd would have done
Did he have to hold himself so pure?
I can no longer go to the Piedmont

My sister died there
It contains the steel room where the deputies took her body
The one where they drilled into the skull
The one where they gouged out a bit of brain
Because even with a note
Even with a note
Even with a note
Christ, could you not give her someone to love besides you?
Your pastor would have done
Your pastor would have done
I can no longer go the Piedmont
At every street corner her ghost whirls
At every coffee shop I smell her burned body
Christ, why did you have to be such a jealous son of a bitch?

The Little Blue Nun

Jacqueline Hollcraft

The Little Blue Nun
I still wonder whether
an eight-year-old
should have had a place in that moment.

My uncle was dead.

Do you want to say goodbye?

My parents ushered me along the corridor,
white with hostility and sterile like acid,
past those either fading away or fighting back.
None were awake, but all looked
old.

I was afraid.
The diseases in each room looked up as I passed,
craning their necks from their doorways—curious.
Who's that girl?
Did I only imagine
that their curiosity turned
to preying glares, jaws starving to eat me?

Like a rash spreading, like a sneeze forming, like nausea growing,
Fear came coming.
Terror slowed my steps, Dread shrunk me down to size—lower.
My guardians prodded me on.

I entered the room where he lay
ashen, pale as bone,
mouth agape and hollow like the hole in a fallen tree.
The room was crowded with muffled sobs,
I had never met my crying-family before.

Say your goodbyes.

How do I say goodbye to someone
who has already left?

Like an empty brown shell dried to thin crispness,
missing its occupant;
his shell appeared equally abandoned.

I want to leave now

Unlike my uncle's, my mouth was stuck shut.
Unlike my uncle's, my eyes were peeled wide open.

Dead feels awful.

Then I saw her,
a Little Blue Nun
with curly black hair peeking out from beneath her blue and white
veil,
wearing a polyester habit that looked like sky.
She wore old-lady glasses that framed her jovial face
and doled out sincere blarney to make everyone smile.
Her twinkling eyes shined their starry light,
examining the wounds Death inflicted.
Her kindly smile was a balm, easing the pain
of the injured.

She was sitting on the bed,
right next to him!
The Little Blue Nun tenderly clasped the dead man's hand
with both of hers,
as if they'd been lifelong friends
or family.
Yes, that's what she was,
his sister for a few weeks.

fear, terror, dread,
all turned and trudged away
down the softened corridor.
The diseases went back to their hiding places
inside the poor people who were just people after all.
My crying-family became my hugging-and-nodding family.
Small smiles and whispers of memories
punctured the swollen air.

Let's go now.

The image of the Little Blue Nun
remains sealed in my memory
the way the Virgin is sealed on the medallion around her neck.
The Little Blue Nun crushed the head of death with a smile;
She wasn't afraid of anything.

I Can't Stay Here

Terry Mack



Along The Avenue

Ernest Williamson III

I must have missed the Supper of the Lord,
Lying here cornered in careless rain,
As the lucky people walk by,
Full-fat and bemused by the sobbing leaves,
Draped and doused in concern of me.
I must have outed a crime against humanity,
Shivering here cussing at the wayward wind
Smoking a dirt-covered Marlboro cigarette
As the ants quietly gather and work round my blood.
Whatever wrong turn I birthed will soon weep in wintry want,
Not of my trembling sullied pink hands
Covered in tattered tawny cloth,
But of my guitar strings catching the glare of a rich man
Who barely hears its tune
slip and slide.
up and down
his numb and ignorant lips.

Grand Canyon

Noel Daniel

I remember the monster in the Grand Canyon. I was young at the time and riding with my parents. From just above the crag of the window I could see a sandy, blood-quartz world that stretched as far as the sea. Maybe the Grand Canyon saved my life, or maybe it robbed me of a normal one. It's just the same either way.

All I knew was that there was a monster in my thoughts and he never left. He was in the stars. He was in the doorknobs that had little holes in them—he ones you could jimmy a lollipop stick into. I spent many nights in my parent's room, lying on the floor, staring out the window and thinking about the star monster. Sometimes he had the horns of a stag, sometimes of a bull, and sometimes both. He had one eye that never closed and he was dark as a fistful of wet dirt. But I never really saw him. That is, until one sleepy trip through the Grand Canyon.

I woke up as my mother swerved suddenly, my head knocking against the car window. I saw stars, both in the sky and my own head. My mother and father were certain they'd seen a deer in the road—but it had been too dark, my father said, like a shadow. It was early evening, my mother said, it shouldn't have been so perfectly black—so hard to see and so unnaturally able to scale the tall canyon wall to our left.

