



penumbra
2011

Penumbra

2011



Volume 21

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 sunspot. 3. An outlying, surrounding region; periphery; fringe.
[Lat. paene, almost - Lat. umbra, shadow]

Cover:
Winter Hunting Stand
By David Wetherington

Opposite:
Sunrays
By Matthew C. Keevy



Acknowledgments

Penumbra is published once a year by the students of California State University, Stanislaus. We accept submissions from all over the world; contributors do not need to be affiliated with the University.

The *Penumbra* editorial staff would like to thank Instructionally Related Activities for their continued funding of this publication. We are also grateful to the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the English Department, and Reprographics for their enthusiastic support.

The *Penumbra* staff would like thank Professor Jamie Norwood for her guidance through the processes of publication.

We invite submissions of poetry, short fiction, plays, and artwork. All artwork, with the exception of the cover, will be printed in black and white. Submission packets are due by February 1st of each year. We are unable to return written work.

For complete submission guidelines please visit the *Penumbra* website at www.csustan.edu/english/penumbra

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Resistance

By Anokina Shahbaz

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” Socrates

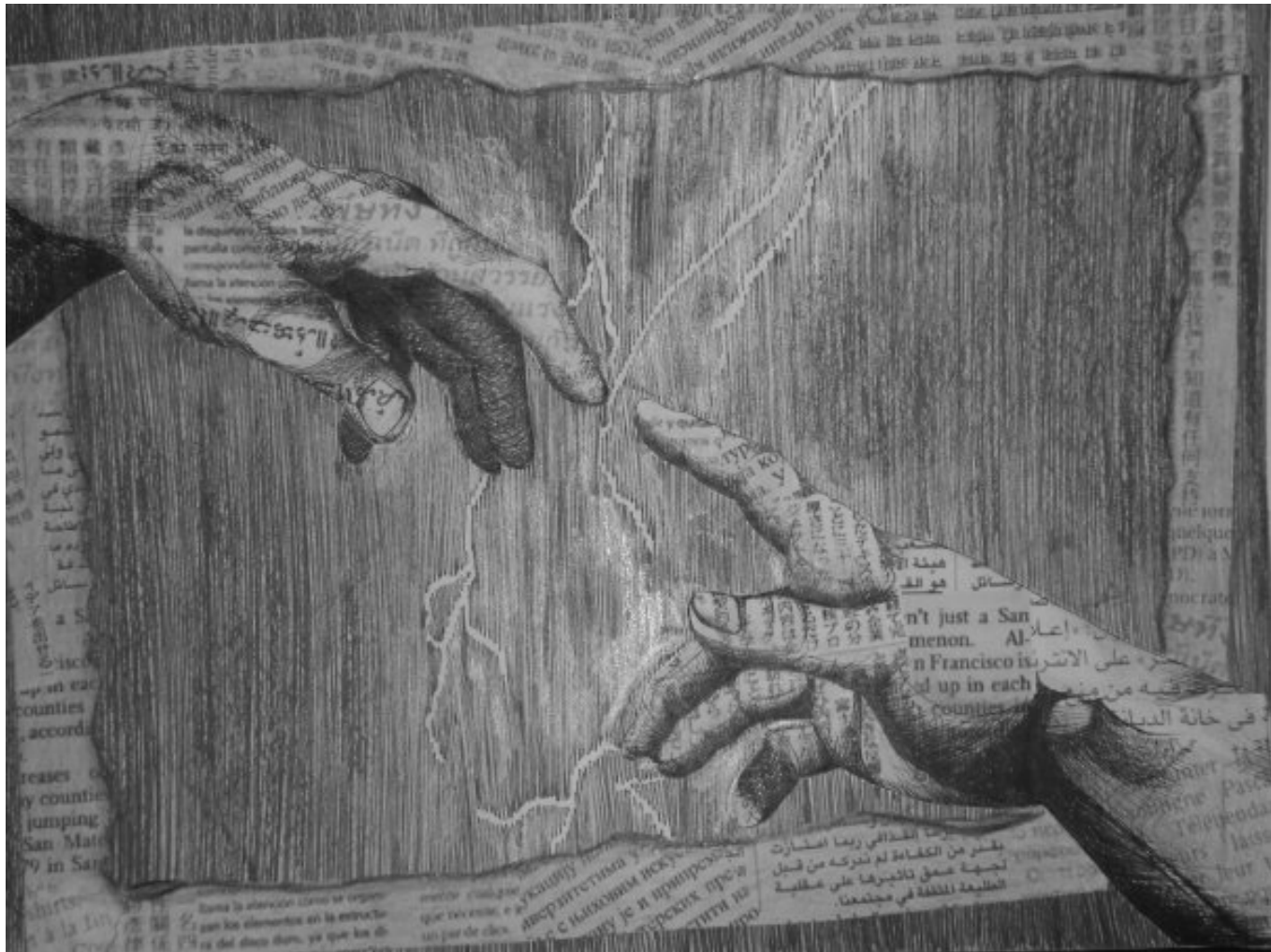
Today I stood in the middle of myself
Wanting to run,
For I cannot keep my own company
At times.
There was no reflection
Only, resistance
To the footsteps I must walk in,
The endless conversations
I must have with myself
for growth.

I begin, over and over again
To ascend
To places I have not yet visited,
Yearning to grasp onto an openness
I can manifest.
Yet, too often, I retreat
Discontent.

The petals that have unfolded
Fragile, eager,
Exposing themselves to the sun
Laying bare the vulnerability
Of being,
Of trying yet again,
Have begun to close up
From the ease that comes
When seduced by fear.

The familiar roles we play
Are tempting.
Silk robes worn as skin
Covering up the wounds;
Echoes replace inner voices
And the wisdom within;
The band steals our song -
The one we have been singing
Since birth.

The curtain opens,
And we can only hope
We have memorized our lines.



One

By Tatjana Mendoza

Ugly Dawn

By Ellen Peckham

An ugly dawn unrolled into the room,
molding with leaden foil the furniture
and the thrown-down clothes,
trying on my shoes.

This morning light has no luminescence,
refracts nothing at all.
In total silence it hammers to monochrome
objects which, even in the dark, vibrate color.

So unconvincing is this dawn
the garden lantern's fooled,
its sensor reading night
so still - at ten - the lights are on.

Before People

By Marina Weighill

Streetlights dimmed from years of use,
skinny trees embellished with pink buds sleeping
held up by two poles
and some black rubber-like material
because, of course, a tree cannot hold itself up.

It is 3:30 in the A.M. I look around and the coast is clear.
I lay down on the asphalt, the hard cold pavement beneath.
I close my eyes and envision what used to be.
I surrender myself to the images and feelings
that are rushing through my mind, stimulating my senses.
In an instant, I'm there;
I can suddenly feel the world as it once was.
The earth belongs to everyone and animals are unafraid to roam.
I try to feel the lush green grass tickling my toes,
and the summer breeze move about my face.
It smells of honeysuckle and damp tree bark.
I feel myself longing for what used to be;
longing to touch the world when it was pure.

Before people, I imagine the world just sat quiet, clean, and happy.
Not yet polluted by the human touch.
Letting my mind wander further into the morning
I try to see everything.

My mind expanding, opening up to all the images
traveling around the vast space of my mind. Oceans, beaches, forests,
mountains, deserts, trees, and flowers; I can see them all.

A blinding light, a honk, and a screech brings me back to the real world.
My eyes open to a tall man in pajamas standing above me, yelling at me like I'm crazy.
Maybe I am a little crazy.
Who lays in the street at this hour? I walk away apologizing to the tall man.
Grasping the last fragments left of my dream,
I walk into an empty house and sit.
It seems the only escape I have is my mind.

The Love Song

By Katie Billiet

I wanted to write you a birthday song. I wanted to write something that would sing between your ears and out your eyes only so that you could breathe it back into your system. I wanted to write something that mattered for someone who mattered more than anyone who would never matter could ever dream of mattering. I wanted to feel you, to feel your age growing older and wiser inside of you. And then I wanted to feel as though you were growing all because of one silly little birthday song that I couldn't even write. Right? But instead, I took a trip to the past and we danced. We danced to the birthday song that I had never written, but you had always known.

Be Like...

By Anokina Shahbaz

Be like the sunrise
that lights up the paths
of the journeys you will take

Be like autumn leaves
unafraid of change
prepared to soar

Be like a mountain peak
majestic and noble
unwavering in the storm

Be like pillars of a cathedral
holding up your integrity
standing for something

Be like the first brick
laid down for a house
to have a foundation

Be like the song
of a nightingale
poetry in motion

Be like the bridges
built to connect
meeting another halfway

Be like a lighthouse
pouring light into the darkness
showing the way back home

Be like the rain
that cleanses the dust
off the soul of the earth

Be like the rosebud
that opens itself up to the sky
and perfumes anything that touches it

Be like the peace
that always surrounds you
ever tranquil, ever content



Abandoned Delta House
By Adrian Mendoza

And so I sold it, emptied it with grief and vengeance.

Once almost

burned it to the ground lighting a fire of gleanings from our

Shelter Island beach walks.

Visited pretending cheer, gave hugs that could not be returned,

pretend “dates” at the cafeteria

and, coming home, cried and drank, raged and cowered.

Then went back.

And so I sold it – our palace, our creation, our center of peace.

How could I maintain a garden where so much salt fell,

fertilize what lives as you do not?

Our little deaths grow ‘round compressing our flesh,

decompose it, preparing us .

There are no first acts now, no catalyst for drama, denouement,

only curtains, curtains.

So after all of this how could I, how could I,

how could I

leave you to the needles and tubes, the kind people

with no sense of you,

who never knew your intellect, humor, musicianship, heroism

(only told to me by others)?

And keep coming home which was no home

without you and not moved, not sold?

Shelter

By Anokina Shahbaz

the ground kissed you when you fell
caressed your pain with its dust
and paved your wounds

reduced to fragments,
every broken piece of you
formed into a melody
that sang for me

take the damaged bits
that once shaped your essence
and plant them as seeds
in places that speak to you, my love
so they may yield a new earth
 there is no other purpose
 behind falling
 but this

give me your bruises
to paint with
on a canvas that has been waiting
to heal you
the only masterpiece I see

is our limitations
in breathtaking hues

your scars
fragile, magnificent
are my poetry
engraving words only souls can hear

lay bare your shadows
underneath the sun
so they may come to light
peel off the cracked layers
of your skin
and let me be your shelter

smile as you break
knowing,
I am here to break your fall



Moonlight Serenade
By Michelle Gein

A Storm Within

By Jordan Scott Gausling

Winds sweep across the suburban landscape, the storm exists more in the heart than any cloud could bring. The fluffy exterior hides a cold darkness within, an unseen enemy waiting with the hand of fate to ground hopes that sail too high, higher than we deserve; but life, the idea of consciousness, is grander than any notion that we conceive. We often forget that possibilities are endless, scattered to every direction the wind changes yet again and changes quicker than any reaction we're capable of.



Listen
By Tatjana Mendoza

Atrey-ha & Laneia

By Scott Taylor Jr.

I was sitting by the campfire with Grandfather and it was a cold night, I remember that much. Oh, and I also remember the story that he told. It was one that I really couldn't forget even though he only told it to me once. I eventually passed it on to my own children and hopefully it will continue down the line and Grandfather will be happy, smiling from the Spirit World, to see that his story kept getting better each time it was told. Grandfather isn't a bad storyteller; it's just that I'm so much better. It was really the only thing I was good at. If I relied on my hunting skills alone, I would've starved many times over. Usually I would trade a story for a rabbit or half a deer. That's what kept me alive most of my life.

"Sit still, Little Owl. Grandfather has an important story." The fire reflected in Grandfather's eyes always scared me, even when I was sixteen. It made him look more terrible than he really was. There was something about stories that changed him. Made him appear eternal. "It is about love."

I remember moaning or rolling my eyes, maybe it was both. "Grandfather, I want to hear about the Warriors of the Sky," I pleaded. That was my favorite story; forget about this gushy love business.

"It is time you learn about things that are stronger than war. It has blood in it, Little Owl. You'll like it." Grandfather cleared his throat and then began. "Atrey-ha and Laneia were about your age and very much in love. They would run out into the woods together, dance together, always in each other's sight. There was never a moment when one was not without the other. Atrey-ha hunted for her, made sure that she was provided for." Grandfather looked at me and smiled. "One day you will have to provide for a woman. You can't feed her with stories in the winter and expect her to live. You are a good storyteller already, but without food, Little Owl, she will just be an entertained dead person." Grandfather always had a neat way of putting things. "But that is for later."

He continued. "One day in the summer, they were playing around a cliff—"

"Oh, I know where this is going. She falls off the cliff."

"You're right. But I'm the storyteller tonight, so act like you don't know what happens. Pretend that you are a great hunter and a horrible storyteller, so that you can't see these things before they happen." He cleared his throat again. "They were

playing near a cliff and he was chasing Laneia. She lost her footing and slipped off, into a large canyon below. Atrey-ha ran down to the valley of the canyon and there she lay, dead.”

“Was there blood? Is that where the blood comes in?” I was starting to get excited.

“Yes, there was blood, Little Owl. She fell down a cliff. There would be blood and her neck was broken so bad that her head was facing backward.”

“Eww. That’s gross, Grandfather. You’re going to give me bad dreams.”

Grandfather laughed. “That’s what you wanted.” I’m sure if Dream catchers were a part of our tribe, he would’ve given me one for that night. “Atrey-ha cried and cried for many nights and many days. He even tried to seek ways to bring her back. He asked people in the village and in neighboring villages about black magic and ways that might bring her back.”

