

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 11 | Issue 1

Article 1

June 2011

Harpur Palate, Volume 11 Number 1, Summer and Fall

Harpur Palate .
Binghamton University--SUNY

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., Harpur Palate (2011) "Harpur Palate, Volume 11 Number 1, Summer and Fall," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 1.

Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol11/iss1/1>

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Harpur Palate, Volume 11 Number 1, Summer and Fall

Cover Page Footnote

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HARPUR PALATE

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Vol.11 No.1



Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal, Vol. 11, Iss. 1 [2011], Art. 1

**BINGHAMTON
UNIVERSITY**

HARPUR PALATE

**SUMMER
& FALL**

**BINGHAMTON,
NEW YORK**

<https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol11/iss1/1>

Vol.11 No.1



.: Harpur Palate, Volume 11 Number 1, Summer and Fall

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ISSN NO. 1532—904610

Harpur Palate is published bi-annually by the Department of English at Binghamton University, PO Box 6000, Binghamton, NY, 13902. Visit our website at: harpurpalate.binghamton.edu

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Typeset in Harpur Palate Franklin Gothic, ITC Clearface, and Monotype Plantin.

Printed by Montrose Publishing, Montrose, PA



“This is where the difficulty lies. We are lucky when that underground current can be tapped and the secret spring of all our lives will send up its pure water. It seldom happens. A thousand trivialities push themselves to the front, our lying habits of everyday speech and thought are foremost, telling us that that is what ‘they’ want to hear. Tell them something else.”

**—WILLIAM
CARLOS
WILLIAMS**

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Tim Jones-Yelvington

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CROW JUSTICE

**SHERMAN
ALEXIE**

As I pump gas, a flock of crows passes
overhead. Then another flock arrives,
and another, and a third, fourth, and fifth.
Jesus, the sky itself is made of crows,
and they're louder than the nearby freeway.
Could this be a family reunion?
Maybe these dark birds are planning for war.
Then, with one great hush, the flock goes silent,
and separates into living currents,
and forms winged rivers around a mid-air
island of three quickly deserted crows.

Why? I don't know at first, but then one bird,
much larger than the rest, breaks from the flock,
quickly followed by other large, fast birds,
and leads a mass-attack on the lost crows
and snap-snap-snaps their necks, and as they fall,
tears them in half. As the crow-pieces hit
hot pavement, the flock, as one, celebrates.
Yes, they celebrate. And I realize
that I saw a public execution.
A murder of crows, indeed, but what crimes,
among the crows, are punishable by
death? I can't begin to understand crow
morality. Hey, I don't want to try,
but justice, like time, flies and flies and flies.

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LANDSCAPE

SHERMAN
ALEXIE

Beside the turquoise river, a game path tunneled through willows.
Beside the game path, abandoned railroad cars collect rust and mice.
If you need to ask me which of the three
I find most beautiful, I'd choose the train.
Does that make me strange?

MARITAL LOVE

SHERMAN
ALEXIE

The sinks and showers are slow-drained
with our intertwined hair,
and I know exactly what size shoe, shirt,
and pants you wear.

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TEN LITTLE INDIAN BOYS

**SHERMAN
ALEXIE**

Condemned, we ran across the bridge, also condemned.
That bridge never collapsed, but we have, now and then.

DIGITAL LITERATURE

SHERMAN
ALEXIE

I once believed that a book-less house was a mockery,
but have learned that abundance is a form of poverty.

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TO THE HOUSEPAINTER:

**CHRISTOPHER
ANKNEY**

A winter-fat robin pecks at snow
over the empty granite marker—
your name chiseled into little canals—

your body broken down by fire
into ashes, jarred
at Riverview Gardens—ironic,

considering you were crippled
by open air, by lungs
that couldn't handle pollen

or the flame of human voices—

couldn't handle your love
smoking her pack-a-day of Salems.

The problem isn't that you died
so early in your life. It's that you died
so early in mine.

I offer the name of my first-born
to know you better, longer— What sacrifice
was buried in your chest? Anxiety tucked
up your flannel sleeves?

Do you have wet ticks of fall
on your tongue? The cornmeal sun?

Do I say now—the pink and orange blurs
to a sweet violet night—that God's a Van Gogh fan—

for light dances at a rhythmic speed
our eyes only blur what's left?

My brother taught me how to hook
a worm—its raspberry and butter insides—
my sister, how a doll can speak.

MISCARRIAGES

**CHRISTOPHER
ANKNEY**

Of justice, of course they've likely sought out why
God dropped stone relics in their bodies. To deliver
these thoughts to the world, though, is a sign of weakness.

Or simply a third or fourth stab inside the belly.
Or simply too large a problem for anyone else
to tackle, or listen to. Confessions are to be whispered

in the solitary confinement of assembly lines,
where one only has time to think of going on
with the company order: noodles, tomatoes, bread

driven off to Indianapolis, Chicago, Cleveland.
So one grew into the "kooky" aunt who fed her remaining sons
as if fattening cattle, and they grew into college

football players. The second aunt: a tiny, powerful switch
of few words, a torture genius at barely five feet
who can contort an ear into the opposite of origami:

the hurt flies in place of the beautiful swan.
The third one leaves and returns as often as tornadoes
around Ohio: always, a minute's wreckage set off

years of repair. Once, she brought a black man home
from Nebraska, and it was love and bruises
just as my uncles predicted. Only, their wives were tender

and that broken in. Only, Journal, said
of her surviving pups, snarled and showed
her teeth when she heard her brothers, having closed up

her heart for her boss—a black man a decade older,
with a Rolodex of lady names on his desk. Dignity fought for
at every holiday dinner. Then, there is sister night—

soaking in bathwater, not blessed enough to cleanse
what's lost. The ghosts crashing off skin, harsh music
that never escapes the sanctuary of the tub.

They poured out the light above our head and brought there
every morning dawn came and they had to stretch their wings
wills against the wall, especially having side battered into
that small space I tell closed awake every day by something big
and terrible, something interesting no harm though I tucked
handwritten poems of frost and like beneath my pillow for sustenance
and a little light. It was such a dark time, the lighting and living away,
the coming back badly to read.

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SANCTUARY



**KARINA
BOROWICZ**

They howled out the lintel above our door and fought there
every morning, dawn came and they had to shudder their wings
wildly against the wall, especially having slept flattened into
that small space; I felt clawed awake every day by something big
and terrible, something intending me harm; though I tucked
handwritten poems of Frost and Blake beneath my pillow for sustenance
and a little light, it was such a dark time, the fighting and flying away,
the coming back loudly to roost.

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Borowicz

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THE WORST GIFT I EVER GOT WAS A GRAVE



JAN
BOTTIGLIERI

They say it's the thought
that counts, but with graves
I say it's the sides.
With stones, it's what's written.

It lies on a piney bump. My grave! Still
in the spot I left it. I was eight,
soft as a bag of kittens.
My mother holds the deed.

Everything that happens underground
is serious: so goes the story
of the water main and willow.
I've seen panic at the anthill,

the dug-up babies like pearly lumps.
If that was me, I'd want thousands, too.
I'd try to save them all
in my tender black jaws.

Dear grave, you have not got
mourners, a maw, me yet.
Most gifts I can't wait to open
but not this.

Not really a plan—it's more of a plot,

what you never think of at all
 until you do: like the mitten
 found in spring mud. Its little wave.

COMPOUND

**MICHELLE
CHAN BROWN**

The gray dogs keep hanging themselves on 14-karat chains.
Bluebottles fill the mailboxes with the whispers of their mating.
We've left wet fruit for the visitors, but they won't come.
With flying, lurid colors, we pass through metal detection.
We lock away all the visible invalids and re-armour the car.
The latest maid empties the garbage of raccoon corpses.
Foragers go undetected, long beards and eyes of dried cherry.
Every fifteen minutes someone detonates the rocking chair.
The sun autopsies the trees, unzips their scarves of black lace.
We're a low laugh away from death or overstating the case.

ENEMY

**MICHELLE
CHAN BROWN**

Genial. Harmless as a new hat.
That is the way of plagues.

The father said: *What smells so good?*
The mother said: *Nothing ventured.*

Nothing demanded. Nothing fed
or cooked. The plague was modest,

refusing the royal "we";
the plague dispelled myths

like candy shell. Not metaphor,
but meat and bone. Not religion,

but man. Lo, the plague was traditional.
Notes the anthropologist: *Traditions kill.*

He held the baby on his knee. He built
the built-in bookshelf. By god, he was lively.

First, the flora fell. Later the animals.
Grief came organic to the children.

The girl wrote: *Only the dog is noble.*
The family kept pulling for peaches.

They'll eat off the family tree.

History told them: no one ever starved
for love. The mother darned

old flags for their cadavers.
After a time, they grew accustomed

to the maggots' fancy footwork.
Each had been told: *you carry the world.*

Their shoulders were thin as saplings.
The children stroked the sofa's stems.

Laughter filled their backpacks.
It is always almost the same.

DEPENDENCY

**MICHELLE
CHAN BROWN**

If you dirty your mouth—reach up,
you'll always find another. If you're stung,
put on lipstick before you suck out
the venom. Self-love is of the utmost

importance. But the chargé frowns
on excess of potassium. (Insects abound.)
Stay long enough, look hard enough,
you'll begin to see beauty, pity the beetle

his exoskeleton. Pity the spider her illusion
of mastery. Pity the fly her knitting;
she may be a mother, corner of her eye
window-tilted, waiting for the car to pull up.

Don't wash your feet—the floor is packed
with shells. Don't close your ears—the false
sea is full of secrets. Don't drink the water.
Many of the mouths have locks. Rust rears up

in underground conditions. As for your hands?
They're all you've got. Of course there's food.
A green abundance of ivy from the ancestral
balustrades, served in a mismatched set of cracked

lowly. Someone's avid for little touches, that sense
called home. Potpourri ghosts in the drawers.

Break the laces of your running shoes. Criticisms,
your stinging words, your loamy doubts—

into the manila envelope. Seal it with duct tape
and, naturally, a kiss. Note that there is no exit.
If you feel fear, eat it. May it stick like a caterpillar
to your throat. Little swallow, swallow it.

It dissolves to sweetness. Try starvation: you'll slip
between the synaptic cracks. If you lack discipline,
stretch yourself until you are limpid as an ocean.
Accept impermanence. Refuse liquids.

Thus effloresced, you may relax. Accept the flush
of your due, the accolades as various as stalagmites.
You are as a cave. You are the new space.
Soon enough, we can breathe and sleep inside you.
Practice it, practice it. Forgetting your name.

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**FLAT
HILLS**



**ANNAH
BROWNING**

I went a long time into the disquiet.

I called my names out. Skies

were clearing. Stones like jawbones
covered the field. There

was a long crease—the place
where hills had met. I said,

I'll try and lie down here. I'll try
and get some sleep. Murderers

stood on the edge of the deep
and were lonely. They waved

all their shovels at me—goodness—
goodness, I said—it must

be something like this.

THE CAVE



ANNA
CATONE

The driver of the tram is altogether lost. Headless taxi.
He is the drawing of the guide entering the interior
in some book of imagined places. He's at the mouth of it,
pitch, open door to the house under.

Mapped over the passageway walls ahead—mind's art—
water pumped in an echocardiogram, strange fossil.

Here, an ancestor's leg caught in the jaws of a predator.
Here, too, the manger.

"Fantastic Caverns," the driver says.

The air now ice water I swam in once
in a dream of the Arctic, stalactites
the blue-green glacier underneath.

The child next to me—his legs knocking into mine—
a seal brushing against my legs.

I WAKE UP IN THE BOAT



**ANNA
CATONE**

I stand over my father
while his heart turns over, speeds up,
slows.

The Captain makes a joke
about putting a dead man in a freezer. My father
sitting up now. Looking out.

We have sailed out far
this time. No sand, tall reeds,
no bedrock. All night only stars,
the sea.

I can see all the way down into it.

OPEN WINDOW



ANNA
CATONE

I can feel it happening. The window of the train
open this time, leaning out. Heavy clamor.
Dust like carbon or some thick thing
I would have washed off, ashamed.

Outside, an electric cable lit up like the skin of a fish
or the Indigo Bunting, blue
but not blue really—no blue pigment, just refracted light—
all blue light through the lush black bird.

I lean and lean, pushed up high on a folded down seat.
Arch after arch that keeps going back—
tunnels that were here at the beginning of this city—
and another train that comes greedy
with its exhaust, with its big white light
turning the corner.

A raccoon rat crosses the tracks.
A glow-in-the-dark man—lit-up vest, flashlight eyes—
flings off the cover of a manhole, climbs up into the dark.

THE WHALE SASHIMI RESTAURANT



**JEONGRYE
CHOI**

**TRANSLATED BY
BRENDA HILLMAN & WAYNE DE FREMERY**

Who caught the baby whale?
Beneath the restaurants standing in a row,
it is raining,
waves call out before our eyes,
and the whale, not knowing it is dead,
calls out for its mother's breast.
It tries to seize the hem of a skirt.
Slipping away, it floats around,
opening its dead eyes
in the rain.
It catches the hem of a wave
sweeping out to sea.
Its dead mouth opens wide
trying to follow the wave.
Its dead tail and dead fin paddle along.
Rain washes down
the window of the restaurant in streaks.
The edge of the sign,
each branch of the Tree of Heaven,
the whale's forehead, its heart, its guts and flippers,
try to wash away
with the desperation of things that can't.

INTENT ON FORGETTING THE BODY



**JEONGRYE
CHOI**

**TRANSLATED BY
BRENDA HILLMAN & WAYNE DE FREMERY**

Opium poppies swayed in the turtle's eyes;
Nakhwa Crags had three-thousand palace girls by its side.

The cat lives beneath the car tire,
the cancer cell beneath the rib,
meowing. Meowing.

When, across from the hospital
far from here,
trains cross the Han,
when they jerk and wriggle across
like cabbage worms,

the snowstorm in the mustard seed,
the distant hill in the cuckoos' cries—

everything is intent on forgetting the body
and the smell of this world.

In the eyelid, into the daydream,
beneath the bluff, the cherry blossoms,
everything floats, scattered and aloft.

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ROOM



**JEONGRYE
CHOI**

TRANSLATED BY

BRENDA HILLMAN & WAYNE DE FREMERY

In front of that room, there is a big tree blocking the window. When dawn comes, a thousand birds arrive to chirp in that tree. The tree weeps like the swirling of a stream. Each leaf becomes a bird and shakes itself. To appease the one window, the tree drops all its leaves.

There is a man sleeping like the dead in that room. There is a man who piles up time in his body. He doesn't know that the tree came to stand in front of the window. He can't hear it weep. There is a man in the world—who tries to extinguish the fire in his chest but has turned utterly to ash. In that room, he is there, lying down.

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**SUNDAY:
NEW YORK
SUBWAY**



**KYLE
CHURNEY**

"What does it mean, American?"—Larry Levis

The child's father slaps a *Wall Street* on his knee
to emphasize his words:

M.S.N., he mouths, *M.S.N.*

like ABC's.
M.S.N.

loud enough to let the whole train hear,

though the man across has slept from Washington
Heights & the woman

unconsciously rocking a stroller remains obscured
in her paperback:

Thugs and the Women Who Love Them.

*

Let a man's soul be a circle—a coin.

Let it be a crumpled piece of fibrous paper,
grimed from fingergrease, flecks of cocaine

*

Kathleen, if she were old enough to want,
would will the father,
who folds & folds the news meticulously
as the debits of his checkbook ledger, to say

*You're the prettiest girl in Manhattan—
though she doesn't understand*

Manhattan as island, Manhattan as emblem
of America.

Even the superlative hides in an eggshell:

She doesn't know that someone's always most,
the best. She watches in the mirror

as she soaps her hands & is happy

she is Kathleen.

He could say *I love you*, & she'll love him
for the timbre of his voice itself—

years before she questions his notion of love—

as she drives one day on the Mogollon Rim
between Heber & Payson, Arizona,

as she descends

from the fallen receipts of aspen leaves & peaks
foreclosed with snow

to sepia hills peopled with saguaros like men

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maybe, then, she will know . . .

She gapes at the ads above the tinted, graffitied
slashed windows of the train

*

as I remember waiting at the subway
where two models, tipsy from noon mojitos, swayed

like sheets of newspaper, swayed

with their own weightlessness,
batted their wrists at one another & giggled:

One reaching far into a white sack, taking an afternoon
to twist her wrist,

tearing at the hidden contents

while businesswomen hurried over Fifth Avenue,
DON'T WALK crimson flashing on their taut, shiny hair;

a cabbie clicking coins in a dispenser,
smoothing his dread with a dollar bill,

the model baring her thin, lacquered lip, twisting
and pulling so hard her drunkenness diminished,

rum-breath

diluted with oil & urine & mechanical chatter.

Slowly, smirking, crouching at the platform edge
she pulls from the sack a piece of tortilla

clutched in her glove-white fingers.

Atop the track, crouched on its haunches, a rat
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waits for its communion,
then clutches the tortilla in its paws.

*We are not worthy so much as to gather
the crumbs under thy table.*

It twitches its cheeks like a man about to sneeze

who sits in the rain on a five-gallon bucket,
a cat on his lap zipped to its neck

in a camouflage jacket warmer than his, the man
who strokes its rayon back,

hood tight upon its ears, tight as unbelievability:

What do cats love

but themselves, licking their fur the way the vainest man
dips his fingers in pomade & slicks his thinning hair;

rubbs his fingers under the faucet &
regarding the mirror, runs them through his hair again.

*

Oh how I want Kathleen's father to lean,

elbows on his knees & vomit nickels

and twenties onto the floor.

It might somehow explain—

though not how I'd be on my knees,
gorging on the bilious money.

She stares at a photo of malnourished teens
fastened to the train car wall, while in a Bangkok slum

a pimpled teen chews chili mango, his laugh echoing

from corrugated fiberglass across an alley,
echoing back to the cinderblock wall

a crook-toothed pimp has paid him to sit against:

Do this & I won't pull down your pants.

The pimp flips the teen a 10-Baht coin,
who shoves it in his pocket, whose tongue burns

& ears sweat

as an American man is inside the house with three girls.
He wonders what he would do if one of the girls

was his sister, Phueng, & he laughs. He laughs
because the girls are from his neighborhood;

he will see one, he's sure, this afternoon—

so, too, the pimp.

He wipes the morning sun from his brow & laughs,
& America says nothing

until the lecher confesses to the pageant murder:

the blonde with teased bangs who was six;
whose face the mother tricked with mascara, rouge,

vermillion lipstick.

Guilty. Guilty, the women spit at the television
after the graveyard shift in Alamogordo,

*

After the pedophile has left, tucked into his jeans,
scalp showing in his fresh comb,

he hands the teen a pack of gum & treads sated
through the muddy alley back to his motel.

His steps echo off the alley walls, back & forth
between his ears

until they are cold steel numbing his cerebellum.

He tastes culpability, which tastes like rotten cilantro or
white-bread stuck to the mouth

from his mother's boloney sandwich, & he thinks

*

I am American.

I am American, cradled in my recliner when I say
This problem's too quadratic—change the channel.

Your mouth, as it says *I don't know of*

*chronic hunger, I haven't felt it, but here,
a piece of salami.*

American is
to stretch your legs to the seat across the aisle,

as if to say to the girl who watches, *Yes,*
I am American.

To slap loafer soles and stilettos on a sidewalk;

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to stare at a cupped hand, & to want nothing more
than to place nothing in that hand.

WILL
CORDEIRO

Our Grayhound descending to a shuffled-out ground
A shock of lights awakes the eyes of strangers
Whose slumped on one another's shoulders
Across time states (holding bottles in their jaws
Their temples rattled on a pane of glass
They go their jumbled paths from overhead
And tumble off, vegetal, out the gate.
Shuttle-larkered streets leading to the harbor
It slanders through the hums of the slums
To neighborhoods beyond these streetlights
I felt a girl and not how she seems a life
Age Helixes done (no going back home
Your mixed connection, 11:30s
Last chance to transfer, so a faint white eye
Has grumbled. Can't sleep in Port Authority.
Best get a room now. First bus leaves six sharp.
The hollow station echoes when he turns;
I shudder—before he's gone—his limousine
Flash Knight's Security badge before
I hold the headlights of my limousine bag
Avoid the anti-dump lull coiled on the floor
And figure I can find an after-hours
The nearby which leaves me with some time
To kill I wonder up the Avenue
Until I find a godforsaken hole—
In the wall between the visible ground, town

.: Harpur Palate, Volume 11 Number 1, Summer and Fall

TERMINAL



WILL CORDEIRO

Our Greyhound downshifts to a chuffed-out grind.
A shock of lights awake the eyes of strangers
Who've slumped on one another's shoulders
Across three states, holding duffles in their laps,
Their temples rattled on a pane of glass.
They grab their jumbled packs from overhead
And stumble off, vegetal, out the gate,
Shuffle darkened streets leading to the harbor
Or slumber through the tunnels or the slums,
To Meadowlands beyond these storied heights.
I left a girl and job here what seems a life
Ago. Holidays done, I'm going back home.
Yeah, missed connection. 11:20's
Last chance to transfer, so a gaunt white cop
Has grumbled. Can't sleep in Port Authority.
Best get a room, son. First bus leaves six sharp.
The hollow station echoes when he turns;
I glimpse—before he's gone—his flimsy badge
Flash Knight's Security. Subways howl below.
I hoist the deadweight of my lumpy bag,
Avoid the shit-dump bum crouched on the floor,
And figure I can find an after-hours
Bar nearby, which leaves me with some time
To kill. I wander up 9th Avenue
Until I find a godforsaken hole-
In-the-wall between the rubble, plywood, brace

Of scaffolding beneath some overpass.
The bartender, in a lacy bra and cut-
Offs which show a little sag of ass, ignores
My sober presence on the stool. A large
Bubba with a harelip shouts "Skunk, Over,"
To get a beer half head. Another man down
The end cradles his face, then moves the crook
Of his locked arms a space, comes up to smoke,
Giving me the eye. A fool keeps punching
Buttons on the busted juke and feeding it
More coins while someone else adjusts a radio.
I fondle grubby glasses and pretend to read;
Half-smudged, "Half-off Specal 2nite is Shot."
I see the man beyond the mirror's end
Is blind; the clock I've studied hasn't moved
All night. There's nothing here that works, but all
Make due somehow as if they owe a debt
Of gratitude to forces which have kept
Them up this long. When last call comes, I pitch
Out, breathing in the ruddy smear of dawn
By the transport depot in exhausted clouds
And feel each minute drain away the stars.

PAULA'S OLD TYME PIRATE PHOTOS

KATIE CORTESE

One minute, we're strolling down George Street and the next Carl's got my wrist in his hand, tugging me into the studio. He goes to the glass-topped desk to get us on the wait list while I check out walls full of all the pirates who've gone before us. There's a couple getting shot right now: the lady in purple satin and black mesh and a plastic dagger at her hip, and the man in short black pants and an orange silk shirt and a stick-on Jack Sparrow moustache.

"Ten minutes," Carl says, and he gets his arms around me from behind, one hand holding tight to his other wrist. I put my hands on top of his, and the ring he gave me last night is cold and loose on my finger. The studio smells of sweat and moth balls and bubble gum, and outside the window people flow by at a tourist's pace, eyeing us like we're rentable by the hour.