I knew. I knew it was the monster. I didn't want to say it aloud and welcome it inside, but the shadow was here and now everyone could see it. This was the first time I thought about fighting it. I was scared it might hurt my parents.

So I dreamed up Door—for at first, “she” was just the doors that kept us safe. Then, suddenly, she had a form. I liked to think Door looked like me, but cooler. She had a sword that cut through shadows and she used it to keep the monster at bay. I daydreamed about Door all night and for many nights after. For months, I wanted a sword. I wanted to be Door.

“Door’s a stupid name,” a friend told me in high school when I showed her my stories. I remember because it hurt.

“Neil Gaiman used it,” I said. I don’t remember what she said to that. Maybe, “If Neil Gaiman jumped off a bridge, would you do it, too?” Yes. He’d only jump if there were something marvelous at the bottom, I think. But that isn’t the point.

I started writing stories. I mean, really writing them, with all of my soul. And that is the point. That is what's magical. They were horrible, but it didn't matter. I found solace in creation, like creators often do. It was the only time I was in the moment—the only time that everything else slipped away. It made me very happy.

But then one day it didn't. One day the light in most things went away, and my joy of writing went with it. I couldn't fill the growing monster in me—I couldn't feed it sweets like I used to. I couldn't write it away. Suddenly it was building and building and I became afraid. I did things that were unlike me. I felt a suffocating bleakness, a sleeplessness, a constant thrum of panic like being hunted. I tried everything to run away. Including things that hurt.

I still wrote, in spite of it being a chore. My stories vented my frustrations, as teenage stories often do. Door didn't show up in them much anymore—but there was one where she did. A single story about a raging war beneath a bloody, unforgiving queen—

"Your head is in the clouds if you think talking will help," a soldier said with the vitriol of a slap. I don't remember his name, but his words assaulted Door. She'd had so much power before, and here he was, tearing her down. "The queen will never listen to you. You had your chance to protect her."

Understanding reflected in Door's eyes and the soldier knew he'd struck a nerve. And he felt that deep-down, visceral, good-badness that you feel when you know you've really wounded someone. Someone who deserves it. The perfect comeback. The most crippling parting blow.

"I tried to stop her from leaving—," Door started, but the soldier cut her off.

"No," he said. "It was you who left the queen."

And then I didn't write much after that.

I went very quiet. I retreated into my room and spent most of my time sleeping. My parents weren't concerned so much as furious that I was so withdrawn. But the monster kept me quiet. Then days turned into months turned into years. So many years.

Two weeks ago, I was driving in the woods at dusk. I was upset. I was lost in myself. Then suddenly, I saw a strange shadow down the road. And it was perfectly black, like a chunk of space, like a vacuum of light. It almost looked like a deer, but it skittered and then jumped effortlessly up into the woods on my left— up a sheer cliff into the trees.

I swerved and my stomach turned as I continued to drive down the road, checking my mirrors. There was nothing behind me, but in a sudden rush of sickness and memory the shadow came to mind. The monster of my childhood. There was panic in my heart and it pounded hard enough to make me dizzy—so dizzy I couldn't drive. The backseat of my car was so black—like a waiting, open mouth. It could be sitting there. If I looked back.

I slammed on my breaks and pulled over, putting my face in my hands and just breathing. I probably also cried. In fact, I'm sure I did—I sobbed until my lungs and stomach hurt. For as much as I wanted to continue spiraling down into that dark place that'd sent me driving, I was suddenly afraid because I somehow knew the consequences. It would invite the shadow inside.

I could let go. I could let the monster seep into the car, into my bones, and finish his dark work. Or, and this was the far less appealing option, I could fight it. And, mostly because I was scared, I wanted to fight it. I did. But I was hurting so keenly. I was running away from a life of “what'd I do wrong's and “why do you feel like that's, and the long-forgotten, growing-dusty art of writing I'd done to make myself happy once.

The monster was outside. Looking back, I realize it was inside too. But I felt it waiting outside my door for me to make one decision or another.

I made the wrong one first. I gave up.

I slammed on the gas and started home. I was too empty to cry, and growing emptier. I felt as though I'd completed some Faustian deal. I was going to commit to it because this was it now—this was the end. And with every mile, I grew more and more fine with that. The end. The end of my story. Of all my stories.

Until I happened to stop and think about Door.