“But if he brings her back, won’t her head be on backwards? She would bump into trees and stuff.”

“Sssh.” Grandfather poked the fire with a stick. Embers rose like released spirits. “He found an old man who knew the Ancient Magic and went into his tepee. The inside smelt like sage and skunk and he made the strongest potions and powders in the nation. Atrey-ha asked him what he could do to bring her back and the old man replied, ‘Kill an elk and release its blood into a bowl. Find a walnut tree and paint all the leaves red with the blood. When the last leaf is painted red, she will return.

“Atrey-ha was so excited that he might’ve found a way for Laneia to return. He quickly killed an elk and slit its throat, allowing the lifeblood to be collected. But, Atrey-ha was saddened because he didn’t know what a walnut tree looked like. He never paid attention when his mother showed him the names of the Tree Spirits. He looked around but there was no one in the woods; he had to hurry because the blood was starting to thicken.”

“Why a walnut tree?”

“A walnut tree is the Spirit of Lost Love. He finally ran into a coyote and he asked the coyote if he could show him where a walnut tree was and in return, the coyote could have his elk that he killed. The coyote was a trickster animal and he wanted the elk very badly but even the coyote had no idea what a walnut tree looked like; he must not have listened to his mother, either. So the coyote took him to an oak tree and said that it was a walnut tree and Atrey-ha believed him. He told the coyote where the elk was.

“Atrey-ha quickly started to paint the mighty oak’s leaves with the blood using only his hands. He had to climb all the way to the top to make sure that every last leaf was painted and then he climbed back down and waited. He waited and waited

and waited.”

“How long did he wait, Grandfather? How long?” I was expecting hours or days.

“Atrey-ha waited for three months. And near the end of the three months, he was starving and very thin but he wouldn’t leave that painted oak tree; he still waited and waited for Laneia to return. His starvation was causing him to see great visions and at one time, the Veil was parted and he could see her. He wanted to embrace her so badly, but he was not a spirit, so he just passed through her and it felt like he was walking through cobwebs. He was near death and if he would’ve died naturally he would’ve passed to the Spirit World and would’ve been with her forever but that was not his fate. He couldn’t wait any longer. He grabbed a sharp rock and pressed it to his throat. Atrey-ha could feel his blood coursing through his body the harder he pressed. He slit his throat and all his blood streamed down to his feet. He fell...then he died.”

“He did this just to see some girl?” I didn’t understand. Now that I’ve been married for many years, the story makes more sense.

“She was not just any girl, Little Owl. She was Laneia, his true love. Since he took his own life, he wasn’t allowed into the Spirit World, and he could never reunite with Laneia. But somehow, after death, he knew that the coyote tricked him. He learned, through the grave, that what he painted was an oak and not a walnut tree. His spirit was not going to rest until he could be with his Laneia again. So, every year, on exactly the same day Atrey-ha died, he goes to all the trees in the world and paints them red, hoping that one of them is a walnut tree that will bring Laneia back.”

“Is that why the leaves turn red? It’s Atrey-ha hoping that he can bring Laneia back?”

“That is why the leaves turn red.”

“But what about when they turn yellow?”

“The leaves turn red when Atrey-ha uses the blood of a living animal, an animal from our world. When the leaves are painted gold, it means that he hunted and killed an animal from the Spirit World and painted the tree with the spirit animal’s blood.”

“Oh, okay. So, he was a great hunter.”

“Yes. He hunted animals from both worlds, hoping that Laneia would one day return as long as he painted the right tree.”

“That story wasn’t so bad, Grandfather.” After that, my interest in hunting slowly increased and so did my aptitude at telling stories. Grandfather must’ve known that I was a true lover at heart. After that story, my love for hunting increased. I

wanted to help out Atrey-ha with my kills. And, until this day, as an old man, after every kill, I rub a small amount of blood on the leaf of a walnut tree in tribute to Atrey-ha who must be forced to wander the earth and when I see how many leaves turn red or gold every year, I think of how powerful love really is.

Huesitos—Little Bones

By Monica E. Martinez

I remember, Huesitos—little bones.

I remember when I was eight. A child with nothing: an empty belly, home, heart, and pocket.

I remember pretending to go to school but never actually going in and rather leaving to go play marbles.

Leaving because the teacher never liked me and because to her I was brainless.

I remember never wanting to go home and instead wandering in the streets till the day grew dark and grey as I did too, inside.

I was eight; I had nothing and no one to go home to.

I was eight when I left home and I was eight when I was forced to grow from a boy with no shoes into a man and learn that with the sweat of my forehead I'd earn a meal.

A tortilla, pupusas, cheese.

To my teacher back home I was brainless and useless, but to others I was like a fresh, strong mule. My callused hands built my future and my aged face, and wrinkles tell my story:

the path I went through.

Two generations have passed and now it is your turn, huesitos, to make the sun shine above your head.

Dream. Discover.

Achieve.

Always dream BIG.

Let your dreams form you, with them discover life, find yourself.

You: a needle in a haystack.

Let your dreams open the door you wish to open; let them be your flashlight.

Achieve what you want.

The deepest desires triggered in you do not take for granted.
Appreciate those around you and never forget your origins,
give back what you once received, spread the gift of learning and wanting to learn,
the gift of giving,
the same way you received what you were once offered.

An opportunity: to prosper and thrive.

Reach those who are in need and those who share your same vision.

With callused hands, I built my future; with a pencil in yours and a blank paper before you as your future, you'll illustrate yours.

I reflect on my life, on the hardships, but in your eyes I see hope.

The things I went through were hard but to you

I say: **Do not** give up.

Treat yourself to the sweet life.

One is never too old.

Never be afraid to be you.

Don't hide your gift.

The path before you is set.

Take the initiative to do what you have to.

You are not alone.

The faded, far away dream you once had as a child is now clearer than ever.

Though you may feel like a little bird at the edge of your nest,

I say: huesitos spread your little wings like the eagle and soar.

Soar the skies and experience the different winds.

From highest to highest you'll go.

... There is always hope. You are tomorrow's hope.



Cathedral
By David Wetherington

Tawny Goes to Church

By Kimberly Pippa

She went to church
for the free ice cream.
The priest told her,
Between licks of cold vanilla,
that Jesus had been looking
diligently
for his dear lost lambs.

She envisioned his wanderings,
sturdy sandals crunching
over fallen leaves of autumn
sounding distinctly
like her teeth
biting into
the remnants of her cone.

Sensing repentance,
black-robed arms gestured invitation,
ignored her glances towards
the soft-serve machine.

Purposefully,
she stepped closer,
grasped his outstretched hands
and,
with no fear of recrimination,
Asked—
“May I have another?”

Roadkill

By Elizabeth Coard

I'm not a fast talker, but my mind can do back flips around the corner at lightning speeds when you start to lie to me, so you might want to put on the brakes and look both ways first, ask yourself what the consequences are if you go left when you ought to be going right. Take a good look at that blinking yellow caution sign and yield the right way, because the oncoming traffic behind that little white lie you are racing to tell, is the dividing line between us, headlights inching out into cross traffic, ready – to run you down.

When Failure Comes

By Leola Washington

He tapped out last spring
underneath a Pine-Sol scented mountain
of clothes

Another failed sense of glory,
a real about-face fake center
rush-down touch down baked
right into my pie crust.

A flicker lights on,
up and down down and up
he runs up stairs to turn
the lights off.
Candles to make up for another failed pass-
in the sheets.

Wound up, and up tight,
he's locked out of pension rates,
designed for some glorified rate of change

Mildew grows back the same way it came down
back up stairs designed for when failure comes round.



Pretty Predator
By Ann Strahm

What Color Is The Ocean Really?

By Sheila D. Landre

Is it blue?

In places it is

the thickened daytime sky
a singing blue
packed layer upon layer,
pushing down its heavy indigo
upon oblivious
bottom dwellers.

In places it is

clear turquoise gems
streaked randomly
with earth and sand.
Reach down from the sky,
ring pieces gleaming
in a silver band.

In places it is

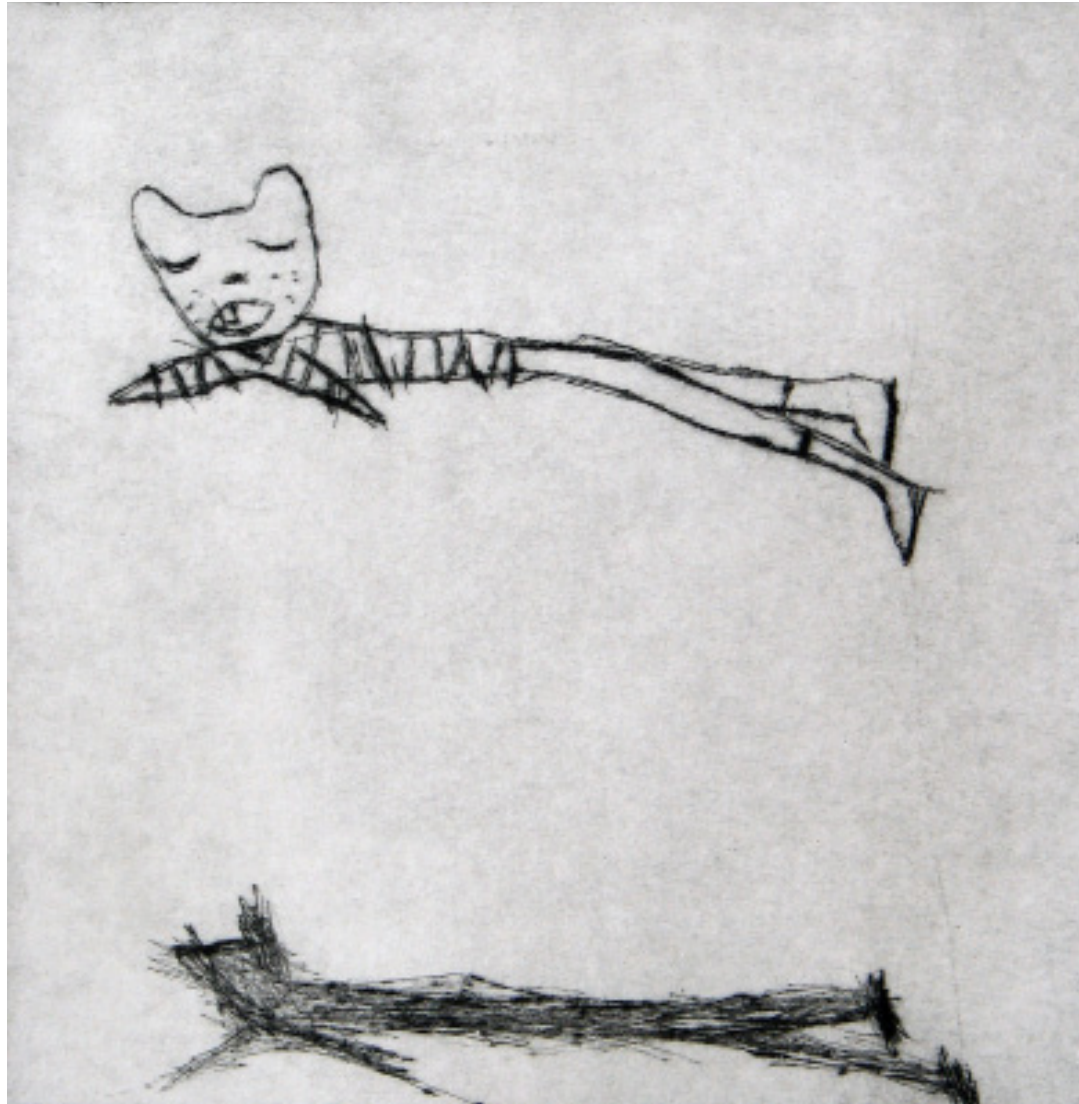
the greenish gray
of twisted winter branches
snow dusted
white caps exposing
something shrill and sharp,
longing to be ice.

In places it is

smooth as midnight
pitching back the moon's light.
Stars dive in and climb out
to sit refreshed and dazzling,
dripping, waiting
for the ride to end.

Scoop the ocean

up in your hands,
feel it pull the world
from underneath you.
In this place it is
as clear as tears,
pale as a memory lost.



Dreaming
By Joshua Bolin

When Celia Falls To Sleep

By Gabriel P. Flores

The lights dim down and sound escapes
when Celia falls to sleep.

And in that sleep the dreams come fast
of her memories desired.

And among her sleep-found resting self
the shadows dance; they motivate.

But one lone intruder lies in wait—
when Celia falls to sleep.

She'll never know since she can't see
the one whose shadow lies.

This poor girl aloft in dream,
with a cynical figure darkly.

And if I could I'd save her so,
but she won't release me out.

You see—

I'm a manifestation of a dream,
when Celia falls to sleep.

He inches closer and makes no sound
as Celia smiles and twists her shoulders.

That twist is me trying to warn her,
but this trespasser stalks her over.

And she is lost in wild dreams

as he begins to touch and move her.
My yells they do not speak to her!
I cannot wake her, shake her, move her!
I go unheard in my cage of dream,
this intruder has control.
And it hurts me all over to say I can't be there—
when Celia falls to sleep.

A Small Pink & White Sock

By Elizabeth Coard

in this pile of dirty laundry—
he just shrugs when I ask.
Lies from a lifetime consummate
the truth of a sordid, toxic history.
Their DNA and fibers twist together
and wring out the unspoken truth
which no super-brand detergent
can un-stain, wash clean as new.

