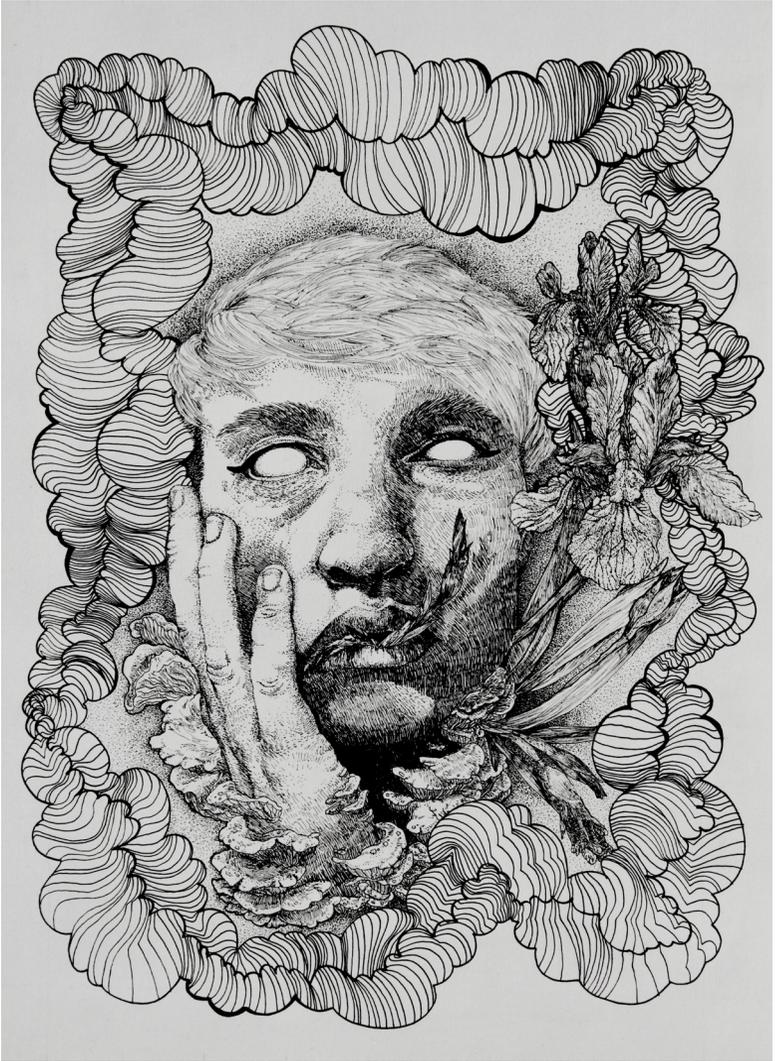


NORTHRIDGE REVIEW

FALL 2015



NORTHRIDGE
REVIEW

Acknowledgements

Without the help of CSUN's English Department and Associated Students, this literary magazine would not exist; we thank them for their support during the semester.

The Fall 2015 staff of the Northridge Review would also like to thank Marjie Seago, Tonie Magnum, and Marlene Cooksey for their supportive and positive attitudes. We would like to extend our most sincere gratitude to Frank De La Santo, Wendy Say, and Karely Gutierrez for letting us into the Desktop Publishing Office on days when our keyholders were not around. We would further like to thank James Bezerra and Andrew Weiss for their awesome contribution to this magazine in the form of QR codes, and Kirk Sever, for his helpful editorial input regarding em-dashes. Finally, a big thank you to those professors in the South Wing of Sierra Tower's 7th floor, none of whom complained even once about our rambunctious shenanigans and odd working hours. You rule.

Awards

The Northridge Review happily publishes work from a variety of authors, some of whom receive additional recognition for their work in the manner of various accolades. We are indebted to our judges and authors alike, and are pleased to present the following awards:

The Northridge Review Fiction Award, bestowed annually, recognizes excellent fiction by a CSUN student. This year's judge is Rod Val Moore, author of the short story collection *Igloo Among Palms* and the novels *A History of Hands* and *Brittle Star*, among others. He has received the Juniper Prize for Fiction and has been nominated for the 2015 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Rod Val Moore presents The Northridge Review Fiction Award to Antoine Bowman for the story *Skipping Stones at Lake Xochimilco* and awards Honorable Mention to Kirk Sever for the story *Omsiladi Beach*.

The Rachel Sherwood Award recognizes excellent poetry by a CSUN student and is presented by Marianne Kunkel, author of *The Laughing Game* and many poems that have appeared in such publications as *Notre Dame Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Columbia Poetry Review*. She works as an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing and Publishing at Missouri Western State University and edits *The Mochila Review*. Marianne Kunkel presents the Rachel Sherwood Award to Shetachai Chatchoomsai for the poem *Blowjob, CA*, and awards Honorable Mention to April Shih for the poem *You Are In A Little Box*.

It is an honor to include winners of the Academy of American Poets Award, which recognizes excellence in poetic form. This award is presented by John Gallaher, author of *In a Landscape* and several other poetry collections. He has received the 2005 Levis Poetry Prize, has been published in various literary journals and anthologies, including *The Best American Poetry 2008*, and teaches at Northwest Missouri State University, where he also serves as editor of *The Laurel Review*. John Gallaher presents the Academy of American Poets Award to Cody Deitz for the poem *Fireworks*, and awards Honorable Mention to Daniel Mouron for his poem *The Explorer's Journal*.

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A Note From the Editor

Dear Reader,

Hi, my name is Kristin, and I am a writer. For a long time, I kept that part of myself tucked away, mostly because I was scared and a little insecure and probably felt overshadowed by people in my life for whom a relationship with writing was undeniably part of who they were. You know what I mean. Sometimes just looking at a person – really, *really* looking at them – can tell you so much about who they are. Or it can tell you absolutely nothing. But the funny thing about writers is, you can usually tell that they're part of the club from the moment you lay eyes on them. Writing came to me that way; after a certain point, a certain number of life experiences, writing became an undeniable part of my self.

I find it hard to explain what compels me to write, though, and often wonder how some people can be so open and sure about how and why and when and where and to what degree they are writers. It is in those moments of listening to other writers explain their relationship with the craft, those moments of *really* looking, of trying to understand what motivations, what spooks, what fits of confidence move us to send our thoughts and feelings into the ether, that I hope for some connection. I hope for vulnerability.

There is something charming about vulnerability. It is why puppies are cute and why the manic pixie dream girl became a thing. Admission of vulnerability can be off-putting sometimes, and maybe a little baffling, but it offers us something as human beings. It is what makes people honest.

My hope for you is that, somewhere in this collection of writing, you find something that allows you a moment of vulnerability. Enjoy the work of those writers whose words forged some connection as we struggled through our editorial duties. Know that, while the job of an editor and her staff is hard, the jobs of the writer, of the reader, are profoundly difficult if they are honest. Here's to hoping you get an honest kick out of this issue. I know I do.

Yours in reading,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristin Kaz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Kristin Kaz

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Tempestt Careon
El Hombre del Valle

Geneva Costa
Clinic
In My Mind
Leg Monster
The Offering

Karoline Kaz
Aw Shit Oh Man
Guts #2
Self Portrait

Katie Oh
The Infestation

1981

Robin Du Pont



It was closing time.
The last of the clothes were left
folded in clean, neat stacks for the next morning,
all laid out beneath the photo of his daughter riding
a chestnut Morgan. His ex-wife glittered
in the background.

He locked the doors to the laundromat
and joined his partner outside.
He couldn't help but think back
to the stretch of field of his hometown
the train becoming a beautiful rattle with the moon,

and this here, right now, all the city
lights aflicker with some kind of magic.

*Here we are two dying men
and with you I'm home,
he thought.*

His partner had his hands in his pockets,
and his eyes glanced from the concrete
and back up, there was a serene
kind of strength caught up in them.

He wished then, that he believed in time travel,
he wished he could go back before 1981,
before he left his ex-wife, and it was just the sunlight
his partner sitting on the edge of the bed,
playing guitar
a lyric caught in the air
like a sparrow in the rafters.

A Minimalist's Travelogue

James Bezerra

LA
Bus
Train
Airport
Airport bar
Plane
JFK
Cold
Taxi
Stairs stairs stairs stairs stairs
Sleep
Coffee
Walk
Cold
Wine wine wine wine wine
Train
Connecticut
Cold cold cold
Dinner
Wine wine wine wine wine wine wine
Sleep
Coffee aspirin coffee
Dinner
Unexpectedly heavy Christmas Eve sadness
Wine
Sleep
Christmas
Coffee
Wine
Sleep
Coffee
Wine
Sleep
Coffee
Wine
Sleep

New year
Coffee
Cold
Train
Snow
City
Rain
Cold
Dinner
Strawberry gimlets
Sleep
Train
Airport
Airport bar
Plane
California
Warm

Blood Moon

April Shih

Some say it's a second coming
of something –
maybe a savior

for your shipwrecked marriage
or another chance
at picking the right numbers;

maybe a do-over, take-back
or *get-out-of-jail-free*; they're all
waiting for something,

begging on their knees.
Some think it's the end of something.
No more nine-to-five. No more taxes.

No more standing in line at Starbucks,
feet tapping, fingers twitching –
itching for a fix.

Don't know if I believe.
But staring at the pumpkin pie sky
edges burning

brighter than the sun
I can't help but hunger for
something sacred –

first kisses,
or the celestial sight
of city lights at night –

and wonder if, somehow,
galaxies away,
across the cold, inky

sea, from the balcony
of *Wherever-You-Are*,
you see it too.

Blowjob, CA

Shetachai Chatchoomsai

I wonder if I move my tongue back
to an alveolar ridge and not the teeth
permitting his pink penis glide
on my hard palate, will my accent become less visible?
No, there are mostly half-moans
issued from my dilated glottis, lifted apart
as my vocal cord trembles,
traveling through his erect shaft
to the open, vaporous air.
It is as if I was an oboist
blowing the shrill C
into the tip of urethra,
pressuring my fingers on his throbbing veins,
the bulge of his scrotal sack. *Ah Ah Ah...*
My section of the world's perverted symphony.
I miss how my "r" trills like a flamingo dance on my mouth-roof,
whenever I talk to my mother over the telephone:
Sabai Dee Krub, Mae – imagining her secured smile.
Do you have a girlfriend, yet? she asks and my tongue lolls,
saliva dewing. Whitish like semen.

Circus LA

Daniel Franklin



The Los Angeles transit system is a joke. It goes here, it goes there, but it doesn't go everywhere. I've traveled hundreds of miles to get away from my wasted life in Seattle (nothing was the same when I returned from overseas) only to find that L.A. isn't everything that it's hyped up to be. My first day in the new city I jumped on a bus that was supposed to take me downtown but I ended up in East Los Angeles. The things I had seen on the television had branded my psyche with violent images of gang bangers and Hispanic felons. I found neither. East L.A. is apparently a haven for yuppies and kids with mommy-daddy money now. It's quiet, an easygoing neighborhood – just what I was looking for. I found a studio apartment that was out of my price range, but I was sure I would find work within a few days.

I didn't have much to move, only a medium-sized, olive, drab duffel bag I received while serving my tour of duty in Iraq. It had everything I owned inside: street clothes, a multi-colored uniform, complete with red squeaky shoes, a make-up case that had every color of the rainbow with offsets of red, yellow, blue, and green, and my hygiene bag. I set up my bag in the corner of the living room, bought some blankets from a man on the corner who was selling handmade fabrics (though he hardly looked like the sewing type), and made a cot in the center of the room. I didn't need much else. As long as I had a roof over my head, a place to sleep, piss, and eat, I was okay. The Corps taught me I didn't need much to survive.

A week has gone by and I haven't received a single call for a paying gig. Despite all my online ads, not one kid in this damn city wants to add a little flare to his or her birthday party. Little shits. But I can hardly blame them. When you have immediate access to jiggling tits and violent beheadings on your mobile device, how on earth can juggling, joke-telling, and magic entertain you? I've considered that my newfound profession may be outdated, that I may be worthless in this rapidly changing world, but I've traveled a great distance to find new life and success and I won't give up now.

It's time to change my plan of attack: I have to show this city that I'm valuable. It's time to get out on the street and grab some people's attention, tear this city away from their phones, tablets, and e-readers.

Now if I can just figure out this transit system so I can make it to the Venice boardwalk.

The wild stories from the Venice boardwalk traveled all the way to Seattle. I've heard of performers who have made a living by stepping on glass or spitting fire, anything to attract the attention of the thousands of beach attendees. If it's anything like I've heard, then I have a shot of making a name for myself.

0500: I'm awake and already suiting up: standard white makeup painted over my face, blue circles around my eyes, a red dot on my nose, and a giant red smile around my lips. I slip into my colorful jumpsuit – complete with giant yellow balls that make their way up my shirt to my collar – then slip on my bright red shoes that I shined yesterday. My costume's crisp and ready to go: no stains, blemishes, or wrinkles. My makeup's evenly distributed, no blotches or excess paint.

It's going to be a good day.

Just before leaving, I grab a plain black jacket and review my transit directions. The trip to Venice shouldn't take more than two hours, or so the online directions tell me. My goal is to arrive as early as possible and stake my claim so I can avoid any conflict with other artists. I've heard the performers are ruthless and willing to fight over the busiest sections. I've left my violent self in the Iraqi desert, but if I need to bust a head or two to make sure I find some kind of success in L.A., I will.

This morning is cooler than the last few days. It feels a bit like Seattle. A thin layer of dew has collected on the rows of cars that line the streets and a light fog has begun settling around the city. Just yesterday I could make out the few skyscrapers in the downtown area from my home, but today they're completely blanketed by the morning sky.

Bus 733 is nearly filled to capacity within minutes of my venture. I'm pressed between a man dressed in a collection of trash bags, and a heavyset woman who forgot her undergarments at home. Every lurch forward and I fall back into the braless woman behind me. I quickly apologize to her, but after the third time I notice that she smiles every time I touch her unconfined breasts. As the bus rolls along, I remind myself the trip will only take two hours.

Then the bus breaks down.

The gigantic hunk of metal pulls to the side of the road and the passengers furiously file off onto the sidewalk. The driver announces that a new bus will arrive in ten minutes and then suggests several alternate routes to various locations, none of which I'm familiar with.

I'm somewhere in the heart of downtown Los Angeles, standing in front of a row of unopened jewelry shops. It reeks of piss and shit, and the early morning dew that once collected over the city has already begun to evaporate. I check my watch: 0630. Bodies file down the sidewalks: men and women off to work, mothers escorting their children, cars grinding their way up and down the oneway streets, honking every so often at careless bike riders who roll too far into their lane. Time

is dying. I need to make it to Venice immediately and I've lost my only mode of transportation. Think Marine. Semper Gumby – always flexible.

"Excuse me, sir." I gently tap the bus driver on the shoulder.

He slowly turns and then nearly jumps out of his uniform when he sees my painted face. "Goddamn, son!" He gives me a nervous smile. "I've seen clowns in L.A., but never a clown in L.A., know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I'm not supposed to be here." I grab either side of my jacket and pull it so its covering the top half of my uniform. "I need to get to Venice."

The driver chuckles and tells me the metro's the quickest way and there's a station just a few blocks away. He asks me to tell him a joke. I tell him to fuck off.

Minutes later I'm running down a set of stairs into the belly of the metro station. I'm halfway down into the cavernous opening when I notice a patch of spattered red blood that's soaked into the light pink dress of a young girl. Time slows. My body freezes. I see the victim: a young girl just to the right of me, no more than twenty years old, pressed up against the handrail of the stairway, her stomach leaking blood. She can barely stand. Bodies walk past her without even a blink.