Not completely about Door, but about the stories I was writing. I had so many. I had people who read them, and even people who liked them. Suddenly, and with a growing strength, I realized I very much wanted to finish them. I couldn't leave them with an unsatisfying end. And no one could finish them like I could. They were mine. They were the one thing on this earth that was completely mine.

And, in a way, Door came back.

Door can be anything to anyone. Door is the music you write that makes you feel better than talking can. Door is the words on the page, whether they're about your pain or aren't. Door is the pencil on paper, the paint across canvas, the pen across tablet—Door is how you escape, but in the healthy way. If I can tell you anything, it's that when you find yourself at the shadowy bottom of the canyon and you know the monster is waiting close by, find your Door.

Because I remember the monster in the Grand Canyon. From just above the crag of the window, I could see a sandy, blood-quartz wound that stretched as far as the sea. It was my first dance with an anxious monster whose shadow stretched the span of my life. Maybe I beat it, or maybe I simply dealt with it. It's just the same either way.

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Alexa Hardy is a Senior in high school and loves Drama and Art. She plans to teach Drama to high-school students after college.

Touring Peru in 2015 was a journey filled with mountains, blue skies, Andean music, and rich folklore. Witnessing the sun rise on top of Machu Picchu at six a.m. was breathtaking and taking a siesta there in the middle of the day has been an unforgettable experience for Ana Laura Mena.

Angelique Limatoc Arnold is a writer, artist, and jewelry designer. She has an English degree from SFSU with a concentration in Creative Writing. Her work has appeared in several publications, including *Penumbra* and *Song of the San Joaquin*. She still believes in blanket forts and coloring books.

Anni Wilson is a printmaker working in linoleum. A classically-trained cellist, she values formal elements of the arts over present-day conceptualism. Her most recent set of linocuts illustrates Moliere's *The Misanthrope* and she is currently working on Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*. She resides at Twin Oaks Intentional Community in Virginia.

Ashley Carter-Mooneyham is a CSU Stanislaus Art and Art History student. She creates mixed-media art, charcoal, film, and painting. She is a Senior and wants to become an Art teacher in the near future.

Brandon Epperson is in eighth grade and loves art!

Carlos Franco-Ruiz (*1987, Managua, Nicaragua) graduated with his BFA at the University of Miami in 2011. In 2013, he moved to Uruguay, where he recently had a solo exhibition, *Fractured Moments*, at Roggia Galerie. He lives and works in Sauce, Uruguay.

Carson Pellanda is an artist from California currently studying at CSU Stanislaus. To see more of his work please contact carsonjamesphoto@gmail.com

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Casey Leslie is a Senior at MWSU, where she hopes to graduate in the spring with a BA in English Education and a minor in Creative Writing and Publishing. She's an avid reader, writer, and has an undeniable passion for life.

Chad Nelson is quite simply just a dude who loves to draw. He enjoys the unusual, the whimsical, and the imaginary. Some of his favorite artists and influences are Mark Kistler, Scottie Young, Goro Fujita, and Alexander Jansson. You can find more of his stuff @instagram.com/handclones

Charles F. Thielman was raised in Charleston, SC, then Chicago, and educated at red-brick universities and on city streets. He has enjoyed working as a social worker, truck driver, city bus driver, and enthused bookstore clerk.

Her name is Chloe Ray. Born and raised in California. Who isn't? Loves honey ice cream and boring people. She's never written a brief summary in third person. She wants to be judged with a blade of honesty. She apologizes. She wants to spend her words like this: Thank you.

Christopher Benson was born and raised in Modesto, CA. He loved art when he was little, and chose the path of an artist during high school. Printmaking and the process of printing intrigued him and he decided that's what he wanted to do with his life.

Chuck Von Nordheim lives in the northeastern corner of LA County, where chaparral verges into true desert. He is an MFA-Fiction candidate at CSU San Bernardino whose work has appeared in *Poetry Quarterly* (Prolific Press), *Drown in Your Fears*, *Statements Magazine*, *Northridge Review*, and *Every Day Poets*.

Cristina Sandoval is an English TESOL major at CSU Stanislaus. She enjoys funk music, coffee, and frequent trips to the library and bookstore. She plans to teach abroad and meet strange and genuine people.

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Cynthia Uriarte is a poet living alone in Modesto, CA. She is a full-time employee at Turlock Poker Room and studies visual arts as a part-time student at Modesto Junior College.

D.J. Gong grew up in Riverbank, CA and resides there, but is working on that situation. He attends Modesto Junior College, but will not be soon. He loves reading and writing, but also eating pizza in bed.