Deception is not biodegradable
or a renewable form of energy.
The agitators are working hard to
shake it loose, filter and separate
stinking lies from soft inner threads,
but so much has unraveled, seams
and lining torn apart beyond mending,
there is nothing to hang on the line,
nothing left to offer the warm sun
or the gutsy autumn breeze.
Nothing to iron out before sundown.

The Man Puts Baking Soda in His Socks to Impress the Girl

By Tobi Cogswell

And does it matter?

He'll take off his shoes,
his socks blinding white;
toes wiggle like mice
freed from their prison
of rubber and heat.

Does her nose wrinkle?

No, only her cheeks
pinken as she too
removes her sandals.
Their feet touch shyly
as he opens the

wine he has traveled
with from far away.

They both need courage
as they learn about
whether their first hug
tells their history

from time before time,
or if she is not
the woman he thinks
she can be, or is -
the girl at the dance
who tapped him lightly,

asked him to dance slow
to a song he will
never forget, one
that made him a man.
The scent of her hair
etched everlasting

in his bones, his life.
White powder footprints
guide his steps toward her,
and she will never
let him go, she is
his soft place, his dream.

Unsaid

By L. Rigdon

“Your hair is longer
than it was before.”

*I love the smell,
the feel of it between my fingers.*

“Not that much longer,
I don’t think.”

*He’s changed the pictures;
I don’t recognize half of them.*

“Oh yes it is,
and thicker too.”

*She never did know
how to take a compliment.*

“Must be that new shampoo
I started a few days ago.”

*This new place
of his is too small.
Hardly room enough for us.*

“No, I don’t think so.”

I want to hold you.

“What do you think of the place?”

How many boxes did it take
for all the books?”

He still kept the one

I gave him.

“The entire place was filled with boxes.”

Let me hold you.

“I still don’t know
how we found room.”

“Looks like you two
did a great job.”

She always was the cluttered sort;

it suits him well.

Stand By For Further Developments

By Amanda Heinrichs

My dad said that this is the year I am going to find love. He based this solely on the fact that I sneezed three times on New Year's Day. Yes, my respiratory system turned prophetic on January first.

The first time I sneezed, my dad said, "*Salud.*"

Now any high school student can tell you that's what you say in Spanish when someone sneezes. What they don't teach you in Spanish class (which makes me wonder what other practicalities they decide to leave out) is that the second sneeze should be followed by "*Dinero*" and the third "*Amore.*" (Apparently, if you sneeze four times, you're going to die within two weeks. Just kidding. You just start over).

I should say, however, that the logical conclusion you have drawn from this, that my Dad must belong to some historically Spanish speaking ethnicity, is completely untrue. Yes, to add to this perfect non-sequitur, my Dad is completely white. Pink, even, when he gets too much sun. He delights in startling waitresses at Mexican restaurants by ordering in competent Spanish and then carrying on short conversations. Unfortunately, these waitresses often look expectantly around the table, and then I have to take a sip of my water or fiddle with my napkin. The perfect irony of this, though, is the fact that (thanks to my mom's Indian genes) I often am assumed to be Hispanic or Latina and therefore Spanish-speaking. After three years of high school Spanish, I still don't get the difference between past and past perfect or whatever all of those tenses are called.

But I digress. Third sneeze: *amore*. So, this is definitely the year I "find love." Sounds exciting, right? I mean, it must be true. The nose knows and all that (sorry).

As I got up from the table after those sneezes of destiny, my dad said, "Well, anyway, statistically there's a good chance of you having a relationship soon." Translation: "You're eighteen and have never had a boyfriend; something's bound to happen before long."

Thanks, Dad, for that reminder. So much for destiny.

“Ode” to My Lonely Sock in the Laundry Basket

By Katelyn Holladay

Dear sock,
White top
and only slightly soiled bottom,
I found you under my bed
whilst I was vacuuming.
Your brothers were already in the wash
and much past the point for you to join them.
So now you sit in the basket
by yourself
and I pity you in your loneliness.
I'll be a good parent
and give you some company tomorrow.

brother

By Michelle Mathews

i see a photo of you
and i realize it's been

one year and five months
since six feet of you
pulled me to your blue
hanes crewneck

i smelled grease
and Virginia grass
that took me back
to broken crayons,
the lines you ignored
and i colored in

you, the saunter
to my goosstep
you, the last laugh
to my dumb joke

you, now more man
than child
always more brave
than i
able to smile natural
as someone else shoots

To the Student Parked Next to Me Last Night:

By Kathy Gasaway

I couldn't help but notice,
as I slipped between our cars,
your box of Better Cheddars
on the front seat.

Coming hungry from a late afternoon class,
that red box glowed like a beacon
through a fog of forced fasting.

I couldn't help but wonder,
did you crave the banana on my dash
as much as I coveted
your crackers?



Ink
By Matthew C. Keevy

A Few Variations on the Seven Basic Plots

By Sheila D. Landre

1. Overcoming the Monster 2. The Quest 3. Journey and Return 4. Comedy 5. Tragedy 6. Rebirth 7. Rags to Riches

Overcoming a monster in order to return to one's origin.

Overcoming one's ragged origins in order to be reborn as
a symbolically richer person.

Some people set off in a vehicle in order to find that magic something
which they think will make them rich. They don't.
Instead they come home—reborn, happy and wiser.

A comic misunderstanding which leads to death.

A comic death which leads to misunderstandings.
Parodies of tragedies which then become comedies,
an easy transformation in most cases.

A rags to riches story of a heroic monster who is reborn after a tragic series of
misunderstandings on his way back home.

A monster who starts looking for something which will bring about his redemption.
Because of misunderstandings, people are killed along the way tragically
or comically.

People who have been killed by a monster seek revenge.

A love story is always a comedy until someone dies.

Coming of age is always overcoming the monster while being reborn.

Sometimes we must laugh at our own tears or else
be overcome by our own tragedy.

Our real lives are usually devoid of plot.

We are always looking for ways to make our lives more like fiction,
but our efforts often end tragically
or comically.

an ode to ugly nature

By Katie Billiet

oh, dead bug, squashed
on my windshield, so brave
to battle the fiberglass
and be sent to the grave.
blood of nectar,
wings of steel
tell me, oh dead one,
how does being dead feel?



Mushrooms
By Lucinda Summerville

Aliens in our clothes

By Jesse Wolfe

Even post re-entry, when we've cooled off—
Prone—washcloths on foreheads,
Though we may never again be delirious
As when we leapt, sans chutes, from our furthest bluffs—
*I am more desperate for you, than you
For me. I'm poorer than you see.*
Cardsharps in a trance, no other game nearby,
All our previous schemes run dry,
I'm still supremely confident.

But wary, too. I think of us,
Then and now, as different species, tethered
By habit, memory, and the strength of three words.
How firm is the rope
Between whom you seem to be tonight
In the rational glare of the kitchen light,
And whomever you might catapult toward?
Of course I believe your promises
Of being held tight in this job and home
By something stronger than conscious choice.
And yes, we're the finest couple I've seen:

More or less one mind, androgynous,
One female side turned outward to the world,
Another in bloom behind its male exterior
(Or choking for lack of air).
I grant all this. Who else does not appear
Bored with each other after six months or a year,
Searching for separate galaxies to explore
In secret friendships, books, unspoken thoughts,
And for their Hondas, separate parking spots?

It's easy enough to say
"They married much too young. No wonder they're nearly done."
"They were doomed from the start: his prick's a monster;
His aim in life, to slake its appetite."
—To stand apart and sneer
In pretend compassion, to congratulate ourselves
For avoiding their particular sins.
But what can I say "I promise" today
If I fear, when you turn to collect on the check,
You'll find the signatory no longer exists?

I'm almost eager to apologize
For whatever torture I'll devise for us
When I awake in ten or twenty years
To find an alien dressing in my clothes,
To learn how hopeless were our current vows
At reining errant pronouns in
And launching you and me
Into any possible contingency
Intact in the love we're molding now.

Bird Light Boy

By Devreaux Baker

My brother said he was deployed
to someplace he didn't know,
we all sat as though we were
a part of the world of last things.
It would be the last time we sat in our usual places
around a dinner table that once belonged
to someone's dead great aunt.

I've been deployed was a sign
hanging at the entrance
to some all night express
from here to eternity,
no conductor, and the throttle pushed
into overdrive.

For a moment we all looked transparent,
a renaissance painting when the painting works
and light seems to shine
from the inside out so everything touched by it
wants to pause there forever.

Outside one bird kept repeating
The same note and my mind
raced backwards through time
to some scratchy summer
when on a dare our brother climbed
into the tallest tree in our yard, until
he disappeared from sight and the rest
of us stood diminished in the empty space
he left behind.

When our mother began to clear
the table, our father pushed his chair back
and set free a small sound that escaped
from some place deep inside his chest,
as though the heart was gifted with speech.
Both of them stood smaller now
and the rest of us just sat, holding onto light
and the one note a bird sang
to welcome morning.



Prezaki sto Paggaki
By Vasilis Markosian

Ruthless Destruction

By Samantha Rose Meroney

Ruthless McCormick never smiled. At least, she'd never smiled when I was looking, or in any picture I'd ever seen of her. She certainly wasn't smiling now: feet planted firmly in my doorway, green eyes like laser beams, searing holes in my sweater. That was another thing she never did, look you in the eye. The only time Ruthless McCormick ever made eye contact with someone was when she was about to destroy them.

That's how she got her name, incidentally. Back when she was just Ruth, in the days of monkey bars and kickball, she solidified her reputation for eternity the day that Ricky Lakowski decided to hurl one of those big, red, chicken-scratched rubber balls at her head. He had a crush on her—it was easy for us boys to have a crush on her back then, when she looked like a human, with normal long, brown, thin hair, and clothes that her parents picked out for her. I remember the sound the ball made as it smacked against her purple hair band, an impossibly loud pow that seemed to reverberate across the entire field.

Her green laser beams swept slowly across the entire population of Runner Elementary, scanning the faces they passed until they locked onto Ricky. He sneered and cackled, turning his head to his friends and high-fiving everyone in sight. Ruth remained absolutely still for what must have been a full five minutes, before slowly and evenly walking across the brown and green grass towards the red ball. When she had it between her flexed fingers, she paced for a minute, head lowered. Finally, she found the rock she wanted, bent her knees, picked it up gingerly, and brought it down on the ball with one swift motion.

The entire student body and I watched as she dropped the rock and made once again for the form of Ricky Lakowski, who'd instantly forgotten the existence of Ruth, his friends now animatedly discussing whatever had seemed important to them at the time. The big red ball was slowly losing air with a soft, carrying hiss. I'm sure Ricky had no idea what was coming for him, but he certainly understood a second later when Ruth, who'd been ripping the hole in the rubber bigger and bigger as she stalked across the field, grabbed his shirt collar and roughly shoved him into the dirt. She was on top of him before any of us registered what she was up to, her fingers tugging the edges of the ball down around Ricky's ears, until finally his entire head was covered.

She'd lost a week's worth of recess for that stunt, and the principal had given her parents a stern lecture. But Ricky Lakowski never picked on her again, and Ruth became Ruthless as easily as snake venom leaks into the blood stream. As the grades flew by, and all of us moved from elementary to middle school and then to high school, her wardrobe darkened and darkened until it was mostly pitch black, and her hair got brighter and brighter until you weren't sure whether she'd come to school with the same purple as the day before, or if she'd dyed it overnight to a lime green. The last thing I ever expected now, ten years out of high school and ten shades even darker in apparel, was Ruthless McCormick knocking at my door.

Apparently she didn't feel the need to explain her presence, eyes focused on the center of my chest, arms crossed upon her thin t-shirt. It had the emblem of skull and crossbones, but done in tie-dye, with heart shaped holes for the eye sockets. She was sucking on her lip ring, something I'd seen her do through many class periods at Marigold High. Her jagged bangs quivered every time she blinked, brushing her long lashes against the hair as if in brutal assault.

"Ruthless." My voice sounded flabbergasted. I've always secretly thought that opening the door and saying someone's name upon recognition was idiotic sounding, but there I was doing it, so it must be an innane human reaction. "Hi."

"Paulie." Her voice was low, but feminine, and her lips twisted wryly. I winced at the usage of my old nickname—only the other guys on the basketball team ever called me Paulie, because of my long, slender legs when I was a teenager, which always made everyone snicker as I dribbled the ball back and forth across the court. At least, everyone snickered until I ducked and diverted around them to score.

"You gonna invite me in, or would you rather stand here all night?" One eyebrow arched, disturbing her hairline. I was surprised to see that it was, for Ruthless, a normal looking color, or at least most of it was. Under the blonde I could vaguely see hints of ice blue hugging her neck and splaying across her shoulders.

"Yeah, yeah." I stood aside, and she barged in full-speed ahead; I stared as she headed into the living room, beelined it for the sofa, and plunked onto the cushions, all while keeping her arms in front of her chest.

I realized I still had my hand on the door, and quickly closed it, pausing before turning back. Her being here was like watching a white buffalo trot across a traffic intersection.

"You want a beer or something?" I ran my fingers through my hair. Ruthless shook her head after a moment's consideration. I wanted a beer, badly, so I turned my back on the living room and tredded to the refrigerator, cracking open a Coor's Light and letting the crisp, cool air crash into my face. When I'd made my way back across the hall, Ruthless was standing next to the wooden bookshelf in the corner, a silver picture frame in her small hands.

“What are you doing?” I felt more unsettled than I sounded; I knew what picture she must be looking at and didn’t want to think about it. She didn’t look up at me, keeping her eyes on the image in front of her face, lip ring no longer moving.