"How much?" I say, and hit my new ring against his knuckle. "We have to start saving."

"We will. After this weekend," Carl says, pressing his lips against my neck, and, even though I don't like to PDA all over the place, it's a special weekend, so I let him.

The pictures on the wall are sepia-toned, and Carl points out one with a German Shepherd in a buccaneer's hat with a large, curved brim. The woman in the picture has her blond hair in an eighties ponytail beneath her dark bandana. Her pirate

Behind the glass counter, a teenage girl with a camera holds up two fingers. "A couple more frames," she says, and snaps her gum. The man standing on the fake prow of the fake boat they've got for scenery draws his fake sword and acts like he's going to run his lady through. But she gets her plastic dagger between her teeth and puts her hands around his neck like she's strangling him. They are both laughing too hard, and the girl with the camera stands there blowing bubbles until they can hold their serious faces for more than two seconds in a row.

"That one'll confuse the grandkids," Carl says.

"If they make it that long," I say. Then the two frames are up, and the couple disappears through saloon-style doors to the dressing rooms. The girl waves us forward. She pulls out a pinkish dress for me, purposely torn over a lacy bodice. Carl gets black-and-white stripes, a wide, yellow scarf at his waist, and a giant hoop earring.

"Are you Paula?" he asks the girl, who stops chewing long enough for a close-mouthed smile. She shakes her head and Carl goes on. "We've been engaged for eighteen hours."

She nods with her eyebrows arched, simulating amazement. We're boring her. This is just her summer job before she goes back to Jacksonville State or U of F, and, to her, we're no different from the last couple she shot: just another picture to cover up another swatch of wall.

"He told me he had a conference out here," I say, as if I can make us real for her in ten minutes or less. "But it was a setup. He hid the ring in my chocolate mousse." I'm grinning at Carl over my shoulder, and his face is red from sun. I want to lay him out here on the floor and draw circles around his belly button with my tongue, but I wonder if even that would set us apart. As it is, the girl slings the heavy camera around her neck and puts us in a tableau with three shoves of her thin, nail-bitten hands. When she's done, I'm standing in front, and he's behind, our faces to the camera, his hands clutching the rip in my dress like the prelude to a rape.

For posterity," he says, a second before the flash goes off, and, though we take ten or twelve more frames, the first is the one we go with. His face is curled in a lunatic sneer, hips thrust forward, sword pointing back, and I am limp in his arms, head lolling against his shoulder, the bready tops of my bosoms bared between his hands. It's the look on my face, though, that's priceless, Carl says at the counter when we see our shots on the flat screen. My eyes are open so wide, and my lips are parted with no trace of a smile. "You don't even look like you," he says.

And I wonder if that's what the grandkids will say when they find this photo in a shoebox of mementoes. Carl, young and virile. Me, thin, smooth-faced. Both of our hairstyles long out of date.

CHICKEN SOUP

LISA FAY
COUTLEY

It's likely you're right, that no one's watching
in my window while I'm mincing the garlic
and thinking of how I wasn't holding a knife
but standing in the health center trying not to
touch the chairs or the square pillar in the middle
of the room, trying harder to hold my jaw closed
as a helicopter laid flat the grass in North Carolina
where they found the body of that small, small girl
with the curly hair and the smile. She smiles still
as I switch to chopping onion and stop crying
over mothers who sell daughters for sex, so now
I'm crying because I never fall in love with men
who love me first, and because every time I call
the doctor, my earache and sore throat go away,
and the chill of the stethoscope, the stranger's tug
at the front of my shirt, the feeling that someone's
looking in where I can't see out—that's gone, too,
and no one should go on faking their cough alone.

THE VISIT

JOHN DAVIS

The day my grandfather visited me
from death, the sun was dark
as duckweed. He wore a necktie.
We sat on a porch humming folk songs.
He whispered that he didn't know the words
the way I whisper I don't know my life.
The willows were budding on the eastern rise.
He said I should plant rice in the damp lowland.

We talked of fine rain on sunflowers and irises.
He said he hated irises once because he had
to draw an iris, his state flower,
in art class by a woman with an accent
so deep she gurgled like a Chinese wine sack.
He said he didn't hate anything else
and I shouldn't hate him for dying
when my mother was two months old.

The wind wore the afternoon
like a puffy down coat.
Some days I am the pink periwinkle.
Some days I am the pink snow
getting dirty in the mud.
Some days my grandfather
visits me wearing an iris necktie.
Those days I watch it bloom.

There's a beat where everybody slows down and wants to consider if somebody has done me the favor of fucking me after all, but I do not look up. I can picture what they are: Miss Amy trying not to drop the box of Snickers she's shelving, and little blonde Lou-Ann giggling into her Seventeen Magazine's No-Tan Tips.

"I'd be happy to investigate," Miss Amy says, punctuating the syllables to make it dirty.

"I know it," I tell her, and I'm careful, getting up from my stool.

In the walk-in, I stand under the cool air vent. Back here, it's mostly hot dogs and fountain drink syrup, but it always smells like cilantro. I press my back against the metal wall and lift up my shirt, fold down the top of my bra to let my breasts breathe until my nipples go hard. Last night, in his sleep, Ricky reached for me. I could hear his teeth grinding, a high-pitched, nails-against-the-chalkboard kind of squealing, and so I put my swollen knuckles up to his jaw and rubbed until his mouth opened and his muscles went slack, and then he was awake, and I was in his arms, his smooth chest against my bare back, two sets of legs bent at the same awkward angle so we'd fit together.

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HOLDING THE LINE

JOSEPH
ENGEL

The rusty train cars are twenty
empty-handed merchants sitting
silent but ready like always;

stubborn in the wind which whips
a lash of brittle howls across this iron
framed picture of sleep, this

ubiquitous breeze, flustered
by forgotten ways of freight, tosses
a bailey hat into its own mouth.

Between the tracks there's a young man
casting dreams of romance in drags
off his cigarette and swigs

from a bottle of whiskey.
He sits in light as thin as mist
on a pile of books

which a drifter sees
with hands like flint,
wide-eyed for warmth.

Though, someone tends
to all these snoring beasts,

with a yawning gait
and a flashlight, for hope,
who knows

every crater on the moon
by name and has taken
to making up constellations.

His wife is the light on at home
who drinks up the wine
and is used to the cold

side of their bed except nights
that her burning arm
finds their dog Orion, her smoke.

Dragging into home burnt and early,
their bedroom door blares open
to his red eyes full of choked out sun,

of thoughts on vagrants
or what might have howled
down between the trains.

He brings the smell
of night and granite and tar
which makes her more awake,

coughs a bit and then
in full eclipse
begins to pull the shades.

BLUE

CHRISTEN ENOS

One time about fifteen years ago, Greg's son found a dead frog in the woods next to the stream that runs down from the reservoir, through the center of town, and into our neighborhood. Being a boy, he brought the thing home wrapped in his sport sock and showed it to his dad.

Greg considered the frog corpse, displayed on their front step that afternoon, and wondered out loud whether they should cut it open, poke around inside, just to see his kids squirm. He laughed as they ran away—daughter into the house, son down the street—hands covering their ears to block out the images Greg had put into their heads. They were laughing, too.

The frog was eventually unceremoniously deposited at the edge of their yard.

About a year after that, Paul's daughter developed a rash on her lower left leg after a warm fall afternoon playing with the boys at the reservoir.

When Paul caught her scratching, scratching, scratching it while the family watched TV two nights later, he demanded to know what had happened. Had she been doing something dangerous? Had the boys talked her into something?

Paul's daughter swore that she hadn't and they hadn't. They were all just playing by the reservoir.

When Tom got the call late on a Friday night, a handful of years later informing him that Paul and another cop had picked up his boy for trespassing, none of us were surprised.

Tom's son and some other kids had cut the chain on a gate to let themselves into the local factory grounds for a night of drinking. Brytaya, the place was called; they made dyes there. The boys went unenthusiastically but willingly when the police showed, leaving their longneck bottles behind in the dark.

Tom had to desert our monthly poker game to go bail his son out, and I went with him. At the station, Tom didn't speak to his son, and we drove home in silence, the kid in the back seat. Tom was never going to punish him. He thought his son only had a fixed amount of love for him, and he didn't want to risk any of it.

Ten years ago the town paper posted a notice urging residents not to eat any fish caught in the reservoir. At that time, I was going out every Saturday morning, casting my first reel before the sun had fully crossed the horizon, escaping the ringing pain of my house where my wife had recently had a miscarriage. Sometimes I brought our daughters along so they could learn that silence could be comforting, too. The fish hadn't tasted quite right for a while, though, so we stopped going.

Greg's son came down with cancer thirteen months ago, and already he's dead at the age of twenty-five. We all get the news standing, on the phone in our kitchens, in our bedrooms, in our dens. We blame ourselves for not noticing the poison we'd brought our families into when we settled near the reservoir.

On one occasion, it snowed blue in our town. Our children, bundled in their winter gear, ran outside, heads back, mouths open.

SYSTEMIC SYNDROME

**REBECCA
FAUGHT**

Days ago, I saw the shadow of birds,
but no birds—just the deep V
on the lake's slash of glow, edges definite
as crayoned wings, an angle
I couldn't trace back to the sun.
Everything has become suspect.

When my grandfather worked
the strip mines, he carried a buckeye
in his pocket, protection against the high-wall
in the dark, against gravity, the forward
momentum of a front-end loader. He knew
the exact ratio—fertilizer to dynamite
to length of fuse—for crippling a hill, its bones
broken, a body that could be carried away.
He knew where to stand not to be that body.
He still kept that seed next to his keys and knife,
the functional jingling of his pockets; the land
was always flattened, and he never was.

It's wet this year, and late in the season.
The buckeyes have all rotted on the ground;
I never could reach them still limbed.
I agreed to pills instead. The doctor promised
they would reset the world to the physics
of if a, then b, but the bus I'm on came

out of nowhere. There is a tunnel
 just ahead, a fifteen minute train hurtling over it,
 and any second, I will disappear in there. I remind
 myself all that bridge knows is push back, its electrons
 holding a shape exactly against the attraction
 of iron and carbon to collapse; and wish
 I had put the pill in my pocket instead—
 something to hold on to, waiting for the fall.

REBECCA
 FAUGHT

When my grandfather worked
 the ship mines he carried a package
 in his pocket, protection against the high wall
 in the dark against gravity the forward
 momentum of a front-end loader. He knew
 the exact rules—nothing to do with
 as length of time—the rigging a bill its force
 instead a body that could be carried away
 the know where to stand not to be that body.
 He told me that story next to the beer and milk
 the hundredth juggling of his pocket, the land
 was always flattened, and he never was.

It was the year and late in the season.
 The gardeners have all retired on the ground;
 I never could reach them still limbed.
 I agreed to this instead. The doctor murmured
 they would reach the world in the physics
 of a word but the bus the on a row

FREAK SHOW



**GRETCHEN
FLETCHER**

The calf stared with one glass eye
in each of its two heads
from the box on the farmhouse floor
where Herb proudly displayed it.
My parents and their friends gathered
around to stare at Herb's stuffed freak,
the men forming a flank up front,
the women hanging back but curious,
sneaking peeks over the men's shoulders.
I, although a child, was allowed to stay.
Herb's wife came out of the kitchen
with plates of heavy, larded apple pie.
"Put that away, Herb," she said.
"The child" But it was too late.
I already knew the truth.

MY PEOPLE

**STEVE
GIBBON**

My wife says that, when my car breaks down, we are not getting a new one. She hates my car. It is a 1982 Lincoln Continental. It is older than my two grandchildren and dark red with silver trim. Driving is one thing I am not too old to do. I know some people at the DMV, and they know better than to try and stop me from driving. I tell my wife that she will break down before my car. I tell her that my car will last until she is dust. This sets her off. She is not too old to throw pots across the living room. This time, a little porcelain owl is broken on accident. It is a small, ugly white owl, but our son made it for her before he moved away and stopped talking to us. She says that it is my fault that he does not talk to us. When the owl breaks and the pieces scatter across the linoleum tiles, she looks at me with this old, round face and wide, open mouth the same as she looked when our son first asked us to stop calling him. When he said that he wanted us to please leave our grandchildren to him and his wife and stay out of it. It was an ugly porcelain thing anyway. I know some people at the park, so I decide to get in my car and drive there.

I drive in my Continental with the windows rolled up and the air conditioning on and listen to talk radio. They talk so fast on the radio, and I can't listen to everything they are all saying at once. When they start to talk about politics, I switch it off. Politics are the worst thing in the world, I think. Whoever

idiot politics should be hanged. I know some people in politics, and I wouldn't mind if they were hanged. Or at least tied up and dragged behind a car and then told to go and find a real job like the rest of us. I worked in a restaurant for fifty-seven years. I am thinking about the smell of garlic and the feel of warm, soft dough in my fingers. I am thinking about what my grandchildren look like when I hear a loud crash and am jerked forward in my seat and my head bounces back and forth on my shoulders. I look behind me and see a man climb out of his car with hair like a matador. He has his shirt open at the top, and a thick black tangle of matted fur emerges from the opening, wet with sweat. He is like a swampy wolfman with a mop for a wig, and he is walking towards my car door.

"You okay?" he asks.

"Yes," I say. "I am fine."

He shakes his head and looks back at his car, a trashy plastic-looking new-age thing which has merged into the back of my own. "What were you doing, buddy?"

"Excuse me?"

"You—you can't just stop in the middle of the road like that, pal." The greasy wolfman slicks his hair back with his own perspiration as he shouts at me. I have half a mind to reach for my golf club and teach this man something about respect. "Somebody could have been killed," he says. "I could have had my daughter in the car."

I am about to tell him that I didn't stop my car in the middle of the road. I am about to tell him that he had better watch his tone when he speaks to me because there is plenty of space in my trunk and I know lots of people. But really, I did stop in the middle of the road. I don't know how I know all of a sudden, but it comes back to me in a picture of red and silver, and I can see myself stop in the middle of the road and begin to think about my restaurant, about the garlic bread and the warm steam that used to make my wife glow in the kitchen lights. I tell the man that I am sorry. I tell him that I know some people who can fix

tells me more about his daughter who is seven and takes lessons to play the flute. My son played the clarinet and was no good at it. I used to tell him to go outside with that noise, and he would glare at me and go outside and play to the frogs in our pond until his mother brought him in for the night.

I say to the man that I am glad his daughter was not in the car, and he nods and we get it all sorted out. I look at the back of my Continental, and there is some blue paint and a small dent, but it is a real car and all the damage was the wolfman's. I will get it taken care of, but there is still the park.

Jeffrey is playing chess at his regular table. He is an old black man with white hair and giant wrinkled fingers, and the man he is playing is new and losing. I don't like chess, but I do like sitting with Jeffrey, who is a great deal like myself. Jeffrey knows people and knows chess. He understands what my wife cannot bring herself to understand: the only way to get by is to have connections. The world is too big for one person—it will swallow you up unless you have your feelers out and can cling to every corner of the earth. My wife says the only connection she wants is our boy. She won't listen when I say that he's not coming back, but if we get enough people to hold us down we can make it by. Jeffrey knows this. Jeffrey's son, Martin, took a piece of shrapnel in the throat overseas when some suicidal whack job drove a bomb into the side of Martin's squad. Jeffrey was in the military himself once and has some kind of medal for it, and, best of all, he knows people in it.

I was swallowed up for a while after my son first left, and it won't happen again, I can tell you. I spent six months sitting in a hot room on a faded couch, listening to the fireplace crackle, and staring at the snowflakes powdering the windowsill as the sun rose and fell, and the room lit up in different shades of gray and blue. My head was stapled to the cushion. Empty, square bottles stuck to the wooden floor by my feet in clusters. Days

and weeks passed where I could not remember waking or sleeping or eating. The people who I knew slipped through the cracks in my skull and pooled beneath the couch. Never again, I said to my wife. I won't forget my people.

"Tommy-Boy," Jeffrey says to me. He leans back and pats me on the shoulder as I walk up to him. He is the only one who can call me that without me getting upset about it. I tried to say something once, and he waved it off and my blood stayed cool. I don't see how it happened, but it happened; that's the thing about Jeffrey.

"The owl got broken," I say. "My wife broke the owl." What I had meant to say was "the weather is fine," and I soak the warm air into my skin and squint at the sun.

"Uh oh," he says, and he looks down at the chess board. "She'll come around. Have a seat; I'm just about to beat Mr. Finley here at a game of chess."

"We'll see about that," Mr. Finley says, and I like him already. He knows he is going to lose, but he is a good sport and doesn't back down.

"Heard from the boy?" Jeffrey asks. Jeffrey is so sharp that sometimes I don't believe it.

"No," I say. "Not yet." Mr. Finley's bald head is damp, and he wipes his face with his sleeve in between moves. He is wearing a tie and a button-up shirt that is nice but a bit out of place for the park. It smells faintly of hot dogs, and I look around for a stand because I'm hungry all of a sudden.

I used to take my son to this park when he was just a kid. We threw a baseball back and forth on the grass. "Keep your eye on it," I said to him. "Don't jump out of the way like that." I hit him in the cheek once and that was that. He threw a fit, and so I maybe lost my cool and said some things which he misunderstood. I called him a Girl Scout and told him we could go to the store and buy him a dress if it made him feel more comfortable. It was all a misunderstanding. He never played any sports after that. It was like all of his love for baseball swelled up in his

cheek, and once the bruise was gone completely, so was the love. The stitches spelled out a curse on his skin, and then he went to art school. The baseball flew back in my own face all the time. It flew into everyone's faces. It hit his mother in the face when he came home to her and said that his father hated him. Try telling your wife that it was a misunderstanding. Try taking your son to ice-cream later and saying, "Son, it was all a misunderstanding." Kids don't believe in misunderstandings. They don't believe in metaphors either. Try to tell your son with mint chocolate-chip on his face, "You see, I don't care about baseball. I don't care if you never play sports as long as you live. But you will take a lot of baseballs to the face in life. You will get hit in the cheek time and time again, and if you quit the whole game after one bruise then you will never win at anything."

It was something like that. It sounded good when it came out, and it fluttered across my son's oversized head like a cluster of furious moths, and I could tell that he was giving this some thought for about two seconds until the cluster broke apart and drifted away, and only one or two of the moths remained, tiny pieces of the message still trying to find a way to understanding. The pieces that he retained involved getting baseballs in the face all the time, and he groaned into his ice cream. What could I do? So he went to art school and met some skeletal tramp with a nose ring, and they eloped when he was just nineteen. Good for him, I said. Good for my boy; he found the love of his life so young. He found a snotty little painter with chopped-up, rain-bow-colored hair who talks on her cellular phone at the dinner table. I can still hear it vibrating against her skinny thigh during our prayers. The vein in my head throbs in sync with the phone beneath the table.

"Tommy-Boy here's just about to drive us to dinner," Jeffrey says. "His treat." I look over to Mr. Finley who is holding his own king between his fingers and smiling at me. The game didn't take long to finish. Or maybe it did. I don't really know; I sort of

"Sure thing," I say. I don't mind that one bit. That's just how Jeffrey is. Next week he'll come up with a two-hundred dollar pair of earrings that he insists I give to my wife. "Don't tell her they're from me," he will say. "Surprise her." I won't tell him that I know they were his own wife's and that he doesn't know what to do with them now. He doesn't have any daughters, and he never spoke to his sister after she stole a stash of six-hundred dollars from his copy of *Paradise Lost* and moved in with her heroin-dealing boyfriend, thirty, maybe forty years ago. So I will take these things home and give them to my wife and her eyes will shine for half a day like she's forgotten all about our son. Jeffrey knows a thing or two about how to rise above. He rises above every day with a game of chess and a good meal. I have my people and my car. My wife has nothing, but those earrings sure help. I will buy dinner for Mr. Finley, and he will also be one of my people. Perhaps we will meet at the park tomorrow, and Mr. Finley will come again and introduce his wife and his children. Mr. Finley will say, "This is my good friend. He bought me dinner and was a gentleman, but his son will not speak to him. He cannot even see his own grandchildren." His wife will take my hand between hers and hold it just a little bit longer than normal to let me know that she is so sorry. Their son will look to me with an approving nod and think to himself, "There is no reason that this fine old man couldn't be my grandfather."

Jeffrey asks if I am all right in the car. I say I am fine and ask why. He says I was at the stop sign for a long time. I was thinking. How can anyone think straight while they drive around? I need to be still for a minute so I can gather my thoughts together, or they will tumble behind the car in the smoke of the exhaust and that's it. They are gone after that. At this age, you can't waste anything.

He says my boy will call sooner or later. I do not have later. Mr. Finley adjusts the seatbelt strap in the back seat and clears

I eat a crabmeat roll in a diner that smells like my house. This is the first time it occurs to me that my house might smell old, like this place smells, with mold on the ceilings and moisture in the walls. Today has been a very stressful day. I have had a lot of thoughts like this, and after a little bit I am beginning to want some time away from my people. The food is good, and I tip the waitress fair: a fat, young girl with red cheeks and a smile with straight white teeth. The teeth on this kid, I say to Jeffrey, and he gives me a wink that I am unable to translate because I am secretly wondering if my grandchildren would be about her age. I drive Jeffrey and Mr. Finley home later, and, when I get to my driveway, I push the button on my sun visor and pull into the open garage. That is the best part of my day every time I do it.

It smells like old people. I make a mental note: get some spicy, new-smelling stuff. Stuff that young people will like. Sweaty leather and oil paint. Those are the only two scents that I can think of when I think of young people.

The kitchen has been restored to its normal state. All of the owl pieces have been swept up and I think probably placed into an old jewelry box for when she gets into the mood for arts and crafts and has some super glue. I hope. But no. I pull the closet with the trash bin open and see the twinkle of white porcelain under the kitchen lights, nestled in some vegetable peelings and an empty milk carton, and my heart climbs down into the bottom of my stomach. I reach into the trash and pull as many of the pieces out as I can, but I do not want my wife to see. It is not a project for right now, and the owl will have to wait until I have some time and some super glue.

My wife is watching the 6 o'clock news. A young boy has been found dead, washed up on the side of a river after he tried to swim at an old, defunct lumber mill transformed into a

praise facility. They show his face from before he had drowned but not after.

"There is leftover roast in the refrigerator," my wife says to me. "I had dinner with Jeffrey," I say. Her face does not change when the news shows a body wrapped up in blue being lifted into an ambulance.

"How is Jeffrey doing?"

"He is as sharp as ever," I say. The boy's mother is shown crying on the television. There are only a few feet of carpeting between me and my wife, but I might as well be on a space shuttle drifting through a black void, staring down through the little, round window at this planet for something familiar. I wonder who this woman is on my couch, wearing a faded blouse with white and tan peacock feathers and big expensive earrings, who can just throw these owls in the garbage, just like that, like they're finished. I can't think straight with that television blaring.