Dallas Edge is an undergrad at CSU Stanislaus. Having a novel published and a photo or painting hanging on a gallery wall are two things on Dallas's bucket list, but he really hopes one day to teach young adults the value of creativity and the arts.

Daniel Blokh is a fourteen-year-old creative writer living in Birmingham, AL. His work has been published by *Scholastic Art and Writing*, *Foyle Young Poets*, and *Cicada Magazine*.

Danyl Crites is a Senior English major at CSU Stanislaus. She is a mother, a lover of music, and the Editor-in-Chief of *Penumbra*.

Duane Locke, PhD, lives hermetically in Tampa, FL near aninga, gallinules, raccoons, and alligators. He has published 6,990 different poems, none self-published or paid to be published. This includes thirty-three books of poems.

Art major Elizabeth Padilla draws inspiration from the outside world and relates to it on a personal level. Her purpose is to allow her audience to connect emotionally with her work. By connecting with each piece, the viewer then forms a bond to Elizabeth's life, emotions, and thoughts.

Dr. Ernest Williamson III has published creative work in over 600 periodicals. His work has appeared in journals such as *The Oklahoma Review*, *The Copperfield Review*, *The Columbia Review*, and *The Tulane Review*. Dr. Williamson is an Assistant Professor of English at Allen University.

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Fabian Gonzalez Gonzalez was born in El Charco, Uriangato, GTO., México in 1987. His poetry has appeared in the *Río Grande Review* and in the previous four issues of *Penumbra*.

Gary Beck spent most of his life as a theater director and has eleven published chapbooks and six published poetry collections with six more accepted for publication. Further works include the novels *Extreme Change*, *Acts of Defiance*, and *Flawed Connections* and a short story collection, *A Glimpse of Youth*. He lives in NYC.

Hayley Perry is a Senior at CSU Stanislaus, pursuing her BA in English. She enjoys putting her emotions on paper where they won't bother her anymore. This is her second time being published in *Penumbra*, and she couldn't be happier about it.

Heaven Lindsey-Burtch addresses themes of femininity and masculinity, domestic roles, animal instinct, love, life, death, physical and emotional trauma, and personal hardship. Through her own understanding of what it means to be human, she projects literary masters of the past and present by doing what all artists do best: stealing.

Holly Walrath attended the University of Texas for her BA in English and the University of Denver for her MLA in Creative Writing. She is a freelance editor and Associate Director of Writespace, a literary center in Houston, TX.

Ingrid Saavedra graduated from CSU Stanislaus in the fall of 2015 with a BA in Psychology. She currently works with children with special needs and hopes to continue this work upon advancing in her educational career. She enjoys running, writing, and painting.

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Jacqueline Hollcraft is an English Literature graduate student at CSU Stanislaus. She enjoys rebelling against current social norms by being married for nineteen years and having seven amazing children. In addition to reading and writing, she loves eating, drinking, and hiking—especially in Yosemite. She enjoys creating stories of mystery, beauty, and/or truth.

James Berry teaches guitar in Brooklyn, NY. His poetry, fiction, song lyrics, and photography have appeared in *Walrus*, *The Lincoln Underground*, and the 2013, 2014, and 2015 issues of *Penumbra*. He enjoys the ongoing relationship he has with both *Penumbra* and CSU Stanislaus.

James Prenatt is a Baltimore-based writer, five-time recipient of Most Awkward Award, sadomasochistic polyamorous lover, and professional pop-tart cooker.

James Weaver loves *Penumbra*! This is the third issue that he has been featured in after the 2012 and 2015 editions. He has also been published in *Collision: The Intersection of Poetry and Photography* and *Susurrus*. He performs poetry throughout the valley and is currently working on his first chapbook.

Jeffrey Alfier won the 2014 Kithara Book Prize for his poetry collection, *Idyll for a Vanishing River* (2013.) He is also author of *The Wolf Yearling* (2013,) *The Storm Petrel* (2014,) and *The Red Stag at Carrbridge* (forthcoming, Kelsay Books, 2016).

Jen Corrigan graduated from the University of Iowa. She has been accepted into the MA program for Creative Writing at the University of Northern Iowa.

Joan McNerney's poetry has been included in numerous literary magazines such as *Camel Saloon*, *Seven Circle Press*, *Dinner with the Muse*, *Blueline*, also in the anthologies *Bright Hills Press*, *Kind of a Hurricane Press*, and *Poppy Road Review*. She has been nominated three times for Best of the Net.