I let out my breath and replaced Ruthless on the sofa. The auburn curtains on the front window masked what little light there was left of the day, making the room dimmer than necessary. I was silently grateful for this effect. While I’d never exactly been a neat freak, I usually kept the house pretty tidy; for the last month and twelve days dust had slowly fogged the air and jumbles of clutter had somehow slipped through my fingers and accumulated on the shelves and floor.

I should have started picking up the empty beer bottles off the coffee table and making the room more presentable now that I had company, but instead I took a long swig of my beer before shoving my sweater sleeves to my elbows and pressing my fingers into my eyes. Maybe if I kept this position I could pretend I was still alone. I was focusing on breathing when I felt the cushion under me shift slightly to the right. I reluctantly brought my face up from my hands.

She had the picture still in her palms, cupped around the shiny frame with a care I’d never attributed to Ruthless. I felt the heat of her leg against mine; she was wearing grey jean shorts, and I was wearing thin khakis. I tried to set my gaze on something else, but eventually they found their way to the picture.

The couple and their surroundings were tinted a slight grey, the light, which should have brightened colors, seemed instead to mute them. Their smiles were wide, cheeks pressed against each other. He had his hands on her waist, and she had laid her palms against his chest. In the background you could see a wooden dining table through a doorway, newly finished, and on the other side a large wedding photo, the image for some reason blurred; but I knew it well, knew it was the couple standing in the hallway.

I took the picture from Ruthless, our fingertips brushing against each other for a sharp, electric moment. The woman’s eyes were at half-mast, heavy with a relaxation that only accompanies true contentment. The man, in contrast, was wide in every feature, his bright blue eyes open enough to see a rim of white around the irises, his lips parted so far you could almost see every tooth. They were dressed in tattered, paint splattered clothes—his blue and yellow jersey flecked with cream and gold, and she had a streak of pale yellow across her bicep.

I swallowed, muscles feeling as if they were swollen and rough. His hair fell across his forehead sloppily, untamed in that way girls always like. I fingered a strand of my own hair, knowing the similarities. Lisbeth once told me that my brother and I had exactly the same texture, thickness, and color of hair—even the same cowlick that made a lazy part at the front right side

of our heads. Being a hairdresser, she obviously had the authority concerning the subject, and we'd acceded to all her claims with teasing acceptance.

The frame made a jarring crack as I quickly discarded it on the coffee table in front of us. "So I guess you heard." I rested my elbows on my knees, looking at the grains in the wood. When I was met with silence, I forced myself to turn my head towards her.

There were slight wrinkles in between her eyebrows, and when I looked at her she met my gaze fully, the light green mesmerizing in its shocked confusion. Her lips parted. I didn't understand what had prompted this effect. Finally she shook her head, blinking at me very slowly.

"Lisbeth was my best friend." Ruthless revealed in slight incredulity. Of course I heard, was the unsaid remainder of her statement.

Ruthless McCormick and Lisbeth Norland Warner were probably the epitome of polar opposites. Growing up, I'd never so much as caught a glimpse of Ruthless sitting in companionable silence with someone, let alone interacting with another as if they were friends. She was singular. While the regular girls clumped together and coordinated outfits and shared magazines, Ruthless took over her own table in the cafeteria, an invisible force field shoving people away. She wore different colored socks and painted her nails dark blue and added safety pins to her backpack by stealing them from her teachers' desks.

I hadn't met Lisbeth until four and a half years ago, when my brother walked into this very living room with this pixie-haired, miniscule angel, stating quite plainly, "I think I'm in love." Peter had met her at an art gallery opening he was orchestrating, back when he was just a PR executive, and she'd spilled champagne on his slacks, broken one of her nails on a sculpture railing, and insulted a painting right in front of Peter's client. By the end of the night they had arranged their first date. By the end of the third year Lisbeth Norland became Lisbeth Norland Warner.

My brother was the social butterfly of us two—growing up under his wing I'd always had that sitcom view of him, the older brother that is slightly cooler and sometimes mean, but still my best friend. For being completely dissimilar, people sure had a hard time differentiating between us; kids at all our schools pretty much clumped us together instead of thinking of us as separate individuals. We were the Warner brothers, always uttered with the slight chuckle for the unoriginal joke, and never Peter and Paul. It was such an issue for me back then, trying to break out of his shadow.

I would give anything to fall comfortably under the cool caress of it again.

My gaze once more fell on the picture in front of our knees, and roamed over Lisbeth's face, her delicate hands

and crooked smile. I'd kind of expected Peter to end up with someone exactly like him—motivated, hardworking, with a black and white idea of morality. Lisbeth was none of those things.

She, contrarily, was less of a butterfly and more like a hummingbird. Lisbeth was exotic, her black hair always in unkempt disarray, clothes always just a little off trend but fashionable. She'd known she was going to be a hairdresser from the age of five, when she picked up a cousin's long braid, snipped it off with her scissors, and the little girl actually went home, to her horrified mother, happy with the results.

Peter talked a lot about some of the “interesting” friends that Lisbeth had, and we would chuckle while she smacked his arm at whatever remark he'd made. Not once had he ever mentioned that Lisbeth even knew Ruthless McCormick existed, much less that they were best friends.

When I looked back up, I was sucked into Ruthless's penetrating eyes. I pressed my feet firmly into the navy carpet, against the instinct to run from the room, the entire house, and never come back.

“People have been coming for weeks, from all over the place.” I held my palms upward, resting on my knees. Ruthless was motionless for a breath and it seemed as if the air rang loudly before she inclined her head and dropped her stare, and I intook another lungful of oxygen, my fingers curling in. My apology accepted.

She reached out her porcelain arm and touched her fingers to the glass of the frame. In profile, her nose turned upward, and her eyelashes stuck out from her skin like glittering spiders. She didn't pick up the picture but kept her fingertips lightly on the faces of my brother and her best friend.

“I met Lisbeth through the salon.” Ruthless touched a strand of her hair delicately. “She saw my hair before she saw me, is how she always tells it.” She turned her head toward me, her eyes wide and focused on my rumpled sleeve. “Told it.” Her mouth twitched, and I noticed for the first time that she didn't have any lipstick on. She had never worn any lipstick, or gloss, or chapstick. My mind slid through memories like mud, and I couldn't bring up one image of those lips with something artificial on top.

“If she hadn't taken me under her wing, I probably would still be coloring my hair with Kool Aid.” Her eyebrow, a rainbow piercing through the light brown hairs, rose. I heard a noise, like the air being let out of a balloon in an enclosed space, and realized that I was laughing. My eyes were squeezed shut, my cheeks were pinched and pulled to their extremes, and I was laughing.

I had not laughed for one month and twelve days.

When I was no longer laughing so much as gasping for air, I opened my eyes and was met once again with the full force of the unwavering green. They lit up my insides with a certain amount of fear and awe. Something, in the molecules of the surrounding air or in time, turned; a shift occurred, though I couldn't identify exactly what it was. Ruthless did not drop my gaze.

"I think I'll take that beer now." She said, and I nodded, grabbing my own and pouring some down my throat before standing from the sofa.

The kitchen was dim; the porchlight outside shone through the window and left stripes across the table and counters. When I opened the refrigerator I was blinded for a moment, and the sound of the jars in the door seemed unnaturally loud. I grabbed another bottle and quickly closed the fridge. The glass bled icy condensation against my palms.

Ruthless took the bottle silently, twisting the cap off in a fluid motion. When she took a swig, I watched the skin of her throat, glowing in the dark room, as she swallowed.

We sat in the quiet at my too-large kitchen table, sipping our beers and avoiding each other's gaze. We'd lived in this town our whole lives, but I'd only ever ran into her after high school a handful of times. Once at the grocery store we'd had a semi-decent conversation; something about how she'd opened up her own tattoo parlor and how I'd progressed in my law firm. It wasn't long after that, actually, that I'd made partner, around the same time that Peter had scored his first sort-of-celebrity client.

It was at a celebration party for my brother and me, now that I thought of it, that Ruthless and I had our other post high school, deeper than pleasantries connection. She'd brought a date, which was a very non-Ruthless idea to me. He'd been this huge, buzzed-cut, bouncer-looking douche, with so many complex tattoos he looked as if a fifth-grader had scribbled over his skin in sharpie. Ruthless introduced him, I recalled, as Juicy—something that'd made me want to spew champagne in wild scorn and amusement at the time. Instead, I did that thing that men always do and always lie about: shook his hand much too hard to be polite, and locked eyes with him in an intimidating fashion.

"You know," I found myself saying now as I examined the long, amber neck of her beer bottle, "I was wondering earlier why I never knew you and...Lisbeth were friends. But that's why you came to our party last year, isn't it?" Ruthless's bare lips turned upward in a perfect imitation of Lisbeth's crooked smile. I felt my heart lurch against my ribcage.

"What, you thought I'd just heard it through the grapevine and decided to stop by?" Her wry tone hid a playfulness I wasn't up to addressing just yet, especially at the memory of Juicy the scribbled-on neo-nazi. "She invited me, yes, if

that's what you're asking."

We fell into silence again, and I sat kicking myself in my mind while trying to avoid staring at her through the darkness. The one other time I had ever been truly alone with Ruthless McCormick, besides now, was in the tenth grade. Our World History teacher had assigned us as partners for our midterm project, and all my friends had snorted and jabbed at my shoulders when our names were called together. The only time we met outside of class was at a coffee shop around the corner from our high school, and she had stared at my basketball jersey while I told her how I thought we should divvy up the work. Eventually she leaned forward and said distinctly, "I'll do everything, Paulie. Don't worry about it. Just show up the day of the presentation and read the card I give you." Then she stood up, the chains jingling from her belt, and sauntered out the door.

I found that although I should feel awkward and unsettled, I was strangely relaxed, sitting across the table from Ruthless McCormick, like that day in the coffee shop. The thought struck me that I wouldn't have to describe everything to her. If Lisbeth was her best friend, she probably already knew everything about the accident.

The past month and twelve days I had accepted pies and fielded questions and allowed invasion from people I hadn't seen since graduation. I had told these strangers that Peter hadn't left a will, that Lisbeth was having lunch with him that day because the salon was closed, that the car was still impounded because my parents couldn't decide whether or not to fix it or toss it in a junkyard.

With Ruthless, I was free. I didn't have to play town cryer to her as I did every other nosy son of a bitch that walked through my door. I didn't have to explain that my brother Peter Warner and his wife Lisbeth Norland Warner had been coming back from lunch at the bistro downtown when a two hundred pound college football player ran a red light and slammed into Peter's silver Chevy Cavalier, propelling them across the intersection and into a streetlamp, like they'd been released from a sling shot. With one dive into those electric eyes, I knew that she knew everything, that I didn't have to tell her a damn thing.

We sat, drinking our beers, and breathed, and relaxed, and felt the heat of the room settle on us like a down blanket.

"I remember you and Peter on the basketball team." Ruthless's voice melted into the air, and I didn't have to look at her to know she was looking at me. "You two were magic." I heard the scrape as she picked up her bottle from the table.

"You went to the games?" I asked. She nodded, the blue in her hair sliding across her shirt and appearing much darker now, distinct against the blonde.

On the court, Peter and I were like yin and yang. Hustle, pivot, weight on your toes, ball in your hands, breath in your lungs, cheers reverberating in your ears, sweat layered across your skin; and we always found each other. When we were in that moment, that space between one second and the next. We never hesitated and always connected. We were explosive alone, like charging bulls, and like snakes when together, fluid and shapeless and striking with precision and deadly intent.

“Magic.” Ruthless repeated. I devoured her silhouette with my gaze.

Sometimes I wondered, when the college football player rammed into my brother, whether that moment for Peter had been like that moment on the court—an in-between space of time, the ball in his hands suddenly flying away, breath in his lungs. I wondered if he’d instinctually looked for that connection that had once so effortlessly followed that moment, if the absence of that connection had sealed his fate.

My hands were shaking. The bottle in my hands rattled against the tabletop. The phone had shook too, when I’d picked it up one month and twelve days ago, and answered “yes” when the ER doctor had asked if he’d reached the household of Paul Warner. In that moment, everything shook. My knees knocked together. My voice wobbled painfully back into the receiver. My world quaked around me, the air vibrating as it came down.

“They...” They had been my best friends. My family. I looked at Ruthless and clenched my teeth, understanding for the first time why I’d actually allowed her in. Fear and sorrow and need boiled inside my stomach, and after a few seconds I unlocked my jaw.

“I don’t...” the words came out as a crackling sigh, and I swallowed, tried again. “I don’t know how to...” Explain myself. Put her at ease. Sway the teeter-totter that my life was sitting on back to equilibrium. Fix it.

“Live without them.” I caught my breath, and glanced up, and sure enough, Ruthless’s gaze engulfed mine. The lasers shot out, almost visible, through the dark room, and straight into me. I felt myself unlock. “You don’t know how to live without them. I know.” She had abandoned her beer bottle.

That shallow instant we sat and watched each other; this was another moment. Inhale, the ball mid air, flying from her slender fingers, the rush of blood in my ears. Connection. A perfect pass, frozen in time, glimpsed at the effervescent transitional phase.

Ruthless stood up, her feet ceasing to resound in this void we had fallen into. She came around the table, and stood in front of me. Her legs folded themselves around mine as she settled against me on the chair. Fire danced between our

skins. I was still enslaved by those hypnotic eyes.

My body, too, settled against her, had known all along, even if I myself hadn't, that this was where we were meant to end up. I should have understood, from the moment she allowed me into her gaze—Ruthless McCormick had come to destroy me.