I sit down next to this woman whose face I have seen every day for fifty-five years but cannot recognize. She is motionless, there, on the center cushion with her back upright and stiff. I reach into my pocket and feel the sharp edges of broken porcelain and hold them out to her, and I feel my heart beating like a man who is watching another man touch his wife's arm in a way that is too familiar. I want to say something about our grandchildren—I want to break through this distance and make her understand that this, too, will pass if we can only rise above it, but what is there for an old man to say to his old wife at a time like this? What is there for all the people in the world to say to my wife at a time like this?

THE CORTEGE

**FRANCES
GONZALEZ**

An animal died in the garage last night. It looks like an emaciated Shetland pony, less than three feet tall with crusted-open brown eyes, visible ribs, and stubby legs with cracked hooves. Splashes of blood mar a long neck sparkling with broken glass and a thin mane of matted, dark hair. The gray coat is dull, patches shedding to reveal chapped skin. Bits of grass and dirt tangle in the tail. Flies burrow into dry, white-haired nostrils and ears. A bone sits between its eyes, worn round and smooth, an ivory ornament on a narrow face. I prod its gray skin with the round rubber end of a toilet plunger, the sweetly rotting vapor of dead meat mixing with mountain rain detergent and cool, autumn air. The garage door never closes all the way, and I'm always finding things in the mornings: panicked raccoons, neighbors' trash bins, and once a broken lawnmower that nobody claimed. But this is the first time I've seen anything like this. The lone window in the corner is broken and bloodied; the shelves are tumbled. Paint cans spill a drying color wheel on the floor. The washing machine is dented. The body lies in the midst of this mess, in blood thick like honey on the cement.

Cameron is not pleased when I call him. He picks up the phone on the fifth ring, and I know he stands hovering over his drawing desk in his apartment, the table littered with drawings of anthropomorphic cats in ski caps, his callused fingers and red hair

A chilling breeze comes through the open garage door, stirring the unicorn's mane. I turn to face the dryer. "I'm all right," I say, though he didn't ask. "But there's a dead unicorn in my garage."

His sigh is so deep goose bumps erupt along my arms. "Call animal control."

I let out an equally gusty breath. It's been five months since he moved out, and I don't know how to talk to him. I would call my mother, who spends her days playing mahjong with the other Chinese ladies of the YMCA. But she wouldn't pick up the phone. The neighbors have been keeping a respectful distance.

For a horrible moment, I think the body blinked, but the movement is only a fly roaming a staring iris. My silence must unnerve Cam. There's a moment of him tapping his pencil on his desk, scrutinizing the pictures, but he says he's coming, and he hangs up before I can thank him. I sit on the dryer to wait, afternoon light turning the body silver. I twist my hands, the dryer cold through my jeans, and wish I still smoked. Cam and I used to read fairy tales in college as English majors. He thought they were interesting studies of society and psychology. I thought they were lovely. Cam will look up the unicorn online, identify some species with a long Latin name. He'll tidy, call animal control, throw out the broken shelves, and scrub out the bloodstains.

The dappled light through the open garage makes the bone on the unicorn's face shine white. If animal control arrives, will they recognize what's dead in the basement for what it is? Will they throw it in a furnace with dead rats? Maybe they'll bring it to a morgue for dissection, hollow it, and examine each piece until its insides are scattered between jars and garbage bags and incinerators. The shining horn will be sent to a lab, tucked in a drawer with boards of pinned butterflies.

I slide off the dryer and dig out Cam's galoshes and his

both straight hair like mine and the dots of freckles on her wide cheeks. Cam's mom, her papery hands webbed with blue veins and her hair dyed brown, hugged me and gave me a yellow Baby's First Year album. When the baby was stillborn, I gave the album away.

The fence is bare now. I find the right spot in the yard, perfectly centered, and start digging. The ground is hard, and at first I can't make more than a few shallow holes. But soon I get the hang of it, stamping the shovel in with my galoshes before twisting the handle and tossing the clumps of dirt aside. The dirt is hard-packed, clay-red, and crumbling. The opening bellows of a homeless street fight ring down the block, and the world softens a little, makes me feel a little less insane.

Cam stands in the backyard. I don't notice until I stop for a break, hands aching. The sun peaks out behind the clouds and illuminates the little hole I've made, no more than three feet wide and only a foot deep. Cam stands a bit away, sunlight turning his hair russet, his big hands in his pockets and shadows under his brown eyes. He hunches in the chill, wearing a windbreaker I gave him when we first began dating. He has a blank, watchful look on his face that reminds me of doctors as they listen to patients describe their injuries.

"The garage is open," he says.

I flex my fingers, the rubber gloves creaking. "Did you look?"

"It's a pony, Anna. It was sick and confused."

It's cold again, the sun disappearing behind a gray string of clouds. It will rain later. He told me what I expected. There are no such things as unicorns or ghosts. There are rational explanations for everything. So why am I disappointed?

"Trying another garden?" Cam asks. He strides over to examine the spare shovel, picks rust off the metal with a fingernail.

"No." I start deepening the hole, inch by inch. "I'm making a grave."

Cam's fingers whiten on the shovel's handle. His black

windbreaker is too big for him, swallows his thin frame, a void to fall into. He named her, picked out the headstone, made a speech at the funeral in a charcoal suit. I don't remember much of it: a red wreath, a dark casket, a room of azaleas, and the white halos of lamps. When he moved out, he said I checked out. And he's right, but he also isn't at all. He wasn't the only one left stumbling in a world that no longer fit right: colors too dull, walls not quite where they should be.

"It has a horn, Cam," I say. "A white horn."

"So you're going to bury it in the yard?" His windbreaker flaps in agitation. "That's unsanitary and impractical."

"Shut up." I plunge the shovel deep in the earth, lift chunks of grass and rock to throw it on a growing mound nearby. Flakes of dirt tumble down into the neckline of my shirt and stick to my sweating back. "If you keep talking, I'll let animal control take it away. I don't want to wonder if I should have done something different."

The pit's uneven, one side a good six inches deeper than the other. Earthworms riot in the pockmarked loam. Cam's face wars between confusion and gentleness, eyebrows accorded and mouth pressed thin, and I look away from the familiarity of it. In the hospital, he looked at me that way. I'd been given a private room, either out of sympathy or to stop me from ruining other people's happy memories. I could hear the sounds from the halls: the frantic footfalls of families searching for their loved one's room, the brisk mutters of nurses as they cajoled and consoled, and the cries of mothers in labor and newborn children. I was tucked into a bed with an I.V. in my arm. Cam sat in a small chair beside the bed with that look on his face, tentative and dazed.

The wallpaper was dotted with purple azaleas. I counted them, getting two walls and two hundred and six flowers in before I gave up, trying to ignore the numb feeling from the waist down. Cam spent half an hour fielding calls from his family asking for news. Finally, he turned off his phone. A young nurse came in with wide, sympathetic eyes and asked me in a soft voice

if I would like to hold my baby girl. Holding the child often helps grieving parents, she said. She spoke like it was a fact she'd learned in school. She touched my shoulder. Her hand was cold through my dressing gown and her nails bitten to nothing.

"I'd like that." Cam's voice was so carefully unobtrusive I almost didn't hear him speak. He was too long for the chair, arms hanging off the rests and legs carefully folded, his knees pressed against the bed frame. When the nurse brought the small bundle, she offered it to me first. I didn't take it. I didn't want to feel her weight, her shape. But Cam took her.

Soft, bluish, tiny hands. Wisps of black hair, flat nose. Still mouth, closed eyes. White cotton blanket. I wanted to tuck the blanket in tight around her, keep her warm when she couldn't feel anything. I thought how nice it would have been to buy dresses and braid her hair and make her breakfast every day and I felt sick, so sick. She smelled sterile. I wanted to peel off my skin and leave it behind in the hospital bed. Cam exhaled noisily, a scratchy sound, and held still as if she would suddenly wake. His face cracked wide open, spilling out: loss, fear, wonder, anger, and the beginnings of resignation, and I wondered how anyone could be resigned to something like this, to such colossal, divine error. I knew I never would be. I hated that he was.

A cold wind deposits leaves from a neighborhood tree in the yard. Some get stuck in the fence. Cam is digging the grave. Soon, the bottom is level again, and he says it should probably be another foot deeper. He says something about methane from decomposition. His hands are red from the cold. I give him the gloves and keep digging my side. I can feel the heat of his back against mine, hear the plasticky rustle of his windbreaker and his small huffing breaths. I don't speak. I've said a lot, and it feels like too much.

We stop when the pit is two feet deep and three feet wide. In the garage, the unicorn lies in the same position as I found it, and that's more of a relief than it should be. The body is stiff. A fresh chunk of the coat has fallen away to the floor, carpeting the

He looks up from the body to cast me a searching glance, a habit of his: charting the ghost of lines and creases on my face like a map showing where I've been, where I'm going. I wonder what he used to see that he liked so much, and if my face now is as unnavigable as his seems.

He breaks eye contact first. "Who wants unicorns to be real if they look like that?"

I grab another pair of rubber gloves, pick out an old handkerchief from a box, and tie it around my face. There's an industrial wheelbarrow in the corner of the garage, a relic from a misplaced notion of paving the yard myself. I lift two of the unicorn's ankles and drag it to the wheelbarrow, sandpapering a trail of bloody streaks and scabs on the cement. Cam hoists the body by the rump and tail, helps me lift and drop it into the wheelbarrow. The animal's rear sticks up, and the spindly legs dangle from the edges of the barrow, hooves scraping against the cement.

I push the industrial wheelbarrow down the drive and around the house, furrowing the sprawling, yellow crabgrass under the fat wheel. Cam follows, and I know we look a bizarre procession. The body's tail swishes as I roll over the lumpy ground, the neck bouncing against the painted rim, eyes staring. Are other unicorns out there wondering where this gray one's gone? Maybe they don't know. Maybe they've left it to me—to us now. At the edge of the pit, we tip the wheelbarrow, and the unicorn flops into the space with a dull thud, a cloud of dust rising.

"What do we do now?" Cam towers over the bony thing in the pit, a battered toy in a dark chest. Only the white bone shines.

I hadn't thought much further than digging the pit. "We bury it, I guess."

"Seems anticlimactic."

I take off the handkerchief. "Why are you helping me?" Cam glances around. "You've always been selfish. You think nobody feels anything like you do." He crosses the yard to the rusting tank of lighter fluid, tucked beneath the Weber grill we haven't used since that last summer. He drags it to the pit, unscrews the top. "I think even fictional unicorns deserve cremation."

And because I can't stomach the thought of a funeral just like the last one, I agree.

Lighter fluid makes the unicorn glisten even in the darkening day; Cam pours a generous amount, dousing it from nose to tail. I crumple old editions of *The New York Post* into the pit like flowers. Page six lands near the creature's open eye. Cam lights the last sheet of newsprint with a match. At first, it only smolders and wilts, but suddenly it flares, and he drops it into a corner of the pit with a curse. The paper lights easily, illuminating the gray unicorn, giving it a sweat-like sheen and a light in its brown eye. For a moment, it looks like it might leap out of the pit and bound away, injury forgotten. But the tail catches fire.

The smoke rises up past the fences, dark and smelling of charred hair, fuel, and meat. The flames brighten, leaping in the pit, scalding enough that I step back and toss the rubber gloves and cloth to a far corner. Cam discards his windbreaker, his eyes bright in the heat, his shadow long in the grass. My hair feels crisp. My hands are tipped with chipped nail polish and swollen from all the digging. The unicorn's eyes melt into jelly, wind rippling across the still lakes of the iris. There's no polished casket, no pretty wreaths or pressed suits. On a cold, dark day, two people dressed in dirt-streaked jeans and dried sweat, their faces burnt, stand carefully apart over a smoking hole in a bare yard. My vision blurs, eyes wet from the heat. The unicorn is ugly and decrepit and has a funeral to match, but it feels better, truer than the last one. This time, there isn't anyone telling me it'll get better. This time, I held the body in my own hands. This time, Cam can't pretend to understand what will never make any sense.

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suppose.”

“You don’t believe that’s what it is.”

He stares at the burning pit, orange flickering in his dark eyes. “I could if I wanted to.”

I could keep him; he will come back if I answer the right way. The boxed socks could go back into their drawer. I’ll wake up next to warmth in the mornings again, his face squashed deep into a pillow. His drawing table will be in the study next to my bookshelf. We’ll be determined but wary, swimmers keeping their eyes peeled for invisible, drowning currents. One day, when the second floor of the house is dusty, the kitchen tiles cracked from use and the pit in the yard planted with hydrangeas, he’ll stare into his coffee cup and say how nice it would have been to try again, and I won’t answer.

The unicorn is charred in the pit, unrecognizable. In the quiet, I hear the sound of bones splintering.

“I don’t want other kids,” I say. “I don’t think I ever will.”

Cam’s face is stark. “I’m okay with that.”

The sun is starting to set, gray turning into pink. The neighbors gather outside the fence, their worried shouts rising in the air. The unicorn burns. I can see the ivory horn, unscathed in the blackened face. In the distance, sirens wail. But here in the yard, there is only the crackling of fire and the bittersweet frown on Cam’s lit face.

WHOLE LIFE

BY

JESSE GOOLSBY

When I was fourteen, pairs of well-suited men began to show up unannounced in our kitchen. I'd get home from basketball practice and there they'd be, crouching around our worn dining table, jabbing at papers as my parents nodded along. They made no effort in my direction, but it didn't bother me. I knew they were insurance men, *life insurance* men. Not that I thought about life insurance, how it worked, or why my parents happened to be in the market for a policy. The men could have been selling dog food for all I cared. But one night, after the latest set of buttoned-up men fled, my mother sobbed while warming water on the stove. She wasn't a crier, and I could have asked her what the matter was, but Jordan was playing the Celtics on Channel 19, and I was fourteen.

I knew mom had diabetes. I knew she had to wear a gray, six-inch, rectangle insulin pump on her hip. She

had to plan things out carefully if she wanted to go swimming. Beyond that, I wasn't interested. I've always wondered if my mother received a death date, if, during a tense hospital visit, the doctor looked across the table, apologized, glanced down, whispered: *June 6, 1996*.

If the visit happened, I never knew. I'm not mad that my parents withheld the date. There were enough clues if I wanted to pay attention: mom going legally blind, her growing fear of standing, truckloads of dialysis fluid, steady insurance men traffic.

My mother cried and shook in the kitchen because she was alive and uninsurable. The expectedness of her death had become probable and close, and yet she inhaled and stood, and added macaroni to the boiling water. My father came and took her face in his hands and kissed her on her lips. I knew they loved each

other, but anything longer than a public peck kiss was unusual. I glanced over, but they ignored me. My father ran his fingers down her blue blouse, and then pulled her close, keeping his right hip angled out away from her injection site.

—

How do you buy life insurance for someone dying? Most would say it's impossible, and perhaps they're right. But in my home, one more pair of insurance pushers stopped by. The older one with gray hair ran his hand over my head like I was his own. His crumpled suit struggled to cover his bulging mid-section. He and his partner came back, time and again, and after one particular visit I knew they would never return because my mom hugged them and kissed them on the cheeks and my father shook their hands and hugged them, and that night my parents didn't make me fill the wood box for the fireplace. They ordered a pizza for each of us—black olives and mushrooms for mom—and they let me drink Martinelli's sparkling cider from a champagne glass.

—

I was seventeen when I saw my dead mother in an Enloe Hospital bed in Chico, California. Her mouth was open, and the bundle of matter that she carried around as a body lay there quietly. She seemed so light, and, when my father suggested I touch her, I strode to the

bed and pushed her cheek with my index finger. Later that evening, my father, my twelve-year-old sister, and I climbed into our green Ford Aerostar van and started the hour and a half drive home to Chester. We drove up Highway 32, through golden hills with ancient rock fences, above forested canyons with hidden arrowheads, and up into the Sierras. We didn't say much, and, after a prolonged quiet, my father reached up and pressed the stereo's power button. The song was "One Sweet Day," a song about meeting loved ones in heaven. It was improbably appropriate, and I let the chorus spill over me until my clean-voiced father smacked the radio and said, "Turn that shit off." So we rode in silence, and once in a while I'd look at my sister in the backseat, staring at the rushing trees with her hands in her lap. And after what seemed like a thousand turns, we rounded the final curve, and off in the distance I saw our lit town's main street, and, to the right, our lake in the darkness, and, while it would never be the same, it still felt like home.

—

My father didn't talk about the insurance money, but I knew it was already in the bank when the man in black came over and opened a catalog of caskets on our kitchen counter. I sat next to my father and listened to the man talk to us about wood grain and silk linings. I knew

my mother wanted to be buried in a simple, unvarnished pine casket, but the sunny afternoon we lowered her into the rocky ground outside of town, my father closed a polished hardwood coffin so heavy it took eight of us to lift it from the hearse.

—

My mother was buried in the Chester cemetery in white garments that she believed would identify her as a chosen one in the afterlife. We didn't put her song books, her paychecks from US Bank, her sunscreen, or our family's photo in the casket. If someone were to open her coffin one day and try to make sense of her life, they may guess only that she preferred the color white.

—

When I graduated university and settled into my job, the first thing I did was buy whole life insurance. I read all about it, how it wasn't the best investment, how I could lose money with inflation. Even the insurance man said, "You sure you want whole life?" I did. I have three policies in total, and sometimes, when a sad song plays, I think about the value of my death. I think about my death date, and my wife and young children. If faced with my parents' situation, I'm sure my wife and I wouldn't tell our children.

—

I don't know what any of the numbers mean. Perhaps I simply want to be alive for as long as possible, and

that monthly premium is a price I pay to breathe and remember.

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**BEGIN
AGAIN**



**JOSHUA
GOTTLIEB-
MILLER**

There is a town in Israel where Armageddon will begin.
We know this because there is a McDonald's there pulled
like skin over the bones of old synagogues. And tourists,
with a faith bone-deep that it won't happen yet. Say
this much about the town: they produce some unbeatable postcards.
And say this about old synagogues: we build prisons atop them.
And say this about old rabbis: even Jesus did not demand anything
of the angels
that they could not grant.

BURIAL RIGHTS



**JOSHUA
GOTTLIEB-
MILLER**

bury me face down
bury me fast
bury me with faint praise
bury me facing Jerusalem
so I can get a running start
bury me

with hands that fool
even the dead leave the dirt
loose as false sky

bury the rocks
you might place on my grave
bury the hatchet bury me

brick by brick
they build the highway going
over my head—we are the weight-
bearing dead

we as well as ask for it

bury the thought
bury the separations of light
bury the rain

bury what you don't want
that you can't
bury receding and being drawn up

doesn't change it's still
the sea

bury my light collected
from stars reflecting
on the water's surface
on the inside of the rain
bury the rain

I can only bring myself
closer to the world
or the world closer to me

spare me
the thought
that I care about the highway
spare me the ground
is a prayer shawl at a dance

THREE SESTETS

CHELSEA HENDERSON

ON WAKING

A winter wren sings from a fence post,
a song twice his size. *Look—*
 how the light disrobes

the windows, stunned and wide-eyed in the glare,
how it enters the house and finds the teakettle,

cool and drowsy on the front burner. *Say something,*
the wren urges, as the sun sets fire
 to the copper belly, *whistle.*

WALKING HOME IN EARLY AUTUMN

There's a violin sketched on the brick wall behind the dress boutique,
penciled pegs, strings & all,
 about as large & as quiet

as sadness. Surely the artist was an exile, a prodigal;
there's the unmistakable shape of a woman's torso.
 To think

I could pass it a hundred times, unseeing. To think I could
lay a hand on the maple tree & find myself suddenly reeling, lost.

AFTER PRAYER

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Of course we had to go out.

The moon burgeoning,
ready for plucking,

hand- & mouthful, lucid.

Bramble of stars, privets & hedges
of constellations.

Tremor of earth mid-swivel,
the night full of our endless looking.

PORTRAIT OF A LARYNGOLOGIST

**CHELSEA
HENDERSON**

Call it an excavation site, the human throat. Call it proof of our flawed anatomy, the many buttons, pendants, clothespins, and nails I've removed from one throbbing esophagus or another, the roadblocked windpipes. The history of swallowed objects is a tragic collection. Each X-ray tells the same story—the bright negative of ribs ebbing away from the darkened sternum, the various centerpieces: a pencil lodged perfectly vertically, sharpened; an open safety pin; a quarter suspended as if in mid-air, Washington in profile, 1979 in faintly raised relief, the reeded edge thumbbed smooth. Call it an accident, but it never is. It's a kind of intimacy to swallow the odds and ends of your beloved, I tell people, like sex. Like the woman who, in her grief, swallowed the bullet that had killed her husband. Or the man who came to me, unable to speak for the agony of his wife's car key—to keep her from leaving, he confessed when I'd pulled it free, the metonymic object lying

on the table between us. How it shone
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 broken tissue caught in the serrated edges.

HENDERSON
 CHELSEA

Call it an excavation site, the human
 throat. Call it proof of our flawed
 anatomy, the many buttons, pendants,
 doorknobs, and nails I've removed
 from one flapping esophagus or another.
 the roadblock windpipes. The history
 of swallowed objects is a tragic collection.
 Each X-ray tells the same story—
 the bright negative of ribs chiding away
 from the darkened sternum, the various
 cutaneous, a pencil lodged perfectly
 vertically, sharpened an open cavity, pin
 a quarter suspended as it in mid-air,
 Washington in profile, 1970 is faintly
 raised relief, the ventral edge flinched
 smooth. Call it an accident, but it never is.
 It's a kind of intimacy to swallow
 the odds and ends of your beloved.
 I tell people like you, like the woman
 who in her grief, swallowed the bullet
 that had killed her husband. Or the man
 who came to me, unable to speak
 for the agony of his wife's car key—
 to keep her from leaving, he swallowed
 when I'd pulled it free.
 the anatomy about being

SPILL

CHELSEA HENDERSON

Here. You once read that it is always an accident
that saves us. This half-desert, half-mountain city
sips and unbuttons and shouts around you,
buildings tined against the glimpse of dusk, heat still swollen
in near-visible nebulas. An accident, like the chipped
yellow coffee mug you're unwrapping from last week's
Times, not sure how it wound up in the box
of kitchenware, not yours. You're a thousand miles
from anyone who might have put their lips
to the champagne flute in your hand right now,
who might have sliced an avocado for the plate
on the table, cracked an egg into the bowl.
This city, so extravagant it has a sky, where things
sing without answers, and sometimes break.
Every day you wake to the thought of her smallness
in the mornings, her hair in rain, her habit
of being new and lovely. And so startling
its webwork of streets and avenues, a city with buses
that barrel through their routes, fully lit and empty,
around corners and up hills at night, a loneliness
so absolute you nearly crave it. Each day you realize
all the people who are not her. A knock sounds
at your neighbor's door, a child's quick feet
racing to see, and the cellist begins downstairs.
Here comes beauty, with all its demands and rigors,
you think, recalling how all twenty-two thousand builders

RASPUTIN DATING

BRIAN PATRICK
HESTON

"Millions of dancing skeletons,"
says Rasputin.

"And still centuries before

all the corpses are to be counted."

The woman listens, pulls
a callused foot from her boot,

moves her toes up and down
his chalky calf.

He yearns to peer inside her heart,

tries not to think of worms
peeking from her skull
or his young daughter

tugging at his beard
as he sings her to sleep.

"How about my place?" the woman asks.

Frigid mother Russia howls
at the door.