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

John Grey is an Australian poet and U.S. resident. Recently published in *New Plains Review*, *Big Muddy*, and *Sanskrit*, he has work upcoming in *South Carolina Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Mudfish*, and *Louisiana Literature*.

Jonah Mejia is in seventh grade.

Ken Simpson is an Australian poet whose latest collection, *Patterns of Perception*, was published by *Augur Press* (UK) last January and who has had thirty poems accepted for publication this year. He lives with his family at Lysterfield, a Melbourne suburb, in the state of Victoria.

Ken White retired from the world of advertising, corporate communications, and interactive entertainment to concentrate on writing and community service. Born in Lathrop and raised in Modesto, Ken enjoys telling stories about the Central Valley heartland.

Kevin Diaz graduated from CSU Stanislaus in 2011 with a BA in English. He attends graduate school at National University and is pursuing a single-subject teaching credential and an MA in Education.

Lana Bella has diverse work, both published and forthcoming, in over 120 journals, including *Ann Arbor Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Literary Orphans*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, as well as a chapbook with *Crises Chronicles Press* (Spring 2016).

Leticia Hernandez, a Senior at CSU Stanislaus, is a part of the BFA Sculpture program and loves talking about herself in the third person. She is both the Feminists' Equality Club and Printmaking Club Treasurer, and a part of the Art Club at CSU Stanislaus.

Lucinda Murphy is an illustrator who uses drawing as a way to reflect on experiences, ideas, and narratives.

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Madison Toel is an Art student at CSU Stanislaus. Madison is a Junior and studying to be an Art professor. She loves working with all mediums and is currently experimenting with mixing photographs with printmaking.

Maicel Barsoum is an illustrator, graphic designer, and photographer who finds inspiration from the natural world and from within.

Mantz Yorke lives in Manchester, England. His poems have appeared in *Butcher's Dog*, *Dactyl*, *Dawntreader*, *Lunar Poetry*, *Popshot*, *Prole*, *Revival*, *The Brain of Forgetting*, and *The Stony Thursday Book* magazines; in e-magazines; and in anthologies in the UK, Ireland, and the U.S.

Maria Gonzales is a BFA student with a minor in Geology and is looking forward to creating more art while sneaking as many dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures into her work as possible.

Mariah Esparza is a Senior at CSU Stanislaus finishing up her English BA. She's thinking about the "real world" and how she wants writing to be a part of her experience. She also would like to have a historically noteworthy library. Hopefully, this all pans out for her.

Mariela Gonzalez studied English at CSU Stanislaus and is in the Credential program to teach high-school English. She loves reading in her spare time and hopes to write a book in the near future. She has *Harry Potter* to thank for inspiring her to love the art of literature.

Maritza Diaz was born on August 16, 1995 and is from a very small town known as Delhi, CA. She is trying to improve her skills in mixed-media art. Her preferred mediums are digital and clay, but she strives to better herself in other mediums as well.

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Mark Fisher is a writer, poet, and playwright living in Tehachapi, CA. His column "Lost in the Stars" appears in Tehachapi's *The Loop* newspaper. His plays have appeared on stages around California. His poetry has appeared in *Lummox*, *The San Gabriel Valley Poetry Quarterly*, and *Gutters and Alleyways*.

Maya Obregon is a relatively new writer (in terms of published writing) though she has loved it for many years. She enjoys writing, reading, and listening to music (though she weeps for anyone forced to hear her create it).

Michael J. Shepley is a writer/researcher living in Sacramento, CA. He has done journalism, ads, travel brochures, and the player book for Crawford's first PC wargame. His stories have appeared in *Atlantic Pacific Rev*, *Snail Mail*, and online at *Verdad*. Some fifty poems have appeared in three dozen publications in a decade. He was published recently in *CA Quarterly*, *Muse*, and *Seems*.

Michelle Hartman's work is featured in *Langdon Review of the Arts* in Texas. Her second poetry book, *Irony and Irreverence*, from Lamar University Press, was released in March 2015 and is available on Amazon along with her first book, *Disenchanted and Disgruntled*. She is the editor of *Red River Review*.

Michelle Matthews is a copywriter in Seattle, WA.

MK Chavez writes about the world as it presents itself to her—broken, twisted, and achingly luminous. Nomadic Press will publish her full collection of poetry, *Dear Animal*, in 2016. Chavez co-curates the Berkeley-based monthly reading series *Lyrics & Dirges* and co-directs the Berkeley Poetry Festival.