“Ruth.” Her hands were against my chest, and her breath skimmed my face.

“It's okay, Paul.” She slid her fingers up to my neck, and smiled. When she brushed her lips against mine, I put my hands upon her thighs and kissed her, explored her naked lips, those that had never been touched by anything artificial.

And just like that, Paul Warner was destroyed. In his place, someone new, reborn from the ashes of grief into fragile, yet sustainable, life.

What One Dredges up when Boating on the Seine and the St Martin Canal

By Lydia Riantee Rand

On the surface of the river Seine in Paris

I encountered *Sainte Geneviève*.

Somber news disheartened the *Parisi*

Vikings approached

and no one knew how to stop them,

they were nearly at the doors, everyone despaired,

but *Geneviève* had the brilliant idea

to spread the rumor that the plague had hit the town,

and clutched it in its lethal arms,

that people were falling like flies.

Pas bêtes ces Vikings!

Not so stupid those Vikings,

they were not going to set horse-foot in that nightmarish town

and raid contaminated goods. So they turned back.

You can become a saint just for that!

Then our master puppeteer, a cheeky Parisian in a cap

—who used to run a bistro in the low class district

and was so fond of his city's history, *la petite histoire* he called it,

that he orchestrated a floating storytelling to enlighten the public—

pointed out *le Pont des Arts*, a bridge where lovers met and pecked and necked,

where a rascally wind —*le vent fripon*—

amused itself hitching up the skirts of pretty girls,

and a habitual flasher used the current to divulge his instrument;
further on, cells had been built on the retaining walls of the bank
to lock up often innocent prisoners, and when the water rose
they stood immersed waist high for days.

Then we left the Seine and veered into *le canal*,
soon entering the tunnel where it goes underground,
a long darkness with stops for the opening of locks,
water gushing and light slicing the dark from grates to the outside;
here and there street signs indicated the above Parisian thoroughfares
we were crossing from underground.

Floating out of the tunnel we found *François Villon* the scoundrel, the intense poet,
holding the poem that won his grace at the last moment,
just before his execution;
in the building next door lived the Italian who stole the Mona Lisa from the Louvre
to return it to Italy, its rightful country,

—son histoire ne tenait pas debout—

but there was something fishy in his story;
not far from there a trunk was recovered from the river
containing a body that was cut into pieces
—it took the police four days to examine the case and determine
that it could not have been a suicide.

We now came to the spot where the *Marcel Carné* film was shot;
l'Hotel du Nord, nostalgic, still appealed to tragic-romantics,
and close-by, behind the bank's wrought iron fence,
small dealers passed on drugs to young dudes
while nonchalant delinquents smoked pot in the periphery.

Et puis il y avait les clochards.

On benches, homeless tramps slept off their wine,
wrapped in multicolor patched blankets and surrounded with countless bundles.

Towards the end of our journey

lock keepers at the control wore masks so as not to catch
the rats' disease they might inhale unknowingly.

And we glided under arched iron bridges

where captivated curious couples leaned over to watch our boat,
and blew bubbles, waving a joyous welcome.

To the left a magnificent abbey still stood

thanks to Parisian protesters picketing in the streets for days
when a real estate corporation tried to tear it down
and build apartment complexes.

Ah, ces Parisiens! Good old Parisians,

given any reason they are out in the streets, striking,
it's so much better to march

than stagnate in a stuffy office or a factory anyway
—the labor force is a real power over there.

As he wrapped up his gift of Paris' small history,

our guide concluded that a certain president
—whose name started with C and finished with C—
promised more than a decade ago to clean up the Seine
so everyone could swim in it,

he added that he would be the first one to dive in

tout nu de preference,

—naked preferably, commented our guide.

Mais...

we are still waiting for that day!

Dialect of War

By Devreaux Baker

I never knew if you thought joining up
was an entrance way to some bright new beginning,
or the slamming shut of some door
against everything you were,
before you put the uniform on.

I remember your mother ironing your shirts,
the smell of steam unfolding stories in her kitchen,
how proud she was of you preparing to leave
for a destination she could not pronounce,
Falluja Kandahar Islamabad

Later the sound of those names filled her body
with the weight of so much pain, she knelt
in the middle of that floor, hands covered with flour
from bread rising on the counter just behind her.

None of us knew what your deployment would mean
with its abandoned territory of left behind words
we kept trying to navigate our way through.

When your letters arrived, fragile as friends who died
in your arms, we felt their ghosts enter that hidden place
at the base of our throats, where words wake up from sleep,

and in that way we came to be filled with a dialect of war.
an alphabet of grief, syllables that represented
people and places we would never know
beyond the mute world of loss.

At night when we lay down to sleep, the names
Islamabad or Kabul
drift inside our mouths like a mantra for the disappeared,
entire families who once sat down to share bread
or celebrate birth.

We carry the names of their homes like small seeds
rattling inside our chests, prayers filled with hope,
searching for some new ground in which to grow.



Spent
By Tatjana Mendoza

I Shall Confess To Nothing

By Aileen Renee Marble

Burn this heart at the stake
For it can not be more different
In ideals than yours.

It beats to a different drum;
One carved of stars and
Bare leaves stretched across
An opening into the earth.
Yours is carved of wood
With a thin paper skin,
And it is beaten with gold
And idols.

I proudly crown myself with
Antlers and give my voice to
The great open sky,
But your voice is never
Heard outside of that house.

Put me on the witness stand
I shall confess
To nothing.

Light and shadow dance
Entwined
In all hearts; yours and mine
Are no different.
Wash all you want, only
If you acknowledge your shadow
Can you lay claim to “purity.”

But you shall never understand
The knowledge in the wind.
Your idol speaks to you and I
Weep, for you are deaf to it.

More weight.
Crush all my bones, maybe
That way you will hear me
At last.

Capitals

By Natasha Hanley

Shall we meet in Santiago,
on a clear, crisp day?
Possibly in Athens
I'll see you walk my way.

I'd love to go to Kingston
and hear that reggae beat.
I'd follow you to Cairo,
never mind the heat.

What shall we find in Paris...
romance everywhere?
Let's meander through Madrid
without a single care.

Should we visit Lisbon?
Now that's a wild ride!
An airplane to Berlin
come on now, let's fly.

I left my heart in Dublin,
it's where my kin reside.
The beauty of Caracas
we simply can't deny.

The time we spent in London,
I never will forget.
Our wanderings through Amsterdam
a cloudy dream, and yet...

Lingering in your direction,
anywhere I'd go.
Just to get these two hearts together
and let international love flow.



Cycle
By Tatjana Mendoza

Little Boy Lost

By Jenny Hamby

Little boy lost, his
red flag newsprint headlines read
DROWNED IN A SHOT GLASS
Smudgy black dots that made up his face
stained my fingers all morning
I tucked him into my coat pocket
took him for a ride
through the oak trees
past the penny candy store
the spindly mountains to the west
“Let’s stop and have a drink,” he said
(his newspaper throat is always parched)
But I’ve got the highway blues again
Wanting him to ride shotgun
His plastered face in my rearview mirror
stunk up my car and the recesses of my mind
I wish I could erase you
Fold you neatly, even
scrapbook your child smile, the whorls in your hair
But I don’t write like that Russian does
Mad with desperation and too many index cards

I'm resigned
Not to reopen these scar tissue memories
You're nothing but trouble for me
This fierce independence is only one foggy breath-letter away
from being always alone
If you lay next to me like I dream you might
You would sink right through the mattress
You're a ghost body
and you never speak my name



Downward Spiral
By Brynne Johannsen

Circle

By Aileen Renee Marble

It's a circle, you know.

Life.

This planet is one,

Well, a sphere,

But that's a kind of circle too.

Inheritance.

That's a chain, from your

Ancestors to you.

If you stop and love those

That walked this path before you,

You turn the chain into a circle too.

A ballerina en pointe

Look at her pirouette!

We start at one point

And no matter how far we travel,

No matter how high we climb,

Our inner and personal circles

Will always come back to the starting line.

The past is a circle,

It causes us to change our trajectory

As we spin towards what we want.

We usually can't go from point A to point B
We have to take the detour,
And down these side streets
We find and see new things
Until we reach our destination,
Changed by the motions.

You have to walk around the issue.
You drive around and look for a parking space.
You learn, then study, then take a test.
The grade you receive, that's the end of
The circle. Then you start again with a new class.
New subject, new job, new station
Cycle through the options.

Clocks are round now aren't they?
Each day is different, no day
Happens twice, yet they all have
The same divisions; the same
Seconds, minutes, hours,
Day and night.
The moon circles the earth
And the earth circles the sun
As we spin in our galaxy.

Life
It's a circle, you know.

Year of the Tiger

By Devreaux Baker

Dear Dragon-Heart, I am steaming you
forty bowls of duck feet, pig feet,
black rice sesame balls of love,

drifting in plum blossom soup.
Yesterday I swept every room
in my house

to rid my corners and walls
of ghosts dressed in ill fortune.
This will be our water narcissus night,

filled with the long O of my petals,
opening their scent beneath your fingers,
one by one.

In five days, you will hang red lanterns
in your bedroom
to welcome all the Gods of Prosperity

down from the heavens and into your bed.
We are the children of dragons;
we share red dreams,

firecracker prayers, memories of bound feet,
silk knots in scarves
we have learned how to love.

I give you this Fortune Cookie Valentine
in the Year Of The Tiger -

1,000 red duck wishes for longevity,
1,000 sweet and sour wishes for good health,
circling the range of your body

as the moon circles our world.

Why Are You Still Here?

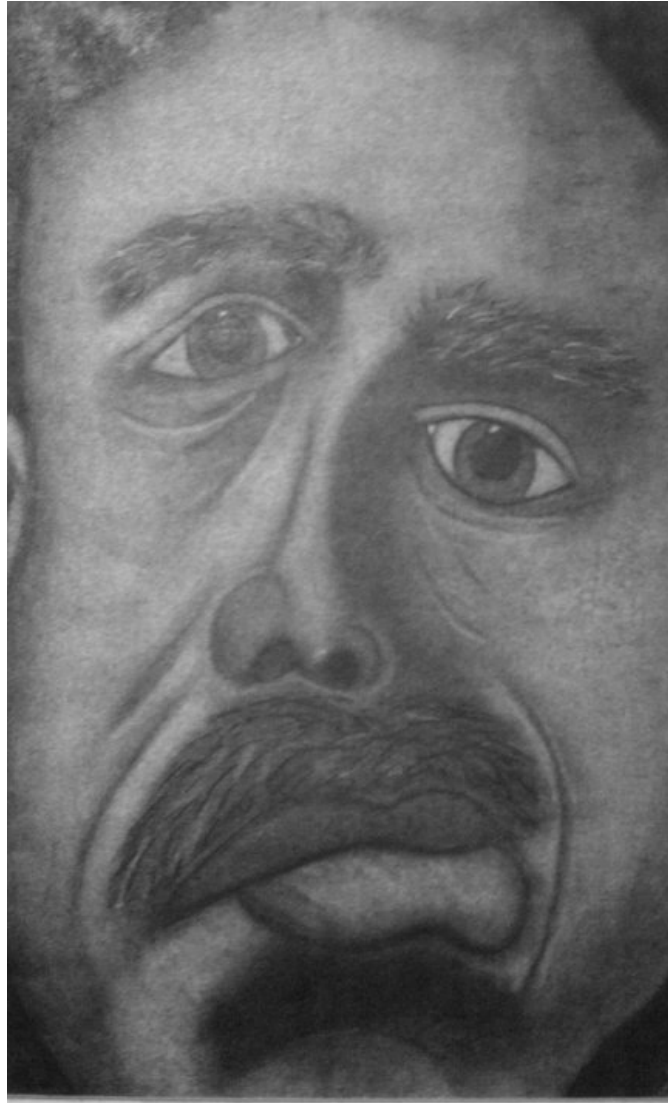
By Scott Taylor Jr.

You said that it was time to end it
You gave me no explanation why
No emotion in your eyes
Clear intent on your lips
All I remember is falling to a place where demons dwell
A black abyss where none speak of love
Love is a cloud far above that place
A place that can only be reached with
Confidence that far outweighs my own

But yet, you are still here
You can't fool me this time
I won't be the victim of déjà vu
Replaying our relationship over again
And again
Being the needle when the record is done
Having no purpose but to recount what could've been
No, that's not for me
I have other fish to fry

It's you that stays with me
It's you that haunts my dreams
And then, like a sprite, you quickly vanish
When I awake
It's not my fault
It's you that won't let go
You're the one that sends me your presence
Like a poorly wrapped package dropped at my door
Why are you still here?

Allow the memories to fade, please
Don't stir them up like centuries old ashes
Let them turn to black and white photos of my ancestors
Let them fray at the edges and then
Unceremoniously melt into the back of my mind
That's where you belong
Nestled next to the forgotten
You don't belong here



Distorted Man
By Amanda Grace Del Real



Winter Storm
By David Wetherington

We Forgot What The Trees Whispered

By Shawn Franco

She told me that she sometimes whispers to the sky,
but she doesn't know if she should call it praying
because she doesn't know if anything really hears her.
She asked me if I ever mistake hopes for beliefs.
Or things that are truth for things that I just want to hear.
Or if I ever think too much about things that I
know I won't ever figure out, and why
do so many of us decide to just not believe in things we don't understand
when our knowledge of everything around us is like a grain of sand,
and this world holding us is the beach,
and her questions floated off her lips like smoke
and into the air above us like halos resembling how innocent they were.