Hooves clomp

on the shit-smeared cobbles
outside, a scream
on the wind of what

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He thinks could be a mouse
He watches the tavern keeper's
cat devour a mouse

and his heart aches, aches
with what he tells her
is love.

BRIAN PATRICK
HESTON

"Millions of dancing skeletons,"
says Rasputin.
"And still centuries before."

All the corpses are to be counted.
The woman listens quail
a collapsed foot from her heel.

moves her face up and down
his chafly call.
He yearns to peer inside her heart.

tries not to think of worms
peeking from her skirt
or his young daughter.

lugging at his heart
as he urges her to sleep
"How about my place?" the woman asks.

light mother kisses bows
at the door
hooves clap

on the old square-cubed
outside a screen
on the wind of wail

1972

SEAN
PATRICK
HILL

was somewhat south of here
an almost immeasurable distance
my mother brought the little broken bird
into the kitchen
it was singing
about the sun walking across the moon
a tide that died along a forested shore
an old woman with two black stones
and
come lately
I have tried to translate the libretto into a tongue
such
that I might come to understand
why the old woman
watched over me
while my mother was somewhere
cracking eggs

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APRIL FOOLS IN LOVE

AMORAK
HUEY

Any fool & his honey soon part of the problem,
solution, base, acid, vinegar, catch more flies
with friendly e-mails, even a cartoon husband
knows that's where such affairs begin.

Stitch in time heals all wounds
but leaves railroad-track scars across flesh,
zigzag mutable map of once & future sins:
the question is, what can be forgiven?

A couple at the door to AuSable Hall are making out,
making do, making up stories about tomorrow.

Someday he will wake up & write
to his wife's best friend to say *I am broken*
but what he will mean is *Sleep with me.*

For now they think it enough that spring has sprung—
that penny saved is worth two in the hand,
that no news is good for the gander.

It is no doubt true to say their best days lie
ahead, & their worst—their thirst
for this exact moment a thing to be envied.

The answer is everything, nothing,
somewhere between lip & cup
in the slip & spasm of their tangled tongues.

Haste makes waste, not want—want not
needing haste to be born, below the waist
or above, the mind what matters,
& then the body, & the heart

appears in such a hurry to catch up
All I am trying to do is get into the building
but they are in my way, these two,
& going nowhere fast.

JOHN JAMES

The field is steeped with the violence of houses.
Night descends blue hills
and I attempt to weigh distance
as a call tests its footing to the water-hole.
(so the front porch, my cat devours a hummingbird)
He beats the brilliant body with his tufted paws.
He pivots the wings
swallows whole the intricate bone-house.

Inside, the pilot light is burning
the stair's thread with the coal eyes is wary
I crowd into bed, asking for more light
in the doorway
a boy saint stoops to pluck
leather from leather until his hands are sore
No prone to sadness, this thief -
I take my glasses off and let them on the table.
The shadow of a tree tests inside my cabin.

This spring I commemorate my father's death
by taking deer-horn above the door
My hammer-stroke disperses
an assembly of bones
waiting around for me to gather their seed.

YEARS I'VE SLEPT RIGHT THROUGH

JOHN JAMES

The field is steeped with the violence of horses.
Night descends blue hills
and I attempt to weigh distance,
as a calf tests its footing to the water-hole.
On the front porch, my cat devours a hummingbird.
He beats the brilliant body with his tufted paws.
He breaks its wings,
swallows whole the intricate bone-house.

Inside, the pilot light is burning.
My sister's friend with the coal-eyes is over.
I crawl into bed, aching for more light.
In the dooryard
a boy saint stoops to pluck
feather from feather until his hands are sore.
So prone to sadness, this thief—
I take my glasses off and lay them on the table.
The shadow of a tree rests inside my palm.

This spring I commemorate my father's death
by tacking deer-horns above the door.
My hammer-strokes disperse
an assembly of hens,
waiting around for me to scatter their seed.

A lake away the river is boundless
It breaks its sudden excess
on a limestone bridge.
A big-axled wagon tips into the water,
where white mud washes the coachman clean.
This is a custom he repeats every year,
coming and going until his wheels give out,
coming to wet his tongue.

Dawn chalks over the horizon,
rendering the sky a storm-blotched red.
The outline of a cow appears on the hill
and then dissolves into the fog.
I follow her path with my ear,
listening as a bell sounds out the trail—
It is mine, this world
of bread and skin and stone.
Lay me in the field with all the fallen horses.

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FEVER DREAM

JOHN JAMES

Rumor of winter: the stars are duly aligned
and I'm afraid
of what the weather might do.

The sow this month freezes in her skin
and there is no barn in which to sleep.

I wrench myself awake: moon-bright
in the yoke of blue November.

And the oxen, they are gone, buried
in the swale
that we call heaven.

On my eyelids, the half-buds of fireflies
droning that summer
in their yellow haze of longing—

your mouth, mine, wreathed in position
to make this gift
comforted, as if to say, mother.

IT TEARS ME DOWN



**KENT
JOHNSON**

—for Craig Santos Perez

It tears me down, my friends are few.
It pains my heart, the farm's come down.
The tools are sold, the flock long gone.
The plow's in scrap, the car no more.
It tears me down, my friends are few.
It pains my heart, this denouement.

It drives me wild, this sell-out field.
It fries my brains, the die is cast.
Ed Dorn is dead, and dear Lorine.
The auction's packed, the hands go up.
It tears me down, it's all for sale.
It pains my balls, this "avant-garde."

The birds are white, the birds are black.
The streams once fished are shined in scum.
The Language poets thrill the Profs.
It's gone to seed, *what will you do?*
Fine cock's been sucked and tenure's come.
You can't go back to Paterson.

I'd try myself, but I give up.
They've got the youth and they have won.
It's all arranged in rows and ranks.

..: Harpur Palate, Volume 11 Number 1, Summer and Fall
 It tears me down, my friends are few.
 The bids go wack at Jacket2.

KENT
JOHNSON

—for Craig Santos Perez

It tears me down, my friends are few.
 It pains my heart, the farm's come down.
 The tools are sold, the flock long gone.
 The plow's in scrap, the cat no more.
 It tears me down, my friends are few.
 It pains my heart, this deconstruction.

It drives me wild, this self-out field.
 It tries my brain, the die is cast.
 Ed Dorn is dead, and dead I am.
 The auction's packed, the hands go up.
 It tears me down, it's all for sale.
 It pains my balls, this "avant-garde."

The birds are white, the birds are black.
 The streams once fished are shrunk in scum.
 The language poets thrill the poets.
 It's gone to seed, what will you do?
 Fine cock's beer waxes and ferns's come.
 You can't go back to Lebanon.

I'd try myself, but I give up.
 They've got the youth and the love gone.
 It's all arranged in rows and rows.

**POEM ENDING
ON A LINE
BY W.C.W. FROM
A LETTER TO
BYRON VAZAKAS**



**KENT
JOHNSON**

The thing that gets me is the jalopy. The
jalopy and the wireless and the bicycle.
The Frigidaire and the musket. It's falling
down around us, dear. This loss and loss.
Them auroras of fall we shared, Floss,
swamped and gone like by them tsunamis.
Such dust and dust. It breaks my heart in parts
And gives me measure. It breaks my heart and
gives me measure, but I surrender, dear.
Could you pass me the salt. Could you
pass me the salt and the shine and spare me
your whine, cause it's getting over, Floss.
I put a lot of work into that Guggenheim. Yep,
I put a lot of work into that Guggenheim,
you'd think they could do better than an e-mail.
Well, whole stars and worlds get swallowed by
them black holes, you know. I say call me
a no-peckered goat, but that big jet going out both
ways is looking pretty good just about now. Shut
the fuck up with your crying. Shut the fuck up

and pass on the salt, I said. Though this moon stew
 tastes fine, I won't deny. Fine and microwaved like
 them poor Japs, they'll never know what hit 'em.



POEM ENDING
 ON A LINE
 BY W.C.W. FROM
 A LETTER TO
 BYRON VAZAKAS

KENT
 JOHNSON

The thing that gets me is the jargon. The
 jargon and the whistles and the beeps.
 The frigidity and the musky. It's falling
 down around us here. This loss and loss.
 Their surges of fall we shared, I fear.
 swamped and gone like by their numbers
 Such dust and dust. It breaks my heart in parts.
 And gives me measure. It breaks my heart and
 gives me measure but I remember, dear.
 Could you pass me the salt. Could you
 pass me the salt and the shine and spare me
 your whine, cause it's getting over, I fear.
 I put a lot of work into that Guggenheim. You
 I put a lot of work into that Guggenheim.
 You'd think they could do better than an e-mail.
 Well, whole stars and worlds get swallowed by
 them black holes, you know I say, call me
 a no-pedestal poet, but that big jet going out both
 ways is looking pretty good just about now. Still
 the fuck up with your crying. Shut the fuck up.

END OF THE WAR ON TERROR



**KENT
JOHNSON**

We have taken custody of his body.

In this spell of intimacy, may our sins seem washed away.

For look: Thousands of youth with phones mass in flash release:
They bear flags; they scale trees; they stand, pushed up, balancing
on the hands of their companions. They are astonished to be living it.

Sudden shot on the screen: Two boys leap into the air, again
and again, crash ecstatically against the chest of the other. Someone's
beautiful daughter breaks away, runs screaming towards the lens,
thumbs up, tongue out, in a kind of ululation.

Try to understand us. Try to see we share your fears, desires,
dreams. Poetry matters to us in same measure it matters to you.
It has been this way, and so it will. Deep grief and joy, great pleasure
and pain get fused; who can tell, sometimes, the difference on the face?

Anchorman asks a guest on Skype: "He has been called
the very face of Evil . . . You who lost your father in the tower on
that terrible day, how does this historic moment make you feel?"

"O," he says, "It's hard to find the words. At first I was so happy,
and then I felt guilty, all of a sudden, to be celebrating a death,
so to speak; it felt strange, you know, no matter how evil he was. But
then my mother said, 'No, son, you have every right to feel happiness

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his face I recall right now. It is the face of my father, a picture
I carry in my mind from long ago, and he is holding open a door."

04/02/11

DERRICK MICKELSON'S CUDDLE BED FOR WAYWARD BOYS

**TIM
JONES-YELVINGTON**

Derrick tells me it's wrong to live for him, that I shouldn't live for another person. "What else should we live for," I ask, "if not other people?"

"Live for yourself," he says. "For the things you love to do."

The things I love to do? Biking, blogging, television, jacking off. Great, I think. I'll live for hobbies.

Picture us on opposite sides of the bed, turned toward either wall. The space between us is gravity in reverse. I used to think Derrick's was the coziest bed in the world, but that was before I slept in it every night for two and a half years and it became just my bed.

I told Derrick that I don't need to drink, that I'd be happy giving it up for him, that he's well worth the sacrifice, but he said he shouldn't be the reason I stop.

When Derrick was fourteen years old, he raided his parents' liquor cabinet and mixed gin and tonics. One night, after several weeks of this, he stood in his living room and watched his father, a heavy drinker, asleep on the sofa, his arms and legs splayed, his chest rising irregularly, his sleep disturbed. Derrick thought about his childhood, how his father was sometimes himself and sometimes not, and how you never knew which you were going to get. He circled his straw through his drink, displaced ice cubes. He sipped. He said to himself, I could get used to this.

Yesterday, I biked home blackout drunk. I walked in the door just after 6:00 A.M. with a bloody lip and ripped, muddy jeans, my bike seat stuck at a ninety-degree angle and the shift cord severed. Now Derrick and I are having a “very serious conversation.” We’re one of those couples that values communication. Generally, “don’t go to bed angry” is a good rule to follow. At other times, all I want to do is disappear into the bathroom, lock the door, run a bath, pour essential oils into the water, and play calming music, the kind I would never admit to owning, something categorized by retailers as “adult contemporary,” and at these times I wish we were a more normal couple, the kind who might scream and stomp and throw and break things, begin to ignore one another, pass nights with one partner sleeping on the couch.

“I need you to tell me what you’re going to do,” Derrick says. “To ensure this doesn’t happen again.”

It’s a trick question. If I say I’ll never drink again, Derrick won’t believe me. If I say I’ll moderate my intake, he’ll say, “That’s what you said last time. You don’t know how.”

Last night I worked a closing shift. I’m employed part-time by Crate and Barrel, selling mass-manufactured housewares. When I visit friends, I recognize their vases, dinnerware, couches. I call them by their names: Good to see you, Birgitta Goblet.

Yesterday I shared a counter with Donna, a woman who tells me stories about douches in the seventies and cocaine in the eighties. I’ve always taken her lined skin and bleached split ends as signs she’s truly lived, and her raspy voice and rattling cough seem to authenticate her experience.

“You wanna know what women want, Benny?” she said.

I expected her to say something expected, something sitcom-esque, like multiple orgasms, a deep tissue massage, a man who does as he’s told.

Instead, she said, "We wanna get drunk. You coming across the street with us after work?"

As with most of my co-workers, Donna and I have little in common save booze. Across the street from our store is a Mexican restaurant called "Hacienda," but nobody calls it that. We only ever call it "across the street." It's not a real Mexican restaurant, but rather a middle-brow, Tex-Mex chain restaurant-type Mexican restaurant, with papier-maché toucans and women in starched, dry-cleaned peasant blouses. I've never tasted their food, only their drinks. They painted a sign on the side of their building—"Es Tiempo por un Swirl!" A Swirl consists of frozen margarita swirled with frozen sangria. They look girly and innocuous, but three of those things will put you under the table.

Last night, I was on my fourth Swirl when I looked at my watch and realized it was already 11:00, the time I'd told Derrick I'd come home when earlier I'd phoned him after closing.

"Time for me to go," I said, sliding off my stool.

"No!" Donna said, then thumped my back. "Stay with us, Benny. What twenty-three year old calls it a night at eleven?"

"Ben's married," said Melinda, a fellow sales associate. "His man's got him whipped."

"What?" I said. "That's bullshit."

I called Derrick.

"I'm going to stay out a little longer," I said.

"Okay," he said. "How long?"

"Only an hour or two," I said. "I don't want to get home any later than one."

"I'm going to bed in the next hour. I had a long day."

I tried to read his voice. He sounded okay, like maybe before I called, he'd already resigned himself to an evening alone. I told myself not to worry.

"I'll call you when I'm on my way home."

"How many drinks are you going to have?"

I eyed my fourth Swirl, two thirds of which I'd already downed. "No more than three," I said.

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"How many have you had so far?"

"I'm on my second."

"So how many more?" he said.

"One," I said. "Only one."

"How many total?"

"Three," I said. "Only three."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

"Call my cell phone when you're coming home. I'll turn it off when I go to bed so you won't wake me."

Before I go any further, I should back up; I should say more about Derrick. So far, you might be inclined to think of Derrick only as uptight, a killjoy. You'll be unlikely to sympathize with Derrick, unless you happen to be Derrick himself, in which case you will say, "I identified with Derrick, and I didn't appreciate how the narrator dismissed Derrick's perspective. The narrator's drinking alienates me like it alienates Derrick. Imagine sitting at home, waiting for the narrator, worrying about his safety. Imagine, too, doubting the future of your relationship, of your own happiness. Imagine being Derrick's age and still having to cope with such uncertainty."

I met Derrick the same week my mother kicked me out of the house. I met Derrick at church. I didn't attend this church for very long, and neither did Derrick. This church was comprised primarily of homosexuals, their friends, and family. The greater denomination of which this church was a member did not approve of homosexuals, and so the church understood theirs as an activist stance.

"I feel too comfortable here," Derrick said after a time. "I feel like we are complacent."

The church held a worship service where the pastor struck a ceramic chalice against the altar and split it in half. The pastor held up the two fragments and said, "These fragments represent our denomination's broken promise. Our denomination has

Then we prayed.

Derrick said, "They are worshipping their own oppression."

Thereafter, Derrick and I spent our Sunday mornings in bed playing pornographic hangman.

"E!" Derrick once guessed. "L! ... T! ...fellatio!"

When Derrick ran out of guesses, I drew a hanging man with dangling testicles and penis, an X for one eye and a dash for the other.

"His name is Chad," I said.

"Poor Chad," I said. I caressed the paper with my palm.

"Sweet, hanging Chad."

We nicknamed our bed "Derrick Mickelson's Cuddle Bed for Wayward Boys," a playful reference to Derrick's predilection for caretaking.

Even though we've shared the bed for almost three years, Derrick still likes to place his body in its center, stretch his arms and legs to each side, and say, "My bed. Mine."

"Not your bed," I say. "Our bed."

"I bought this bed long before I met you," Derrick says.

"This bed has been good to me."

Then he pulls the sheets and blankets up around his face and says, "Swaddle me," and I dive beside him and cuddle him close, thrilled by the reversal of roles.

Derrick taught me things, functional things, like how to balance a checkbook, correctly position a collared shirt on an ironing board, or enhance the flavor of hamburger patties using barbeque sauce and French onion soup mix. I am not the first younger man he's fallen for, and this is something else he taught me: how sometimes it's the younger one who holds the power, on account of we don't necessarily know who we are or what we want, and so we might leave at any moment. When Derrick told me this, how he'd been left, I made a vow never to leave him

After I got off the phone with Derrick, I texted my friend Miguel:
What R U Up 2?

He texted back: Chillin @ home

I responded: Can I cum over?

Miguel works at the store. When I first met him, he didn't make much of an impression, but then, a few weeks later, he got a haircut, and I started noticing him. He stood behind the counter as I walked toward him across the sales floor, and I smiled, and then he smiled back, and the way he smiled, the smile he smiled, that smile hooked me, and that's when I knew I wanted to have sex with him.

We had our first conversation shortly thereafter, in the break room, over lunch. He told me he was a DJ, that he dropped out of college several years ago but wanted to go back, and this time major in sound production. He said someday, after he met the right man, he wanted to raise a kid, but he'd just gotten out of a long, toxic break-up, and it was still difficult to trust people. I have always appreciated people who open up about their toxic breakups first thing after meeting you, and so I liked Miguel immediately.

This is where I should probably explain Derrick knows all about Miguel. We have an open relationship, but only when one of us is out of town. Sex only, nothing like prolonged emotional intimacy, everything shared with one another, and I'll be honest—I resent having to explain this; I resent that I can't just say “open relationship” and leave it at that. But I know that if I do not explain, you might misunderstand the situation, and, in this case, to misunderstand is to miss the point entirely. Being open brings Derrick and me closer. We check out men together, call attention to those we know the other will appreciate. Sharing fantasies is a bonding ritual; it energizes our sex life. I've never understood why straight couples manufacture such

desires, I believe, allows poison to seep slowly into a relationship.

I waited until Derrick was away on business and then propositioned Miguel in writing, over Facebook. He wrote back, "I think I'm interested, but let's talk about it tomorrow."

I prepared our apartment for his visit. I swept and vacuumed and hid the dirty dishes in the oven. I pictured Miguel on top of me and got hard. I wanted to feel his soul patch graze my lower lip, wanted him to look into my eyes and moan my full name, "Benjamin, Benjamin, Benjamin," or, even better, its Spanish pronunciation, which sounds like, "Ben ha mean, Ben ha mean, Ben ha mean."

The next day at work, I watched him. I have always been attracted to boys with ADD. Miguel could only hold a conversation for a minute or two before something—a cute child in a stroller, a puppy in a handbag, a well-built heterosexual man on the arm of his fiancée—distracted him. He ricocheted across the sales floor like veggies in a wok, and I would've liked nothing better than to hold him steady.

That night, after our managers dismissed us and he still hadn't said a word to me, I approached him as he opened his locker and said, "Do you have a minute?"

We stood in the rug aisle for what felt far longer than a minute, occasionally looking at one another, but saying nothing. I giggled.

"What?" he said.

"What what?"

I thought for sure he wanted it, but was perhaps too shy. Derrick once told me single people have more to risk by hooking up with someone partnered, and so they often need the partnered person to make the first move.

"Do you want to come home with me?" I said.

"Listen," he said. "It's like I know myself, right? Sometimes I have these intuitions, like the timing isn't right, or I can feel something isn't a good idea."

As it turned out, that evening in the rug aisle was only the first of many times I did not have sex with Miguel. Later, there was the time he texted me when he knew Derrick was out of town, and said, "Can I come over?" But I'd already jacked off, so I said, "Maybe another time." Or the time I invited him out with me and a friend of ours, but he cancelled at the last minute and said he was staying in, and asked me did I want to stay in with him, but I couldn't think of a polite way to extricate myself from our friend, and so I said, "I'll call you later."

"I know he wants me," I told our mutual friend Cyndi over beers. "Not knowing isn't what bothers me. It's never hearing him say it. It's longing, like in the old days, like we're star-crossed or something. It's good drama, not bad drama."

"If I tell you something, do you promise to vault it?" Cyndi said.

"Vaulted," I said, and made a motion with my fist like I was spinning the dial on a safe.

"Miguel told me he's afraid to hook up with you because you're the kind of person he can see himself falling for."

After that, I became truly obsessed. I needed to hear him say it, hear him say he was afraid of falling in love with me. Or perhaps even make him fall in love with me. I wanted a brief and passionate affair. I wanted to feel tempestuous and torn. Then, after weeks of pitched emotion, I wanted to say to Miguel, "I'm sorry; it's over. My heart still belongs to another." I wanted to put my hand on his chest, kiss his forehead, and say, "We'll always have Crate."

I took a cab to Miguel's apartment and left my bike chained outside the store. When I got there, he was waiting on the curb, looking intense and revolutionary in an olive commie-worker cap, white wife-beater, and one of those Palestinian liberation scarves-turned-hipster-fashion must-haves draped around his neck. He was shorter than me but also broader, stockier, darker,

himself. He maintained a permanent scuff because he'd shaved so often that the shaving gave him ingrown hairs. I had no idea whether he'd ever cracked the spine on a book of poetry, yet I imagined him dragging his cheek across my nipple while murmuring Neruda.

"Go on inside," he said. "Door's unlocked. I'm going to go grab some beer."

We popped Coronas and sat in front of his laptop. "Have you seen this yet?" he said, and called up a music video on YouTube, a band of shaggy boys with synthesizers, DayGlo warpaint on their cheeks.

"Wait," he said. He paused the video a minute in, opened his iTunes. "Have you heard this one?"

Certainly, you must understand why I found him entirely adorable. He was a total spaz, and all I wanted was for him to spaz me. I needed to spaz out.

"It's hot out," he said. He threw his scarf across the tiny room where it landed draped across his sink. He peeled off his top. He unbuttoned his shorts, shimmied and kicked them aside. He grabbed my belt buckle and pulled. "Take these off," he said.

We stood a foot apart in our underwear, drank multiple beers, bobbed casually to the songs on his computer. Women belted rhythmically about the allure and alienation of nightlife. The ceiling light glared; you could see dust bunnies under Miguel's desk. I sucked in my gut, rolled back my shoulders, crossed my arms. I felt a draft and shivered.

Probably, you are wondering about Derrick, whether I gave him any thought. The more sensitive among you might picture Derrick alone in his cuddle bed, sleeping fitfully, awaking periodically to check for me, to wonder when or whether I'll come home.