Los Angeles suddenly evaporates and I'm back in the godforsaken desert I'd left only months ago. Gunfire begins to crack behind me, followed by the screams of my Marines.

Where is the enemy?

Los Angeles comes back to life in a fury. A booming voice travels up from inside the belly of the metro. Time returns to normal speed. The girl slumps to the floor just as a brawny, tattooed man begins to make his way up the stairs toward her.

The tattooed man reaches his "bitch." Spit flies from his mouth as he rains down a fury of words. The girl cringes, clutching her stomach in pain. There's no time to think – only act.

Los Angeles evaporates once more, and I'm left standing in the desert with only the tattooed enemy and the bleeding girl in front of me. Three steps forward and I'm within range. Two hands wrap around the enemy's neck before he realizes I'm there to kill him. Surprise lessens the need for force. With minimal strength I pull on the back of the enemy's neck and fire one knee forward until bone meets bone. My kneecap crushes his nose into powder. The enemy howls in pain and tries to back away, but I'm in control. I pull down on his neck again and this time his eye socket meets my knee: orbital fracture. I repeat the process: a second orbital fracture. The enemy finally goes limp and shrinks to the floor.

A newly formed crowd applauds the violence that's just occurred: "What's happening?" "That clown kicked his ass!" "*Ese pallaso esta loco!*"

Recheck the enemy's condition: the tattooed man is unconscious. Check the status of the victim: the bleeding woman is climbing to her feet, her eyes two

round, wet moons.

The crowd is growing. There's too much commotion. Another enemy is possibly hiding within their ranks ready to detonate an IED. I need to move immediately and get this girl to safety. I look back at her. Both of her pupils have completely blackened. "Get away from me!" she screams at me. She looks to the crowd for help. "Get this clown away from me!"

She's in shock. The crowd is growing restless; restless crowds form mobs. The tattooed man is stirring just next to my squeaky shoes. We need to move. I bend over and look at the girl straight in the face. "I'm here to help you," I say softly. "Will you let me help you?" In between screams, her eyes meet with mine. She sees past the caked makeup and lowers her guard for a moment. "Let me help you," I say again.

The girl begins to nod, slowly at first, and then faster.

With one hand wrapped around the girl's wrist, I lead her through the raucous crowd. As the girl and I punch through, fingers shoot at my face and smear my red and blue makeup. Hands grab at my jacket and multi-colored jumpsuit, tearing at the fabric in an attempt to stop me. I pull the girl close and throw my free hand forward, pushing past the angry bodies.

I make it to the top of the stairs with the girl still linked to me. We sprint down the street with a few bodies following after us. A bus has stopped just a few feet ahead. I push the girl in front of me and lead her onto the bus and file in after her. The doors close behind us and the vehicle begins to press forward.

"Where does this bus go?" I make a quick scan of the passengers on the bus.

"All the way to Venice beach, funny man." The bus driver eyes me up and down. "You and your date going to Venice?"

I pay the bus fare without answering the driver and set the girl on the nearest seat next to the front exit. I slump down next to her and throw one arm around her shoulders.

There's no enemy here. You're safe.

My nerves finally begin to settle. The girl's body slowly starts to rest comfortably on the seat. She's staring at me now, her two beady eyes looking up and down at me: my smeared make-up, my torn clothes, and my squeaky shoes. Her head slowly shrinks into the crook of my arm; her body rests against mine.

"Who are you?" she asks softly.

I turn away from the girl and look out the bus window. A quick flash catches the window and I see my reflection – a white face with smears of greasy red and blue paint stares back at me. "I just wanted to help," I tell her.

I manage to take a closer look at the wound on the girl's stomach. It's only a small laceration across the lower left side of her belly, not as bad as I thought. Some kind of sharp object that I'm assuming belonged to the boyfriend: pocket

knife, keys, glass. I tell her she's going to be okay. She nods but doesn't say anything else. For most of the ride she stares out of the window at all the blurred faces on the street as we pass them by.

Her name is Claudia. She's only eighteen years old, originally from the midwest. The tattooed man is her "boyfriend." They met at an audition for some movie role. He told her that he could get her into some films, low budget stuff, but some paid camera work. She obliged. He didn't tell her that she would be doing porn films simulating rape.

Claudia is eighteen years old and doing porn in L.A. When I was eighteen years old I was shooting hajis in Iraq. Maybe it's fucked up everywhere you go.

I make my way down the bus's small staircase and onto the street. Claudia follows behind me, but stops just before her feet hit the sidewalk. She stands in the doorway of the bus, her pink dress covered in dry blood, her face pale and tired. "I need to go back," she says, her head shifting toward the ground.

"Go back? To him?" I take a step forward and consider taking her wrist and dragging her off the bus.

"Yes. . ." Claudia's voice cracks in two.

"Hurry up, clown!" the bus driver says just behind her. "Grab your date and move on."

"You don't need to go back there," I tell Claudia. "You can make a different choice."

"I'm sorry," Claudia raises her hand to her face and wipes the tears away from her eyes. She takes one step back up the stairs and the bus driver shuts the door just before I can grab her. Her red, drained eyes meet with mine just before the bus pulls off. "Thank you," she says through the glass.

For a few moments I stand there, frozen on the sidewalk in disbelief, hurt that I even attempted to help Claudia.

Was it God? Fate? Maybe it was some act of chaos that forced us to ride the bus together. But why do I feel like I've failed to save a girl I don't know? Why do I feel like I've fought for someone who didn't want to be saved?

My squeaky shoes scrape across the street as I make my way toward the boardwalk. Thoughts buzz around my head like bees, each of them stinging my face with their questions. I'm almost too confused and frustrated to notice the eyes that are following me as I step onto the boardwalk. Gasps and murmurs rise from onlookers, their shrewd fingers pointing at me, judging me. A small crowd of young children begins to form behind me. Their tiny voices demand that I perform for them. With every step their voices swell with frustration. I have a mission that's nearly complete. I can't lose focus now, not when I'm this close. I cannot fail.

The crowd of children grows larger. Their mass of laughter and jeers fully consumes me until I am forced to turn and face them. They gasp in horror at the sight of the miserable, beaten clown. The following silence brings a smile to my face. I take a deep breath and look down at my uniform and notice a patch of dry blood in the center of my chest where Claudia was resting.

“Mommy!” A young girl screams in horror at the frightening clown before her. The rest of the kids mimic her response.

The crowd of children explodes and fires off in all directions, leaving me standing alone on the boardwalk.

Corrections

Meagan Avila

I beg at your feet
like a masochistic dog
for your critique;

Oh, beat me.

Leather ripping skin,
and with every lash,
fallacy released.

Crooked

Leah Manacop

I swallowed six “I love you”s before you started
speaking. Upturned-eying me
beguiling me with your bleach-cleaned
smile – the kind paid for by OC moms who care
too much
‘til their daughters bring home one
too many girls, doors locked
one too many times, they’re “friends” only,
coming out, exhausted to lament that they’re confined by
just that word.
(that moment hasn’t come for you yet) I think
when your mom greets me with a tease about my
crooked teeth and recommends a guy on the southeast
side
who fixed up her little girl nice
straight and white. While I
bite my tongue in response, crimson acid clotting, you
only sit there nodding. So I grin while
she walks past, and say as loud for her to hear
“Your mom’s still got a tight little ass, and so do you, my dear.”



The Clinic

dig

Brett Hymes

childhood storms

out the backyard

where I am buried

beneath family trees

uprooted

guilt

trim me of lineage

fell me to stump

body made sap

pour me

drench soil with seed

plant stone

carve me a name

Divine Fate Codec

Shannon Hourihan



Reading the divine fate codec.
Workflow is based on transcoding a range of
saturated color, richer blacks;
editing, finishing, and archiving.
Wavelet compression for a perceived sharpness.
Poems in this volume contain the
theatrical projection: the first alive format.
Hope is based on the alphabet
of enthusiasm. An overexposure
of negative pleasure.

Do You Know the Way to JFK

James Bezerra



Uptown
Queens-bound
E Train
crossing under
East River
\$22
to my name
3,000 miles
from home.
I'm not even worth mugging.
Like a monk
with just a bowl,
I got a plane ticket
a metrocard
and a smile.

The Explorer's Journal

Daniel Mouron

The circulatory capacity of scuba divers alters with fluctuating densities of pressure to induce superhuman respiration underwater. Oxygen tanks at thirty feet begin to compress air which at sixty feet condenses dangerously thin and at ninety feet changes three atmospheric altitudes entering the lungs to spread, within ten minutes, throughout the bloodstream, as pumped from the heart, providing life to the brain, and on the molecular level, becoming part of the tissue to disseminate new conditions for breathing and new consciousness to the human body. Swimmers at ninety feet or below no longer inhale the oxygenated gas of Earth's indigenous troposphere and may be said to be evolving, biological interaction and transmutation at work, by fundamental cardiovascular adaptation, into a foreign-based organism with distinctive qualities for life, arguably as inhuman as a fish. The world of the ocean is itself extraterrestrial to mammalian bipeds and bears the potential to affect, with grave consequences... – I made it! Hoist me up. My God, you wouldn't believe what it's like down there: felt...strange. Well, I'm back now, thank God. A sandwich now, thank you, Tim, I'm famished! No, I didn't find the wreck of the *P29*, but several crabs...

Fireworks

Cody Deitz



This evening, the sky looks like a party napkin:
fireworks in red and blue spider against the black

backdrop of night. A Cessna motor buzzes, too,
a giant June bug on and off the throttle,

and I think about perspective,
what must, from up there, look like palm trees made of light

growing in fast-forward and then exploding – absurd:
only two hundred years since the first men

rose into the sky to see the sunrise a thousand feet up.
Two convicts almost had the honor, their expendability

suddenly a blessing. They would have seen the earth
like a cubist painting, its geometric divisions in color,

just a representation of order, like time, but heavier.
I have only a few days left to be twenty-four,

before time moves inexorably forward, and tonight,
distance and time are starting to look alike,

with the same lit-fuel tinge; this is what burnt time
must smell like, a melancholy

sing that can't help but excite.
Perhaps we've been breathing it in

so long we no longer detect its sharp scent
in the evening when the honeysuckle and citrus bloom.

Flood

Glenn Collins



When the years of worthy excavation
done by the ants
fell victim to the passive conviction
of a flash flood swelling
to the highest peaks of their world

the roots grew in like worms.

Munching on grains of sand
of broken home,
with flesh hair and soup bones
slithering meat rhizomes
careening into their gory dirt space.

The ants had no room for fear.

These roots, these roots, they said, are lying.
We can hear them crowing and cawing
a worm snout echo, flesh for a new generation
a home where death means life means death.

Sometimes living means reaching
for petrification,
the type of immortality suitable
for an exoskeleton.

A hollow root, a hollow worm

The Funeral of Icarus

Trevor Misner

The loud crack of the splash startled the sheep so badly that they all scampered up the hill in fright, away from the water's edge. The shepherd turned away from the sky with a jolt from all the bleating, looking toward the sea. He thought he spotted a pair of slim legs sink beneath the green surface, rubbing at his eyes before looking again. He turned inland, shouting up the hill to the farmer who had been tilling and was now calming down his whinnying horse.

"Ah! Did you see what made that great splash just now?" he asked.

The farmer looked down the hill at him, eyes glancing at the water.

"I didn't, but it sure gave my mare a fright!"

The shepherd frowned before walking over to look at the shore. A fisherman was sitting there, with an empty pail next to him.

"Ah! Did you see what fell in the water?" he called.

The fisherman looked up slowly, his small eyes squinting up at him.

"Aye, I did. 'Twas an angel fell in the water, there," he replied, his voice barely carrying over the wind.

The shepherd blinked.

"An angel?"

"Aye, look at them feathers floating there. A young lookin' angel hit the water, and then sunk beneath."

The shepherd stared at the white feathers moving in the current, shaking his head.

"Old man, I do believe your eyes deceive you. It must've been a large bird!"

"No bird cries 'Father, help me!' when it drops," the fisherman replied.

Before the shepherd could retort, a shadow passed over him. He looked up, gasping at the sight of an old man with white wings soaring in the air. He seemed to be looking for the water, crying to himself, 'Icarus, oh Icarus!' before turning back toward the sky and away from the shore.

The shepherd gawked at him until the figure was too small to see. Without thinking, he stuck his cane into the ground before starting to run down the hillside toward the small cove. He took off his shoes and bag on the way.

"Ah, what are you doin'?" the fisherman asked, his voice finally rising.

"I am going to see if you speak the truth!" he cried before diving into the water, the shouts of the fisherman cut off.

As he floated in the gentle current, he looked around, peering down into the depths. There, he spotted the body, sinking ever more deeply.

He surfaced to take a large breath of air before going back down, kicking mightily to reach the prone creature.

When he reached it, he grabbed it around the waist, swimming as hard as he could to the surface with the little air he had left. Breaking through, he gasped as the yelling from shore became hearable. Several ropes were thrown to him, for his stunt had attracted a few people to the shore.

When he was back on land, he laid the body on the sand.

“It’s a young man...” one of the people whispered.

Quite young, the boy’s skin had started to turn blue. His limbs and chest were bent and dented in awful ways, but his face remained with youthful innocence.

“Is he dead?” the farmer who had run down asked.

The fisherman felt his throat.

“Quite. A fall from that height? No chance.”

“Look at the things on his arms,” the shepherd said.

There were leather straps up and down the broken arms, pieces of wax and feathers still sticking to them.

“He was no angel. Just a boy with wings.”

The shepherd stared at the young man’s face, the eyes still open. They were glazed over, unseeing. He used his hand to close them, and pushed the gold colored hair out of the boy’s face. He looked as though asleep.

“Who is he?”

“Icarus,” the shepherd replied.

The group stared at him.

“How do you know that?” the farmer asked disbelievingly.

“I heard another ange- man, shout it from the sky. He had wings like this one. He called him Icarus.”

They were silent for awhile, staring at the corpse.

“What are we to do now?”

“Make’m a grave,” the fisherman answered. “Up on the cliff, I’d say. If that father of his ever comes back, he’ll know where he can pay his respects.”

Everyone nodded in agreement. The shepherd stood before picking the boy up with arms, strong from lifting pregnant ewes, under his knees and back. The boy’s head dangling, the farmer’s wife, who had joined them, gasping a small sob at the sight.

The crowd walked up the hill, leading the shepherd on the grassy path. By the time he reached the top, they had already started digging. The farmer’s wife had laid down a blanket, which is where he laid down the body.

The wife arranged him so that he did not look so broken, singing a mourning song that the crowd picked up as they dug. When she was finished the boy looked even more like he was in a deep sleep. The gold hair was decorated with flowers,

while a bigger cluster of the flora was placed over his heart.

They sang even after they had finished digging the grave, the men lifting the blanket on both sides before lowering him into the ground. They filled it in again, and when the last of the dirt was packed, their singing stopped.

One of the men found a stone slab and chiseled into it, the setting sun giving off barely enough light for him to see his work. When the grave marker was placed, they all spoke a prayer to the gods so that the boy's spirit might find peace in the afterlife. That Hades would grant him entrance to Elysium, and that Hera would watch over his soul.

They started to leave, the shepherd reading the stone one more time before walking back to his flock.

‘*Ίκαρος. Άγγελος που έπεσε.*’

‘Icarus. Angel that Fell.’