And I said,
Emily, we all go to bed with questions
that have answers too big for our minds ability to hold them.
But I sometimes like to imagine that when we were born
we had all the answers to the universe,
and each second that went by after was a secret we forgot.
And we were all born with lungs that didn't know how to breathe,
and that first breath we took brought us closer to dying,
and each day we lost more and more of that God inside of us,
and we forgot what trees whispered to us.
We forgot what a thousand harps sound like
when the angels would play music to the poems we spoke

when we were infants.
We were empty.
And our hearts would puddle raindrops
before we filled ourselves with too many bricks,
and we were bowls made of glass.
We became human when the world fed us too much of itself.

And I said,
Emily, most times
I'm a monsoon waiting for a farmer's prayer to soften me,
a wolf waiting for a moon,
a lonely wind waiting for a kite to dance with.
I'm most times just waiting for a reason to breathe again.
I've counted stars for each time the night has kissed me open beneath her breath
and filled me with sparrows, with smoke,
with clouds too heavy to see if the waiting hands of God
have collected the ember of my prayers
that I sent off the fading fires of my tongue, but the sky
isn't big enough to hold as many stars to match it to.

And Emily, I've asked myself too many times
if tornadoes are really just trying to find a place to glide across,
but if they just don't know their own strength.
If they just don't know how fragile those fields are holding them.
Their legs are just too heavy
like my heart is just too heavy.
I'm still trying to find a chest that can hold this heart that I have

because this heartbeat that I have hurts too much.
See my passion.
This world can throw me at those bricks like an alleyway kiss in the rain.
Like a wrecking ball.
Like a fist.
I'll make a swing set of my back
so that I can come right back to them.
Do it again if they must, it'll just be the same.
I won't stop hitting those bricks until those walls
know my name.
We were all
given reasons to bleed.

So Emily, believe me when I say
I've opened my arms to the storm, my hands to the coal,
My eyes to the smoke, I've let the smoke swallow me.
This world has fed my cuts to the salt, my mouth to the blade;
I've offered my wrists to those rusted nails.
All of this
just to want to feel the rain
even more.
I've opened my pores like canyons
so that they may catch those falling raindrops to disguise my tears,
but I promise you I'm not crying,
I'm just allowing them to find the right beauty to fall with
and to find their way back to the ocean.

And Emily, we all have too many questions
that will never be answered,
but some things just have to be left untouched.
That's why our hands are too small to hold the moon,
but our eyes
somehow hold it for us.
The same way our eyes hold those same tears
moving towards the music they were born from.

And Emily, I promise you
that if you listen to those waves
you'll hear the same music as you did in the womb
back when you might have known everything.
Let the ocean cradle you in its movements.
On nights when I need to get away,
you can most times
find me there.

They Celebrate in June

By Elizabeth Coard

Father's Day!

my little package remains undelivered
remains testament to our loving
remains a thin purple line
magical appearance in an oh-so-small window
a line separating our old life
from a new life
contending for simple truth
when is it life
at what point do we concede
give it a conscious spirit
a debate raging in my mind
for my life
and my soul
father?

Father's Day?

a little package wrapped in surprise
in pinks, purples, blues
I cannot deliver to you
I cannot deliver at all
I cannot hope to be delivered by
a quiet disappearance
separating old and never
a debate in obscurity
fading little line
without a life
in ultraviolet waves
death beyond recognition
soul of god
Father!

Reader's choice: This poem can be read in counterpoint, by line breaks or two consecutive stanzas.

To Sarah

By Kathy Gasaway

The instructor displayed the wooden box,
tiny bones suspended anatomically
for scientific discussion.

Gaspings,
holding back tears of shock and pain,
I envisioned the child
who never walked, never breathed, never smiled, never knew
that somebody loved her.

I tried desperately to avoid
the chasm that opened beneath my feet,
horror-struck, edging closer,
swimming, stumbling, straining to read
the yellowing label;
Afraid to know, but relieved to find
it wasn't you.

Not knowing that such things could be,
remembering that blocked-out time
when I was too young, too scared, too hurt, too devastated
to understand what I signed away
or that I would one day regret the decision,
I am left with the desperate hope
that you are not hanging
in a dusty box
in some other anthropology lab.

The Lifeboat Coxswain in Late November

By Jeffrey C. Alfier

But pray ye that your flight be not in winter.

Matthew 24:20

On the bayside lodge, an early snow sweeps
over windows, blurring the world outside.
A woman closes the front door behind a man.
Releasing the brass latch, she cups his face,
his skin wildered in an aftertaste of salt.

He knows boats that never return and chapel bells.
With a mind digressed to tide and weather, ropes
and rafts, he may appear or leave in an instant,
gripped by the dark intensity of his implements
and the seabirds that pass over him at midnight.



Fleeing the Dock
By David Wetherington

Dream Catcher

By Marina Weighill

Sitting, staring
At the dream catcher
Catching more breeze than dream
Catching sweet lavender scents
And apricots on the wind
Catching chills and Goosebumps
From summer
Showers

Sitting, staring
At the fireflies
Telling little firefly secrets
To the peonies in the garden
Listening to the droplets drip off
The wind chimes
Making melodic melancholy with the rain

Listening to the music the wind makes
Playing her earthen instruments
So pure and raw
Hearing the ticking and tocking
Of the great grandfather clock
Reminding me that time is passing so very quickly

Reminding me that I cannot stay this way forever
Cannot stay in a rocking chair
Harmonizing with the elements
Cannot breathe the same clean air
Nothing stays the same

Story of Love

By Natasha Hanley

Inspired by Edgar Allen Poe

The story of love shall I sing?
It begins upon angels' wing
and its symbol, a golden ring.

The sway of love, so strong
In lover's heart and song
It is only for you that I long!

The hope to be bound in love's joy
Playing games of love, acting coy
My love thee shall forever employ!

I pray thine love is vast
As if a spell it shall be cast
Upon thee heart, there to last.

Shall the darkness of night
Forever blinded, without sight
Only add to love's plight?

Yet how long shall love last?
Inevitably to be outwardly cast
Into memory, into the past.

And what doth love reveal?
Only for thine heart to steal
And slowly as an onion, peel.

But why should love be so grand?
To always hold another's hand
And forever wear wedding's band?

Trust thee? I fear I cannot
For looming near is fate's plot
To banish love and for it to rot.

Oh! The severance of love doth feel
As the hog would defeatedly squeal
Before the slaughter, before the meal!

Sorrowful of hearts, so sad
Careful steps to not be mad
Find it within thee to be glad.

Happiness, it must be the key
Soaring oer open sea
For thee are forever free!

The Depths of Ourselves

By Jordan Scott Gausling

The gloominess hides my face from the world,
each grain of sand is lifted in my steps,
then buried among the rest of its peers.

The wind nips at my fingers and ears,
reminding me of what I've been missing.

Peering into the expanse, I'm being enticed.

I want to be a part of it.

I want to relish in its fury, its peace, its beauty.

A whole other world lies in the depths of what stretches before me.

Is it a better world?

Is it a world where I fit in?

Or, does my individuality fade in the murky and cold palace to which I am held.



Delta Crop Rows
By Adrian Mendoza

How Life Goes

By Trish Falin

When explosives fill old shells
to lie in dirt,
to sprout like red tulips in a
Wichita spring dawn
when light pops over the horizon,
a hand touching earth,
a bulb opens
just long enough for impact.

The briefness of flower
before stems are cut
and carried off.

Tell me again before tomorrow
everything is all right,
and nothing new grows in summer.

I don't want a bouquet
or so neatly folded flag,
and please, don't say
thank you.

Golden Boy

By Angelique R.L. Arnold

She wears him
like an old pair of jeans.
S l i d i n g
him on just right
fitting the curves
of her existence.
The reinvention of mediocrity
sparkles in high heels
inhaled to pose
picture perfect,
as he stifles his own breath
to hold together the seams.
Even the most solid stitch
unravels over time,
his exhalation
of who he once was
frays like tentacles
reaching for something,
anything on the fringe
to meet his grasp.

He will be left curbside
when he is worn
too much for her tastes.
And like found treasures,
another will smooth
over his rips and tears,
upcycling emotions
to the softness and strength
of a durable soul gone by.
Priceless.

The Ride

By L. Rigdon

From a month to a day
these withdrawals are insane,
but I'll take whatever
I can get.

Through love and devotion,
then spiteful emotions,
this roller coaster ride
won't stop.

I cry
I hate
I need
I smile
I giggle
I swoon
I curse

I sit
I race
I stand
I pace
I stop
I go

Again?

Vibrations keep me sane;
giving me hope and joy
by making the ride go faster;
locking me in
for the long haul.

Pocketing my true self
to dwell in dark corners,
I fear that there are no answers,
no truth,
save that the ride goes on forever.



Espalda
By Adrian Mendoza

Exotic Dancer on Break Behind *The Blue Lion Cabaret*

By Jeffrey C. Alfier

Shielded by the translucence of a wire mesh fence
that frames her in the staunch heat of a summer
solar noon, she's screened from traffic's meddling
eyes. Free of neon, her skin's a rice paper lantern
in fog, beads of sweat seeping through a glaze
of eye shadow and foundation – not enough
to spoil her looks in the ten-minute break, drawing
breath in icy clouds of menthol cigarettes
passed between dancers in low-octane respite.

With angelic indifference, she drops, for a brief
time, her clichéd stage name of Candy, or Ginger,
the backdrop of dance music echoing in dull
thumps, like fists against a submarine bulkhead.
Back on the dance floor, her fiery lips run
lambent over the shift's lingering male
faces, ones she'll never let catch sight of her
exiting through that sole door – never hers alone,
waving back at any stranger she can name.



Crying Liberty-Separation Barrier
By Isaac William Farhadian

A Story from Fuhlsbüttel¹

By Katie Suratt

1940

Morning had begun several hours ago, but the sky was still tinged with darkness. The little window was shut up tight with curtains drawn – an attempt to keep warmth a prisoner for as long as possible. But a pale beam of cold dawn slipped past the barrier and prodded at a small sleeper in the tiny room. She felt it as a finger pressing into her side, insistent, urging her to get up and face the day. She awoke to the chill. “Mutti says to get up,” said a figure that stood by the bed. Uschi rubbed her eyes, realizing in her drowse that the poke was real. It was her oldest sister, Inge.

“Why?”

“Hurry up, or we won’t get any bread today,” Inge whispered. “Lilo would have gone with me, but she’s busy helping Mutti with the wash.” Inge left the room to put on her shoes. And Uschi forced herself to leave the warm safety of the bedcovers.

She was waiting with a metal milk pail in her hand when Uschi entered the kitchen from their bedroom. Each of the four cramped rooms in their home had to be accessed by one of the others. A tiny kitchen with a gas stove, a wall-papered sitting room, and two bedrooms formed the square-shaped world in which the Handelsman family lived.

“Will we go to Herr Schöps’ today?” asked Uschi, quietly.

“Yes, we will see him too. Mutti says we need milk.” Putting a finger to her lips, Inge opened the door. The entrance hall was musty and colder than the rooms they left behind them. They shared the hall with three other families, which meant each of them had to take a turn in cleaning it. A stairwell to the second level lay on their left, where the families Rautenkranz and Knor lived. Opposite from where they stood on the first floor was the Koch family. The little girl who lived there rarely played with them and her brothers were trouble. At least, that’s what Mutti said.

In fact, though Handelsman and Koch lived side by side, they avoided each other as often as politely possible. Little Uschi

¹A suburb of Hamburg, Germany (pronounced FOOLS- burtel)

was too young to understand why, but she knew to be quiet when in the sitting room, where only a thin wall separated her family from listening ears. *Verboten*. In the past, she had been reprimanded for speaking too loudly; she didn't understand that words could be forbidden.

Carefully, the two girls tiptoed past the doors so as not to wake their neighbors. The entryway opened to a common courtyard of hardpan dirt and a large garden split into oddly-sectioned plots. They waved across the yard to their mother and sister, who were hanging wash on a line. "Tschüss, meine Lieblinge²!" called their mother.

"Tschüss, Mutti!" they echoed as they closed the gate behind them and headed down the lane. The chilled morning air bit their noses and pinched at their cheeks, and they tried to hurry, pushed onward by the prospect of food. The *Bäckerei*³ was several blocks away to their left and across the street from their little row house. The way was really not very far, but everything seems much larger, and time tends to stretch on when you are small. Especially so when you are hungry. And cold. Very cold.

Inge said a quick prayer, fervently hoping that the bread lines would not be long and that the shelves would not be empty when they arrived. Please let there be bread. Last night they had eaten very little for dinner. Less than most days, since there had been no bread with their soup.

"There's a monster in my tummy," said Uschi, a hand on her stomach.

"Me too," said Inge, and held her sister's hand, walking just a little quicker at the thought of their mission.

Magda Handelsman had learned from a neighbor that there would be bread that day and had sent her eldest daughter, Ingelore, along with her third eldest, Ursula, to purchase a couple of loaves for the family's meals. She paused in the act of hanging up one of Karl's shirts to dry. Her stomach was growling. She ignored it and focused on her husband's shirt. Black stains on the sleeves and a small hole near the bottom hem. The stains couldn't be removed, but at least she could mend the hole. Karl shoveled coals for a Nazi supply train. Though the work was hard and paid very little, it was enough to keep their family fed if not full. Magda bent slowly and reached into her basket for a pair of woolen socks. As she rose, very carefully, she looked at her daughter, Lieselotte. *How thin she looks*, she thought to herself. *How thin they all were!* Then her thoughts moved back to Karl, and she wondered if he would bring something home from the train today.

²Goodbye, my loves!