He'll understand I needed to see this through, I told myself. He'll understand if I'd called him, it would have interrupted the moment. He'll be proud I overcame my fear of initiating, that I finally put this Miguel situation to bed. Got Miguel to tell me everything. Every fucking thing. And then, when I come home,

"I used to think about you a lot," I said, raising my voice to be heard over the music. "But lately I haven't. Maybe I'm getting over it... you... it."

Immediately, Miguel kneeled, pulled down my briefs, whipped out my dick, and stuck it in his mouth. I was flaccid, could almost feel it shrinking inside him.

I should clarify I like blowjobs, but I hate them when I'm not already hard, when I haven't worked up to them, haven't felt a tongue inside my mouth or breath across my neck. And I hate watching them—I always skip that part of any porn film—hate how robotic they look: no bodies touching, no eye contact, like the men are just tools instead of people, like they could be anybody. I feel demeaned, and then I feel embarrassed, and I wonder what's wrong with me for not wanting to watch this, like maybe I'm more like a chick for wanting a bunch of vanilla touching, and then I grow more self conscious, more uncomfortable in my skin.

After a moment, Miguel took it out of his mouth and said, "I like dick."

"I always thought it would be cool if it was like this," he said. "Like you could come over occasionally, no strings attached, and we could just get our rocks off."

I reached for another beer and realized the pack was empty. I shook it.

"You got anything else?"

Miguel emptied his cabinets and found a half-empty bottle of cheap vodka. I grabbed ice from his freezer and filled my glass more than halfway before topping it off with Coke. I thought, Tonight might be my last chance. I remembered how in the past alcohol made me more pliable, more willing. I drank.

Miguel sat back down in front of his computer, and I pulled up a chair beside him. I moved closer, wrapped an arm around him, balanced my chin on his shoulder. I felt somehow we'd lost ground. I didn't understand how we went from sucking back to

sitting. What was he thinking? I waited for him to make a move to grab me, move me, take me, take control, to take over, to do something. I drank.

Sometime later, he threw open the door to his back porch. We heard birds and saw a hint of sunlight.

"Fuck," he said. "Do you know how late it is? You should go."

I motioned toward his bedroom. "I can crash here."

"I've got a twin bed," he said. "I can't share that shit."

I stared at the wall while I put my clothes on. Once on the corner, I hailed a cab. Halfway home, I drove my fist into the seat. In the rear-view mirror, I saw the driver eye me suspiciously.

"Fuck," I said aloud. "Fuck. Fuck."

What the fuck, I thought. What the fuck was that?

I dialed Miguel's number and his voicemail answered.

"Fuck you," I shouted. The cab driver pulled over, stalled. "I'm sick of this fucking bullshit. You fucking asshole. Fuck. I'm fucking done. Fuck."

I hung up.

"Out," the driver said.

On the curb, I shivered, had a vague recollection of having just yelled into Miguel's voicemail. I immediately dialed his number.

"I think I just said some bullshit," I said. "I'm sorry. I'm coming back down there."

This ends tonight, I thought. Enough. I will make him tell me everything, whatever it takes; however long I have to stand in his apartment, I will make him tell me exactly how he feels about me. I'll tell him what Cyndi said. I'll tell him what I already know. Then he'll tell me. I'll make him.

I hailed another cab. I gave the driver Miguel's address.

A tall, wrought iron fence flanked Miguel's building. The gate was locked. I wrapped my hands around the bars and shook it. I stretched my leg to the highest crossbar and hoisted myself up, felt the pointed fence top poke my buttock before I landed in a squat, feet throbbing.

The door to Miguel's apartment was behind another locked door. No buzzer. I phoned him again. No answer. I went to the side of the building, pulled up a trashcan, looked in his window. The lights were off, but the glare of his laptop escaped through his open bedroom door into the outer room. Maybe he was awake, watching a movie. I rattled the screen. I banged on the window, lightly, then loudly. I shouted his name.

I heard the front door open behind me. I heard a dog barking somewhere, behind another closed door.

"What are you doing here?" Miguel said.

"I don't—I left—" I couldn't remember.

"You need to go home," he said. "God, are you okay?"

He grabbed my arm, pulled me back through the front gate to the sidewalk. "We need to call you another cab."

"Let go," I said. I pulled my arm free.

I ran. Somewhere, I stopped running and remembered my bike. Even though the sun was up, I thought, if I leave the bike out all night, it will get stolen.

I do not remember going back to the store, retrieving my bike. I remember riding, how I tore around a corner, through an alley, decided to ride on the sidewalk, caught my wheel on the curb, fell.

I remember later, I looked up, read a street sign, recognized the names, miles north and west of home. I'd taken the wrong street, a diagonal street, and overshot.

I remember I turned, lost my balance, fell. I got up, lost my balance, fell again. I saw my front light bust off the handlebars, heard it scatter across the pavement. I rode. My gears wouldn't shift. My seat was all wrong.

I rode and rode, only sporadically remembering. I remember I saw a familiar train station, realized how much farther I still had to go, and I remember I shouted, "I just want to go fucking home. Fuck, I just want to go home," and drivers in their cars turned to look at me.

When I opened the door, Derrick was already awake,

getting ready for work.

"I'm fine," I said.

"You're bleeding."

"I'm fine."

Derrick held me. He wiped the blood from my lip and fixed me toast with raspberry jam.

Now we're lying feet apart at either edge of Derrick Mickelson's Cuddle Bud for Wayward Boys.

Derrick asked me what I was going to do to "ensure this won't happen again," and I told him the accident was a wakeup call, that it traumatized me as much as him. I told him this to keep him from ending us, but also because it might be true.

Then Derrick said maybe we should separate, and I said aren't there other options, and he said, what other options, and that was several minutes ago, and we've been quiet ever since.

The bulb in the fixture above our bed flickers.

"We should buy light bulbs," I say.

"Maybe Lisa has extra," I say, when Derrick doesn't respond. Lisa is our landlord.

"Lisa thinks we should have a ceremony," I say. "She wants to plan our reception."

"I don't need other people to validate my relationships," Derrick says.

"Yeah," I say. I stare at the flickering bulb. "Plus, straight people's marriages all end in divorce anyway, right?"

Derrick is quiet again, so I keep right on talking.

"And the ones that don't end in divorce end in death. You either break up or you die. There aren't a lot of options."

The bulb flickers to black. Then it flickers back on, fainter than before. I think about what I want to tell Derrick but can't. How earlier, when he held me, when he pressed the warm washcloth against my cut lip, I could feel what he felt, his terror and relief, and, for a moment, I felt happy. I felt happier than I'd felt in ages.

.: Harpur Palate, Volume 11 Number 1, Summer and Fall

TRASH

BY

CLARK KNOWLES

**The John Gardner
Memorial Prize
for Fiction**

Published by The Open Repository @ Binghamton 115 (The
Knowles 104

Nick saw Pickle's mom kissing his mom in the kitchen. At first he didn't know what he was seeing because Pickle's mom was so much bigger than his mom, and he almost said, Hello, Mrs. Jenkins, but something made him hold his tongue and then Mrs. Jenkins turned to reveal his own mom with Mrs. Jenkins' hand running up her arm and coming to a stop at the base of her neck, and then the oven timer dinged and Nick was released from his fog, and Mrs. Jenkins backed away, and his mother leaned back against the sink where the sun coming through the window made it look like her hair was on fire. Pickle, who was fourteen, was down in the family room sitting on the couch that Nick's father had found on Bishop Street with a free sign on it and brought home and then beat it good with a broom in the backyard before lugging it inside and covering it with old army blankets that were scratchy as hell. Pickle and his mom came over all the time, and Pickle laid out on the couch like he owned it, but Nick didn't mind sitting on the floor on account of the couch still smelling like Bishop Street, which ran alongside Ragland Federal Penitentiary and had muddy ditches that everyone knew were full of convict piss and blood. Nick's father's nose was permanently stuffed up due to allergies and getting punched so many times, so the smell didn't bother him, and whenever Pickle said something about the smell of the couch or the whole basement, Nick kept quiet and then Pickle said, Must be your farts that stink up the room. The word 'fart' was terribly funny. Once he'd called Pickle a fartface, and then Pickle sat on him and choked him and punched him in the throat. Now, when Pickle was around, Nick didn't say much at all. The reason Nick was standing in the kitchen doorway waiting for his mother to say something about kissing Mrs. Jenkins was because Pickle ordered him to go up and get some Cheez-its. Hey, mom, he said, me and Pickle want some Cheez-its. Sure thing, sweetie, Nick's mother said. Benji Sullivan, a red-haired ninth-grader who lived down the block and was always hanging out at the pond

his mother was fuckable, but Nick wasn't quite sure what it meant. He understood a rawness in the word and had heard many kids say it, even kids in his own class who whispered it on the playground so Mrs. Griffiths wouldn't hear and revoke recess privileges, and even uttered it aloud himself when he was alone in his room, but how or what fuck or fuckable or fucking meant beyond something his own dad said when he was working in the yard or stuck up under the kitchen sink, trying to fix the leaky trap that he should have just replaced with a new piece of PVC but didn't because he didn't know why he didn't, he just didn't, was beyond Nick. His mother was the youngest of all his friends' mothers, and everyone talked about it except her. Nick's grandmother talked about it all the time. Nick's dad said that he remembers when his Abbie was his own personal teenage bride. There is a picture of her in a school gym wearing a long black gown and square hat and she was pregnant, one hand supporting her belly at the bottom, the other resting on top, holding him like a running back who didn't want to fumble the ball. In the picture, she is sweating, and her hair is dark and stuck to her cheeks. On the playground by the old metal jungle gym that they took down over the summer—Benji Sullivan said it was because some kids got rust poisoning from it and died in Splain County Hospital and were cremated and had their ashes scattered from an airplane so that no one would find out they were gone—Pickle had told everyone that Nick's mom was so young that she didn't even have any hair between her legs. Nick had felt the need to correct Pickle in this but didn't want to be punched in the throat. He'd seen his mother naked many times, and there was indeed a patch of hair between her legs, and, when he thought of his mother in her room naked and pressing the heels of her hands into her eyes or holding her body still in the old wooden chair while she said her prayers, he remembered her like she was standing in the sunlight in the kitchen now,

Mrs. Jenkins, who wasn't fat but wasn't small, leaned over Nick and squeezed him tight against her chest until he felt like he'd smother in her flowery perfume. You are so cute, she said, so cute, and it won't be long till you're a little jerk like Harris. Harris was Pickle's real name, but no one called him Harris but Mrs. Jenkins. Even Mr. Jenkins, who worked for the Public Works Department, driving a yellow service truck around doing God-knows-what, called Pickle Pickle. Nick never asked why he was called Pickle in the first place. Oh, Pickle's a good kid, Nick's mother said. Abbie, there's no such thing as a good teenage boy. They just think about their doodles all the time and expect you to wash their underwear even though it's not anywhere close to the hamper. The teen years are a burden, I'll say that much. The two women moved to opposite sides of the kitchen, and Nick's mother kept looking over as she pulled out the bowl and dumped Cheez-its from the box until they spilled over the edge and onto the counter. She handed Nick the bowl and told him to make sure he shared with Pickle, and then she turned away and opened the oven and reached in and removed the tray of lasagna that she'd made with spinach and cottage cheese instead of her regular way with meat and real cheese because she read in Reader's Digest that this was less fattening, and that spinach was full of iron and anti-oxidants, and because she just wanted to try something different as long as everyone was okay with it and didn't turn it into some major production and because it just sounded good, okay? She just wanted to see how it tasted. They'd had the conversation about it at the dinner table the night before, and Nick's father had said, Just calm down; I didn't mean to get you all aggravated. I was just saying that I like the regular lasagna and was it possible to put some meat in there somewhere, and his mother said that would ruin the whole purpose of not using meat in the first place, and then they stopped talking and looked at each other. They top of the lasagna was smooth and pale, not crispy and

...brown like it normally was. She sat it on the stove and looked at it like it was the saddest thing she'd ever seen. Just pop it back in for another twenty minutes, Mrs. Jenkins said, it'll be fine. Nick shoveled two handfuls of Cheez-its into his mouth because Pickle always hogged the bowl. Those boys just get along so good, Mrs. Jenkins said. It's such a pleasure to bring Harris over here in the afternoon.

Nick's father took him to the dump on Saturday morning. He had this old truck that he'd got because it was in his own father's will that he get it, and even though all the other brothers wanted it, Nick's father told them to go pound sand because he helped rebuild the engine when everyone else was off doing fag stuff. He'd held up his knuckles and showed a scar that ran across all four fingers that he said came from getting his hand caught between one sharp metal thing and another sharp metal thing and his father pulling on his arm to help dislodge it and practically tearing off his fingers in the process. So, he said, I put my blood in this truck, and the rest of you can just go screw. He hadn't seen his brothers since that day, but they all sent each other Christmas cards. Last year, Nick's father had made Nick and his mother pose with him in front of the truck for their Christmas photo, and when he saw the finished print, he said, That'll chafe their asses. It was an old Ford F250, white with a red tailgate that came from the junkyard and didn't fit quite right. It took a good effort to get the truck started. It was rusting along the bottom of the doors and along the bed. Nick's father pushed down the clutch and pulled out the choke and pumped the gas and turned the key with a great deal of grunting and puffing, as if he had jammed the key into a brick. The garage filled with plumes of white smoke until both of them were coughing and Nick's father kept saying, Come on, baby, come on, baby, and then the motor caught and roared and sounded thick and powerful and the frame rattled and shook, and Nick could feel the shaking all the

The dump was the same as it always was. There were four or five trucks parked back by the heaps of metal, and Nick's father dropped it down into first and crawled past the different sectors of junk on his way back there. This Saturday, they stopped and looked at a rocking chair that was missing one rocker. Nick's father set it up on the tailgate and said he might have an extra rocker back in the garage and wouldn't it make a nice addition to the downstairs? Nick nodded and kept his eyes peeled for treasure. He saw a bowling ball in a pink bag that he wanted, and his father picked it up and studied the finger holes and then looked at Nick's hand for a moment, spreading out his fingers and squinting as he made some mental calculations and then held the ball and the hand out together and then set the ball in the bag next to the chair. Somebody'd be a fool not to snatch up a good bowling ball like that, he said.

When they got to the group of other men, his father got the small cooler from behind the seat and told Nick not to wander too far, but he was going to talk to the boys for a bit and to go off and explore and have fun. Nick wandered in and around the different mounds. Over near the junkyard edge, a half-mile away from his father, were the bottle collection bins. Most of the bottles seemed to have missed the mark and covered the ground in nearly every direction as though there had been a terrible accident in the land of bottles or a massive battle that left bottles spread across the asphalt like dead soldiers. Behind the bins was a sharp drop off with a small warning sign advising folks of the generally hazardous nature of the landscape. Nick leaned against the railing and swung his legs out over the gully. A lot of water ran from the junkyard to the sluice below, and the dirt looked like a sheet of brown fabric that'd been cut to ribbons. Thousands of bottles had been caught in the runoff and carried away. Sometimes the gully was full of water and looked more or less like a regular stream, but now, dry as it had been for months, there was nothing but

cracked dirt and plastic bottles as far as Nick could see—green and blue, clear and brown, Gatorade from the 7-11 and nips from the liquor store—every kind of bottle he could imagine.

By the time his father honked the truck horn, Nick had made his way to the yard waste. There were mounds of brown grass and leaves and uprooted bushes and stacks of Christmas trees so tall that the bottom trees had to have come from before Nick was born. Deep inside the pile he could see glimmers and gleams of tinsel and forgotten ornaments. He was halfway up a pile of leaf bags and grass clippings when he saw the truck coming around the bend. In the bed next to the broken rocking chair was a giant stuffed deer. Parts of the body had no fur and one of the eyes was missing, but the rack had sixteen points, and whoever posed the deer made it look as though it was jumping and both of its front legs were frozen, bent in mid-air, the body supported by a thin rod extending from the chest to the base. The road through the junkyard was full of divots, and the buck rocked back and forth as if it was gearing up for one final leap, out of the Ford and into freedom. Nick pictured it running down through the gully, bottles flashing in the sun as it danced through the plastic river. What do you say about that? his father said. He'd only been a few beers into the six-pack when he saw something that looked like an antler sticking out from a pile of trash bags. He and Mr. Jenkins had dug it out, but Nick's father claimed it before any of those other jokers because he saw it first and 'first comes first serves' was a motto he lived by. It's missing some stuff, Nick said, and what happened to its hair? We'll turn it sideways or put the bald spots up against the couch downstairs so that you can't see them. I think I got an old marble that I can paint for the eyehole. I've always wanted a deer like this. Who'd want to get rid of such a thing? Why not just set it on the street? Some sucker would've paid money for it! Of course, then it wouldn't be ours, now would it? Lucky for us I have a keen eye. It's something all the Turnell men have, you know. You'll

Mr. Jenkins came over that night with Mrs. Jenkins and Pickle. He said he needed to check on the deer because he had a stake in it, but he winked at Nick's father, and they both laughed despite the fact that no one said anything funny. Pickle was mad because his mother hadn't let him go to the dump that morning. She told the other adults that he was under a punishment for abusing himself. Nick overheard them talking on the back patio. Mr. Jenkins and his father laughed some more, and Nick's father said, Keeping him at home is only going to give him more time for that. Pickle just sat on the couch and picked at a scab on his knee. After a while, he lay back and told Nick to turn on the TV because he wanted to watch the All-Star game, and then he stuck his hand down his pants and stopped talking. Mr. Jenkins told Nick's mother that she was looking fine, and she told him that he was smooth as a con-man. I've never conned a man in my life, he said. I wasn't talking about men, Nick's mother said. My honor is being impugned, Mr. Jenkins said. I bet you conned your way into some skirts, said Nick's father, and they all laughed. Pickle's mother said, Poor Harris doesn't stand a chance. You two are grown men still thinking about your doodles. Jackie, Nick's father said, I have whole minutes when I'm not thinking about my doodle. And Mr. Jenkins said, But then you're thinking about muffins and melons, and they all laughed again, and Mrs. Jenkins slapped Mr. Jenkins on the shoulder and told him he was just awful. They were around the table on the patio. Nick's father had found the table outside a foreclosed house. It sat crooked so there was a 2x4 under one leg, and Nick's mother had draped an old tablecloth over it, and a pitcher of margaritas was on the table, and each adult drank from a wide-mouthed glass caked with salt. The bug zapper hissed and popped. Just out of the circle of the porch light, the deer sat

certain it was riddled with fleas, ticks, bedbugs, mites, chiggers, lice, crabs, and all sorts of unfathomable disease bearing microbes. She told the Jenkinses that she couldn't for the life of herself think of one reason why anyone would want to dig an old, dead deer out of a pile of garbage and bring it home, though she'd been married to Bill for almost seven years and should be used to just about anything coming home from the dump or God knows where because Bill Turnell didn't have to go to the dump to find trash; he could find it anywhere. Nick's father said that he brought her home once and that didn't turn out too bad, and his mother stopped talking for a while, and Nick watched her face change shape while she tried to think of what to say, and he saw Mrs. Jenkins raise her foot below the table and rub it on his mother's foot and her face settled into itself, and she said, Anyway, I can't see why anyone would want to kill a deer and stuff its big dumb body in the first place.

They drank their drinks for a while then his mother stood up and went into the kitchen to get some ice. Pickle pulled his hands out of his pants and went upstairs. Nick followed him but stayed just out of sight. His mother was standing at the sink, looking out the windows, watching her company out back. She seemed to look past them for a moment as if there was something far away that only she could see. Pickle came in and pressed himself against the cabinets. Help you with something, Pickle? his mother said. No, ma'am, he said and pressed harder, pushing his hips forward. I got things to do, Pickle. Why don't you and Nick go out front? Pickle kept pressing, moving a bit so that the knob of the knife drawer hit right at his zipper.

Nick's mother narrowed her eyes and drew tight her lips, and although Nick rarely saw his mother angry, he knew that she was beginning to boil, much in the same way that she did when she'd entrusted him with the care of a cake on the way to his father's family reunion. She'd put the cake on the backseat and told Nick to make sure that it didn't slide onto the floor, and he

holder over and helped himself to as much icing as he could scrape away without her seeing him, which was easy because she and his father were arguing the whole way, and his mother kept folding and unfolding the map and comparing it to the directions she'd written on the back of the electric bill envelope, and his father kept saying, For the love of Jesus, Abbie, I know where we're going. Can you please stop with the map? You're driving me nuts. And his mother apologized each time and said, I just want to be sure, or, Have you ever tried to fold up one of these things? I'd like to see you do better. Nick kept running his finger across the top of the cake again and again while keeping an eye on the backs of his parents' necks above their seat backs, and just before they pulled into the driveway of his Uncle's house, before his father's moonfaced brother loped over to the window and talked his gibberish and his father said, Stuart, you're looking sharp, Nick had slipped the lid back in place and then his mother had turned around and said, That cake do alright? Nick had seen her lips tighten and her eyes narrow and her whole body get stiff as she stared right at his mouth, and he raised a finger to his lips to find icing dried there, and then he looked down and saw that he'd also got icing on his shirt, and he didn't have time to look back up at his mother because she was out of the car and opening the back door and sliding back the cake lid and seeing the icing, which looked like a plowed field. That's the look she had now as Pickle rubbed himself and closed his eyes and Nick remembered how she had beat him right there in the driveway in front of his father's family and how no one had even looked twice as she yanked him from the car and held his wrist above his head and smacked his butt again and again so hard that his feet nearly came off the ground with each blow. It was like she kept him from shooting off into space by holding his arm. She'd taken the cake inside and later he'd seen it on the table with new icing, and, by the time they left to drive home in the

dark, his mother had forgotten all about it and rode the whole way home with her head on her father's shoulder. But Pickle didn't see her getting mad. He had both hands in his pockets and he was just pushing and moving against the knob and then his mother broke free from the sink and was standing next to him with her face right in his ear. She snatched one of his hands from his pocket and slapped it down on the counter and Pickle looked over at her with his mouth open. She was talking soft, all air, so mad that she lost her voice, and Pickle tried to lean away but his hand was pressed to the counter and Nick heard the words, Don't try to run now, you little pervert, and then the sounds were gone again, and she was talking so fast and quiet and mad that it looked like a wind was blowing in Pickle's face, and then Nick's mother released Pickle's hand, and he brought it to his face and wiped it across his lips and cheeks as Nick's mother spun him around to face her and swung her arm down hard and hit him right between the legs, and Nick's own knees buckled a little even though it wasn't him that was being punched. Pickle was trying to sink to the ground but Nick's mother, who was stronger than she looked, held him up by his shoulders as he gulped his breaths and whimpered. She never stopped talking to him the whole time, just running a stream of words at him until he was standing on his own again. Outside, the other adults were laughing. The crickets were beginning their songs. Somehow it had got to be pitch black even though it seemed only a few moments ago since the Jenkinses had got there. His mother released Pickle, and he covered his stomach with both hands and walked to the upstairs bathroom and saw Nick standing by the stairs and said, What are you looking at? but didn't wait for an answer before going into the bathroom and closing the door. Then his mother was standing in front of him. She'd pulled all her hair back and was carrying a bowl of chips and a pitcher of drinks. She looked down and smiled and said, Sweetie, do me a favor and get that salsa on the counter and bring it down to us,

up. He nodded and he turned a moment and studied his face. She was back to normal, with just a bit of red in her cheeks, and her voice was regular, but she looked at him as if he was a kid she just met and wasn't sure what to think of, and then she shook herself a bit and said, Your father makes a strong margarita, and walked down the stairs past the series of Norman Rockwell plates she'd got from her mother and hung in the stairwell. From each plate, sad and courageous faces watched over her as she passed.