The Gift of Prometheus

Jason McMillen



I've never told anyone this before but there's no redemption in my future and I guess nothing of what I say here – now – truly matters. If I could go back and change what happened, maybe I would have done things differently or been more careful; maybe the woman I killed would still be alive. There's no going back; no time machine, no eraser, no white out, only what happened and what is, and the devious yearning that lurks inside my subconscious. I was born into a family that was neither poor nor wealthy but decidedly comfortable as long as we abstained from some of the more frivolous interests of life. My father would always tell me that "it's better to think with your head than your heart" and at one point – at about thirteen or so – I couldn't help but snicker like a little boy and pervert its meaning into "it's better to think with your pecker than your heart." My mother on the other hand, less full of wisdom than my father and decidedly less educated, would tend to me and her casual business of planning events that ranged from weddings to business gatherings. They were best known around the neighborhood for being exemplary citizens and, unlike most other marriages around, they managed to persevere through hardship and troubles peacefully without resorting to divorce.

While I was young I excelled in school, though admittedly I was a nuisance to the teachers and staff. They commonly had to pull their words right before the final clause of "smart ass" came out in their scoldings and forcibly interject another more suitable phrase in its place. All in all I was a pretty star child despite the usual shortcomings that come with being young and less than knowledgeable about the world. However, there was something darker lurking around in the depths of my mind that nobody knew about, and I was observant enough – and smart enough – to keep my mouth shut about it. It was a fascination that slithered around in my dreams, waiting to come out, a dark secret, an infatuation, a desire to watch things burn. When I was a child we would oftentimes go camping and I would secretly be enthralled by the curling tendrils of the fire and the blazing inferno chambers that were created between the wood and the coals. I would make sure to hide one of my shirts away from my parents so that I could later bring it to my face and savor the fragrant smoky remains of fresh pine. When I was a little older – and had easy access to lighters – I would keep one hidden in my bathroom, along with all my other toiletries, so that I could omit the world for a few brief moments and passionately observe the life of the flame before I extinguished it once more. It was how I found serenity.

When I came of age I pursued the career of a fire fighter and I became one within a reasonable and slightly shorter than expected time frame; the path requires a great deal of qualifying prerequisites. I thought that it would quench my longing to see fire blasting out fragile windows or conflagrating into something with a unique temperament – something that you could admire for its tenacity and voracious appetite. While I was making my way toward becoming a fire fighter, a process that took years, I kept a picture buried in my dresser – a picture of the cataclysmic firestorm we very nearly created in Tokyo during the incendiary bombing campaign of World War Two. It was the most destructive air raid in the history of mankind, whose monstrosity even surpassed the destruction caused by the later nuclear blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Sometimes at night, before I went to sleep, I would stare at it in awe and wish that the conditions would have been adequate for one to occur – a fire so massive and powerful that it would live and breathe on its own, autonomous, with spiraling arms of fire twisting down from the sky to consume everything in its wake. When a girlfriend found it one time I had to lie and tell her that I had reviewed it in my studies and had no idea how it came to be there. I played the disorganized and undomesticated bachelor card because if she knew that I looked at it sometimes before I went to sleep – so that I might see it come to fruition in my dreams – she would have run screaming out the door. She was pretty as I recall, or at least I thought so, but this was many years ago and I don't know what became of her. Her dark brown hair was usually kept short but it remained undeniably effeminate in its appearance, and she had a smile that I could watch for days. She had a soft yet high pitched voice that was calm and reassuring but not quite as quaint as it would appear in text alone; it was a voice that usually prompted me to grab hold of her and give her an endearing kiss hello or goodbye.

A number of years after she had found the picture and we had parted ways, I craved something else, something more captivating, and I began creating the fires myself. I would carefully deliberate what I wanted to burn and how I wanted to burn it – I always wanted to create a new personality, something I had not seen before, but time was holding me back; I couldn't draw too much attention by starting too many in short order. It was too coincidental if several fires in a small area started with conveniently “natural” causes, especially when there were never any physically harmed victims. I always made sure that nobody would be in the buildings when I set off the reaction that would lead to their engulfment in flame and utter consumption. Sometimes I would keep tabs on them for weeks to make absolutely sure that no one would come to harm, including the dangers to those in adjacent buildings. Although you may not find this as reasonable justification for my actions, that was my code of ethics for committing senseless acts of destruction.

All of that changed when the woman was found trapped and burned alive, charred in the fetal position while trying to hide from the scorching heat all around her. I tried to take refuge in the fact that she had likely suffocated to death before she was consumed in fire, but it did not console me in the slightest. I learned that she was an employee there and had a key to the building – she was young and, according to the investigation, had left some jewelry in a jar on her desk and went to retrieve it when the building ignited. When I saw her picture in the media I was immediately captivated by her beauty, her glittering green eyes, smooth white skin, and her alluring charm. I fell in love with the image of her and she was more perfect than anyone I had ever seen. I wondered if I had met her more intimately if I still would have loved her – or if she would have loved me in return; one can only hope to love and be loved in a life that is destined for the grave. Maybe in a different time and in a different place we could have made a life together and lived happily ever after. Perhaps things could have been different and I would have had the chance to kindle the fire of love in the place of roaring monstrosities of destruction.

I mourned her death grievously and I hoped they would never find me – though I knew they were circling in faster and faster, like vultures to the sight of a kill. One night, after drinking myself into a stupor, I sat for hours at the foot of my bed with the bore of a shotgun in my mouth and seethed with a rage and sorrow that could never be reconciled. Tears and drool intermingled with one another and viscously slithered down the barrel to my finger which rested on the trigger, quivering and afraid. I was too much of a coward to pull it and pay for what I had done and I hoped that I would not have to face the furious retribution reserved only for hypocrites of the highest order. I didn't want them to know that I was both the creator and the destroyer.



The Infestation

grow

Brett Hymes

After Eavon Boland's "Anorexic"

I vomited the hunger
of innocence

remember
youth is heretic
remember
child of desire

my body burns
through years of conceit

curiosity bleeds
heretic

past pain
hasn't learned

I renounced the days of
glorious nostalgia

in passing I see youth
through half-truths
and scorched self-denials

Hallowassermans

Marcus Rigsby



Nolan Wasserman, age 11, looked all the way down the steep grassy hill to the bottom rocks that curved up like a ramp, which in a moment would send him rocketing skyward for the final reckoning.

He looked up to the Willwether Group company skyscraper, hovering on twin jets a mile above him in the starry sky. For too long, company president Martin Willwether had looked down on the little town of Bedwood from his palace in the sky – his great technological feat and symbol of his unquestionable power. It was time for that flying skyscraper to come down.

“I’m a tiny bit sad, Follette,” said Nolan, coasting his bike to the edge of the hill. “Now that it’s almost over.”

“Sad?” said the bike. “Not scared? Not wetting your little pants from fright?”

Nolan laughed. “I bet Willwether is gonna cry when he sees us.”

“Yeah,” said the bike. “Wet his face.”

The bike’s frame was etched with magic runes signifying flight. The water bottle cage had been replaced with the pan pipes they’d received from the Sheep-kin for valor. When Nolan slid over the hill, the pedals activated the oscillating bellows which blew into the pan pipes, and the night air rang with the notes of the Wind Song.

They swooped off the land ramp, and darted into the air, a straight shot toward the skyscraper that hung slanted and black on the starry horizon. They would feel the heat of its hover jets before the sun rose.

Nolan Wasserman, age 29, walks out of the preschool where he teaches three days a week. There is a man standing by Nolan’s car, wearing a long brown coat that Nolan recognizes.

“Hi, Nolan.” The man has a syrupy sad smile. “Do you remember me?”

Nolan doesn’t know how he feels seeing his old therapist again. It isn’t a good feeling.

Dr. Egan puts his arm around Nolan’s shoulder and Nolan sinks under it.

“You’ve got a job,” Dr. Egan says. “I’m so proud of you.” Did that mean Dr. Egan was keeping tabs on Nolan’s employment struggles? Or did it mean that even at age 11, when he parted with his therapist, Nolan was expected to fail? “Do you like working with children?”

Nolan nods. They like him, anyway. He makes them animal masks with wires and cloth.

“You know we can always use a good idea man at Willwether.”

“I don’t have any ideas,” Nolan mumbles without looking at him.

“Well, that’s all right. That’s not why I need to speak with you.” He opens the file folder under his arm, reveals the sketch of the bicycle with an electronic voice box mounted on the handlebars. Electrical wires coil around the frame. “We still don’t know how you did it. But you did it with company property, and we need it back.”

“I don’t have that either,” Nolan says.

Dr. Egan takes him by both shoulders and forces him to make eye contact. He has the same hooked nose and slick brown hair Nolan remembers. He does not appear to have aged.

“Nolan. That’s not good enough.”

“It stopped talking when I was eleven. We left it back at the old house. I don’t have it.”

“No, no, I get it. You’re an adult now. You have a job to worry about. And just to be clear, you’ve informed them about your mental health history and all that?”

“Um.”

“You know it’s a State requirement if you’re working with children.” He claps Nolan hard on the shoulder. “Tell you what. I’ll mail you a copy of your health records. Just in case. You take care of yourself, Nolan. Congratulations on the job.” Dr. Egan strides out of the parking lot, looking back once to smile and wink.

Nolan turns away, bowing his head in defeat. He feels as if he has been hurled back into the over-soft chairs of Dr. Egan’s therapy room, hurled back into the body of a frail little boy.

He almost trips over 4-year-old Annette, who stares back up at him through the eye holes of a raccoon mask. She has a ball in one hand. It flies into Nolan’s forehead with a squeak.

Nolan’s rock hit Dad square in the back of the head, then he hid again in the alley between Mom and Dad’s shop and the Hunka Junk. The rock made a satisfying thunk and Dad gave an almost musical howl. At age 7, Nolan couldn’t have told you why Dad deserved such a punishment. All he knew was that Dad could have taken out the skinny 20-year-old suit from Willwether in one punch. Instead, he let the man knock a clipboard of papers out of his hand. Dad bent over to pick them up while the company’s liaison feigned apology and laughed. Nolan knew that the logo above his family’s shop belonged to Martin Willwether. It didn’t matter. Dad should have punched the man.

At age 29, Nolan answers his door to find Follette leaning outside on her kickstand. “Happy birthday, Nolan,” her voice cracks from the speakers on her handlebars.

Nolan slams the door and walks away.

The knocking echoes through the apartment, too loud to ignore. Nolan throws the door open.

“How are you doing that!” he shouts.

“Don’t you yell at me, Nolan!” the bicycle says. “You left me in that ghost town. I think I’ve been very polite, considering.”

“Lef – You stopped talking to me! You made me think I was –!” And suddenly the last eighteen years speed up and hit him like a bus. It’s like watching a movie again, realizing he’d missed the point the first time. Follette. The talking bicycle. She is real.

“You made me think I was crazy!”

“You’re right. I did,” the bicycle says. “Will you please let me in?” She looks sad and pitiful for a bicycle. Her handlebars seem to droop apologetically, or maybe her front tire is just flat. Her red paint is mostly scratched off now, along with the runes he’d marked on her eighteen years earlier. It is a strange mix of nostalgia, sympathy, and not wanting the neighbors to see him shout at a child’s bicycle that compels him to let her in.

“Well, this is the apartment,” Nolan says.

“...Nice.” Follette wheels into the living room, which looks like the only room in the house, apart from the bathroom and a tiny kitchen.

“Sorry for the mess.” He picks an armful of dirty clothes from off the floor.

He realizes he has left his medication on the kitchen counter: A bottle of silvery fluid to be injected straight into his vein once a day. Nolan and Follette used to dump it out in the woods because it burned going in and made parts of his mind feel dark. Now he takes it sporadically, during those fleeting impulses to get his life in order.

He plunges the bottle into the clothes pile when Follette is turned the other way. He doesn’t know why he feels he must hide it from her.

“What are we doing to celebrate?” she says.

“Um. Working on a lion mask and marathoning *The Twilight Zone*.” He points to a dining table where a tangle of wires, a hot glue gun, and a laptop open to Netfricks sit. He spots a Neil Diamond CD lying on the counter. Again, not knowing why, he hides it in the armful of clothes.

“Yeah, I just moved here. I don’t really – have any friends. Yet.”

“I see.”

Follette is looking at the side of the hot glue gun. And at the sinister geometric logo.

“So Willwether is making art supplies now. Huh. I didn’t know they actually made anything. When I think of them I think of their civic planning –”

“Was there a particular reason you came here, Follette?”

She jerks her handlebars to look at him, probably crossly. “It just so happens that company thugs raided the old house looking for me. Do you know what they’ll

do to me if they find me?”

“I –”

The CD falls from Nolan’s arms and hits the floor with a crack.

“Really, Nol? Neil Diamond?”

He bows his head.

Follette’s speaker crackles a sigh. “They’ve come for you too, haven’t they?”

Nolan reaches down to pick up the CD. The bottle of medicine falls from its hiding place in his arm and rolls to Follette’s front tire. She ignores it.

“Nol – Is it still okay to call you Nol?”

“I know what you’re going to ask, Follette, and I don’t want any part of it.”

“We should have taken that skyscraper down eighteen years ago.”

“Well, we tried.”

“Nol –”

“Look!”

Follette stands silent, waiting for him to speak. But now that the floor is his, Nolan has no idea what to say.

“You just – come back into my life, expecting me to take on a-a very powerful company for you –”

“So don’t do it for me.”

Nolan picks up the CD and the medicine, dropping most of the dirty clothes, and walks to the bathroom. “Look. You can stay if you want, but you won’t be safe here. The company is blackmailing me to get to you, so...”

“Nol,” She calls after him. “Just go with me to Bedwood. I won’t ask you for any more than that.”

RE: LEAVE ME ALONE!!!

Me: If I turn it over to you, will you leave me alone? Forever?

dr.a.egan@willwethergroup.com: Yes, Nolan. If that’s what you want.

In his heyday, Martin Willwether was a regular presence on TV talk shows and news broadcasts, with his handsome half grin and big framed glasses – always by satellite feed, never in person. Commentators uniformly hailed him as a great innovator, but struggled to explain what it was his company did. Growing up, Nolan thought the Willwether Group was his town’s government. He remembers how surprised he was to find out that Bedwood had a mayor, who governed little after trusting Martin Willwether too much.

From Follette’s tiny, uncomfortable seat, Nol can already see the company logos rising above the highway: a black monolithic building floating over a city skyline. Everything, from the local shops to the hospitals to the police station, has the logo stamped by its name. It seems to be Willwether’s nature to suck a resource dry for the fastest, though not necessarily the maximum, profit. Bedwood was one

such resource. Now it is empty and silent. A skeletal monument to Willwether's whimsy.

Nol and Follette ride past a dilapidated neighborhood, a caved-in courthouse, and a rusted school bus smashed into the wall of a Terry's grocery store. Far off, over the forest, the company skyscraper hangs airborne on the horizon, just as it did when people lived here.

"My knees are cramped," Nol says. He has been sitting with his feet on Follette's handlebars since they left the motel. "And I've probably bruised my tailbone by now, too."

"You'll have to suck it up," Follette says. "I'm doing all the pedaling anyway."

"Do bicycles get tired?"

"Not our bodies. Our spirits do. Yes, I suppose we can get tired a very long time. If there were something so bad it needed to be slept through."

They come to the woods at the edge of town. Years ago, this place was bordered off with "danger" tape and barricades. Nol used to have to sneak in wearing a raccoon mask to hide his identity from forest spies. There's no one to stop them going in now.

It's cool inside the forest, but the trees are shorter than Nol remembers. There is more light piercing through their leaves, and the smell of sawdust is strong. When he was small, he thought the forest was endless and dark, that he could hear the calls of wrecrows deep inside.

"Follette?" Nol says. "What's a wrecrow?"

"A werewhat?"

"Never mind." It must have been something he misremembered.

Another odd word comes to Nol's mind. Hallowasserman.