³Bakery

Robbery of the train by hungry and desperate citizens was a common occurrence. There were so many people who were starving while the Nazis feasted on luxuries. Karl, she knew, would never steal. But if someone wished to express their gratitude for his silence towards the guards, that was another thing. Sometimes it would be a slab of butter or a sack of sugar, a wheel of cheese, or even a bucket of coals, and one time, it was meat. It was always left in a corner for him to claim, just sitting there inconspicuously and ready for the taking. But it was so very, very risky. *If the wrong person saw something suspicious... Even the neighbors can't be trusted...* She knew Herr Koch wouldn't hesitate to speak to the authorities if he knew what was going on next door. And yet so often she had seen his children stealing from the milkman or the grocer. But she kept quiet on the subject except for a warning to her own children. *Futterneid*⁴. People could be so horrible to each other.

Silently, she cursed the Führer and his war. He didn't care for the common people. He never had. Her family wasn't starving yet, but with six mouths to feed, life was a procession of struggles; she found herself devising new ways of stretching and saving. A kick from below sent her hand flying to her belly. Well, seven mouths perhaps.

Inge and Uschi had reached the Bäckerei just as the line started to flow outside the store. Even as they waited, it began to curl around the corner and down the street. Inge reached into the depths of her pocket and felt the coins that would buy them bread. Her other hand was still clasped by her little sister. Though they were three years apart in age, they looked like twins. Both had freckled faces and blonde hair, along with brown eyes. As they stepped into the store and inhaled the scent of the place, both girls smiled and looked at each other. They agreed that fresh bread was the best smell in all the world, and their anticipation of enjoying it soon was greatly increased. Their mouths were watering for that taste of comfort.

At seven years of age, Inge could look over the counter when she made her request to the Baker. The older gentleman looked wearied but gave a small smile to his young patrons. Uschi was still shorter than Inge, but she saw his face and her smile grew even bigger. She liked to look at his little grey mustache as it wiggled when he talked.

“Zwei Schwartzbrotte, bitte,⁵” said Inge.

“Heute haben wir nur Feinbrot,⁶” he replied with a sigh and placed two loaves on the counter. Inge surrendered the coins from her pocket along with a ration stamp. “Danke,” he nodded as they turned to leave.

⁴A German word that has no direct translation. It describes a jealousy of others who have food or other necessities. It is like when a dog fights another for a scrap.

⁵Two loaves of black bread, please.

⁶Today we have only white bread.

“Dankeschön!” they replied.

By the time Inge and Uschi arrived at the creamery, their hunger was roaring wildly at them. Even watching Herr Schöps, the milkman, was not enough distraction from the lovely smell which came from two parcels wrapped in paper in their arms. Uschi loved visiting his shop to see how he shaped the butter into a perfect block with his two big, wooden paddles. But at the moment, she was more concerned with how quickly she and her sister could get back home. Every moment seemed to linger. Herr Schöps took their pail and walked towards a shiny, metal vat. He opened the lid and started to carefully ladle milk into their pail so as not to drip or spill over the sides. It took longer than usual. He made sure to chat with them and ask about their parents and their sisters. And then he gave them a friendly smile as he handed it back.

“Dankeschön!” the two girls chorused as they paid for their purchase and then scurried out of the shop and back into the street.

They had a wonderful meal of milk and bread that day, and both Uschi and Inge quickly forgot the hunger they had felt so acutely that morning. When Papa came home, the family felt surrounded by warmth and safety; any previous thing which might have caused them distress was banished for a short time from their thoughts. He had not brought anything from the train that day, but the fact that he was present gave them a certain contentedness. He was safe from harm and so were they. Later, when it was evening, Magda took the remaining loaf and began to slice it for dinner. Back and forth with her knife, she sawed into it, but it was no use! The crust had collapsed; the loaf was hollow. She knew immediately what had happened, and though she felt deeply for her two daughters, she had no choice but to spank them and send them to bed.

That Hot Afternoon

By Trish Falin

When the electricity shut off
only dogs barked
and you stood on the balcony
silently watching me undress,
smoking a cigarette.

Workers blocked a street
to repair a broken pole
while I picked out a bra
and you tucked hair behind an ear.
My eyes caught your unguarded stare
of skin covered with sweat.

Later I might argue that you
were longing in the quiet hour
for television, a radio, that no one
was home from work to talk about the day.

And I might say later that you were lovely
or just that you had black hair
pulled back off your shoulders
with eyes empty on a clear day.

and counting

By Elizabeth Coard

It's been three days
since you said you would call,
three days since I felt your breath on
my neck and your hands caressing the
small of my back, tracing equations around
my waist and testing your big bang theory between
our breakfast and your afternoon walk along the creek.
Brahms, playing in my hands, to keep my mind from plummeting
off the bridge suspended between our time together and my time alone,
waiting. And I knew you would break my heart that night in October when
you asked if you could call me sometime. I said for you to commit my number
to memory if you wanted me, and it's been three days now, almost four, almost
forever.

Christmas Night: Just Ahead of the Storm Front

By Jeffrey C. Alfier

Light snowfall's a harbinger in flurries
that etch wind to make a sky legible.
Streets are taken by webs of bulbs spilling
festive light into darkness and storefront
windows of boutiques determined to fail
on cue before thinning numbers of sales.
The sole place open late is a liquor
store. Its only occupant is the clerk,
asleep in a chair, back-lit by neon
ads and charming liquors a homeless man
scans - a wide spectrum of bottled amber.
Thirty degrees out, but the homeless one
won't linger in the warmth of the café
he bought coffee in, even though gloveless.
In the stone wind, he and I gain distance
from each other at equally vacant
ends of the street, as snow thickens and gains
in radiance on our whitened shoulders,
light falling into light, in cold whispers.

The Space to Hold it All

By Anokina Shahbaz

Breathe in the chaos
That surrounds you,
Inhale the stale air
Filled with voices of broken spirits
And the scent of failed attempts
 And breathe out a symmetry
 Of wholeness.

Hold your palms open
And carry the weight
Of humanity's brutality.
Feel the shame drip between
The spaces of your fingers
Feel the sharp corners
Tearing your skin
 Touch its harsh exterior
 Until it softens into peace.

Rest the burden of lost souls
In search of themselves
And every passion abandoned
On your exhausted shoulders
 And walk forward, even
 If you are on your knees.

Look unswervingly
Into the eyes of yesterday
And all the promises it did not keep
All the hearts it left in pieces
That now lie scattered on your path
 Plant them in virgin soil
 Nourish them with holy water.

In the midst of the madness
Consuming, pervasive
Become the space to hold it all.

Erected by James MacDonald, Loving Husband

By Tobi Cogswell

Come sit here beside me
skin lit, a candle
on alabaster, small gold rings
draw my eyes to your neck,
your pulse beating, hands still.

It has always been like
the first time. The first kiss,
first lovemaking, first
child. The children.

Your smile never died,
even as we both grew older,
less able to sway with the wind
of disappointments and sadnesses.

I still see you in your
wedding veil, the one
our daughters also wore, being
both poor in material riches
and also superstitious.

I drink to you in the glass
you loved so well – the sun
piercing reddened shadows
on the wall above your empty chair.

My heart. It will not be long
until we dance again,
eyes bright,
fingers straight and sure.
'Til we marvel at the golden
blossoms along emerald hills
and what takes the place of sky.
Save a place for me.
I will not find another.

On the Day Before Goodbye

By Tobi Cogswell

Angry eyes looking
for guidance from rain
she slipped indoors, but
left herself outside.

Bundled and blown, up
against no one's love,
she watches the clock.

The smell of burnt toast
sets the tone today
while sticky-soft tears
will set tomorrow's.
She's tense as a wire,
the bright thorns of grief
anchor her to this

place, force her to last
on air and gracious,
wonder if sky can
shadow her sorrow.
She thinks of their life...
He said you are mine,
you are my beauty...

She will not hear those
words from him again.
Her sadness says mend
what fate has broken.
Her heart, and the weight
of a thousand sighs
breathes only silence.



Emergence
By Andrew R. Jones

Why No One Can Be an Anthropologist

By L. Rigdon

I get in long conversations
about gender roles
and society,
especially with my male friends.
(Talking with most women
outside of school
leads me nowhere straight).

One day I was discussing my
childhood thoughts
about what I wanted to be
when I grew up.
I told my friend that I could
distinctly
remember wanting to be
an adventurous anthropologist,
traveling the world
and making great discoveries.
But then I would
deliberately
stop thinking
those thoughts.

I couldn't have a
job
traveling the world
and be a good
mother
at the same time.

My friend was shocked,
at first,
especially with me being such a feminist,
(now),
but he knew about my
religious upbringing,
and understood why I
foolishly and fervently
thought
as I did,
back then.

But in that same conversation
he brought up something
amusing;
perspective from the phallic side,
as it were.

He too wanted to be
an anthropologist,
traveling the world
discovering mankind,
or any kind, for that matter.

But he too was
discouraged
from a life of digging and
discovery.

After all,
what kind of a
man
provides for his family
by looking at the dead
for answers?

Channeling Hemingway

By Angelique R.L. Arnold

He pours words over
blank canvas ladled
with whiskey intent,
the formed echoes of an old soul
seeking solace
in cavernous thought.

His voice is not lost
in a Parisian café, nor
stifled in a dust cloud
before a rhino run.

He sips lattes at the Starbucks
on McHenry, wrangles
neighborhood cats from crapping
on his mother's roses.

Still a writer,
always a writer,
losing himself wherever he goes.

He is One tonight,
clicking spiritual connections
by candlelight, the bottle in hand,
the glare of technology,
ill-conceived for this moment
of clarity. He changes his font
to American Typewriter,
lights a cancer stick, and remembers
his loathsome regard for Zelda,
his father's rusty rifle in the hallway closet.
With this, he escapes
further into each word,
each letter a door closing behind him
till he no longer knows
his own name.



Birds on Wire
By Lucinda Summerville

What the Water Gave Me

By Devreaux Baker

Reflections on the Paintings of Frida Kahlo

I

There is a woman on a tightrope
suspended on razor sharpness
dancing with one foot high in the air
arms outstretched on either side of her body

She dances above me, her dress floats
in the water beneath me
a discarded skin, shimmering with her memories

The wire beneath her foot stretches beyond
the distant gathering dark
like a wing about to rise
opening the eyes of sky into a blinding white

Afraid of the light, she keeps her eyes tightly shut
choosing instead the safety of the dark
the knowledge of wire pressing into her skin
is a comfort she has come to love

II

The night cradles us, black arms reaching from so high a place
dropping beneath her moon mountains

If we could wake out of this embrace
into the roots of sky
we could open ourselves to anything

The woman in red is sitting between these two
one hand trailing the dark, stirring up bad dreams
the other moving through sky, transparent with clouds and blue

Just behind her the forms of cactus, like broken hands praying
rise up

Somewhere there is a house
full of this kind of light

The Road Trip to a Town Called Nowhere

By Katie Billiet

This highway's your hell; let it take you under.
Sip on that pavement, or you won't last much longer.
Sand is grit and grit is silk.
That's all it takes to survive in filth.
Streets no longer paved of gold and silver,
instead on every corner awaits a killer.
What happened to economy, fair and trade?
Now we're just focused on the next grenade.
Blow.
It's a catastrophe of blasphemy,
not trial and error.
It's malevolence of benevolence.
Just look in the mirror.
Our nation of patience is a country of bluffs.
The open road to freedom is just a car full of stuff.



Refugee
By Andrew R. Jones

Summer Solstice Picnic

By Trish Falin

Red blooms fall off trees, drip across grass,
It's the blood of a new season.

I cannot remember the name of this flowering tree
That comes back again and again.

Two softball teams barbeque ground beef patties on grills after a game.
Both sides share beer and fries, adversaries are allies, safe in this park.

Overseas, Murphee sits on a hospital bed, knees half gone, bone sheared
like a cut stem, the bright white centered in a fleshy bulb.

Here I see babies crying as so many bored parents push strollers by me.
The late afternoon sun blinds my sight, another sun settling on a perfect day.

The babies are crying for their feet and miles they cannot run;
the soft round flesh of knees healed smooth as beach sand.

The girls play hop scotch, reach for the sky, sharp shrieks invade the picnic.
Where are their hands? Appendages lost in the hot light searing June.

Hands disappear in the morning fog not inch by inch, only suddenly with a bright flash;
and our ears cannot hear the chant, a prayer, *red rover red rover, Murphee come over.*

Their delicate fingers are stuck in our throats, another ball wrapped inside the glove.
We dislodge the catch with Coke, and politely ask for someone to *pass the ketchup, please.*

Invited

By Anokina Shahbaz

I have lived
with my back against the world
facing walls that echoed my silence
sheltered from concocted demons
that have never chased me.

The calling of the universe
is relentless –
fingers tapping on my shoulder,
beckoning me to turn around
and join the senselessness and beauty,
asking me to expose myself
to its noise and vivid darkness.
I have turned down the invitation
one too many times,
for now I find myself
glancing behind me,
my ears fixed on the myriad sounds
arising from a stillness
carrying forth the earth's hymns,
and my arms softly reaching

aching
to touch the grace
that begins where I end.

The echoes have grown faint
imperceptible,
and I have grown tired
of resistance and refusing
to partake in this dance
that always waits
for our sacred contribution.
Release this longing
in the threads that course through me.
Let me take part
in the unsung stories of tomorrow
and walk this path
we all bear our souls on.
Tear down these walls
that have begun to confine me
for today,
and every moment that follows
I am invited.