That night, when everyone else in the world was sleeping, his mother left. He learned this the next morning while he was waiting for someone to get him breakfast. His father came into the kitchen still wearing his boxers and t-shirt, though it was nearly time to leave for church. No church today, buddy, he said. Just get yourself a bowl of cereal, okay? How come? Your mother needed to visit her mother for a while, his father said. He rubbed his stubble and put coffee into a filter and poured water into the machine. That was all the answer he provided and, for the next month, that was all he said about the matter. Several weeks into her absence, Nick asked when she was coming back, and his father set his pipe wrench onto the floor and stared into the open cabinet as if the answer was written on the leaking pipes, and then after a few minutes he stopped staring and picked up the wrench and went back to work on the trap without saying anything, and Nick watched for a while from the hallway, but once his father went beneath the sink there was no talking to him if you didn't want to get a load of swears in response and him saying, If you're going to blab at me at least be useful, but then he'd give no indication of what useful looked like, and even though it was a sink and not a toilet, it smelled bad, damp and old, and all the tools were wet or covered in plumber's goop, which his father used like he owned the goop company, and he'd eventually say, Never mind, never mind, I'll get it myself, and he'd reach back behind

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that Nick wouldn't have known what to call anyway, and then he'd say, Stupid fucking sink and this stupid fucking house, until Nick would decide he'd be best served to occupy himself in another part of the house.

Life without his mother wasn't really all that different than life with her. It was August and the ground was dusty from the summer's drought. He got up and ate cereal and watched television and went to the playground to wait for the neighborhood kids and came home and ate peanut butter sandwiches for lunch, and in the afternoon Mrs. Jenkins still came over with Pickle and sat in the living room like Nick's mother had just run out to the store, and sometimes she brought her knitting but mostly she did crossword puzzles and did laundry for Nick and his father, which they kept in big piles in their rooms because there was no one to put it away. If Mr. Jenkins was working late, Mrs. Jenkins would stay and make dinner, and Pickle would sometimes sleep on the couch, and the next morning Mrs. Jenkins would get there before anyone woke up and already be doing laundry or cooking a chicken that she would strip and turn into chicken salad for lunch, and they'd all eat on the patio, the chicken still warm and stuffed between two pieces of bread with onions and celery and salt and globs of mayonnaise. One day, after Mrs. Jenkins had been there all afternoon but finally gone home, Mr. Jenkins came by and sat at the curb in his yellow city truck. Nick was by himself and he watched Mr. Jenkins hold the steering wheel with one hand and tap his fingers on it and smoke a cigarette with the other hand, blowing smoke out the window. It was nearly dark and Nick didn't know where his father was, and no one would tell him anything about his mother and, even though he'd known Mr. Jenkins all his life, he didn't like the way he was sitting there. The streetlight eventually came on over the truck, and Mr. Jenkins opened the door and walked up the driveway, rubbing his hands over his hair and talking to himself. He

latched the screen door and hid behind the Bishop St. couch and stuck his head just around the corner a bit to where he could see clear to the back fence. Fireflies were already out and a few stars burned low in the sky. Mr. Jenkins walked over to the screen door and jiggled the catch. He cupped his hands and peered inside, his face an ink spot. He was still wearing his work clothes. He took out a cigarette and lit it and blew the smoke in through the screen. The couch fabric made Nick's skin itch. He was sweating. Finally, Mr. Jenkins moved away from the screen and walked over to the edge of the patio and put his hand on the deer. He stroked its fur and rubbed all the way up its neck and stuck a finger in the empty eye hole. He took a long pull on his cigarette and then tossed it into the yard. He kept his hand on the deer's snout and at first it looked like he was going to kiss it, but then he punched it right below the missing eye and the whole deer wobbled on its stand, and Mr. Jenkins grabbed his fist with his other hand and bent over with his hands cupped together at his waist like he was trying to fold into himself and he muttered to himself some words that Nick didn't understand but that didn't sound good, and then he stood up again and started kicking at the deer. He kicked the front jumping legs until one was crooked, and then he kicked the belly and then the back legs, but it just absorbed the kicks and rocked back and forth as the night grew darker and the fireflies thicker, and then he stopped kicking and stood leaning against the deer, breathing hard and saying over and over again Nick's mother's name—Abbie, Abbie, Abbie—in between his breaths, and then he stood up straight and rubbed his eyes. Nick stayed a silent witness to an adult having an attack of what his grandmother called 'nerves.' He'd never seen such a thing before. He wasn't afraid, just curious as to what Mr. Jenkins was doing and why he was saying 'Abbie' and where Mrs. Jenkins was, and Pickle, and his own mother and father, and to why he was suddenly alone. Even being alone

stopped wobbling. It was just there always in mid-jump but never landing. Around its rack, fireflies blinked on and off. He could see its one good eye, and, although it was dark and the eye nearly black, it gleamed at Nick, pulsed even, as though the deer was winking, telling him to be courageous. Mr. Jenkins patted the deer on the side and reached up and ran his hands over the rack. Then he went to the side of the deer and pushed until it fell over, the black eye now facing the ground. He kicked it twice more and then straightened his clothes and took several deep breaths and left the yard.

The next thing Nick remembers was being woken up by his father. He was lying on the couch in a cocoon of old blankets. The deer was standing upright, and his father didn't mention anything about it. Hey, Nicky, he said, why don't you go on up to your room? What time is it? Nick said. Late. Where'd you go? It's late, his father said again. Time for bed. I want to stay here, Nick said. His father patted him on his leg. Suit yourself, he said. I told you it was a good idea to get that couch.

The next day, the deer came inside. His father moved the couch and set the deer against the wall and pushed the couch against the deer. Its marble eye facing out, its front legs and hooves above the back so that when Nick laid on his back and looked up at just the right angle, it appeared that the deer was leaping over him. No matter where he went in the room, the marble eye followed him. Nick and his father stood and admired both the deer itself, which barely fit into the room, its rack grazing the ceiling tiles, and Nick's father's own genius in claiming the deer and the couch and filling the room with cast-off things that made it feel homey and alive. Mrs. Jenkins stopped by with a casserole. She and Pickle were on their way to the public pool, and Pickle wore his long blue trunks and no shirt. His belly was white and pudgy. He didn't have pockets for his hands, so he stuck the tips of his fingers into his

wasn't wearing a swimsuit, but she was wearing a shirt over her swimsuit, but it wasn't buttoned except for the bottom two buttons, and she didn't wear any pants or shorts. She wore flip-flops and her toenails were painted a dark red. She was very tan, and Nick wished he could lay his head down between her breasts, which swayed beneath her open shirt. I can't believe you brought it inside, she said, that awful thing. There was some vandals around, Nick's father said. Probably teens from the other side of the pond, Mrs. Jenkins said. They weren't looking at each other and their voices were louder than usual, and they said each word very clearly, like they were reading from a book. They looked at each other and Nick's father kept his eyes on Mrs. Jenkins' face. She stood close to him. I don't know, his father said. I don't know what to think anymore. Harris, Mrs. Jenkins said, you don't know of any boys that might want to hurt Mr. Turnell's deer, do you? Pickle was staring out the sliding glass door down the long slope of the yard. He didn't answer. Mrs. Jenkins was looking at Nick's father and at the deer and, for a few moments, no one said anything. Finally, Mrs. Jenkins said, Harris! so loud and sharp that it was like a cap pistol going off, and all of them jumped, even Mrs. Jenkins, who seemed surprised, too. A bright swath of red bloomed down her neck toward her chest. What? Pickle said. Answer my question. What question? Never mind, Mrs. Jenkins said. They all went upstairs, and Mrs. Jenkins unwrapped a casserole and told Nick's father that it was ready to eat but that he'd have to warm it up himself for dinner unless he'd like her to come back and get it ready. And his father took Mrs. Jenkins by the elbow and pulled her close and whispered something in her ear that Nick couldn't understand but which made Mrs. Jenkins face flush again and, she said, Oh, my, and then his father said, Me and Nick are going on a quest, but we should be back by supper, and Mrs. Jenkins said, Well, I'll stop by if I have time. As they were leaving, Pickle punched Nick on the shoulder. See you around, shithead, he said.

battle with the ignition, foot pumping hard on the gas pedal and the smell of gas filling the cab, the engine turned over, and they drove off toward Parkson, leaving the garage in a plume of smoke. His father turned the radio to a talk station where they were talking about taxes and freedom, and, every once in a while, Nick's father would slap the steering wheel in agreement with the talker and say, Exactly, or, This guy knows what's what, and each time he'd slap the steering wheel, Nick would look over to see if his father required his attention or his input, but his father seemed quite content to be separated by the three feet of threadbare fabric, so Nick returned his gaze to the countryside flowing outside the window. They stayed on I-95 for a short time, and then they were on increasingly skinny, winding roads that led through towns with big churches and grange halls and post offices built right up close to the road and houses that looked run-down but which had big cars in the driveways and front yards full of wildflowers and unpainted barns three or four times the size of the houses they served. Soon, the road was straight and hilly, and Nick's father was going a bit too fast, up and down, the wind coming in hot and fast and the radio drowned out by its roar. Nick's hair flew in all directions, bits of it catching the corners of his eyes, but even though his eyes watered from the wind and the fluttering hair and the sun that seemed to be in his eyes no matter which way he looked, and even though a nub of longing for his mother was unfurling in his belly, making it hard to see, he would not roll his window shut. He didn't know why he was thinking of his mother and where she had gone. This was the first time the thought had occurred to Nick—that his mother wasn't at his grandmother's but some other place, perhaps to get away from him, or maybe the deer, or any of the other trash his father brought home, and that maybe the quest his father was taking him on was to a place where his mother was, and that she'd see them both and realize how much she

missed them, especially him, her son, who loved her even more when she was gone, who needed her, too, and she'd climb into the cab and he'd be squeezed in the middle, his legs pressed against his mother's legs because that's how you had to sit in the truck on account of the gearshift, the winch controls, and the four-wheel drive controls all sticking up from the floor. At the base of the gearshift, where a rubber gasket had dry-rot and flaked away, Nick could see the road blurring by in a black and gray streak.

Up ahead, a group of low buildings grew out of a thicket of bushes. His father slowed down because there were two thirty-yard dumpsters outside the house full of what appeared to be items useful to Billy Turnell. The house had a 'For Sale' sign in its window, but no one was around and none of the windows had curtains, and you could see from the front all the way to the back, down through a long field bordered by a line of fat trees. His father stopped the truck next to one of the dumpsters and got out. Nick stayed in for a moment, but when he saw his father climb up the green wall of the dumpster and jump over the lip and disappear into a tangle of metal and wood, he knew they'd be staying for a while. He got out, too, and the dust rose around his ankles. The house was larger than it first appeared, but it also seemed like it was one house made out of many different buildings with several smaller roofs extending in different directions and a long section that had a flat roof connected to another section that sloped away from the main house. The main house even looked cobbled together and its roof set atop the mess like a cap or an afterthought. Nick walked around to the backyard and found what was left of an old barn foundation, massive field stones that seemed to have sprouted rather than been set by farmers. The barn would have been huge, but all that was left was an empty pit and a few piles of unpainted barn boards stacked in rotting piles. All around the foundation grew broad-leafed weeds and purple flowers and goldenrod. Dozens of birds chattered in the

trees and in the grasses as well as squirrels and chipmunks, which darted in and out of the gaps between the old stones, many of which were longer and thicker than two or three of his own body.

Nick gained access to the house through a door that was attached by one set of hinges and which hung loosely in its frame. It swung open at his touch, and he stepped into a musty backroom. He found shovels and vacuum cleaners and tool boxes. Someone had spray painted instructions on the walls—Keep, or Load Bearing, or Demo. The floors squeaked under his feet. One side of the room was full of trash, boxes of old newspapers and mason jars and wine bottles and rags and parts of doors and thick beams filled with hooks and nails. Further inside, he moved into another, darker room, and there he found steps that led down to a cellar. Nick crouched at the top of the stairs and looked into the darkness, wondering if people were down there. He evaluated the amount of bravery it would require to chance a descent, but even though he was drawn toward the opening, he resisted and turned to go. He wasn't exactly frightened by the raccoon, but, after having stared so long into the basement, its bright eyes and raised paws and open mouth with sharp teeth surprised him so much so that he yelped. Part of him knew that the animal was stuffed but his heart still roared in his chest. His fingers tingled and the hair on the back of his neck stood on end. After a few moments, he walked closer to the raccoon and touched its soft snout. It was surprisingly light, and he lifted it easily off the box on which it sat. He opened the box and inside were half a dozen stuffed birds, including a small white owl with large eyes that lay on its back, waiting just for him. He took the raccoon outside and came back for the birds, and even though it felt like stealing, he told himself that no one else could possibly want these old things, no one but him. He took his treasure around front, where his father had nearly filled the back of the truck with things from the dumpsters. He'd found an old desk

dozen empty picture frames and another rocking chair that was missing a rocker and an old army footlocker with the name Cpl. Arthur Day painted in black letters under the hasp, and a steamer trunk and two vases, one of which was filled with dusty silk flowers and several come-alongs and a metal pail full of chains and three baskets of mason jars and boxes of nails and bottles of cleaning supplies and two brooms that he'd shoved upright in between the tailgate and the rest of the trash, where they stood like straw flags. He was still in the dumpster rustling around, so Nick set his treasure by the rear bumper and climbed up the side of the dumpster and looked in to see his father dusty and sweaty, his shirt soaked through and a small cut on his hand that bled a little red stream down his wrist and up his forearm. He was working on a piece of pipe that was buried beneath what didn't interest him. He'd give the pipe a good pull and shake it loose a bit. Then he'd clear away a bit more debris—plaster and lathe, squares of linoleum, old rags, empty cans—and then yank the pipe again until he'd worked it mostly clear. Finally, he gave one last heave and the whole mess pulled free and sent him flying backwards onto the pile he'd been rummaging through. A great cloud bloomed inside the dumpster walls. Nick very nearly lost sight of his father. It was like looking through a dirty bed sheet. When his father started to move, his body was a shadow, a ray gliding over the sand in cloudy waters. He waved his arms and coughed and spit and said, Jesus H. Christ, but when he finally got to where he could stand up, he was smiling, his teeth glowing. What did I tell you? he said. What did I tell you about having an eye for finding the right stuff? He reached down and picked up the pipe and held up one end to show Nick the curved elbow joint. I knew I'd find it, he said. I just knew it when I climbed up here in the first place. I could feel it in my guts. I said, Billy, the piece you need to fix that God-blamed sink is in this dumpster, and you ain't leaving till

you find it. They don't call me the trash man for nothing. He was holding the elbow joint and studying it with pure love.

Nick couldn't see anything special. It looked exactly like the piece that was always leaking, but his father looked so pleased that Nick found himself smiling, too. His father climbed out of the dumpster and set the pipe carefully in between the army trunk and the boxes of bottles. I found something, too, Nick said. The apple don't fall far, his father said. Nick showed him the raccoon first, and he wasn't sure if he'd ever seen his father more pleased. He smiled even wider than he had in the dumpster. He was like a different man than the man Nick had started the trip with. But wait, Nick said, there's more. He made a big show of opening the box and revealing its feathery contents. He knelt down in the dusty driveway and undid the flaps and tipped the box forward very slowly and watched dusty lines crackle across his father's face. It wasn't just his mouth, but his whole body was smiling. This, Nick thought, must've been what his father looked like when he found the deer at the dump, or what he might have looked like when he'd first seen Nick's mother outside 7-11, where her high school boyfriend had left her after a fight over a Slurpee. She'd expected the boy to come back and when Nick's father saw her—and sometimes when he told the story, he said she was standing there with her hands on her hips like she was Queen of the World, tapping her flip-flop foot like a royal might if her carriage was late, and sometimes when he told the story, she was sitting on the curb, hunched into herself, the saddest, prettiest little lostling ever—he pulled his car right over and offered her a ride. The rest, he liked to say, is historic. Where'd you find all these wonderful birds, he said in a hush. Out back, Nick said. They're so little and so pretty, his father said. They'll go beautiful with the deer. All but the owl, Nick said. He's mine. He's going in my room. His father looked at him, studied him was more like it, like he'd never seen Nick before, like he'd been in a coma for a long time and was just coming to and recognizing the boy in front

that he looked like he was wearing a mask. Of course, he said. Of course. They're all yours. You found them and you can do anything you want with them. They can all go with the deer, Nick said. All but the owl. His father clapped him on the back and said, This is good stuff. Show me where you got it. So Nick took his father back around to the loose door, and they both went inside, and, as they passed the tools and the vacuums, his father said not to touch them because they weren't for taking. They belonged to someone working for a living. How that differed from the birds and the raccoons, Nick didn't know. When they got to the room with the stairs that led to the basement, his father opened boxes and threw some garbage around until he uncovered another army trunk. He opened the lid and the inside was full of fabrics, curtains, and bolts of red cloth with small, yellow flowers and blue cloth with tiny, light-blue dots and pairs of pants and shirts that Nick's father said hadn't been worn since probably World War II and, below all of that, a layer of floral print dresses that they pulled out and held up and pushed their noses into and smelled like they were expecting some particular smell that wasn't the musty old smell they got. Nick's father pulled out all the dresses and a sewing basket that was inside the trunk that rattled with its spools of thread and tins of needles and thimbles and pins. He looked around once more before turning to leave. They walked back around to the front and the dresses went into the cab, in the middle of the bench, a pile of colors and patterns. He set the birds carefully down into the last remaining open spot in the bed and set the raccoon down into an open bucket near the tailgate so that it looked like they were just giving it a ride. Come on, Nick's father said, we got a ways to go. You mean this wasn't where we was going? Of course this wasn't where we was going. I just stopped here. They were in the truck and they stopped talking while Nick's father pumped the gas and cranked the key and listened to the slow grinding of the

.: Harpur, Palate, Volume 1, Number 1, Summer and Fall course it did, just like always, and the dumpsters were swallowed in that first cloud of smog and then they were off down the road. The dresses would not stay stacked and flowed out between them like water seeking its level. Nick rested his hand on the material and rubbed it between his fingers. After a while, he said, So, where are we going? His father didn't take his eyes off the road. They were focused way off in the distance, scanning for his next great find. Well, he finally said, now we're going to get your mother.

**MORE WORDS
AFTER
MY BROTHER'S
SUICIDE**

**KATHARYN
HOWD
MACHEN**

Funeral? I dumped the son
of a bitch's ashes into rotted

palm leaves, worn out mulch, black
dirt fit only for scorpions

and a one-eyed cat's sour piss.
Do I miss him? Does a

heroin addict who's killed her
own child dare to say prayers

on weekends? His only friends
were fat tight cigars, a man

who stole trash from the town.
The sound of his voice when he

called me to lie? A vicious
dog trying to drown.

LAUGHTER'S LAST CHANCE

AL
MAGINNES

I did not plan to be awake
watching a comedy special,
my book frozen in my lap as I pretend
I only looked up, curious about how
the TV managed to turn itself on.

A stand-up comic slouches around
a microphone, and he's hitting them
where they live, going for it, laughter
rolling constant as water, low,
rippling, then quick and loud
as white water over rocks.

When he finds a couple down front
and riffs on them for a few beats,
the laughter takes on new appetite,
even a bite of rage. The camera holds
the couple's stricken faces, their game
attempt to laugh along. I've seen this.

The ones singled out are always
adult versions of class presidents,
jocks and prom queens who never
gave the time of day to the comic
in high school. Now it's their turn
to sit and take it. There were no cameras
in seventh grade, but the laughter had teeth.
For half a year I was the one
shoved into lockers, mocked until

the thin soup of tears came burning
from eyes I no longer trusted.

I never knew why it started or stopped
any more than the one after me
or before me knew. The difference is momentum.

The comic knows just when and how
to change direction. Kids do not.

When the soft wires of school whispers
flooded with the attempted suicide
of a classmate, another pariah,
it was easy to believe.

The water pooling in my front yard
after a pipe burst brought a battalion
of city workers to see if it was
my problem or theirs. When one tried
to measure from the center of the water
to the curb without getting his feet wet,
as though touching water would spark
some electricity latent in the body,
I laughed with his co-workers
at his duck-footed ballet, as readily
as I joined the crowd when
its attention turned from me.

The girl reappeared, healthy,
unaware of the rumors.

The pipe got fixed. Whatever wounds
we got or gave in those days
before counseling and zero tolerance
we shoved away or swallowed
and showed up again. The show
always goes on and it always ends.

The couple drives home. She goes to bed;
he gets the sitter home, fixes a drink,
sits in front of the TV.

Another comic berates a crowd,
and he watches, happy, like me
to join any laughter not aimed at him.

DRIFT ICE IN THE FOREGROUND

LINCOLN
MICHEL

—for RJ

Birds will flee in flocks not
because it is snowing but so that
winter may be allowed to come.
One sees them disappear above the tree

line and turns back to grab a sweater.
It is blinding in the sky. A bird that forgets
to sing will be abandoned in the storm.
There is one of these in the heart

of every block of ice. If he is freed,
he will nest in the first warm cavity
he finds, even a yawning mouth.
Often I awake to find one pecking

at snowflakes from the tip of my tongue.
If no such home is found, the bird will fly
in circles until he bursts into a flurry
of ice. I remember the first time we met.

It was beneath a green statue glittering
with frost. I was carrying a handful of kindling
and you were desperately rubbing at
a chunk of ice in preparation for the storm.

MEN

CHRISTOPHER MUNDE

That precipitous fall from symbol to the world could kill a man, or the thing
half-transformed to man on the way down.

The Leeds family learned this; their thirteenth child has haunted the Pine
Barrens for decades,
sometimes as a horse-headed man with wings, others as a hoofed lizard,
never as a centaur. Painful
to admit, but it does matter which end's human.

Regarding the Pineys, our pack leader told his busload of scouts,
*With several generations of inbreeding and no civilized contacts, if you see
one, you'll know—talking real horror.*

Such is deformity, and with the lack of shapeliness comes the misshaping of
all surrounding life: Absence: A wall;

Paved ground: A wall; the razored
gloaming of the evergreens: A shifting, roiling roof. God,

that slope. I dragged a canoe up that pale, vertical sand hill in the Barrens
and could not find sky through all the green, strain
of the dragging barely registering on my rise toward the darkness, the Devil
that wasn't there,
(So what if it wasn't) raising me, nonetheless, to his jade maw.

And then the latest rash of Jersey Devil sightings were all proven hoaxes:
Seems no one questioned its existence until they really started seeing it.
All of the prints were left by wooden hooves, or feet, or talons and so no

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in fear, only threats of horror (so what if it wasn't shape), and thus,

a kind of fall:

Not a man's weeping face—whatever line divides men from things he won't
cross before the needle-cloaked earth—

he shrouds himself in receding wings, or clasps his face in his paws, or digs
talons into horse hide, then

lizard skin, into Devil, then nothing as the forest floor comes close.