Dr. Egan uttered a patient laugh from his therapist's chair. "The word I used, Nolan, was hallucination." Nolan sat across from the doctor, with his back straight and his hands folded in his lap. Over the years he'd learned to disguise his intellect with malapropisms. He'd learned that the world operates by a strict set of rules. Some of them apply only to him.

"Tell me if I'm right," Dr. Egan said. "You see things. Things other people don't. Wonderful things. Terrible things."

Nolan opened his mouth, not sure if he should answer. But Dr. Egan surmised it anyway.

"What you have is very special, Nolan. Not a lot is known about it yet. On the one hand, you will never live a normal life. People won't always accept you. But you'll find – if you haven't already – that you are incredibly gifted at making things. Wonderful, terrible things. Now, let me tell you about the people I work for."

One night, Nolan sat on a curb beside a cage. A neighborhood cat was inside,

pawing the walls and hollering. Finally, Nolan's patience paid off. There was a hallowasserman perched on the streetlight. It swooped down upon the cage, with gorgeous blue spirit wings, and Nolan sealed it in a jar.

All through the night, he tinkered in his garage workshop. With a jumper cable, he linked the rod protruding from the hallowasserman jar to the voice box wired on his bike. A warm blue glow lit up the garage, and the bike began to wobble on its side. All on its own.

"Hello, Follette. Welcome to life."

The forest gives way to a rolling meadow. They are surrounded by grazing sheep.

"Do you remember the first time we came here?" Follette says.

"Hm." They weave through the lackadaisical herd, sometimes brushing against a woolly side. One sheep gives Nol a dumb glance, chewing a mouthful.

"It's too bad," Follette says. "We weren't able to save them after all."

When Nolan closes his eyes, he can hear a far off echo through the rocks and green hills. It's the battle cry he uttered here long ago.

"For freedom and honor!" cried Nol.

"For bolts and glory!" cried Follette. And they charged into the ranks of black-suited company men.

The Sheep-kin were hiding from the invaders in their huts. Their civilization had arisen from a docile people, so the Willwether Group came with shepherd's crooks and sheep dogs to subjugate them. But one look at the boy, fighting fiercely from the back of his two-wheeled steed, and the Sheep-kin remembered themselves. Every able bodied ram-kin and ewe-kin threw on their tunics and raced to the field of battle with musket and war-shovel in hoof. They drove the company men back to the forest, and soon the skyscraper hovering over the meadow turned and floated away.

"Four ovations for Follette and Nol!" cried the Sheep-kin. "Baa, baa! Baa, baa!"

The meadow gives way to an expansive rock field. Follette struggles in the smooth stones and Nol must carry her on his shoulders. Her old, paint-chipped frame feels rough against his skin.

A tiny stream trickles beside them, with drifting minnows and tadpoles.

"Wasn't -" Nol stammers. "I'm sure this used to be a huge river. Wasn't it?"

A breathy sigh crackles from Follette's speakers. "A mighty river. The seat of a mighty people."

Nolan remembers, and the gentle trickling sound is swallowed up by a rapid's roar.

The River-kin's civilization arose from a fearful and violent people, so when

the Willwether Group came to conquer them, they did it by whispering rumors into the river's surface. Soon the Spear-Fin Clan believed that the rude comments about their mothers' pelvic fins were coming from the Moon-Scale Clan, and the Moon-Scale Clan blamed them on the Long-Barbels.

When Nol and Follette discovered the River-kin, they were killing each other. So the two waded out to a calm pool with something all the clans liked: Jello cubes with dried flies from the health food store. A summit gathered around Follette and Nol and the old hatreds were forgiven, and the newly united River-kin drove Willwether's snorkeled invaders to the shore and beyond.

When peace was won, the River Queen coughed up a blue stone and presented it to Follette and Nol. "Etch your prayers in the old script of flight," she said. "Chase the Willwethers to their citadel in the clouds."

There was no place left for their war to go but up.

RE: RE: LEAVE ME ALONE!!!

dr.a.egan@willwethergroup.com: One more thing, Nolan. I want you to know that Mr. Willwether isn't mad at you for what you did to him. If anything it was our fault for putting such demands on an unbalanced little boy. Here's the point: I know you're not happy, hot gluing children's masks, letting your talents languish. I know you better than you know yourself, Nolan. Won't you give us another chance?

The journey is over. The land has run out, and all that remains ahead of them is a steep grassy slope with a natural ramp at the bottom.

The massive skyscraper is so close now, it feels like it could come down and crush them. Nol lays Follette down on the hill and lies on his back next to her. He realizes how much bigger he is now, compared to his old bicycle. He does not know how she expects to carry him off the ramp, to the skyscraper above. In fact, he does not know how she ever did.

"You're planning to sell me to Willwether, aren't you?" Follette says. She doesn't sound angry, but it is difficult to read a bicycle's voice. In Nol's limited experience bicycles trusted too easily, and took it too well when their friends let them down.

"One way or another," Nol says, "it's time to put this game behind me. Move on and be an adult, you know?"

"They won't let you forget them. Even if you give them what they want."

"You know," Nol says, "when I agreed to take this journey, it was because I thought you would convince me not to turn you over to Dr. Egan. Instead, this whole thing has made me feel like George Bailey from *It's a Wonderful Life*. And Clarence the angel is telling me to jump."

Nol tries to watch the sunset and not the flying monolith overhead. "We tried to fight them, Follette. We failed."

Cue suspenseful heroic theme music. Follette and 11-year-old Nol raced up the stairs of the evil citadel, kicked down the door to the office of their ultimate nemesis.

“Your evil is at an end, Martin Willwether!”

“It’s not over yet, Ass-Nol! Now, feel the sting of my Kill-O-Ray (TM)!!!”

“Oh nooooo!!!”

Follette snorts. “Is that how you remember it?”

It is hard to say how many days Nol and Follette spent wandering the flying skyscraper. Even in the light of day, the offices of the Willwether Group are dark. Only the faint blue glow of the runes on Follette’s frame lit the way, and that was barely enough light to see down to the laces on Nol’s shoes.

They took shelter beneath a secretary’s desk because no one staircase went straight to the top, and they’d been wandering a long time. All night, a freezing wind howled from the air vents, whipping papers around the office. Rasping whispers echoed from the vents, though they had yet to meet any people in the building.

Wasserman, the voices said. Wasserman.

They found Martin Willwether, not in an office, but cowering in a break room pantry. He had a frayed beard and patchy white hair; no glasses, but purple bags that stretched from his eyes to his cheeks. He bore no resemblance to the sly, handsome Willwether on TV, but it was him.

At first he said nothing to them, except to mumble some repetitive and incoherent chant. Only when Nol began to menace him with his large wrench did the crazed man start to make sense.

“It’s all their doing! The voices pilot this ship! I don’t want any of this! I just want to find a place where I can sleep!” Willwether curled into a ball and murmured to himself.

Nol and Follette shut him in and talked in the hall.

“He’s lying,” Nol said. “He’s on TV every day.”

“But always by satellite. Nol. I don’t think he has anything to do with it. I think someone’s making him.”

“You think he had nothing to do with what his own company does? We came here to destroy Willwether. He’s Willwether.”

“All I can tell you is, you’d better be sure.”

When they opened the door, Martin Willwether pushed past them and raced down the dark hall. Nol leapt onto Follette’s seat and pedaled after him, wrench in hand. He rode up to one side of Willwether. He swung the wrench –

The box is right where Nolan buried it 18 years ago. Inside are the River Queen's etch-stone, the oscillating bellows, and the pan pipes of the Sheep-kin. At the bottom of the box, the empty eye holes of the old raccoon mask stare back at him.

Nol drops to the ground. "It's all here. I'm not hallucinating any of it."

"It doesn't prove anything," Follette says. "You could still be crazy."

"I really did fight a guerrilla war against an evil corporation."

"Was that ever in doubt?"

"Martin. I hit him until I heard his ribs snap, but I didn't kill him, I didn't —" It was so easy with the mask on. Nol bites his lip. "That was when you stopped talking to me."

Follette is standing over him, watching to see what he will do. "Like I said. Bicycles have sensitive spirits. Or at least I do."

Nol closes the box and holds it shut. He closes his eyes, which are beginning to sting.

"You were just a child, Nol. Martin Willwether was the symbol of the company you despised. It must have been easier to attack the symbol than to contemplate fighting the spiritual entities controlling him."

"Do you hate me?"

Follette circles around him and leans against his shoulder. "I was created as an extension of your being, Nolan Wasserman. When your spirit cries out for help, I will hear it, and even if it is miles away, I will never fail to find you. Never."

Nol puts his arm around her rough, paint-chipped frame. "That doesn't really answer my question."

Follette laughs. "No, I guess it doesn't. But you were right about one thing. I am telling you to jump." She points her front tire to the grassy slope. "Let's find the controls on that thing. Bring it crashing down and fly out the window at the last minute. Like heroes."

"Okay, and what good will that do?"

"Just listen."

Nol closes his eyes. He can hear the malevolent voices call him from the skyscraper. Hallo! Wasserman, Hallo! He knows them by their spirit. They are the dark hallowassermans, so named because Nol had no name for them. They are the hand that plugs the springs of life and civilization. Not for profit, but for the thrill of exerting power over them.

Nol mounts the pan pipes and the oscillating bellows. He etches the runes of flight on Follette's beat up frame. They rush down the hill and shoot off the ramp on a gust of wind. A great pair of blue feathered wings burst from Follette's frame, and she rides the wind up and up. Now they are black against the starry horizon, and there is no one who can say if they will come back down.



Aw Shit Oh Man

He Who Pursues Length Over Pleasures

Courtney Kaplan

My neighbor
is vegan and sober and always in need
of Chapstick,
though I suppose he doesn't apply
as needed because of certain
chemical elements surely implied
on those labels I've never ever read.

I've always been impressed
by people with such an energy
for every single day life.
I give up, at least once a day,
and sit in my chair that looks out
the window at the world and drink too much and smoke
too much and forget what it is
I'd hoped to grow into.
Sometimes it is my only solace,
to know that giving up
is a part of my future, as all
futures are eventually given up on,
whether by choice or not.

I asked my neighbor
Why?
His response was that he wants
to live to be very old.

Hive: Identity

Alina Nguyen



He puts on black gloves
and spills colored substances
into small tubes.
He turns on the machine
and presses the handle, to stage
sounds like bees directing their home.
This is his job, how he crafts honey.
Wipes off skin and shaves off fuzz.
Once that stencil of identity is placed,
there is no going back.
He starts with the black construction.
Later we'll do color, he says.
He engages in small talk,
and before I know it we're done.
Now I walk around with this emblem,
and take pictures without heads.

How to Become a Stoner

Dani Socher

september

Begin by deciding that, upon your entrance into the tenth grade, you want to be cool. Lay on your too-firm mattress the day before school starts, ignoring the cramped nature of your messy room while sipping warm orange juice and mapping out detailed plans for popularity enhancement. The rush from this semi-Machiavellian process will be fantastic, empowering, sensual. Stroll into Holbrook High the next day with a brightly-shining grin on your face, self-assured and confident in skinny jeans and a fresh haircut.

Start with a shared laugh and/or giggle here and there by mentioning that Mr. Argyris, the round-bellied gym teacher, is probably gay, or perhaps by tripping the British kid who reverses the foreigners-are-cool-and-sexy paradigm. Talk to a pretty girl named Chloe, and make her laugh by swearing every third word. Give Mrs. Donavue the finger behind her back. Isabelle, the perfectly Italian chick, will find this hilarious. Others will chuckle, if not with her full-throated exuberance. As you begin to assemble the friend forces, make it clear to each and every one of them that you're up for anything.

october

You'll be invited to your first high school party within a month or so. It will probably be Chris, the cobalt-eyed and saffron-haired and green-pocketed basketball captain who asks you. The party will be on a Saturday night, a "real banger," he says, and this will cause considerable stress insofar as parent-related stress goes. Because Chris will also invite you to stay over after the party, and now you'll have to ask your parents for permission to sleep out. The moment will finally hit Saturday morning, when you can't delay it any longer, and they're sitting there innocently enough in matching robes and matching smiles, eating pancakes with blueberries on the side when you finally gather up the requisite courage.

"Mom, Dad, can I sleep at Chris's house Saturday night?" The pause between question and answer won't last longer than a fistful of moments, but to you it'll seem like a fucking hour. And then, simply enough, your mom will say, "Sure." Your dad will just nod at his newspaper in a vague way, not entirely clear on what's going on. You will walk back to your room, trying to keep the clip at a trudge, as opposed to the skip you're dying to break into.

The nervousness and excitement that will permeate every pore of your being that night is a vibrant, buzzing type of anticipation, one that threatens to jailbreak

out of your body like an independent being, dashing forward to do everything you've never done: kiss a girl, take a shot, smoke a joint. Stand in front of your mirror for about an hour trying on every piece of clothing you own, eventually opting for a maroon cardigan with blue khakis, not to mention half a bottle of Axe.

When the party finally begins you will be truly raring to go. Work at being an active participant, and fight the fucked-up-and-nervous mentality your brain will desperately chase after. Drink anything handed to you, never sit down, and don't even think about passing up spin-the-bottle. Sure, your first kiss(es) will be more sloppy than titillating, but who cares? Everyone will ask your name, and you'll meet more people this night than you ever have in your life up to this point, or at least it'll seem that way. You will feel like the king of the world, even if it's closer to court jester of Chris's first party.

It's later, when the Doritos are gone and the scarlet cups are null and void of booze, when it's just you and Chris and Chris's dog, that the weed will come out. The two of you will sink into bean bags. Try to slouch, as Chris does, and avoid seeming like an overeager schoolgirl as you watch Chris roll an immense joint with his eyes half closed. You will be surprised and intrigued by the smell, a pungent skunky and sweet odor. Either take a hit the first time he offers it, or wait nervously while he puffs away for a few minutes.

Take a few deep drags, cough horribly, and let the acidity sink through your taste buds. Wait to feel stoned. You will feel nothing. Before you fall asleep, tell Chris you want to smoke again soon, and that you "love being high." A week later, you will toké with Chris a few more times. This is when you begin to realize that weed is going to become a major player in your life. You can't quite put your finger on why, because it isn't just the somehow light and heavy-headed feeling, it isn't just the munchies – it's everything. The snap, crackle and pop of burning kush, the bitterly sweet and awfully amazing taste, the sticky residue on your fingertips.

november

Buy weed for the first time, because Chris is getting less and less interested in smoking you out. This is reasonable, because you can actually keep up with him now, smoking-wise. Buy an eighth from Gregory, a clean-cut Jewish kid who wears polo shirts. Because you're friends with Chris, Gregory will tell you to call him Greg, and throw you an eighth for ten bucks off. The best \$50 you'll ever spend, as it turns out.

Go home after school, and roll up a large nug into a lumpy, misshapen joint. You'll be faded on your own for the first time, and discover that it's a different high altogether. You're less jumpy, and you end up watching *Mad Men* for about three hours on Netflix before you head downstairs to wreck your kitchen. Repeat for the next few weeks, and laugh quietly to yourself when your mother remarks that, "You must be going through a growth spurt, because you just don't stop eating."

january

There will be several options available to you and Chris for New Year's, but the two of you will decide to bring it in with your cabal of pot-smoking buddies. The night will go something like this: You spend about an hour preparing the tools of your happiness for the night, and you enjoy this almost as much as the smoking to come. Tearing the darkly rustic shell of the Swisher Sweet (White Grape), grinding the weed until it's nearly a powder, packing a gram and a half into the cigar, carefully rolling it and licking the edges with a sexual devotion to detail, then reaching consummation with the tip of a lighter's flame carefully applied to all edges. When the rolling station has finally closed for the night, it'll be about 10:30. Convince your friends to watch *Breaking Bad* with you, and marathon the fuck out of it.