Natalie Schemmel is a visual artist who depicts herself in her work to discuss issues of femininity and sexuality. Through this exploratory process, she hopes to illuminate truths not only in herself but within the viewer as well.

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Nate Maxson is a writer and performance artist. He is the author of several collections of poetry, including *The Age Of Jive* and most recently *The Whisper Gallery*. He lives in Santa Fe, NM.

Nathan Long has worked in various journals, including *Tin House*, *Story Quarterly*, and *Crab Orchard Review*. Seven of his stories have been finalists for the Glimmer Train Very Short Story Award, and three have been nominated for a Pushcart. He lives in Philadelphia and teaches at Stockton University.

Nikhil Nath has been writing poetry for eighteen years. He has been published in various magazines in India, the U.S., and the UK. Nikhil Nath is his pen name. He lives and works from Kolkata, India. "Write rubbish, but write," said Virginia Woolf. This is Nikhil's maxim for writing.

Noel Daniel has had many names and written many stories. She has very little idea where her life is going, but hopes that writing is always a part of it. She also thinks that someday owning a pug would be rad.

Salvatore Salerno lives in Modesto, CA because everyone must live somewhere. He was awarded the Academy of American Poets University Prize at UNC Greensboro, where he obtained an MFA. His books of poetry are *Sunleaf* and *Inkboat*.

Sean Montalvo is a 21-y/o digital and sketch artist who specializes in both illustrative realism and new-school cartooning.

Seth Jani lives in Seattle, WA and is the founder of Seven Circle Press (www.sevencirclepress.com). His own work has appeared in such places as *The Foundling Review*, *The Hamilton Stone Review*, *Hawai'i, Pacific Review*, and *Gravel*. More about him can be found at www.sethjani.com

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Stephanie Malley is a mother of four and hails from western Pennsylvania. She writes poetry and crochets to avoid dusting.

Summer Krafft is a writer, performer, student, and event coordinator in the Central Valley. She is also the playwright of a One-act entitled *Sanity Dance*. She has been previously published in *NAILED Magazine* and *The Manifest-Station*. Her work tends to explore themes of love, rage, forgiveness, and the body.

Tara Dybas is a fifth-year student at CSU Stanislaus, having taken the 2014-2015 year off for cancer treatment. She is an English major and has a great love for all things literary. She is merely human, though she is not typically aware of it. She's a Gemini, after all.

Tatiana Olivera is a writer, poet, and Pokémon enthusiast who dabbles in graphic design, photography, video editing, and craft-making. She is proud to be 50% Assyrian.

Tejal Patel is currently a Senior at Modesto Christian High School. Art is her greatest passion and one of her defining qualities. She lives to create art to share and inspire people.

Terrence Battle, a CSU Stanislaus Junior, is studying Psychology and Child Development. Native to the Garlic Kingdom of the world, Gilroy, CA he likes long walks on the beach and ice cream. He enjoys looking at the funny side of things.

Terry Mack is a graphic artist and designer perpetually amused and intrigued by technology, gaming, and internet culture, and modern lifestyle in the digital age.

Thomas Larsen has been a fiction writer for fifteen years and his work has appeared in *Newsday*, *Best American Mystery Stories*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *LA Review*. His novels *Flawed* and *Into the Fire* are available through Amazon.

AUTHORS & ARTISTS

Tobi Alfier is a multiple Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee. Current chapbooks are *The Coincidence of Castles* (Glass LyrePress) and *Romance and Rust* (Blue Horse Press). She co-edits *San Pedro River Review* (www.bluehorsepress.com).

Veronica Pulido is a Xicana, wife, mother, and creative enthusiast. Her art revolves around her culture, native tongue, and the effects of love.

Victor Soria lives with his wife, daughters, and dog, where he's lovingly ignored. He spends his time reading, yelling for someone to help find some lost item, and cooking, although everyone else wants pizza. He also teaches English, which gets him out of the house, which his wife appreciates.

Victoria Hardy is an art student at CSU Stanislaus and enjoys working with a variety of art forms such as painting and sculpting.

Vincent Tomeo has been published in *The New York Times*, *Comstock Review*, *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *EDGZ*, *Spires*, *Tiger's Eye*, *ByLine*, *Mudfish*, *The Blind Man's Rainbow*, *The Eovictorian/Cochlea*, *The Latin Staff Review*, and *Grandmother Earth* (VII thru XI).

Yvonne Downs is a young student at CSU Stanislaus. Although studying Business, she has a fascination with and love for the arts. Aside from painting, she also plays the clarinet and composes poetry.

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