He glimpses something move off along the beach, something he should
have become,

some solid, constant man: one-who-does-not-drag-a-canoe.

But here the ground accepts another one, and his last thought stains
this place, retains the same

misshape: *If only*

I'd killed someone.

PUNKS



**KRISTINE
ONG MUSLIM**

They live under the stairs.
Upon entering the house, they do not wipe
their shoe bottoms on the welcome mat.
They are makeshift boxes smirking
with cardboard lips, gorging bad music.
They have discolored teeth and bad hair.
Every bit of darkness helps. Everything else
kills them. Their toxic mushrooms
hunker down on the cellar floor.

BROOKLYN



**BEN
NADLER**

When I was young I made a mockery.
I went down into the city, chased
the underground like it was a golden thing
not something black. I embraced the night
dancing in dark and cavernous clubs.
I slept away the days, sometimes not seeing
more of the sun than the first few rays.

Things changed. There was no event
it was just that I was twenty-six
the party was winding down, I wanted
a couch to sit on.

A buddy got me a job down in Bay Ridge
loading crates off boats and onto trains.
The rails took the freight up to the Fresh Pond Yard
where it was loaded onto longer trains
and sent out across the surface of the country.
My muscles ached, I unloaded many
boxes and acquired a few skills.
I worked hard, but the trains were already
a holdover from another age
and the job didn't last very long.

I took the postal exam, but scored poorly
and lingered low on the hiring list.

I did better on the MTA test
my name came up quick and they made me
a track worker. I went on down. It wasn't
bad work, moving steel around, mostly
maintaining. The tasks were clear.

Eleven years on the job, safe in the union
they made me a night shift supervisor.

When I got off my shift, I'd go see Vera.
She worked nights too, in the hospital
which does not have many windows but is lit
with long fluorescent lights.
I'd come over to her apartment.
She'd be tired. I'd be tired too
and beaten down, but I always managed
to swagger through the door like I wasn't.
I'd take off my dirty clothes, I'd kiss her face.
I'd take a shower and rinse off the tunnel dust.
I'd come into the bedroom. She'd already
be lying down on the bed, I'd come
lay with her.

Our son wasn't born yet when I stepped
on the third rail, only incubating
deep in Vera's womb. I call that living though
as I can't say his life was much different
than mine those three short months we both
lived in the loam.

They say it was an accident. The events
were incidental and stupid. We had finished
cleaning up, and switched the power back on.
I went back to retrieve a bucket and
in doing so slipped. Dumb luck, sure, but
I don't call it an accident.

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I always had a never-ending fight against the world
with a foe like that the odds weren't in my favor.

You attack something for long enough
eventually it attacks you back.

Trespasses are not forgiven.

I do believe electricity

remembers being coal before it was burned.

WAKE

WILLIAM
NEUMIRE

After his mother died, my uncle got so drunk he curled up
in the yard with the dog. *October of deer dangling
from oak branches with their guts cut open to dry.*

My grandfather dug his .22 out of the garage and sat on the porch
taking aim at the family mutt, Charlie. My grandmother wouldn't go
to New York for fancier medicine.
She said god did what god did.

Charlie'd gotten into bad berries out back and shit on the kitchen
floor. He yelped the whole airborne arc into a pile of leaves.
My uncle crouched behind the movie theater baked in music.
On the way home, like his mother taught him, he made the sign
of the cross as he passed the church.

In the dim lawn, Charlie was a piñata of leaves. Under the deer
he buried himself with my uncle.

My father tells me this again and again. No lesson. No round up.
Convinced this will help me someday.

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BEACHED PILOT WHALE

WILLIAM
NEUMIRE

This is the story of clouds the color of waves.
The eyes of whales
are the size of the human heart.

That could be a lie, but this is still the story
of a parachute

of clouds over the dull blue water.

Whales have no names, not even when they are dying
before us. But you can touch them there
on the Australian beaches.

Hearts are the size of fists and certain birds
that run reconnaissance through the clouds.
There's an alchemy between us

whereby his eyes become my heart,
my fist, a bird witnessing
and reporting back to his eyes.

Sometimes the things we don't know about try to leap out
of the ocean and find us. Even dying like this,
they look up and say, *you have been drowning.*

DECEMBER AT ZION

BY

JACOB NEWBERRY

This morning I am awake before the strays have begun to wail. They cry like panhandlers every morning in the moments after sunrise. They will forget me when I leave.

I am in Gethsemane by dawn. I stand near the front of the church for a Tuesday mass, but I am turned toward the back, looking at the rose-colored window of the Church of All Nations. The scene is Christ's betrayal. I am alone in this service with three priests.

A woman arrives, places her heavy bag on a pew in the back. She seems too old to kneel, yet she hurries to the front to receive her blessing. She cries out almost imperceptibly, *Son of God!* And it is as though the doors to all the temples of Judea have been opened. The color of rose fills the space beside the altar where she kneels.

I stand in the entryway to the church before I leave. I look west, where there are children walking in

the shadow of the Mount of Olives. They follow a path that takes them out across the Kidron Valley, a path toward the apartment complexes that spring up from the land outside the city walls like tamarisks in June.

The Lion's Gate stands open from across the valley. And in the north, there is Zion reaching out as from the arched back of the sky.

At Zion I find only parking lots. I want to dig my hands into the earth, to hold them in the ground like many seeds. If I leave them in the soil at Zion, they will spread throughout the earth and cross the sea. But here the land is painted lines, a hardened ocean of sand and shells.

There was a time when the prophet stood outside the city gates, when he called to the people of Jerusalem: *Bring forth the bones of the kings of Judah.* When I find a corner of the mountain that is unpaved and reach my hands into

I gather the land in a plastic bag: my hands are stained for hours. I go back toward the city and pass through the Messiah Gate, where a boy offers camel rides for ten shekels. He is enormous, this creature. I think he must be older than the child who pulls his reins, and yet he returns calmly to his place beneath the outstretched fronds of the Judah palm when he is asked. I turn to see Zion again as I pass through the Messiah Gate: surely my hands have crossed the sea.

A WORD BEFORE YOU GO

BY

JACOB NEWBERRY

It's April and the dogwoods have finished blossoming. The Bradford pears were the first to go. Now even the azaleas are shedding: a carpeting of white and pink across the sidewalks where I run. Through the late stages of fall, there were the acorns to crush as I passed through the city. Even as it grew colder every day, I could anticipate the sounds my feet would make, trampling those early lives of oak. I fear there are not many trees left to bloom this year. If only we grew hydrangeas in this town: they flower every month.

But not all good things have passed. The breeze is heavier now than in autumn, and the trees with their many leaves sigh much more deeply in the wind. The skies are clear, and the days are steadily warmer. Already this spring I have been running and fooled myself into believing that the heavy swaying of the trees was in truth the sea, believing I could smell sunscreen

on my face and hands, that the next hill would crest upon a vision of the water. I have made the long drive once to the beach this spring already, but it was too cold to be what I wanted. I left sand in my car, on the floor, in the seats, so that on warm days I might believe in some small space of my heart that I am still living beside the water. Try it sometime: sprinkle sand on the carpets by your feet. Then one day you will enter on a summer afternoon, your car a greenhouse made of steel, yourself a wilting orchid, and the sand will come to you quickly as a pathway to a planet without land, where all existence is submerged in the blessings of the sea. And you'll be grateful.

WHAT DO YOU

JOHN A. NIEVES

The sentence ended without punctuation,
just Lake Michigan's continual failure
to push through the pilings of the pier—
a wind-up toy stuck in a corner.

Almost a question—
a shard of utterance.
I could have pressed you to finish,

but the lake was in my veins,
polluted, swarming with lamprey,
unable even to desire strength.

There were only two paths:
one back down the dock toward
a lifetime of stale smiles and car exhaust,
the other,

an icy dive
a desperate breast-stroke aimed
at that one narrow passage to the sea.

LAST YEAR

DOUG
RAMSPECK

Something was slaughtering the chickens,
spiriting them away, so that only
a scattering of feathers was left behind.

At dusk the oracle of grass was damp
beneath the variegated sky,
and there was nothing to remember except

for the mud of the swales in the summer
fields, how the peat in its plastic sacks
stank always both of living and dying.

To be consumed by a kind of quieting,
the heat that clings to the flagstone
before seeping away, the moon that presents

itself in the night's hall. Always the feathers
of the chickens like moths battering
our kitchen windows after dark, bullfrogs

with their desultory cries, a detritus carried
in a chest even when we waded to our
waists in the river, the mud water covering

our bodies. Always the feathers
lay in patterns in the pens, a few

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as though you might disappear like that,
the years vanishing and never coming back,
one small white feather cupped in a palm.

THE BIG PICTURE

DOUG
RAMSPECK

There is a place, I've seen it, where the night
has a full mouth of stars that bivouac above us.

It is the prophetic hour. We walk beneath a raw
skin of sky. Surely this is love like cool water

slurped from your palms. In this dream I have taken
a knife to the underbelly of the rising moon,

have read into its entrails a prophecy.
Everyone thinks the sky is lonely.

The stars are strings of eggs, unborn. A trail
of near existence. The black muck that clings

to the heavens. What lasts except this?
An unrequited longing, raw in the open chest.

A ladder propped after dark against the great tree,
someone having climbed out of sight.

SUFISM

FAISAL
SIDDIQUI

Black spots dappled
over its tiny white body,
a *Chitkubra* pigeon.

No holy dove,
locked in a cage
prayed Allah's name every morning.

Not fit to be made into biryani,
filthy little thing
sat on a ledge protruding

from the top floor of our house.
It was not one of our homer pigeons.
For weeks, disappeared in a clear sky.

On *Shab-e-Barat*, celebrating
Allah saving Noah,
firecrackers and 5-rupee bombs

lit the night on fire. To make
the bird a holy animal,
I tied an *Anar* firecracker to its feet.

In seconds it flew into the
dark, coruscated
the sky with brilliant sparks.

UNDER THE BRIDGE

KAREN EILEEN
SISK

Once upon a time,
my mother was a girl lured
into a dried creek bed, her face
smeared on newspapers—
photos of a girl that disappeared.
She returned with swollen
nose, broken teeth, torn,
bleeding between her legs,
her neck ringed in bruises,
bite marks like a necklace.
Some never come back.
Ones found are bleating billy goats
at slaughter that cannot make words.
Your slug-suctioning fingers
peek through footbridge planks
that I take between home and school.
My black patent leather shoes
protect my toes from being
eaten like pale gumdrops.
Your voices deceptively soft,
call my name through slat gaps,
murmur you have candy
or whisper that my father
sent you to bring me home.
The vibrations of your thick
consonants tickle deep down—

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to peel my legs, staining my knees.

I want to see you,
but I think of missing girls' bones
found mounded in the dump
or my mother on the front page,
and I cannot run fast enough
to cling to the cigarette ash smeared
lace slip she wears at the stove,
as she attempts to build dinner
out of spare parts.

CALLING YOU BY YOUR NAME



**MOHAMAD
ATIF SLIM**

Grief is fickle, as television static. I can still picture you in the hallways, hiding behind my bedroom door, hear your terrible swan-singing in the shower. But when I'm curled in bed, facing right, and the fluorescent tube is dead, when I turn on my night light,

your features become clear, my favorite face shriveled like a fruit around its kernel. A beetle caresses your eyelid where I couldn't, a worm curls on your foot where mine should. Two weeks after, does your shroud still hold your shape? Your broad shoulders stretching it, the white

dented where your elbows spread like geese wings. When the smell of your damp bed invades, that's when I close my eyes. Come to me, in my dreams. Come to me, whole and pink. Remind me not how the earth moulds to our form, but how we belong to the one to whom we return like home.

TUNNEL VISION



**MOHAMAD
ATIF SLIM**

Did our eyes cry
shrilly to each other
in the empty rush
of a midnight train
when I tried to study
the large space
between us—I in
the back seat, you
in front? Did we
each select our carriage
with purpose, or is this
manifest unanticipated?
We both stared into
the inky glass next
to our heads, leaning
against it as though
it was a shoulder.
In the livid
city transit there is
little time for two—
was the opportunity
lost to us before
it was even found?
No, we were in love,
suddenly. It was the
tick-tock beast of

the blood heat
beating that kept us
apart, the organ of fear's
sermon: it's better
to be right and have
missed, than wrong
and regretful. Did I see
a tear collect in you?
Rest, deep, on this
subterranean journey,
and weep—our lives but
a cold, hard chain
of coincidences, an endless
tube of chance and
serendipity, just
out of reach.

THE BEAR MOTHER'S LULLABY



**MOHAMAD
ATIF SLIM**

Time to sleep—
hear

winter's reigns
alighting

here, children. Ball
into the hallowed

pit, lie
thick and brown,

round cushions
of baby fur.

The mice have
curled

together, tails
circled tight,

children, and the bats
are like

cocoons in
Monbetsu. Squirrels

have hoarded husks, as
the hemisphere

tasks itself white,
gentle refrigerator.

Keep warm, roll like
husks, sleep;

the night is long, till
born again, children, we

chase honey, bees,
chuckling water

and fish. Listen to
how

the migrating
birds

come back—
look for sun

on wishlike
bright morning.

THE FORSAKEN CRY



**GABRIEL
SPERA**

About torture, they were all wrong,
the old masters, how little they understood
its tactics and procedures, how it takes place
as the world turns its innocent gaze on the wings
falling flaming from the sky, and how always
just a headline away are those who don't especially
want to know what's happening—the water, the cold,
the cramped kennels, the body checks, the terminals
clamped to bloody ears, the power drill
driving toward the strapped-down thigh.

In Dante's *Inferno*, for instance: the damned
are poked and lashed by batnosed fiends
who exhibit none of the delicate tidiness of those
who take their orders only from the highest circles,
and seem to forget that they who have let go
all hope of even the most inventive death
have no incentive to speak—assuming intel
is the goal—and any words retched up by a man
chin-deep in a fen of human excrement
must be taken for what they are: mere poetry,
inadmissible in all but the courts
of the bull-horned and dog-toothed,
and any witness, having followed his convictions
this far, though unaware the ground he trusts
lies upside down, yet knows he will never
return to the world of light.

THE COMMUNITY



**GABRIEL
SPERA**

Someone heard a car pull up the drive,
so they hurried her out the back door
and through the woods to an abandoned
trailer home. And there it continued.
No lights, but dusk was still hours away
even in late Autumn. The carcass
of a burned-out toaster oven filled
the counter, and a Christmas tree, still
tinsel, stood tilted in a corner.
The smell of cigarettes and decay
rose from the cushionless couch as trucks
whined down the featureless interstate.
Some boys left, others came, one at least
for each of her eleven small years
on earth. Someone flipped out a cellphone
and started filming, compelled, no doubt,
by the same vague sense of history,
of moment, that moves the young soldier
told of the enemy's surrender
to shove a piece of the bombed-out mosque
into his pants. The community
voiced shock and regret when the details
were made public, when those that could paid
the bailbonds and slunk home and the news
rippled out, and did not, not at first,
blame the girl, the child of Mexicans,
for dressing like a high-school senior,

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the car door swung wide, for sliding in
and ruining the lives of all their boys
who were just kids, after all, and who,
being black in a town known only
for its prison and refinery,
would always bear the burden of proof.
There were meetings—at the church, school gym,
clapsed hands, tears, scripture, a microphone.
Somebody asked where was the mother?
Someone nodded, someone nudged, and soon
everyone was asking the same thing—
not asking, just saying because
really, did they need to ask, was there
really anyone who didn't know?

MARCOT



**D.E.
STEWART**

Brilliant early sun after the vernal-equinox gale winds yesterday

Before flying off into water-glass skies toward the International Date Line

Watch a Cooper's hawk on high perch in a dying maple pick apart a limp
mourning dove with focused relish

In a way as dramatic as switchbacking down four thousand feet of gray
volcanic slope below Kilauea to the ocean

Puna-side

To stand over the chaotic surf crashing on the cliffs at the black Holei Sea
Arch and watch three soot-black Tristram's storm-petrels dancing on
the wind just above the spray

Elusive seabirds in their mysterious flare and dash darker even than the
eerie colorlessness of Kilauea's ash-gray

Metallic ocean, iodophilic pitching surface horizon away in mist and coastal
fog

Birds without the fresh lava's sheen, storm-petrels, the *Oceanitidae*,
dramatically kinetic before the sizzling papaya-orange incandescent
magma spilling out upslope

..: Harper Palate, Volume 11 Number 1, Summer and Fall
gases

Walk carefully on the solid crunching black pahoehoe's glass needle shards

On that which flowed a couple of weeks ago and is still warm

Molten pools beneath, channeling through what can burn,
the roots, organic pockets burned out and filling up

Muffled thuds of occasional methane explosions below the flow

Throwing dirt and bushes high as if from a demolition charge

Watch the orange-red lava's seaward progress, ineluctable as moonrise-
sunset nightfall, from a bank a few yards off the sinister front's
advance

Through grass patches and light brush

As the surface ahead heats towards the two thousand degrees of the
magma, grass flares, bushes and scraggly kapuka trees wither

Alien force that kills instantly

Ground cover goes to pale yellow flames, weak combustion flickers against
the glowing mass of wrinkling lava moving in behind

Mineral terra firma remade directly on top of what has been

Extrusion that spills onto an ocean shelf that it itself extends

Flows around outcrops and fills ravines

As it reaches seawater, throws up toxic clouds of laze

The mix of steam and hydrochloric acid laced with bits of glass from the
magma that explodes dropping off into the ocean in sizzling chunks

Lava quenched by meeting water on the black-sand's swash glows
incandescent

Small steaming blobs lifted by the waves, wash in and out on the immedial
sandy black

Volcanic time not our time

Not within organic time, day, night, seasons, growth, decay, stasis, or cyclical
renewal

Inland, upslope from the Kilauea's east rift zone, magma spills from two
miles below the huge caldera

Kilauea Volcano dwarfs steep-sided Mount Rainier in height and mass

Lava advance recasts the surface in the volcano's complex's east rift zone

Leaving pahoehoe cooled into a bulged, thick and endless wrinkled hide

Walrusesque

In places much like a squat trunk of a fallen copper beach where its bole
first limbs out, left, right, constrictor roots, fat, piled, gray

Like continental ice sheets and tsunamis, flowing lava negates everything it
reaches

Dominates absolutely

Whatever stands in front of it gives way or is gone

Gasping in the searing pain of its sulfuric gases, agape

Dogs sulk away from it, birds avoid overflying it, people walk toward the
lifeless, smoking line of it as to an event

Not the endless continuation that it is
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Vulcanism as pilgrimage

Visit Kilauea like trekking to Olduvai Gorge, to the Acropolis, the Forum
Romanum, to Chartres, Kyoto, Tiantan or the Forbidden City

Lava cooling into black rock confounds terrestrial assumptions far more
than flooding, landslips, dune migration, avalanche

Lava flows with no reference at all to anything except itself

But we live on volcanic slopes, Vesuvio-Mayon-Etna-Montserrat

Gambling our time lines against theirs

Guessing that if there is an eruption we'll make it out

Gape at the timber-fall patterns on Mount St. Helens decades on, the
universal gray, and the open face of the peak that was blown away

Fifty-seven people killed in a lightly populated, thoroughly-alerted
community

Cross-grained world of coexistence with great violence

Skyscrapers after Nine-Eleven

Lives lived on the San Andreas Fault

Sixty years of most of us on the planet living in the target zones of
hydrogen bombs

Living as though how we choose to live will always be

FROM GRAFFITI SIGNATURES



CODY TODD

A SCHOOLYARD LIGHT POLE IN DENVER

Tagged scrawl of lettered,
star-shaped selves.
Glossed and wet, gold marker
paint beneath the lamp.
Your face in its maze,
its architecture.
Illegibility
contesting the moon's
matter-of-factness.
Permanent longhand:
before the letter
became the letter,
it would morph into
a face, this shaky
planet hanging
in space, with a thousand
feet of braided hair
going everywhere
on the schoolgirl
punching the daylights
out of the tetherball.

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Waltzed into the city. Waltzed
onto the tongue. You could have stitched me

to your shadow all night. The tongue
discloses nothing. Hear lips. Hear thighs.

An earthquake rattles the fish tank.
A penny to a piranha

that floats up to the top. We sucked
oysters and built a village

out of tissues. We died warmly as poems
and resurrected coldly as

noises of kiss and suck, where the city
was the lost book, of disordered chapters

and stolen missives,
where the message must not leave

its sender to be received.

WITHIN AN ALLEYWAY IN CHICAGO

—for Stuart Dybek

Windy names congealed faster than rain turns snow. My meal was air. Grace
hid in a salt shaker inside the Nighthawk's Diner—a flame we all huddled
around to stay alive. Ironweed scenes and boxcar transience, or city scenes
through each paper lantern of a veiled open window. Where rain paints the
wet cement city into a cloister, a heart where the trains vein between each
chamber.

Toyota covered in land crabs. Imagination
is a stone wall covered in lichen. Imagination
is a spire splattered white with guano and pigeon.

Imagination is the half-mouth, gnarled lips
pulled back from the gums and buckteeth as crooked as
duck feet. Imagination is the possibility of the bricks
when the rubble speaks for itself, the song
of locusts and honeybees, bitching and bitching some more.

UNDER A BRIDGE IN PITTSBURGH AND PURGATORY

—for Sean Thomas Dougherty

Blue on blue in two separate tones and hue

reads: Live, from Planet Rock!

Wondrous digital music from the heart inside

the owl, watching the bucolic get gutted

for the aqueous dream of the metropolis,

watching our conspiracy with rust.

**A
DOZEN WAYS OF
LOOKING AT
THE PIT
ON BOULEVARD**



**KEVIN
VAUGHN**

ATHENS, GEORGIA

I.

It was burnished, red

& there was a bottom

& children.

When I stare long enough
into the Pit.

I see children.

II.

Kudzu leaches the stream
opposite the Pit,

but
something hardy

Its vines leech
& spirit the last particles
of an industrial age.

Children once tumbled
& splashed in the septic

runoff from upstream
& machinery above the Pit.

III.

I've heard told:

Some rock & roller
bought the Pit
to let the kudzu have its way.

& so reminded
of its sprawl on his first album
no other city may claim him.

IV.

Wading
the Pit slices my knees, ankles
& hip bones

but how else to gauge it
for myself?

V.

The Pit knows:

What my heart rejects: Athens as a tongue too-foreign

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How everything kept happening.

Why we have become bosom friends
When I came to leave.

Who stands here next.

VI.

Viewed by satellite,

the Pit
is Boulevard's center
& Boulevard the proper
center of Athens.

VII.

The Pit & abyss kiss
like cousins

(this is the South)

green
sudden, jagged depth

with a pungent blossom

like grapes
too long on the vine.

VII.

Overlooking the Pit

is a family

of vintage Volkswagens.

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IX.

Dear Pit,

Black folk called it the "Hot Corner"
where dressed in their finest
they spent Saturday nights joyful.

Now, young white women staff Hot Corner's
old black man bars.

Wilson's Soul Food keeps odd hours
& Morton Theater stands lonely.
You swallow most of Athens, but
you did not swallow Hot Corner.