At around 12 AM, nine blunts deep, mutter Happy New Year's to Chris and fall asleep at about 4 AM with your head on his shoulder, Walter White's groaning voice combining with the cannabinoids to create a mixture that poisons alertness. Wake up still high at 7 AM to find Chris's parents angrily shaking a bag of weed and yelling at the five of you. Hightail it out of there, leaving your wallet and phone under the couch and not sure of where to run to, knowing your home phone is in imminent danger of a terrible, earth-shaking phone call. You won't be able to remember ever feeling such a potent hybrid of horror, paranoia and general freak-the-fuck-out swirling around your brain.

When you finally make it home, your parents will remark that you still smell like weed, and your mind will twirl in fear. But your father will just adjust his glasses and say he's a little disappointed, and wasn't this conversation supposed to wait until junior year at least? Your mother will just cry and shake her head. You will feel bad, but not about the weed; any and all sorrow will come from the fact that your parents just don't get it. And after you head upstairs, forced forward by the prickly feeling of anger from parental pupils, you'll put a towel under the door and spark a small bowl. The light green grass will color your emotions one by one until you leave the stress behind and begin to embody calm.

february

You will begin to realize that your plans, schemes, and plots in pursuit of popularity don't mean much at all. There are a few select things worth the price of admission in high (ha) school, and "coolness," or having a few hundred friends, simply isn't one of them. To reach nirvana in high school, you need a constant supply of marijuana, pussy, and a Netflix streaming account. For the weed, all you need is the part-time job at Zipp's. Sure, you smell like grease on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but now you can afford an eighth of the finest kush on a weekly basis. The pussy is even simpler. Ask out a girl named Ashley. Or Becca, if you so prefer. She should have raven hair, luminescent sapphire eyes, and like *Mad Men*

almost as much as you. She'll give you a lot of head, smoke with you every now and then, and ask for very little beyond meeting your parents and the occasional date. As for the Netflix, well, your parents cover that.

march

You will begin to run into problems with Ashley. It'll turn that out you don't like her all that much, and so you will begin to take opportunities to get high over chances to hang out with her. Respond to her text messages a lot less than you used to. She'll blame it all on your chronic marijuana consumption, of course, and say that you're totally disconnecting from life and ignoring everyone. Realize that she's seriously angry, and concoct some ridiculous bullshit about how you aspire to write fiction and the weed helps you write, and then spin off some half-baked literary plan to write a reverse-Kerouac, modern *On the Road*, with a female narrator named Deanie. Or a stream-of-consciousness novella from the perspective of Mary Boleyn. Whichever you prefer. Regardless, by the end of the conversation Ashley will like you more than ever, and consider you some type of tragic genius.

april

Ashley will dump you one day, because she figures out that you don't write shit and that you spend all of your time getting high with Chris. It won't hurt that much, because although her body was great, the single life is the smoking life. Explain to Chris over a *Star Wars* marathon that she didn't understand you anyway, and start blowing through a quarter ounce of the sticky stuff every week – because everyone needs a break from reality these days. Your GPA will quiver, but who cares when it comes down to it. Your parents will begin to view you with suspicion, commenting on the bleary state of your eyes and the fact that you're always sleepy. Purchase eyedrops. Use them.

may

Once or twice you will seriously consider why you love weed, but your thoughts will travel down a hardly yellow brick road that turns foggy with kush smoke the further you go, and soon enough you'll be happily choking your mind with serenity. And your popularity concerns of yesterday and yesteryear will seem insignificant next to the large glass instrument of mind-sex that Chris is offering you. Spark your Bic, shove the flame into the bed of green pleasure, and happily observe the chamber filling with thick, milky weed fume. Excavate the slide and allow the blessed high to swim through you once more.

Hypnagogia

Shetachai Chatchoomsai

I

I wake up with enough adrenaline
to burn down the house.
Breaded ashes kneaded
into the path of my feet.

Ring, ring, ring...

My mother's calling from Thailand,
where respect is due faster than library books,
where air thickens & leeches off your neck.

II

My face smog-heavy, breathing American air legalized by I-20.
Over the Facetime window, "Mae," I cry & say how school is hectic
like Bangkok traffic.
The school magazine facing a webcam, I say, "my poem got published,"
My mother, who writes Thai poetry, asks about the topic.
Our family, I say & see her face droop into a Noh mask,
asking "Why would anyone want to hear about it?"

And I learn that to speak about unheimlich in Thailand, I must choose to be
either

An exiled Jihadi or

A closeted homosexual.

III

At my grandmother's funeral, I heard my mother sob
alongside her poem, as her mother being incinerated to the sky.
It was my grandmother's favorite lullaby, my mother choking, disrupting
her rhymes, holding words deep
inside her bosom.

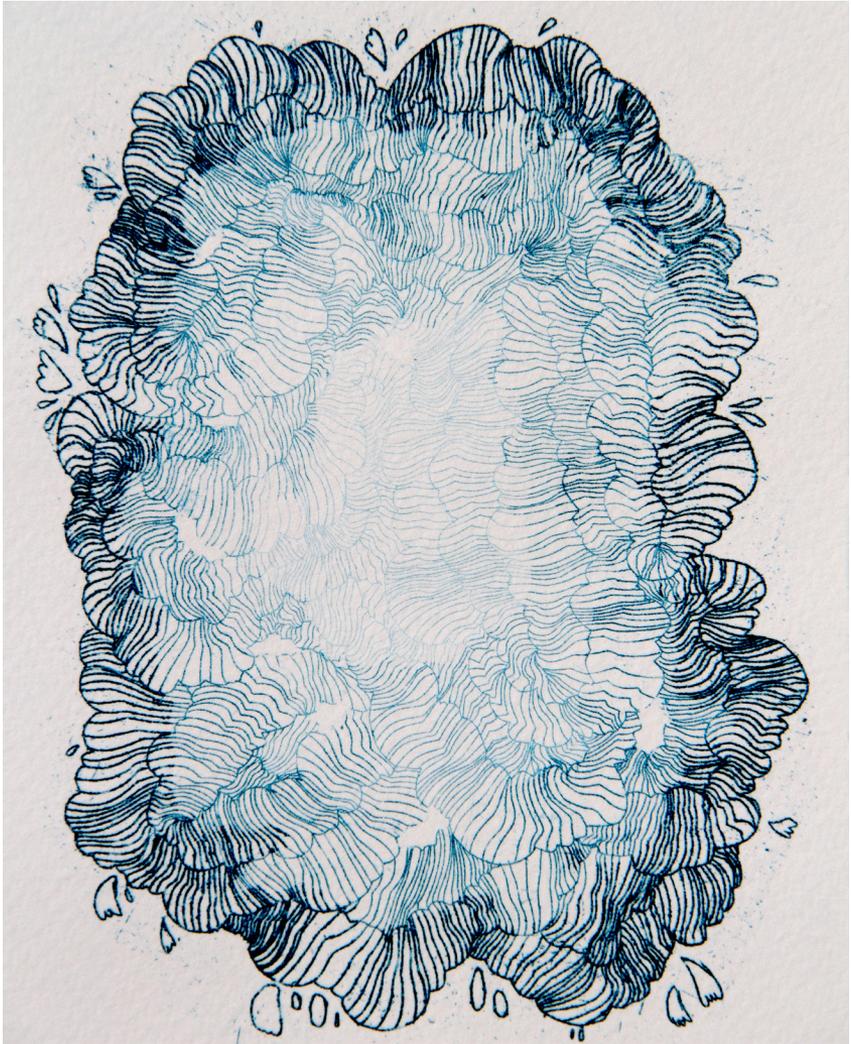
Standing silently beneath her podium,
I imagined my mother flying up high above the chimney,
plunged & smothered by ashes & flames.

But instead it was me who had saved the skeletons
& strung them around my neck, baring my mother's scheme
of her elegy.

IV

Los Angeles 12:30 am:

The scything blade
swings
like a pendulum,
the navel split,
worms slithering.



Guts #2

Imaginary Number

Brett Hymes



I am x and why
 does my back bend
to the parabolic pleas
of an imaginary number

 that once designated
a heaven perpendicular
 to my plane of existence.

 Carrying decimal thoughts
up one
 over one
until left as is
 for the remainder of the night

the coordinated sheets
 composed dark matter
into a dance of melancholy parallelism

by bending string theory acrobatics
to displace the anti-matter of fact departure
of an idea.

Itch

James Bezerra

I think I could like surfing. There's a board strapped to the roll bars of a jeep in the 7-11 parking lot and it makes me think that I could like surfing. Legs dangling, slow and calm in clear blue water. I'd be tanner then. And leaner, too. My skin would seem to always be warm, somehow, from the sun it had been soaking up. I could sit there on the board and let the water rise and fall and rise and fall and rise. And fall. Like riding someone else's breath.

I flick my burnt out butt out across the parking lot and into the 7-11 I go. The white light inside is stale. There's no one in the IAM crowd who looks like the surfer I would look like if I had a jeep with a surfboard on its roll bars. At IAM here, this many hours from any ocean, I'd only be passing through. Why would I even be here? Probably I'd just be on my way from somewhere else. Probably I'd been in love, but it hadn't worked. For her I'd left the ocean, followed her back to her home, so many hours inland until the air didn't even smell wet anymore. And we'd tried our best, we really would have. But you can't power love with just the memory of kissing in the night under the crashing white shadow sounds of waves. It wouldn't be enough, just to remember the grains of sand that had fitted themselves into the grooves of my fingerprints as my hands had slid along her smooth, summer-singed skin. But then her tan would fade back to the pale that had once marked only the parts of her that only I'd seen for those summer weeks. Her apartment would have smelled like taupe paint. Taupe is very soothing. At first. At first it seems to be the soft tan of beach sand. But the longer I would have stayed there in her apartment – wearing socks and using coasters and working in the office at her brother's auto shop – the harder and dryer that taupe would have become, until it was a flat brown rocky desert. Until we finally would have had to tearfully admit to each other that it was all just nothing anymore. So I would have loaded up my jeep in her carport and lashed my board to the roll bars while gnats buzzed around the halogen bulbs above me. On the way out of town, I would have stopped here at this 7-11. Probably I would have been hungry.

At the counter I buy a pack of smokes and I can tell that the guy wants to say that he had just sold me some this morning and that he had just sold me his cheapest wine a couple hours ago and how come I couldn't just buy all of my shit at once? But he doesn't say anything like that and I pull out my wallet and I pull out crumply cash and the guy doesn't bother to notice anymore that not all my fingers are there, but there are kids in line behind me buying a paper carton of beer and I notice that they are noticing because I can just hear the way their

talking gets a little slower because their brains are working now because they're wondering where the fuck the rest of me is and I want to tell them that I fucking left it in the desert. But I don't say that. I shove my hand back in my pocket and I don't say anything.

I light up in the parking lot. The jeep is still there. Still. I think about how nice it was going to be to slide back into the waves after so long. How good it would be to feel the world take a breath below me. To lift me effortlessly, thoughtlessly, like a child, like a bug, like a speck of dust, as light as a thought or an atom of light. How good the water would feel on my legs. On my own skin and between my toes. And I look up and I can see me there on the rippling blue ceiling of the water, my feet dangling lazily on either side of the white board. Happy. Slow. Calm. Easy. How good it must have felt to be me up there just then in that moment; returned to the sea. Alone and empty of everything that fills me too full too often. How depressurized I must be up there. How peaceful and floating I float there. And right now I'm so envious of that me that I'm almost angry.

I think that I could like surfing. I've never tried. I could try. I could learn and then, some hurricane night, I could watch lightning cracking over a roiling black sea like a flashbulb over so much oil. I could point my board out into it. Lay my body down onto it and paddle out. Feel the cold water slide between my fingers. And another burst of lightning and everything is gray light for just a half a second and I can see that all the tops of rising waves have gotten sharp. Then darkness and the mad clap of thunder and the shockingly dry smell of singed ozone.

My eyes are closed, I realize, but I can smell the cigarette still smoldering slowly in my hand, so I haven't had them closed for that long, this time. I don't open my eyes, because why? I wiggle the fingers I have left on my left hand. There's an itch on one of the fingers I don't have anymore. It's seven thousand miles away and so too far to scratch.

Deep breath in through my nostrils, I take in the asphalt smell of the 7-11 parking lot. It wasn't ozone, that I was thinking I was smelling. I don't know what that smells like. My nose was remembering the smell of sulfur. Or cordite, maybe? Whatever they could get their hands on. Maybe it was the smell of super heated air blasting out at 1,600 feet a second. Or maybe it was the smell of metal shards blowing through the desert heat. The smell of sand mixing with the blood in my mouth. Another crack of lightning behind my eyelids and its not the ocean anymore. It's just all that smoke and someone's face above my face, screaming at me and I can't even hear him. Maybe it's that thick, salty smell of one's own blood, everywhere, and the numb sensation that something is wrong with this human body.

Deep breath in through the nostrils. My ears hear the ping-ping of the door sensor and I open my eyes and he's there and he's just a kid. A teenager probably.

Scruffy face but a lean tan body. He looks at me looking at him. He grins big because he's stupid, I can tell, and he hollers over, "Cool looking legs, bro." He hops up into the jeep. Guns it and he's gone, taking the surfboard with him. My finger still itches.

Jungle Book

Glenn Collins

Eyes are the stars of the forest
moon of their dead-tree desires
a gathering for light – A child lies

Swallowed by the wind of his dreams
he is pulled into the darkness
a feast for reason and justice

The boldest tree crumbles
the gathered taste the fallen

The child howls and a beast is born



El Hombre del Valle

La Puerta Del Diablo

Joanna Benitez



In this region of mine, of forest and mountains where cows and horses roam freely and you can easily count the poking ribs without getting out of the car to take a closer look, there is what looks like a cave. It is located a distance south from here, but you must go down before you hike up. It is there that you will find a peak. A beautiful peak where you can look out into the horizon and eat your pupusas while sitting beneath the tree. It is said that people were sacrificed there in old times. I was your age my dear, during the war. This is the place people were taken to die. Still, it is very beautiful.

This place is called *La Puerta Del Diablo*, The Devil's Door.

There is a cave that is not much of a cave, rather the promise of one, for the entrance is closed off by rock, as if the Devil himself formed it to hide within. Many people sign their names on this cave that looks like a door. When or why this started nobody knows. It is just a game, to sign your name to let people three years from now know that you were at *La Puerta Del Diablo*. They use whatever they have in their pockets or purses. Markers, spray cans, eyeliner, lipstick, pens. It doesn't matter.

The Devil laughs within. He no longer needs to go to humans when it is dark, the humans come to him. They sign their souls over willingly. Perhaps these are the ones who become the creatures.

Some time ago, there was a beautiful young woman who married a handsome young man. Soon the woman gave the man a baby boy.

One humid day, after the giggling infant was put to bed, the woman sat on her husband's lap. Opening his shirt collar, she stroked warm wet skin that darkened but never burned under the hot sun. When the man did not smile down at her with that glint in his eye she became worried.

"What is it, *mi amor*?" She looked down at his untouched plate and cut fruit. "You do not like what I made for you?"

"I did not bring turkey; I have not brought you turkey or red meat for a while."

"I told you that I find it every morning lying at our door."

"I know, I just..." A frustrated sigh. "It maddens me that other men bring you such things while your husband cannot. They covet you." He turned to look at his wife with dark hair that was as black as the night when the moon is shy. "They

would all make better husbands for you and a better father to our boy.”

The woman smiled sweetly. “*Mi amor*, it is you that I love. Besides, I do not think it is the men who bring the meat.”

“If not the men then who? Do you think they come to die at our doorstep?”