Death Amidst Life
By Andrew R. Jones



Eye See You
By Ann Strahm

Black and White

By Jared Stuart Francis

The world in blacks and whites
With its varying shades of gray
I am not the vibrant color
That brings the world to life
The yellows, reds and pinks
Making the world more unique
But I am a white, or a black
Or a shade of gray
Not by choice I was just made this way
To sit in the background unnoticed
As the brights bring the world a new light
This is best for me
I'm left to understand the basics
What makes life tick?
I am the colors of older days
From not too long ago
They want me too but I won't go
For without me
The world would lose definition
And the brights
The shining lights
Would not be so bright

To The Graveyard

By Aileen Renee Marble

Snow and mist
Burning my skin as I walk
To the graveyard,
My crunching footsteps
Loud as breaking glass while crows
Circle overhead and appraise me.

No tears, for they would
Freeze in my eyelashes and
To my face.

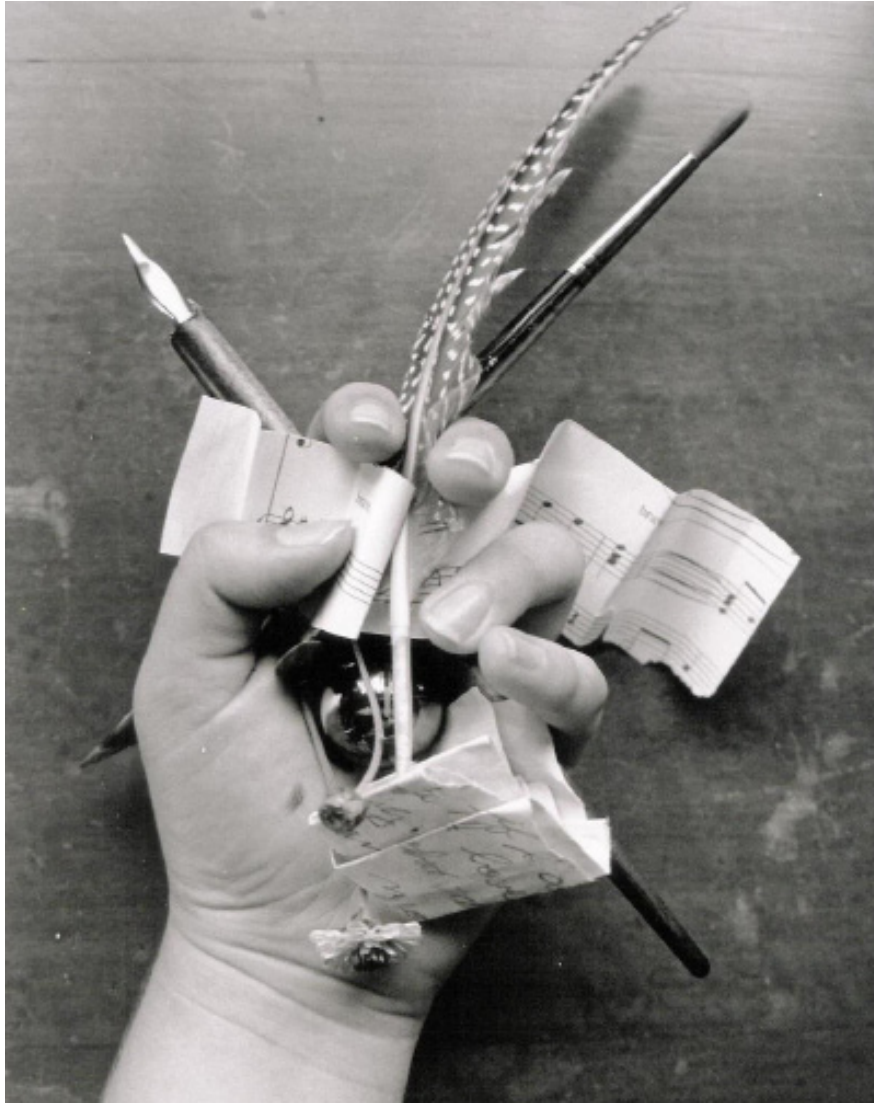
I find what I am looking for;
The frost covered the gray stone
Like a layer of lace,
A decoration from Mother Earth,
The one who has claimed you at last.

The thorns bit my hands all the way
But I didn't mind the pain;
I put the bouquet of roses on
That layer of glittering snow
Which covers the ground like a
Wool blanket.

Snowflakes fall, stinging my bare arms
Biting the flesh of my face
But it holds no candle to the ache inside,
The teeth crushing my heart;
Your absence.

I fold my hands and break the silence:
“I will always love you.”

The crows fly away.



Self Portrait
By Katie Suratt

Contributors' Biographies

Jeffrey C. Alfeir

Is a two-time Pushcart prize nominee whose poems have appeared recently in Connecticut River Review and South Poetry Magazine (UK), with work forthcoming in New York Quarterly. His latest chapbook is *Before the Troubadour Exits* (2011). His first full-length book of poems, *The Wolf Yearling*, will be published in 2012, by Pecan Grove Press. He serves as co-editor of *San Pedro Review*.

Angelique R. L. Arnold

I have a BA in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from SFSU. My work has appeared in *Penumbra*, *Song of the San Joaquin*, among others. We all have something to say, so my motto has always been "Speak Up!"

Devreaux Baker

Is the recipient of Macdowell Fellowship, a Hawthornden Castle Poetry Fellowship, and three California Arts Council Awards to produce *Original Student Writing for Public Radio*. Her new book of poetry is *Red Willow People*, Wild Ocean Press. She directs the Mendocino coast Poets Reading Series.

Katie Billiet

Is an English major in her junior year at Stanislaus. She plans on teaching middle school English/Language Arts. But wants to become a P.E. teacher as well. Her best writing happens around three in the morning, when typing in the font “Perpetua.”

Joshua Bolin

Lives in California. He is currently a B.F.A. student at CSU Stanislaus. He likes cats.

Elizabeth Coard

I’m a pianist, painter, poet, and dancer, often weaving together two or more art forms. I’m a member of the Chaparral Poets and the current Annual Contest Chair. I have dozens of publishing credits and more than a few awards.

Tobi Cogswell

A two-time Pushcart nominee. Publications include National and International journals. Her full-length poetry collection “Poste Restant” is available from Bellowing Ark Press. She is the co-editor of San Pedro River Review.

Trish Falin

A California poet whose work has appeared in the journals Soundings, Lost Creek Letters, Penumbra and Askew. A former news reporter and editor, Trish earned her MFA in Creative Writing Poetry at Antioch University in Los Angeles.

Isaac William Farhadian

Double majored in Political Science/History, and graduated Summa Cum Laude from CSU Stanislaus. He is currently working on his graduate degree in the field of history at CSU Stanislaus.

Gabriel P. Flores

This coming spring semester will be my second attending Stanislaus after having transferred from Merced College this past fall. I have devoted my thought to the study of psychology with an emphasis on understanding psychopathology—so as to help those who have a hard time living a normal life receive their deserved shot. Reading and writing poetry has been a hobby of mine over the past several years, and I am much obliged to have a chance at my work being read.

Jared Stuart Francis

I am currently a Philosophy student at CSU Stanislaus and I enjoy writing the occasional poem in between implementing my plans for world domination.

Shawn Franco

A Modesto poet that has come up from the spoken work scene. He's performed at colleges and universities up and down California and has won respect by almost everyone who has read and listened to his work. He's known for imagery drenched lines with an intense and beautiful feel which gains him love from many.

Kathy Gasaway

I am an English major planning to graduate this spring. I have enjoyed my college experience and will be sad to see it end. This is my first time ever submitting my work for publication, but I hope it won't be the last.

Jordan Scott Gausling

I currently reside in Truckee California and am a substitute teacher as well as a cook. I enjoy writing in many forms, including poetry, prose, and music. I have two awesome children, Mason and Noah, and I love the adventure of life.

Michelle Gein

Hey! My name is Michelle Gein. I am a student at Beyer High school. In my spare time I read, write, and draw. I have a unique enthusiasm for life that I like to bring into my art pieces.

Jenny Hamby

Jenny is a first-year graduate student in English literature at CSU Stanislaus who plans to continue her education in a Ph. D program in the same field. She enjoys writing poetry in her spare time. She has been previously published in Penumbra in the spring of 2008 and 2009.

Natasha Hanley

A Graduate student in Geopolitical Studies at CSU, Stanislaus. Her writing is inspired particularly by her grandfather, Donald Pringle, a published author from NY, who stormed the beach at Normandy, France.

Amanda Heinrichs

A twenty-two year old CSU Stanislaus alum currently working at a bookstore, whose first step in a plan toward world domination is being published in *Penumbra*. She enjoys caffeine-free tea, boys with red motorcycles, and wearing sandals in all weather.

Katelyn Holladay

I am a local and an English Major at California State University Stanislaus. I aspire to write one day as an author, as well as for television and film. I am an individual of many interest and joys.

Brynne Johannsen

A psychologist who sometimes moonlights as an amateur photographer. She enjoys being able to capture a poignant moment on film, forever to be remembered through the lens. Her most important and rewarding job, however, is a mother to her two young children.

Andrew R. Jones Ph. D

Is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at CSU Fresno. He began drawing at age three and has no formal art training. In addition to pencil and charcoal drawing, he also dabbles in oil painting and sculpture when he finds the time.

Matthew C. Keevy

Was born and raised in the central valley and actively enjoys life as an avid outdoorsman and wildlife photographer. Graduating from CSU, Stanislaus in 2008 with a BS in Business he now works as an Information Technology Consultant at CSU Stanislaus.

Sheila D. Landre

I am a 1978 graduate of Cal State Stanislaus, a veteran of 30 years of teaching in Turlock, and a charter member of The Licensed Fools poetry group. My work has been published previously in Penumbra, Zam Bomba, Talk Arts, Stanislaus Connections, and Modern Bride Magazine as well as in other collections. I have appeared on stage at the State, The Prospect and Luna's Art Café as well as many open-mics.

Aileen Renee Marble

Is a Sophomore here at CSU Stanislaus and is majoring in Criminal Justice with a concentration in Forensics. She enjoys writing poetry in her spare time.

Monica E. Martinez

This is my second year at CSU Stanislaus. Both my parents are Salvadoran; I was born in Los Angeles, CA and raised in San Jose. I'm the first in my family to go to college and I'm here to pursue an English major with TESOL concentration. Writing has always been a passion.

Michelle Matthews

Teaches and writes in Austin, Texas.

Adrian Mendoza

I was born in Modesto and worked 17 years as a staff photographer with The Modesto Bee. My primary area of documentation since my departure from the Bee has been photographing the California Delta from the air, land and water. I love music.

Tatjana Mendoza

I am currently a Business Marketing senior at CSU Stanislaus with a long time love for the arts. Further, I am originally from San Francisco Bay Area where I have also recently become involved with a local collective of artists who host art galleries to benefit the surrounding community.

Samantha Rose Meroney

Is an English Major at CSU Stanislaus. She aspires to become an author, and also likes to read, sing, dance, and act in her free time.

Ellen Peckham

Has read, published and exhibited in the U.S., Europe and Latin America. As a result of an exhibition at IPCNA in Lima, Peru in 2009 and of readings of her work in Spanish her bi-lingual book Recording Loss/ Registro de una Perdida has been published there.

Kimberly Pippa

I am a graduate student at CSU Stanislaus majoring in Rhetoric and Teaching Writing. I prefer the genre of creative nonfiction and hope to teach the subject in the future.

Lydia Riantee Rand

Was born in Paris, France. Her poetry and short stories appeared in reviews, magazines, and anthologies. Two books of her poetry, one non-fiction and one of travel stories are in print. The Wild River Press will publish her fictionalized memoir, *The Goosefoot Chronicle*, this year.

L. Rigdon

Lives in Central California with her spouse. She graduated from California State University, Stanislaus, with a B.A. in English and is currently pursuing her M.A. in literature. Ms. Rigdon works as a professional writer and editor for various clients.

Anokina Shahbaz

I am currently a full-time student at CSU, Sacramento working on my Masters degree in counseling. I hope to incorporate my love of writing into my future work with clients as I walk with them on their journey to healing.

Ann Strahm

Is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Gerontology at CSU, Stanislaus. In her spare time she loves to view the world through a camera lens- particularly enjoying macro photography.”

Lucinda Summerville

I am a native Oregonian who got the photography bug at a young age. I have always been enamored with cameras, taking photos, trying out new techniques and learning how to improve at my hobby. I have always wondered about the life of wildlife photographers. For now, I'll settle for the ducks in the local ponds.

Katie Suratt

Modesto is my hometown, and I am currently attending CSU Stanislaus as an English Major. My one great wish is to write and (hopefully) to do it well, so that others might benefit from the gift I've been given.

Scott Taylor Jr.

I am currently in Turlock with my wife, Amanda and son, Hayden James, almost ready to apply to an MFA program in Creative Writing.

Leola Washington

Leola Washington is a poet, and aspires to become a novelist.

Marina Weighill

Is 19 years old and attends Las Positas College. She has been writing for a few years now. She loves life, the color orange, and puppies.

David Wetherington

A photographer who lives and practices dentistry in the Sierra Nevada mountain town of Sonora, CA. He had his start using film approximately 13 years ago, and still adheres to many traditional techniques despite the move to a digital medium. More of his work can be seen at www.dkwphotography.com

Jesse Wolfe

I am in my fifth year as an English professor at CSU Stanislaus. My specialty is British modernism; my first scholarly book, *Bloomsbury, Modernism, and the Reinvention of Intimacy*, is forthcoming this year from Cambridge University Press.