X.

The man in the pick-up truck
whose bed flies
the American flag
the flag of the Confederacy
& the POW/MIA

drives past the Pit, but does not
stop to look for clues
for teeth, a femur—

XI.

The Pit comprehends the seasons:

Kudzu's thick fingers
tender on the throat of Spring.

Swollen more by sticky air
& Summer's dew.

Autumn halts kudzu's crawl
& garter snakes hiss
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into their burrows
at the loss of cover & sun.

Kudzu tangled:
Swaths of gray
in the dark hair
of a woman aging—
Winter.

XII.

A distinctly Southern mistake—
an imported assassin.
Will the kudzu wither

the looks of white women
when they clutch
at my dark skin
this far down Boulevard?

OTHER EQUATIONS FOR VELOCITY

**MARK
WAGENAAR**

Distance over time, or beneath it,
the exact equation—strange that the bullet
exploding through the apple (a paradiso of one),
the handful of monkey shit flung through the bars
at the gawking visitor, the kingfisher that falls
through flame & snow at sunset,
are subject to the same ribbon of numbers—
beyond him, yet inadequate for the speed
at which one life turns from another.
For the world to turn from the sadness of Tuesday,
for the pace of the moth steering by starlight—
like her forgiveness, the means beyond him, the end
a distance he can only look to. The shrapnel that once
whistled at the speed of sound now traveling
a half inch a year through his abdomen, leaving
a score behind it, a red symphony of sixteenth notes,
an inscription only the blood reads. Each time
the metal splinter sets off an alarm at an airport
he guesses at the distance it will travel
on the flight, the thousandth of an inch between
New York & Tokyo, the infinitesimal movement
in the time it takes to turn a glass doorknob
(like trying to feel the spin of the Earth),
in the time it takes for the thought—maybe
they melted down a slipper to make this—to swim
its way to his hand from a synapse near

where the night meets the sea, if cradling it
 he cannot help but think of the ball
 of her foot—a paradiso wherever we are,
 she once said—& the surgeries, her ruined arches
 like white gates that open into a courtyard
 where a salt statue dreams of dancing.

MARK
 WAGENAAR

1. The first was time in beauty it
 the same question—strange that the bullet
 exploding through the apple to produce of that
 the handful of monkey skin from the back
 2. The glowing vision the knowledge that life
 through time & now it comes
 we subject to the same ribbon of minutes—
 it is not time yet irrevocable for the speed
 of which time the time from another
 for the world to turn from the surface of the world
 in the pace of the world moving by itself—
 the last moment the time beyond him the end
 a distance he can only look to. The distance that once
 existed in the speed of sound now traveling
 a bullet through the air, the sound leaving
 a scar behind it a red symmetry of distance in the
 an inscription only the blood reads. Then time
 the metal sphere sets off an alarm at an impact
 the distance it will travel
 in the light the luminosity of an inch between
 the first of time the infinitesimal movement
 in the time it takes to turn a glass doorway
 then it is not to feel the end of the world
 in the time it takes for the thought—maybe
 that melted down a shape to make this—to swim
 its way to his hand from a separate now

MOVING IN

SARA
WATSON

Suppose in that small space,
face to face, day after another
long day, we realize we are just
like our mothers—unopened
invitations. Inches of dust.

Nothing is clean. I cannot be bothered
to make change to wash the laundry. To rinse
used bowls and spoons. To gather my piles
of books from the tables and floors.
When we moved in we said we would make love
on every surface. See, I have buried them all.

Two tiles came down this morning;
a mixing bowl fills up with drops.
This is our home. These three rooms.
Me in a bathful of bubbles. You
leaning back in your computer chair.
Soft shuffle of internet solitaire.

THE ETHEL MERMAN SHOW

BY

KIRBY WRIGHT

My kid sister, Julie, loved dressing our father up as a woman. After he fell asleep on the couch, she'd hustle to her room and return with a box filled with essentials: our mother's old auburn wig, lipstick, rouge, eye shadow, and mascara. Julie called it *The Ethel Merman Show* because, once wigged and packed with makeup, he bore an uncanny resemblance to the famous Broadway singer. Julie would invite our mother to come in and check out her handiwork.

"My," she would say, "I didn't know Ethel Merman was visiting."

I think my father secretly liked the attention. Once I'd heard him chuckle while Julie applied lipstick. "Not so hard," he'd instructed when she dabbed on eye shadow. He had even helped by raising his head so she could pull on the wig. Sometimes, after the transformation, he'd laugh at himself in the living room mirror.

It was a mystery why my sister was doing this. She was only six, but I sensed *The Ethel Merman Show* had become an obsession. Was she trying to make him seem less threatening? He'd recently told her to stop cutting her hair short, to help more around the house, and to quit eating snacks. He'd warned her she might become "a fatso watso" that no boy would want, despite the fact she was rail thin. Maybe Julie was doing to him what he was trying to do to us—turn us into creatures he could shape through control and manipulation. Part of my creaturehood was wearing clothes my father approved of, keeping my hair short, and lugging around a book bag he'd selected at Long's Drugs. "What a nerd," I'd heard one of the Cool Kids mutter at Punahou School.

My father was particularly harsh during a pork chop dinner. He said my big brother Barry and

I were both freeloaders and, if we didn't get into a good college, we were on our own after high school. He reprimanded us for getting poor grades and told us his partner's son got into Harvard. When my mother tried defending us, he said the chops were "dry as a bone," the beans were soggy, and the rice was burnt. She retaliated by saying he was lucky to get anything, and he told her he was tired of sending her mother checks. That cooled her jets. He didn't say much to Julie, except that she should sit up straight and wear more than a Banana Splits top and shorts to dinner. It seemed ludicrous that he should dole out advice on table manners considering he talked with his mouth full, hunched, and wore a white undershirt over stained khaki shorts.

"Bet I know why you're mad," Barry told our father.

He stabbed a lima bean with his fork. "Why?"

"Cause Mom's splitting tonight for her Women's Guild meeting."

"Yeah," I piped up, "and that's at the Cheney house, where Mr. Cheney lives."

My mother nodded. "Paul Cheney is the most handsome man in Kahala."

Julie toyed with her brown bangs. "And maybe the world," she chimed in.

My father chewed a piece of pork on the side of his mouth like

gum. "That Cheney's a punk."

Sometimes, when my father was in a vile mood, we stuck together and fought like a team. It reminded me of the movie *Mutiny on the Bounty*, where Fletcher Christian stands up to Captain Bligh and rallies the crew. The only problem was we couldn't throw my father overboard.

My mother waltzed out of her changing room wearing a platinum wig with a sexy flip, a sparkling green dress with a slit up one side, emerald pumps, and jade clip-on earrings. Julie and I followed her into the master bedroom and watched her apply green eye shadow and mascara. She picked up her lipstick tube and colored her lips pink. She had the charm and sophistication of the movie star Grace Kelly. As a teenager, she'd made the front page of *The Boston Globe* lying in a one-piece on Swampscott's Beach; when her singing career didn't take off, she reluctantly took a job as a secretary at MIT. She'd had her pick of a dozen suitors with promising futures, everyone from MIT eggheads to brash BU business students, to frazzled lawyers-to-be at Harvard. I could never figure out how, given all that competition, my father stole her heart.

"Can I borrow your lipstick, Mummy?" Julie asked.

My mother smacked her lips

and capped the tube. "You already have left for Daddy," she replied.

"Kirbo!" Barry called from down the hall.

"What?" I called back.

"Your teacher's on *Hawaii 5-0*."

"Al Harrington?"

"Yeah. Come watch!"

Barry and I sat on zabatons in front of the TV. My Samoan history teacher had landed a plumb role as a detective, but I grew impatient waiting for him to show up. I got sick of listening to Steve McGarrett banter with his sidekick, Dan-O. Then came an onslaught of commercials for Tang, StarKist Tuna, and Fritos.

I nudged Barry's shoulder. "What was Al Harrington doing?" "Jumping over a fence."

"Your teacher has a very small part," my father said. He was sprawled on the couch with his fingers interlocked and hands resting on his chest. It looked as if he were praying. His glasses, combined with the deep lines etched between his eyes and brow, gave him a scowling appearance. He lifted his leg and farted.

I heard heels on the dining room floor. My mother walked over to the living room mirror and fluffed up one side of her wig with her hand. "You men have a good night," she said.

"Have a good meeting, Mom,"

Barry answered.

My father sat up on the couch.

"Cheesus, June," he said, "you're going to a meeting dressed like that?"

"What's wrong with the way I'm dressed?"

"You're trying to impress Paul."

"I certainly am not."

Julie ran barefoot through the dining room and joined my mother at the mirror. She clutched the fabric on my mother's hip.

"You look like a lady of the night," my father continued.

"Boys," my mother said, "do I look like that?"

Barry turned around. "No."

"You look good," I told her.

"You look like a hooker," my father countered.

"I'm leaving," my mother said.

I got up, opened the front door, and flicked the porch light on. "Have a good time, Mom."

"I will, despite all those terrible things he said."

Julie and I watched from the doorway as the Barracuda backed out of the garage. I knew my mother was mad by the way her car burned rubber leaving the driveway. I shut the door. Julie followed me to the living room, and we stood watching the final credits.

"Did Al Harrington say anything?" I asked.

"No," said Barry. "All I heard

were grunts when he fought this main guy.

"Did he win the fight?"

"Duh."

My father swung his legs back up on the couch. "Don't you boys have any homework to do?"

Barry got off the zabaton.

"Homework, dopework," he snickered. His blond hair sprouted over his ears, and I knew my father resented him for not cutting it. Barry's creaturehood was turning defiant, but he still did all the crazy weekend chores our father invented to keep us under his thumb, things like scrubbing dust off the outer walls of the house with a bristle brush and digging up leaking pipes in the garden. Julie and I followed Barry past the lanai's sliding glass doors. I caught our reflection in the glass: we were a parade of Troll children, with the oldest leading the way and the youngest bringing up the rear. Barry retreated to his room and closed the door. I knew he wanted privacy because I heard him push the lock button on the doorknob. Julie lowered her head and walked the hall.

It was my turn to do the dishes, so I scraped pork bones and scraps off the plates into the trashcan. My father had refused to buy a dishwasher because he said they wasted too much water and electricity. I put the stopper in the sink, squirted in dish soap, and turned

on the hot water. When I was eight, my father had given me kitchen

instructions on the proper order for cleaning, and I followed that now: first came the glasses, followed by the plates and saucers, and finally the silverware, pots, and pans. I washed, dried, and put everything away. My father's newly amended instructions required wiping down the counters with ammonia, so I did that too. The kitchen smelled clean, but the ammonia burned my nostrils and made my eyes tear.

Julie showed up in the kitchen carrying a box. "Time for *The Ethel Merman Show*," she whispered.

"Is our victim asleep?"

"Dead to the world," she said and led the way. My father was snoring. I turned up the TV's volume a smidgen while Julie tiptoed over to the couch. She touched the stems of his glasses with her index fingers and slowly slipped them off. She dug through her box for supplies. I watched her color his lips bright red and pat turquoise eye shadow onto his upper lids. She didn't forget about eyeliner, and she fattened his eyelashes with a mascara brush. She pulled the wig out of the box and rested it on his head.

"Daddy's missing one thing," she said.

"What?"

"I'll go get it."

While she was gone, my father made a noise deep in his

I could see gold molars and silver fillings. His lips hid his front teeth but only because he'd whittled them down after years of biting pencils at work and chewing ice at home.

Julie returned with a spray bottle of Chanel No. 5.

"Ah," I said, "*la piece de resistance*."

She floated the bottle over him and misted from head to toe. "There," Julie said. "Now he smells sweet."

I sniffed the air like a dog. "Sweet as a daisy."

"Now, who does Daddy look like?"

"Let's see. Judy Garland?"

"Guess again."

"Raquel Welch."

"You've got one more try."

"Ethel Merman?"

"You win!" Julie said.

My father stirred, enough to make the wig slip down and cover an eye. Julie lifted the wig and hooked the edge on his bushy eyebrow. He looked like an Ethel Merman who'd had a few drinks after a long night of belting out show tunes.

Julie tucked her makeup back in the box. She seemed lonely, so I invited her into my room to look at albums. She always liked checking out the covers and the pictures of the rock stars, especially the albums

of Pink Floyd, David Bowie, and The Moody Blues. She went through my albums, and I pulled down an old acoustic guitar from the top shelf of the closet. The guitar had belonged to Barry, but he gave it to me because he said he was sick of strumming it and that it took up too much room.

"Wow," Julie said.

"Let's take pictures of Julie Gill the Rock Star," I suggested.

"I'll get Mummy's hat!" she squealed and darted for the master bedroom. She returned with a floppy yellow hat that our mother wore every Easter.

I posed Julie on my bed with the guitar straddled across her lap and the hat plopped on her head. I pulled the Kodak Instamatic out of my desk drawer and aimed.

"Pretend you're playing," I said.

Julie put her hands over the chords and smiled.

"Look serious."

She squinted and puckered her lips. I pressed the button, the camera flashed, and the flashcube turned. "One more," I said. This time there was no flash.

"Can we take one of me with my Trolls?" Julie asked.

"It won't come out. I need a new cube."

The doorbell rang. Julie pulled off the hat and I grabbed the guitar. The doorbell rang again.

"Stay here," I told Julie, "I'll go

see who it is."

"What if it's Mummy?"

"She has the key."

"What if she lost it?"

I walked the hall fast and Julie followed. Barry's door was still closed. We reached the dining room, and I saw my father standing in the doorway talking to someone. The wig was gone. His hands were tucked in the pockets of his shorts. I veered toward the guest bedroom—it was a good place to spy because no one could see you looking out if you kept the light off. I gazed through the louvered window. Eleanor and Don Torkelson, my mother's Church friends, stood in the lit alcove outside the front door. The Torkelsons were a short couple that liked to gab with my mother in the parking lot of Star of the Sea. They had Boston in common, and there was usually talk about harsh winters, the Kennedy clan, and future trips to Bean Town.

"Who is it?" Julie asked.

I lifted her up on the desk below the window.

Eleanor passed something to my father. "Now, Hal," she said, "tell June we stopped by with some homemade mango chutney. All our neighbors rave about it."

"This chutney's the real McCoy," Don added, "but there's something more, Hal."

"Oh?" my father asked.

"The mangoes for the chutney

came right off your tree."

"Very good," my father said.

"Well, good night."

"Good night," the Torkelsons said, and the door closed.

I watched them march quietly over the blacktop to their car. I lifted Julie down, and we ran through the kitchen and past the glass doors.

My father was looking in the mirror. "Chrissakes," he said, rubbing the back of his hand against his lips. "That damn Torkelson's queer and now he thinks I'm queer too."

"He doesn't think you're queer," I said.

He turned and faced us. He'd smudged the lipstick, and it looked like war paint on his cheek. "Doesn't think?" he asked. "What would you think of a man wearing lipstick and crap all over his eyes?"

"I'd think he was cute," Julie answered.

He looked down at her and up at me. His eyelids were still lined and his lashes were heavy with mascara. Half-moons of turquoise shadow were perched on his lids. He smelled like my mother. "Julie," he groused, "don't you ever put makeup on me again, d'you hear?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"But what if I just answer the door from now on?" I asked.

"Goddammit, Kirby," my father said. "Never, ever bring this up again."

nights filling in coloring books and combing the locks of her Trolls. I pretended to study. Sometimes I'd hear Julie using different voices through the wall we shared, putting words in the mouths of her Troll family. She'd use a soft, pleading voice and answer it with one that was deep and angry; the angry voice droned on and on, even after the pleading stopped.

"The closest thing was a queen," I said.

He turned and looked at the light and I looked like war paint on his cheek. "I don't think," he asked, "What would you think of a man wearing lipstick and crying all over his face?"

"I'd think he was cute," Julie answered.

He looked down at her and up at me. The candle was still lit and the house was heavy with music. Their voices of four years ago were bearded on his face. He smiled like my mother, Julie. He grinned, "Don't you ever put makeup on me again, do you know?"

"Not tonight," I said. "But what if I put makeup on you from now on?" I asked.

"Goodnight, king," we father said. "Love you living the life."

MISFORTUNE

JENNIFER
YUILL

I hoard my cookie fortunes.
I tuck scraps away in forgotten
pockets, pieces in
sock drawers, slivers
in picture frames,
red or black
type smashed between book
pages. They sleep like
butterflies
under glass. The lucky
numbers fade. The paper
yellows and hardens.
I do not learn Chinese.

CONTRIBUTORS

SHERMAN ALEXIE is the author of, most recently, *Face*, poetry from Hanging Loose Press, and *War Dances*, poems and stories from Grove Press. He lives with his family in Seattle.

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KARINA BOROWICZ's forthcoming book, *The Bees Are Waiting*, was selected by Franz Wright for the 2011 Marick Press Poetry Prize. Her work has also appeared in *AGNI*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *The Southern Review*.

JAN BOTTIGLIERI lives and writes in Schaumburg, Illinois. She's an associate editor for *RHINO* literary journal and has an MFA in poetry from Pacific University; previous publications include *Court Green*, *After Hours*, *Margie*, and *Bellevue Literary Review*. Her first trip underground was a visit to Mammoth Cave in Kentucky when she was three years old. She was not scared one bit.

MICHELLE CHAN BROWN's *Double Agent* was the winner of the 2011 Kore First Book Award, judged by Bhanu Kapil. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cimarron Review*, *Sycamore Review*, *Witness*, *The Missouri Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Gertrude*, *The Concher*, *textsound*, and others. Her chapbook, *The Clever Decoys*, is available from LATR Editions. She earned her MFA at the University of Michigan, where she received the Michael R. Gutterman prize. She lives in Pomfret, Connecticut, where she is the Writer-in-Residence at Pomfret School and works as assistant poetry editor for *drunken boat*.

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GRETCHEN FLETCHER won the Poetry Society of America's Bright Lights, Big Verse competition and read her poem, "Two Giant Men in New York," in Times Square, where she and the poem were projected on the Panasonic Jumbotron. Her poetry has been published in numerous journals and anthologies and online. Gretchen leads writing workshops for Florida Center for the Book, an affiliate of the Library of Congress. Her chapbooks, *That Severed Cord* and *The Scent of Oranges*, were published by Finishing Line Press, and some of her poems are on her website at OpenArtSpace.org.

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BRENDA HILLMAN has published eight collections of poetry, all from Wesleyan University Press, the most recent of which are *Pieces of Air in the Epic* (2005), and *Practical Water* (2009). With Patricia Dienstfrey, she co-edited *The Grand Permission: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood* (2003). Hillman is the Olivia Filippi Professor of Poetry at Saint Mary's College of California, and works with CodePink, a women-initiated grassroots movement for social justice.

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books are *Ghost Alphabet* (White Pine Press, 2008), winner of the White Pine poetry prize and two chapbooks published in 2010, *Between States* (Main Street Rag Press), and *Greatest Hits 1987-2010* (Pudding House Publications). New poems appear or are forthcoming in *Salamander*, *Center*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Solo*, *Lake Effect*, and several others. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina and teaches at Wake Technical Community College.

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prose and poetry appearing in over five hundred publications, including *Contrary Magazine*, *Hobart*, *Mary*, *Narrative Magazine*, *The Pedestal*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Southword*. She has been nominated five times for the Pushcart Prize and four times for the Science Fiction Poetry Association's Rhysling Award.

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JOHN A. NIEVES has poems published or forthcoming in journals such as *Indiana Review*, *Redivider*, *Fugue*, *Minnesota Review*, *Cortland Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review* and *Florida Review*. He won the 2011 *Indiana Review* Poetry Prize and the 2010 *Southeast Review* AWP Short Poetry contest. He is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Missouri.

DOUG RAMSPECK is the author of four poetry collections. His first book, *Black Tupelo Country* (2008), received the John Ciardi Prize and is published by BkMk Press (University of Missouri-Kansas City). His most recent book, *Mechanical Fireflies* (2011), received the Barrow Street Press Book Prize. His poems have been published by journals that include *The Kenyon Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *EPOCH*. In 2009 he was awarded an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award. He directs the Writing Center and teaches creative writing at The Ohio State University at Lima.

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GABRIEL SPERA's first collection, *The Standing Wave*, was a National Poetry Series selection and was published by HarperCollins. It also received the Literary Book Award for Poetry from PEN-West. More recent honors include a 2009 poetry fellowship from the NEA and the 2011 Evelyn Scott Poetry Prize from *Zone 3*.

D.E. STEWARD's "Marcot" is one month in a sequential project that runs month to month, underway since September 1986, bringing the number of poems finished to date to 294, with almost 200 published. A recent issue of *Conjunctions* (No. 55, "Urban Arias") has a good one about Berlin. The form is an attempt to note, and to build on, some of the reality of time. Google "d e steward poetry" for more than you would want to know.

COLEMAN is the author of the chapbook, *To Frankenstein, My Father* (2007, Proem Press). His poems have appeared in the *Denver Quarterly Specs Journal*, *Hunger Mountain*, *The Pinch*, *Salt Hill*, and are forthcoming in *The Literary Review*, *Florida Review*, *Lake Effect*, and *Conduit*. He is currently a Virginia Middleton Fellow in the PhD program in English-Literature/Creative Writing at the University of Southern California. He is also the Managing Editor and co-creator of the online literary journal, *The Offending Adam* (www.theoffending-adam.com).

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MAURICE CUNYAN is a 2001 winner of the Felix Pollak Prize, for his manuscript *Voodoo Inverso*. He's also the 2011 winner of the *Columbia Poetry Review's* annual contest, Phoebe's Greg Grummer Award, and the *I-70 Review's* Gary Gildner Award. His poetry appears widely, most recently in *Subtropics*, *Southern Review*, and *New England Review*, and in the fall of 2011 he'll be transferring from the University of Utah's PhD program to the University of North Texas.

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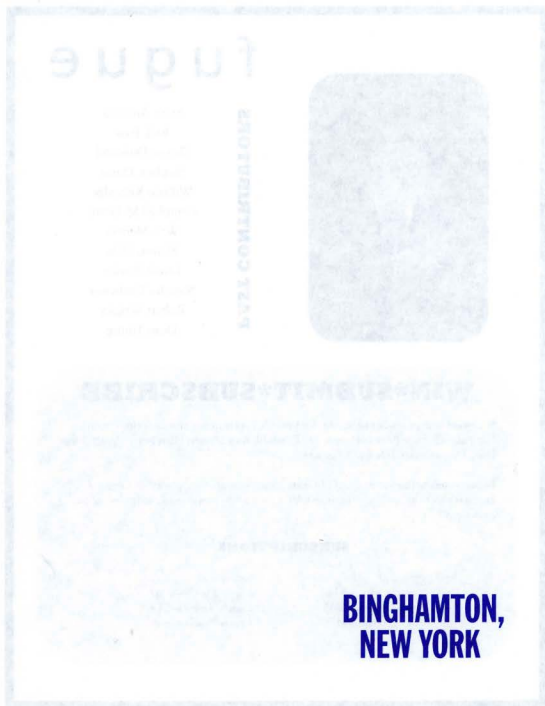
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∴ Harpur Palate, Volume 11 Number 1, Summer and Fall

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