The woman shrugged, reached for a cubed watermelon piece and pressed it to his lips. He chewed and the liquid from the red fruit gushed down his strong throat, cooling his body instantly. The woman continued to feed him until he stayed her hand. When he went to return the favor she shook her head and kissed him, taking the essence of the fruit into her. The man smiled for she had done this before, taking nourishment from his mouth. When she made that sound like a pup, he understood. Taking her by the hand, they went to bed.

When the moon was high overhead, shining so bright so as to be noticed by those who have forgotten, the woman, careful not to wake the slumbering man beside her, rose from bed and made her way to her child.

The babe slept soundly. His soft left cheek was pressed to the thin sheet of cool fabric she had placed under his head for comfort and his bottom was up in the air, his legs curled under him.

Lifting the cotton mesh that protected her baby boy from evil creatures that would suck his sweet blood, she stroked the delicate downy hair behind one small ear, the silky texture encouraging her to do so again and again and again, until she was gently petting him.

Forcing herself, she left her son with a tender smile and entered the bathroom.

Reaching under the sink she pulled out the small clay dish the color of damp dirt that her father had given her a long time ago. Cupping the slight weight, she went down to her knees and gagged.

Three body spasms later a murky liquid left her lips in a gush of vomit. The moment the last of it touched the clay dish the woman shook out her soft red fur. With her black wet nose she nudged the dish to the edge of the floor, careful not to spill her soul.

Swiftly exiting the small house, she ran out into the night.

The man awoke to the cries of his son. Noticing that his wife’s warm skin was not against his, he rose from bed and walked to the kitchen, yawning the entire way.

Bringing back a warm bottle of milk, he entered his son’s room. The boy stopped crying the moment his wet round eyes landed on him. The father grinned and cradled the child to his chest. After the babe was fed and burped, he touched his lips to the top of his soft head and gently placed him in the crib. The child instantly went to his stomach and curled his feet under him. The man laughed softly as he pulled the delicate fabric circling the crib together to protect his child.

Shaking his head he went into the bathroom to look for his wife.

That is when he saw the small clay dish tucked against a corner. He picked it up and noticing the liquid in it frowned, then emptied the water down the sink. He placed the clay dish on the bathroom counter.

Back in bed, he awoke an hour later to the whisper of noise. Frowning that his wife was not in bed yet, he listened closely and knew the noise was coming from the bathroom. When he came to the bathroom door and switched on the light a small yell escaped his lips. The noise was followed by a high pitched yelp. The creature was hunched at one corner, its ears plastered to its head. The husband almost confused the creature for a *cadejo* but the fur was not the white or black of the evil or good spirits, rather it was the color of blood mixed with gold. The man, not knowing what to do, looked around the small space for something to use to guide the animal out, preferably a broom. The creature, knowing his thoughts, dashed forward with great speed. Thinking the animal rabid, he kicked out with one foot as he tried to scramble out of its way. The creature dodged his startled form and managed to escape the house through an open window. Heart pumping, the man looked around in shock. There was nothing that he could think of that would draw the animal. There was no food that he or his wife had left out. Looking at the corner where the animal had sought protection, he cursed, went on his haunches, then picked up the broken pieces of the clay dish. He dumped them in the kitchen trashcan, then called out his wife's name.

The wife could not return to her husband, for he had unknowingly washed her soul down the bathroom sink. Without that murky liquid she was cursed to live the life of the animal she was now. She could not raise her child into a young man nor make love to her beautiful husband ever again.

Through a cave hidden in rock, laughter was heard.

The husband looked and looked for his wife but could not find her. Swallowing his pride he considered the fact that his wife could be having an affair. When the sun chased away the moon, he went to his neighbors and asked for her, but they all gave him the same answer. All the men offered their help. He asked in the next pueblo and the next after that, past the cemetery where his abuela was buried a year ago – all the while his child was tucked into his strong arms – but nothing came of it. The husband looked up at the darkening sky, remembered that the moon's light encouraged the *Sihuanaba*. He headed back home with an aching heart.

There was a way. She knew of only one way. All that was needed was one that

had not yet been touched by the blessed water. Her son was unbaptized.

The devil laughed, anxious for his creation's creations to spill the blood he desired.

A week, the man mourned the loss of his wife. The three chickens he had found at the door the morning his wife disappeared were gone. When he had to go off to work he left his baby boy in the care of his *madre*. The creature with the eyes that glowed in the night stalked his little boy and it was making him anxious. He had caught the creature trying to enter his house during the night at various times. Once, he caught the creature about to jump onto the babe's crib, but he had managed to grab the animal by the tail just in time and swing it onto the wall. The wall curved against the creature and plaster rained down. He was surprised when the thing recovered from the impact and ran into the night. He had taken to bringing his son into his bed at night now. But the more time passed, the more aggressive the creature became.

She just had to get her son alone long enough to eat him. Once she did, she could take his soul and become a woman again. If only her husband or the old crone would leave her son alone for ten minutes. Just ten minutes. She could eat the babe in ten minutes if she rushed.

The devil looked on through the two boulders he caused a long time ago after having fun with a stupid girl. He did not care for the volcano or the swells of the warm ocean. No. He wanted, craved, and rooted for the woman to succeed.

Desperate, the man sought guidance that Sunday.

"Padre?"

"Sí?"

The elderly man listened to the young man's story then nodded sadly.

"And tell me, you say there is a...creature?"

"Yes, it is a...um a..." the man began describing the creature for he did not have the word for it.

"Ah, yes, a *zorro*, a fox."

"Sí, Padre."

The priest nodded then gave a great sigh. "And you say the *zorro* keeps sneaking into your house and once tried to attack your son?"

"Yes, he was trying to jump onto his crib."

"She. Look *mijo*, I know how to fix this, but you must make a decision. Who do you want more, your son or your wife?"

"What are you saying, Padre? I want them both."

“No, no. If you can only have one of them which will it be, your son or your wife? Come now, if you had to choose, son or wife? Choose, choose now.”

“How can you ask me that, *Padre*? What is going—”

“Choose.”

“No! I want to know what is going on. Tell me!”

“*Aye mijo*, in life you cannot always have both, you cannot always get everything you want, *que no*?”

“*Pues sí, perro*—”

“No. Look, you do not need to know. It will only cause you pain. Besides you do not need to know in order to choose the one you love.”

“I love them both.” The husband said with tears in his eyes. He looked into the *Padre*’s clear brown eyes and knew that something was wrong. “I must know. I love my wife. I love my son.” He reached for his chest, gripped the fabric over his heart, hoping the pressure would alleviate his pain. His chest started to pump up and down.

“I did not want to cause you this pain, but I will tell you. It is your wife. Your wife is lost to the *zorro* and if you let her she will kill your son.” The husband shook his head, denying the Father. “You must choose...or you will lose them both.” He felt the father’s soft hand grip his shoulder. “I am sorry, but you must, you must choose.”

“Then I choose my son, *Padre*.”

“There now.” The Father went to the back of the church, came back with a bowl of holy water. Thrusting it into the young man’s arms he said, “Take this, when you see the *zorro* again you must throw this on its back.”

“How is the water going to get rid of the *zorro*?”

“It will save your son. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, *Padre*.”

“*Bien*.”

The young man stood in the shadows where the moon could not find him and touch his skin with its silver light. His child was sleeping in his crib once more. Hours passed before he saw the door swing further open. The *zorro* was low to the ground, her ears flat. The fox was so engrossed in stalking that she did not notice her husband standing beside her with a bowl of water.

The husband moved forward. The fox’s ears twitched, for the water sloshing in the bowl from his movements alerted her. The fox jumped to the side just as he swung the bowl and water leaped out, but it did not touch her, the water pooling where she had been three second ago. The *zorro*, in her crouched form, growled and launched herself at her husband. At the same time, still balancing the half empty bowl of holy water in one hand, the husband reached for the machete he had propped up against the wall behind him. The *zorro* attacked before he could

reach the blade and, biting down on his calf, felt warm blood trickle down her throat. With a shout the husband fell. Holy water sloshed out and onto his chest. The *zorro* went for his hands to force him to drop what remained of the water. The husband kicked at the fox, catching it in jaw with his boot. Desperate, the fox went for his face. The husband, acting in pure instinct, raise his forearm to protect himself. The *zorro*'s teeth clamped around the muscular forearm. The husband shouted and shook his entire arm, trying to dislodge the beast, but the *zorro* held on. The forgotten, almost empty bowl of holy water pitched forward from the husband's violent shaking and spilled, falling on the *zorro*'s vibrant red coat. A scream left the fox's throat. The man watched with wide eyes as the fox began to twitch violently until it died. The young man, feeling a chill from the wretched scream, was breathing hard as the fox transformed.

With a shout the husband crawled forward, desperately calling his wife's name. With trembling hands he picked up the naked form of his beloved wife and held her against his wide chest. Tilting her head back he swept her long black hair from her beautiful face to reveal sightless eyes and lips wet and red with his blood. The husband's entire body shook with the hard sobs of a man.

Long minutes passed before he heard a small cry. He stumble toward his son and with trembling hands opened the cotton netting to reveal a tiny *zorro* whimpering in its sleep, its face pressed to its front paws while its bottom was up in the air. Near the baby *zorro*'s head was a small pool of a familiar murky water that was not sinking into the crib's bed sheets.

Confused and in pain, the husband waited all night until his son was once again a babe and, leaving him with his *abuela*, sought out the *Padre*.

"The holy water killed my wife. You made me kill my wife!" he screamed at the holy man, who was lighting a candle.

The priest looked at the husband. "At least you can bury her now."

The mountain quaked as the devil laughed with glee. He sat back in the throne he made not long ago with the bones that were deposited to his door. The previous throne was old and soon so would be the one he was sitting on, but that would come later. The devil searched for the next soul among many. After a short while, the devil grinned.

So, my dear, did you go to *La Puerta Del Diablo*? It was beautiful wasn't it, just as I told you. You didn't get lost did you? Yes, I know there are a lot of paths... good. Did you try the *pupusas* and the *horchata*? Now, tell me child, did you sign your name on the rock?

Listen

Glenn Collins

That voice of hers
carried baritone blues
rhythm lost in wet walls

like a needle punches out
electric veins

enough
to sap dry cloud

the rainy gloss
of her mother's eye
and that little voice of hers

The Mad Doctor Credits His Mother

Chuck Von Nordheim



knitting monsters from surplus organs
like she sewed quilts from fabric scraps
kneading life into *livor mortis*
like her fist and fingers quickened dough
melting death's leathery membrane
like she warmed wax seals on her jam jars
filling the world with my dread children.

Migration Patterns

Jordan Guevara



We were cradled in our seats, swaying along the mechanical current of the rails. Outside, the city was padded by the soft light of the sunset, and we were only about three and a half miles from our stop.

I looked down at my shoulder, at my body's involuntary motion. Our shoulders were five to nine centimeters apart, depending on which direction we were swaying. It was a total of one hour and twenty-seven minutes between her house and where we wanted to be.

I'd taken this route before, but then, in the dusk, it was entirely unfamiliar. The seat next to me was an ineffable presence, a scent like a shot of espresso, a smile like the PCH in the summer. Her name is June. Because it was her, I found it impossible to sit still, my hands pinching at disparate points of my sleeve, pants, socks, glasses, anything within reach. It was the type of afternoon to fall asleep to, but not with her. Not with this swaying. Not with that face. I was trying, desperately, to disguise this as a routine trip on the red line.

"We're only a few miles away," I said in a tone that suggested that I was used to traveling with cute girls. I tried to inch closer to her, but the train executed a devious turn, and my attempt at flirting was rewarded with a collision and an apologetic, "Whoops." She smirked, fully aware of the gesture. I retreated into the confines of my seat.

June was part of our group of accelerated Junior High Scholars of the Future, a program designed to promote the research of precocious kids that would otherwise be subject to swirlies and your cookie-cutter humiliation. But as it turns out, we could not outrun our predetermined fate, and the swirlies were only encapsulated with further insults regarding our specific field of research.

Really, the only benefit of this program was that the two of us shared mostly the same schedule, joined at the hip as far as our academic counselor was concerned. Biology. Algebra. But our English class was where the magic happened, where, out of all our other classes, we sat side by side, where I was free to pass as many notes and make as many witty comments as the hour and fifteen minutes allotted.

"Why don't you ever talk to me in class?" she asked.

I compiled the answer quickly, a simple formula of her voice and her face and my developing hormones equating to copious amounts of sweat and stuttering.

"I don't like to miss out on anything important," I replied, my voice wavering like a buoy jostled in the sea.

She smiled, acknowledging the fact that I was either lying or honestly that

much of a nerd.

“What was the name of that book again?” she asked, jumping off that nerve-racking topic.

“Oh,” I said emphatically, “*Weston’s Guide to the Migratory Patterns of the California Grey Whale*.” I enunciated “migratory” like a spelling bee finalist.

We got to our stop before I could discuss the current research on the grays, before she could tell me more about her own expertise on the green sea turtle, before I could hear more of her voice as I sat on the train beside her, swaying.

We gathered our bearings as we exited the train, but nothing looked familiar to me. Something changed. I had thought it was a beeline straight from one point to the other. Over the last few months, since the last time I had been here, they must have updated the stations on the line. I squinted into the sunset, into the buildings that looked familiar yet foreign from this perspective, into the streets that ebbed and flowed in too many directions. I was lost.

“Come on,” she said, already taking steps toward somewhere. “I think I know where we’re at.”

She swung her head from side to side, looking at street signs in a way that I understood as her also being lost but too adventurous to give a shit.

“Listen,” I said, “We should probably go back up and get off on 6th. It’s almost dark and I don’t want to get mugged.”

“Who’s going to mug you out here? What are they going to take, your pen?”

I padded my shirt pocket to make sure my pen was still there.

She went ahead, making lefts and rights and generally ignoring my cautionary advice.

The city at dusk is full of apathetic chaos. The sunset dreams itself to sleep, washed out by the night and the coastal mist, but the city is still charging through. Nine-to-fivers on their way home, dreary yet determined, the day following them home and keeping them irate and frustrated by everyone surrounding them, all unified by exhaustion. Buses stop and start in their asthmatic gasping, cars rumble through the swamp of congestion. Sirens. Horns. The bums strolling the sidewalks, singing, yelling, conversing with themselves and their imaginary selves, making sense of the chaos, mimicking life itself like a minstrel performance. We hiked through the sensory havoc; we dodged bicyclists, hordes of pigeons flying through, the immovable river of bodies on the sidewalks. The city was giving me every reason to reach out and hold June’s hand.

“We’re here,” she says with a triumphant smile. I gawked a little at her brazen posture, at the fact that she was here with me looking for the most important book that I had lost.

We head inside, and the musky scent of old books is warming.

“Look,” she said in a heavy whisper, “Duncan’s here.”

Something sharp flared up in my chest.

Duncan was sitting on a bench between two shelves, partly hidden between stacks of books while scanning through one close to his face like a smug bastard. June walked toward him, and I trudged about three meters behind her.

“June,” he said, looking up cooly, “I didn’t know you came in.”

He knew. For all I knew, that book he was “reading” was upside down and was only a thinly veiled attempt at looking smart.

Duncan was the school’s resident cool guy. I wished he had been some sort of archetype from *The Breakfast Club*, but of course I wouldn’t be allowed that luxury in a rival. He combined horn-rimmed glasses with cuffed jeans, a band shirt with a double-breasted cardigan, the face of an all-star athlete with the sensitivity of a poet. He was also the exemplary member of the Junior High Scholars of the Future. The face they used on the brochures that they passed out to our parents. What a prick.

“What are you reading?” June asked, hopelessly dreamy-eyed.

“Dr. Seuss,” Duncan replied, maintaining a coy smile that transformed into a shit-eating grin when he turned to look at me. June let out a conspicuous laugh and picked up one of the books in the stack next to him. She began thumbing through it, trying to find a point of conversation.

“No. For real, Duncan, are you reading all of these?” she continued.

“Well, I’m actually here trying to find a few books on the behaviors of the California sea gull. I know that’s not exactly my area of expertise, but I thought I’d try my hand at something so I don’t look like an ignoramus on our trip tomorrow,” he said, adjusting the glasses sitting on the well-crafted bridge of his nose.

The next day was our first field trip of the year, a whale watching tour along the coastline. And apparently, someone was now going to be on that boat watching the dumbass birds flying around instead of watching out for the California gray whale like they’re supposed to on a whale watching cruise.

June had already found a seat on the other side of the stack, still flipping through the pages with an imprecise directive. I was still standing there, approximately two and a half meters from both of them or 92 million miles away depending on which distance you calculated, leaning on the shelf looking helplessly at the nature guides and the covers of pandas and desert foxes aligning the row. Duncan continued his rant about his “novice inquiries,” and she ate it up like feeding time at Sea World.

I remembered I had come here for something, something that I had lost. I spun in the opposite direction and immediately made a U-turn to the other side of the shelf, still in range of the bashful giggling and the pretentious bullshit that prompted it.

I muttered letters, authors, marine mammal species, while looking for *Weston’s*

Guide to the Migratory Patterns of the California Gray Whale.

There it was. Tucked away from the sea gulls and the turtles and the city streets. I picked it up and stared at the cover, identical to the one I remembered having ever since I could remember. I turned to page seven. In bold, the words, “The Female and Her Calf,” and underneath it the picture of a mother gray with her calf at her side, heading south toward the lagoons of Baja, California, where she would help her calf color in the picture and he would smear it with every color except gray and at night she would tell him a story about a baby beluga and when he got older he would focus his studies on the species even long after she had left the home of the warm lagoon.

I thought about where my old copy was at this point. The last time I had seen it, it was accidentally abandoned in the back seat of mom’s sedan. I wondered what part of the country it might be in now. A landlocked state without any marine life? Maybe the East Coast, with entirely different species, entirely new breeds made superior through evolution that made this guide obsolete?

I don’t even remember the story of the baby beluga anymore.

I didn’t even know if the book was still in the back seat. My eyes swelled hot and I ran away from that bookstore.

I took the train back home. Back to where I would find my dad on his way out with his drinking buddies, giving me an empty, oceanic smile as compensation before he left. Back to my little sister who’d flip precociously through books about stars and planets and ask me for help pronouncing nebulas, who’d never ask about mom because she was too young. Back to a refrigerator with fast-food leftovers and bologna and coke. Back to the living room that would freeze over at night. Back to a home so far away from that warm lagoon we once thought we’d never leave.

The next day I woke up with new resolve. I’d get on the boat and I’d see the whales migrating south like they’re supposed to.

We were at the pier, about to board the *S.S. Melville*; apparently Captain Jim Shore had a sense of irony brought about by the boredom of ferrying a bunch of restless brats for two decades. I had made it my imperative to stay away from June today, and, it goes without saying, Duncan as well. The Future Power Couple of the Junior High Scholars, I thought. The Jay-Z and Beyonce of our middle school.

The boat was way too crowded to successfully focus on spotting whales. Fat boys in the galley snack bar who were more concerned about not getting seasick. Burly jocks in the galley with them, making sure they knew they were the fat boys and laughing at them with the other jocks. Rambunctious punks stomping up and down the stairs, pulling on levers and scribbling dicks on the sides of every surface. The pre-teen girls romanticizing the trip, translating it into a whimsical

voyage along the Mediterranean and conjuring fantastic scenarios as they look out the port side and see the distant cranes and polluted waters of the docks. The already exhausted teachers who wished the galley had an open bar. This was no place to conduct research.

I had tried to ignore the decibel level of the boat, and I scanned the waves mechanically, alone on the starboard side of this floating circus. Wavy ribbons of light stretched through the clouds. The water looked like a tattered flag still holding on against the wind.

A few hours went by. There were still no whales. There were a lot of fucking birds, though. I stood there, leaning against the rust-riddled railing, scanning inward for everything I knew about these migration patterns. Our exact location. The exact day. The exact temperature of the water. I forgot exactly where they would be. *Weston's Guide* always had a chart to track the distance of their yearly migration and where and when you would spot them depending on all those variables, a chart that my family once analyzed in unison when we went on our yearly trips, a chart that confirmed its accuracy when the four of us would go nuts at every spotting. But now I was adrift in possibilities with no compass to point toward an answer.

"There you are," an encroaching voice said behind me.

I turned around to look. Then I turned around and looked back at the ocean, wide-eyed and no longer looking for anything in particular.

"Hey," I replied, feeling the immediate dampness on my collar.

I knew June had been on the boat, somewhere, but I didn't expect her to find me out here. Maybe somewhere in the galley or on the upper observation deck. But not here. Just the two of us.

"Have you found any grays yet?" she asked.

I shook my head softly.

"Where's Duncan?" I retorted.

She rolled her eyes and smiled at my unconcealed jealousy.

"Here," she said, fishing out something from her backpack. "I saw you leave this on the floor before you threw your tantrum and left me at the bookstore."

I looked down to see the flukes of the breaching whale on the cover of *Weston's Guide to the Migratory Patterns of the California Gray Whale*. Who the hell was this person? With the gall to make me fall in love with her, to drive me into an insatiable need for her scent wafting by, to bask in that ferociously playful smile, to hand me a book that sent me floating along a crest to the warm sands of adolescent infatuation. "I love you" perled in my throat, although I think I was still too young to understand what that meant.

"Th...thanks," I said.

She scuttled to my side, our shoulders grazing as she opened the book to the

table of contents.

“Let’s see if this’ll help,” she said.

I instinctively flipped to the chart in the back. June craned her neck trying to make sense of the diagrams and numbers. I guided her eyes by tracking my own process with my finger on the page. But we had come too soon. The pod of grays was still further north; they were making their way past the British Columbia coast, according to the chart. Approximately 1,300 miles away from our overcrowded boat sailing through a polluted shoreline. I never saw the gray whales that year. But the whales didn’t really matter now that June was leaning on the railing beside me, the two of us looking for something that was too far away to even bother with.

The trip ended without any sightings, although the rest of the people on board seemed to have enjoyed whatever else they had been doing. We were waiting at the dock of the pier as the teachers and chaperones were organizing the chaos of middle schoolers being released from a floating cage for nine hours. The coastal sun was dimming into night.

“Hey,” June said, putting a hand on my elbow, “There’s a nest not too far from here.”

“A nest of what? I’m sick of looking at the sea gulls.”

“Why would I want to look at a gull nest?” she asked, raising an eyebrow and scowling in slight disgust. “I’m talking about a sea turtle nest.”

How could I have forgotten that? Between my own delusions and fantasies and the bookstore and Duncan and his stack of upside down books, I had forgotten that she had her own fascination, one that she was opening the door for me to venture into. We ditched the class, and she led the way. We walked side by side, skipping through the uneven path of the beach.

“Here we are,” she said, nestling herself in the sand and gently pulling me to a place beside her.

“You know,” she continued, “No one actually knows how the turtles get here. They go from different foraging sites thousands of kilometers away, but they always wind up at specific spots year after year.”

“So how do they navigate around the open water, then?”

“I don’t know. They just wander, I guess. Just going by instinct. I don’t know if they even keep track of distances most of the time.”

I looked at her with glassy-eyed incomprehension.

“They just wander,” I repeated softly.

We waited for the pink dusk to slide into darkness. But it wasn’t cold on the shore like it normally is at night. The breakers coming in lapped softly down the coast. The clouds cleared and the stars hiccupped light in the early night sky. June slid her hand over mine. Her hand was warm. We had stopped moving; the two of

us, our hands stacked over each other's on the sand, our bodies peacefully inert. The moonlight stroking her face. Her legs glowing with the refracted white sea foam.

The turtles came gliding onto the beach, synchronized in their scuttling. They were emeralds in that dim white light as they built their nests in the sand. The turtles laid their eggs and covered them in loose mounds, heading back into the sea and leaving June and I on the beach like a pair of newly minted guardians. There was an impending blackness on the horizon where the sky and ocean met, a storm probably. But it was just the two of us there, and that night, among the crests of the breakers and the turtles and their eggs and June radiant in the dim light, I didn't feel lonely.



The Offering



Omsiladi Beach

Kirk Sever



The woman across from me, you see her? Donna. You see the way she stares, blank eyes, the way she rearranges her silverware? This is not the date I had planned. I had seen something different. But I am here. Can you taste a bitter green? Are you American, too? This salad reminds me of something, these bitter greens, the sort you could forage from piles of discarded weeds. The restaurant has put too much dressing on the greens. Like a peasant or farm girl who applies garish makeup the day of her wedding, so the dressing tries to hide the natural musk of these weeds.

I say weeds, but we can all agree that these plants were grown on purpose and sold at ten times their value.

As children we used to pick these, especially the purslane, but also the clovers, the lamb's ears, and the dandelion greens. They were what our moms fed us. Now I pay for this. It is an appetizer.

The woman across from me keeps smiling my way. Donna. I hope she likes her salad. The way the restaurant overdresses the weeds says everything I could ever hope to say about America.

We would pick the weeds on our way home from the beach. My brother, Aram, knew which plants were edible. We would snack on the bitter greens as we walked home, sun-burned, in the dark.

We were seldom at the beach for fun. Money needed to be made. Aram showed us the way to do it, the way to get jobs from the beach manager. We were given tubes of lotion and spray bottles and we ran from one umbrella to the next, offering spritzes to the guests. Sometimes they would tip us, but usually not. If they tipped us it would be ten *centimes*, just enough to buy a caramel. I never bought caramel, but from time to time Aram, who always made the most tips, would buy us a caramel to split.

We would spritz, but the real money came from rubbing lotion on the beach patrons.

Why do I ponder this now, when I am with this woman, who, unlike a peasant or farm girl, is actually made more beautiful by makeup and gold bracelets?

Donna says to me, "What're you thinking about?"

"What, me?" I say, looking around, trying to be funny. Only I laugh.

“You keep drifting away.”

“You see this leaf in my salad?” I sound hostile. It’s okay. I continue, “We used to pick these, when I was a kid. Eat them. But when I first came to America, I learned these were weeds. My first job was picking these and putting them in a trash can.”

“Is that arugula?”

“Dandelion. If I ate them, the Mexicans made fun of me. I was a gardener. So I ate what they did. Corn tortillas with fatty meats. Chorizo, tendons, stomach. You know, now that I think of this subject, the Mexican food reminds me of my mother’s cooking. Believe it or not, when I hear a lawnmower or smell cut grass I see my mom.”

“Oh,” she says as she chews on the dandelion. “It’s bitter.”

“My mom would boil them for a few minutes. Blanche out the bitter flavor. But we would eat them raw on our way home from the beach. I once won a raffle.”

“You did?”

The fat men with the moles, with the carpeted backs, they were the ones who wanted lotion. Looking back, I can’t tell you if they were perverts. One thing is certain, I would never ask a ten year old boy to rub lotion on my back. Some liked it too much. They would grunt and urge us to rub harder. I remember the lather on their backs. Some would even get erect. Years later it came out that Aram would give some of these men pleasure in the striped, private tents.

I tried to lotion only the upper back and when the men would say things like, “Aren’t you hot in all this sun,” or, “My buttocks have tension,” I would change the subject. “Let me bring you a beer,” I would say, “To relax you.”

We also ferried buckets of beer and rose-colored wine to those who paid to lie under umbrellas in the black and white sand. I would suck a piece of ice – forbidden – and trudge barefoot over the hot sand from one umbrella to the next. The umbrellas were as colorful as the sails of the boats that moved slowly across the gentle white sea.

I tell Donna, “I always wanted to sail in one of those boats, but when I finally did, it was in one of the Great Lakes, when I went to school to Chicago. I was the oldest of my classmates, so they expected me to pay the complete sailing fee.”

“Was it cold?”

“Very cold. Frigid.”

“My dad,” she says, “used to take one of us, me or my brothers, and we would sail a small boat around the marina.”

“Here?”

“No, down south.” The waiter clears her plate, and she says, “Oh, thanks.” One

thing I have in common with Americans is I know how to be polite. You don't see this in all cultures.

The Lebanese were like snarly dogs, but they gave decent tips. The Germans were cold and to the point; actually some were quite kind – I'm sure I'm mixing the real Germans up with the Germans in films. Come to think of it, I didn't mind the Germans at all because they had the least hair on their backs. We would all want to bring cucumber water to the American women, especially the red headed ones, they were exotic. The French were impolite and entitled. I do not say any of this to my dinner guest because I understand these impressions to be racist. The Greeks talked the most.

We are at that point in the evening. It is that time between the appetizer and the main course, in which I need to decide whether or not I want to take this woman home with me. She does not seem detached but neither does she appear interested. Our mutual friend had set up this date, and, in spite of my drifting thoughts, this woman has not – it seems – given up on me. Should I take her home? Do I want to see her naked legs? I cannot decide. This makes me nervous. Am I impotent? It has been a while since I have been with a woman, though I pleasure myself on a somewhat regular basis. About twice a week.

I decide that I will try to be a livelier dinner companion. I will at least try to keep Donna's interest up. I ask her about herself.

Donna gives me stories about life in a place called Modesto. She likes talking about this time, a moment before her parents became rich, even though this moment lasted only nine years. Her stories...they are borrowed. They are heirlooms. They are the stories you make up about yourself after staring at photographs from a time out of memory. She talks of taking the bus to school. Of her dog. Of picking flowers on the hill near her apartment. Her brother was retarded. Things like that.

But I drift to Omsiladi Beach. I think I mentioned that the sand was black and white. Not exactly. The beaches of my childhood were white. All beaches were white. White sand led to the white reflection of the sun on endless water. It was only at the beach resorts where you would find black and white sand mixed together. Only the Americans complained in their broken French, "The sand gets my clothes black."

Everyone knows the sand at these places gets the clothes black. The Algerians spread charcoal across the sand every morning. This is the only way to keep flies away. If you arrived in the morning, in fact, you would see the sand colored completely black from the freshly spread ashes, and the water blue. By noon, due

to the footsteps of patrons and workers kneading the charcoal into the sand – and add a little help from the afternoon wind – the sand would be swirls of black and white. The French thought this to be magnificent, a sign of luxury. Charcoal on towels and bikinis was, to the French, a mark of privilege.

“So you haven’t been there?” she says.

Vaguely, I am aware that I am a participant in a conversation.

“No,” I say, “But I would like to go, if for no other reason than to see the setting of your pastoral childhood.”

“Do you like the wine?”

“It’s wonderful,” I say, but I understand what she means. I have barely touched the glass.

I lift the glass and say, “To Modesto.”

We drink the wine, an American wine, a bloated wine tasting of tar. I cannot believe that I actually enjoy this wine. A decade ago I would have spit this on the ground.

She pries away the fish’s skin with her fork. “Now you tell me something about you.”

This is the time to break into Donna’s heart, so I tell her about my mother’s cooking. Even as I talk, however, I feel a heavy swell of melancholy, so after a minute of recounting stew and garlic, I tell Donna instead about the scorpions that we used to clean off the beach.

The company who managed the beach, the very same who had fenced in the beach, who had built canopies, had bought umbrellas, and had even jettied off both ends of the sandy expanse, had also renamed Omsiladi Beach to something colonial, like The South Parisian, I forget. But I do not forget what my friends and I called the place: Scorpion Beach. This was because the charcoal which kept flies off the beach was the very same ingredient that seemed to attract scorpions at night. Maybe charcoaled sand retains more heat at night, I don’t know.

I tell Donna, “My friends and I, we would get to the gate before the sun came up, and the manager would give us old laundry bags. Whoever brought back the most scorpions would get a *franc*. Many stopped doing this because my brother, Aram, would always bring back the most. That is because I gave Aram my scorpions and he and I would split the *franc*. Eventually the manager had to change the rules. He started paying us one *centime* per ten scorpions to motivate us all to hunt.”

“Oh my god, how strange. Did anyone ever get stung?”

“Of course. We got stung all the time,” I say. “They pinch you and hang on and jab you. But you can’t kill them otherwise the manager doesn’t count them. He doesn’t pay for dead scorpions.”

“How miserable.”

“It feels like a hornet’s sting.”

The waiter asks if we want more wine. I say, “Yes, please.”

Donna says, “I don’t think so, I have an early morning.”

“Then I’m okay, too,” I say.

I had wanted to tell Donna something else, but she was already somewhere in her car or maybe home. My car pushes through the rain. Nothing on the radio holds my interest, so I drive to the pelting sounds of the water cleansing the dust from the hood.

I call Aram after I finally remember what I had wanted to say to Donna. This is later that night. This is after I have removed two glasses and a half of Scotch from this world. I listen to the ringing in the receiver of my phone.

“Hello,” a man’s voice says. I have forgotten what I am doing.

“It’s me,” I say.

“I know it’s you,” the man says.

I recognize Aram’s voice and I remember why I have called. We speak in our colloquial French, the same we have been speaking in since I was born.

“I was thinking about you tonight.”

Aram says, “That’s funny, I was thinking about you, too.”

“You first.”

“Mom called out to me, she woke me.”

Aram often hears from our mother, who is dead. I do not mind this. In fact, I believe in this sort of spiritual intervention.

“What did she say?” I ask.

“She told me that she lives in the souls of insects.”

“What does that mean?”

“You know, I asked her that very question,” says Aram, “She said, it means I can catch you when you do something stupid, so behave yourself.”

“Have you been misbehaving?” I say.

“No, I’ve been good. Just work. All I do is work.”

“Good,” I say.

“Did you call to say hi, or did you just miss me? Did I forget your birthday?”

“I had something to say, something about Scorpion Beach.”

Aram does not speak. Maybe he is waiting for me to complete my thought. More likely, thoughts of our childhood give him pause.

“Remember,” I say, “Remember what we would do with the scorpions?”

“Yes,” Aram says. He fakes a laugh.

I laugh too.

“I’ve got to go,” he says, “I’m exhausted.”

Aram was in charge of burning the scorpions. I helped him do that for about a year. We would empty the laundry bags over a charcoal fire. Some would run out of the fire, their stingers smoking. We would laugh and flick the runaways back into the flames. The scorpions would pop and crackle as the fluid inside their carapaces boiled. The stingers opened like popping corn. Bent car antennas were perfect for fishing out the cooked scorpions. Many were charred black, but some scorpions were toasted perfectly and tasted of fish and hazelnuts.

The resort manager approved of this. He wanted the creatures executed.

Soon, however, there were few scorpions on the beach. We made less money from our scorpion hunts, and the manager rejoiced that someday there might be no scorpions left to sting the beach patrons.

That is when we stopped eating the scorpions. Their extinction would bankrupt us. Instead of pouring the scorpions over the coals, Aram would hide the nervous laundry sack behind a trash barrel. After sunset, once the beach was empty of clientele, once the last oil lamp had been extinguished, Aram and I would carefully distribute the scorpions across the beach. This is why we got fired.

I do something stupid. After Aram hangs up I call Donna’s number. You know how it is. You have an idea in a Scotch-fuzzed moment and the idea is incredible. You call her number and she answers, half asleep. You tell her about the scorpions and she asks you what time it is.

After you hang up you want to suffocate yourself, somehow to die. You want to split your body with a knife or do something, anything, that will return you to your childhood. Instead, you make mint tea and take a walk in the rain.



Characters

HARRISON, early 30's

HARRIET, late 60's

HARRY, late 60's

(LIGHTS UP)

SCENE I

(Saturday night, Harriet cooking in the kitchen, Harrison's over for dinner, he's setting the table)

HARRIET What do you mean you tied her to the bedpost?

HARRISON I tied her to the bedpost! I just got fed up and I did what any normal human being would do.

HARRIET You promised you wouldn't do that anymore.

HARRISON It was fantastic!

HARRIET What have I done?

HARRISON You haven't done anything. I did, Mother!

HARRIET But that's not what I meant. You idiot!

HARRISON Don't act innocent with me. This reminds me of the time you told Aunt Lucy to put peanuts in the marinara sauce. Remember?

HARRIET When! What? You were just a kid then.

HARRISON I was nine years old and I overheard everything. You told her to grind it and add it to the sauce and that he would never know what hit him.

HARRIET Ohhhh... I remember. I know why. You misunderstood. He loved peanuts and he couldn't eat them raw. I merely suggested... ahh... That's all.

HARRISON I remember it clearly, mom. Her arm was in a cast that day, her face was all bruised up and she wouldn't stop crying. You called him a bastard.

HARRIET Noooo. Da...don't... You see...she accidently tripped on a toy or something in the kitchen. Yeah, that's what happened. She fell and broke her arm.

HARRISON Remember the tooth paste? Mom, you're a good lady.

HARRIET First the peanuts in the sauce bit and then the tooth paste bit? That's ridiculous. What's next? Milk?

HARRISON What milk?

HARRIET I'm just adding bizarre to your ludicrous accusations.

HARRISON What milk, mother?

HARRIET Who said anything about any milk?

HARRISON You did. Just now.

HARRIET No, I didn't.

HARRISON Dad likes milk. He used to drink it all the time until...

HARRIET Pass me the big pot underneath the sink. He still does.

HARRISON Where is dad? Tied to the bedpost?

HARRIET He's upstairs taking a nap before dinner. *(Gives Harrison a dirty look and carefully reaches over for a paring knife)*

HARRISON What are we having for dinner?

HARRIET Chicken.

HARRISON Isn't dad usually up at this hour with a martini, waiting for

dinner?

HARRIET Did you just leave her tied up like that?

HARRISON He never sleeps in this late. She wouldn't shut up so...uuuhhh...ya!

HARRIET Yes he does. I hope you left her something to eat.

HARRISON I'm going out for a smoke. *(Harrison walks off stage)*

HARRIET *(She whispers to herself)* Just like his father.

SCENE II

(Harriet still cooking away. Harry casually walks through the kitchen door with a martini glass in his hand)

HARRY I heard voices? Are you talking to yourself again?

HARRIET What?

HARRY I said, I heard a man's voice.

HARRIET Where is the glass?

HARRY Here it is.

HARRIET Not this one!

HARRY You mean the glass of milk?

HARRIET YES!

HARRY Oh, I dropped it on the floor by mistake. I left the glass on the nightstand.

HARRIET You left the carpet soaking wet all this time? I can't believe it. Typical!

HARRY No. Now wait a minute. I threw your bathrobe on top of it and stepped on it a few times. It did the trick, you know. The floor is as good as ever. Cheers! *(Winks at Harriet, then takes a sip)*

from his glass)

HARRIET You're the one who wants to drink a glass of milk before naptime. Just say when and you know how the rest goes.

HARRY I spilled it, okay? It was an accident. Next time you can hold my hand while I drink the damn thing.

HARRIET Sometimes it would be easier for the both of us if I...

HARRY Try it!

(Harrison walks back on stage, surprised to see his father sitting at the table with a martini glass)

HARRISON Hey dad! How was your nap?

HARRY I couldn't sleep. I accidentally dropped the damn milk on the floor and your mother is on my case about it.

HARRISON What milk? Hey, I found this machete in the bushes by the door. I've never seen this before. What's it doing there?

HARRY WOW! This one is really nice and shiny. It's positively not one of mine. I don't know how it got there, maybe the gardener...?

HARRISON Mom? What do you know about this sharp blade?

HARRIET Ohhhh, which blade is that dear?

HARRY I need another drink. Knowing your mother, she was probably shaving her legs with it. *(Laughs, walks off stage)*

HARRISON Why a machete, mom?

HARRIET The stupid bird wouldn't stop talking so I left the cage door open and he flew out.

HARRISON Larry? Oh shit! Just like her. She wouldn't shut up either.

HARRIET I know...I know. He was watching me with his beady little eyes and I didn't appreciate him repeating everything I said. He was the talker, alright.

HARRISON Why do you think I tied her to the bedpost? She did the same thing. She repeated everything I said.

HARRIET I did manage to pluck a couple of his beautiful feathers before letting him loose. (*She points to a vase full of feathers on the dining table*) He sure was pretty.

HARRISON You said you plucked only a couple of feathers mom.

HARRIET I hate to disappoint your father. I try to please him, but sometimes he's not all together. He's worse than before, especially now that he's losing a couple of his marbles.

HARRISON What are you talking about???

HARRIET Sometimes he calls me LARRY.

HARRISON That's not a few feathers?

HARRIET Aren't they beautiful?

HARRISON I forgot to tell you. I ran into Aunt Lucy yesterday. Did you know she went to the hospital last week? She had a broken nose.

HARRIET Why, sure, you don't say. I hope she's okay.

HARRISON She told me, you finally gave her that bottle of peanut oil you've been promising to give her.

HARRIET Oh no. A broken nose? Are you sure???

HARRISON MOM!

HARRIET What now?

HARRISON You had lunch with her and you gave her the oil.

HARRIET Yeah, so what? Is that a crime?

HARRISON No, but...

HARRIET No, but nothing. She's been asking for the oil for a while now and I keep forgetting. Yesterday was the perfect opportunity. Now, set the table.

HARRISON Don't act so innocent with me.

SCENE III

(Harry walks back on stage with a disgusted look on his face. He is holding a small bundle wrapped in aluminum foil)

HARRISON Dad?

HARRIET What's wrong? Are we out of olives again?

HARRISON DAD! What's wrong?

HARRIET I told you he's been acting weird lately.

HARRY I was looking for more olives under the bar and instead, I found this behind the bottles. *(He peels the aluminum back)*

HARRISON What is it? It smells. Oh shit!

HARRIET Don't air it out in here.

HARRY It's Larry! His head has been chopped off. This is all that's left of him.

HARRISON I thought you told me you had to let him go.

HARRY He was my friend. He was my drinking buddy.

HARRIET I told him to be quiet and he wouldn't shut up. So I let him go. *(Still holding the paring knife)*

(LIGHTS OUT)

Pacifica Nervosa

Shetachai Chatchoomsai



Like Hansel and Gretel,
I eat a house to survive
abandonment.
I keep my family alive
on the ridged rugae.

The week of Qingming,
I ask the crude Venice sun
to space my womb:

my grandparents' persimmons preserved,
my mom's magnolia entwined with dad's dogbane,
my brother's cherry blossoms branching –
I arrange buds beneath the celiac silt,
hands holding wet earth
while muddied feet falter,
carrying them closer.

porcelain lungs

Khiem Nguyen



candlelit insignia sears skin
wax seethe soft breasts fingertips

tickle quiet quiver zip tie wrists
diaphragm spaz helpless safety

succulent lips fervent ferocity
dizzy strange soothe insanity

porcelain lungs shake shatter
pieces piercing euphoric cancer

sugar pill placebo cure fictitious
sickness catastrophic electric rush

synapses trigger fire shimmer pulse
stellar bliss straitjacket sanctuary

celestial hammock spread among
azure auroras blossoming sky

depart body levitate above
glimmer miraculous dusk niagara

Postpartum Mestiza

Shetachai Chatchoomsai

1.

You're a princess, roped,
your eyes seek your daughter's eyes beneath the womb,
pinned down on the stone slab.
Moonlight brightens your daughter's skin,
lips purple & unyielding.

2.

Being a teller is not so bad, your mother says, for a woman like you.
You could be a designer, a make-up artist, you say,
hands throwing out stillness in the room.
Four years I'll give you, she says, her hands bound beneath a book.

3.

You dream, laying your head on your mother's back
rubbing her trunk legs with hot balms.
Eavesdropping her bowels, your limbs shrink into buds,
your brain a rope of nerves,
your vagina a slit of skins.
Unwrapped from vulvae,
there's only your shrill cry, *knowledge* you ask.

4.

Your English professor says the new Mestiza must master a fluidity of cultural
intersection
& self-contradiction. The critique of the essay it glares under sunlight,
red lines striking through your sentences,
your hands clutching the margins,
the faith of you being a prophet & your daughter a messiah born to set us free.

5.

You stand up on your mother's body laid down on the sea.
Lifting your daughter up,
you scream, lungs holding on the horizon.

6.

Darkness is a stranger you invite inside.
You don't expect it to stay for dinner with your daughter.
You hope it'd keep you full & shield your eyes from the Sun.
Rarely have you drawn out tears to cling on the red sheen on your nails.
When you drop your daughter off at school,
your eyes lurk around every corner.
It never leaves.

7.

Your mother left you to Mexico, her home.
You've wished her well, like waterfall shedding streams of the far cliff.
There's no way, you know, to leave your home
where you could never speak
or run free.
Nowhere to return, either,
not when the sky is black & the blue forsaking
where buildings are high & the crosswalk below you
is shaking.

8.

One morning, your daughter hands a form for you to sign,
the word *Maturation* buzzes like a bee on your mouth-roof.
You're a high school teacher & she's thirteen,
you can never let her go.
No form to hold you together in the darkness
that gazes & points at your daughter.
You'd run across the borders for her, for your mother to see,
breathe fires to light up countries,
blind the Sun with your arms,
burn down cities to ashes,
to the scorched, even plain,
your skin ablaze,
bursting into the wind of dusts,
into a hurricane, rain, into mist
above the ground on which
every she will rise.

Recipe

Meagan Avila

I know a mother to three.

A baker,
whisking eggs and icing cakes
washing spoons, pans.
Her hands crack.

After children's eyes have surrendered to heaviness
and heads rest on dishtowel pillows,
she writes poetry,
star-crossed rendezvous.

They've never been read aloud,
but they exist,
scribbled discreetly
on the back of a chocolate mousse recipe
in between deliveries and
feeding her children cake.

The Sea Desires Storms

Chuck Von Nordheim

She makes an aquarium of her skin.
Olive ink for kelp forests, purple ink
for the deep places unexplored by men.
Body art and body part always in sync:
arms stand-in for a lobster's mandible,
pink areolae for a squid's knowing eyes.
She seeks one who makes his dreams tangible
through tattoo mutation, who disguises
weak flesh with a turbulent sky's whirled
vortex of dark cloud backlit by gray moon.
She aches for lightning to be unfurled,
for his bright bolt to sizzle in her lagoon.

But while she waits for her heaven to appear,
she continues adding new paint to her veneer.



Leg Monster

The Sill

Sidonie Tise



I was looking out the window and staring down at the street, which looked to be made entirely of water, running dark and quick, and in the middle of it stood Pseudo, tall and seeming not to mind, waving up at me and calling, “Someone left the faucet on!”

I touched the back of my head self-consciously, then remembered that I was no longer a child and not everything was my fault. There were silver fish leaping in the street, and Pseudo stooped and caught one of them in her hat. I laughed, gripping the windowsill, trying not to fall out, and she looked up at me, triumphant, grinning.

“Come down!” she called.

“Now?” I called back, uncertain.

She held out her arms. “What better time is there?”

There was no better time. My eyes wandered up and away from Pseudo, whose outstretched arms held all the night sky above her like a cape. The streetlights streamed wet and yellow on the sidewalks, and already I could hear the city as it came to life in the muffled rush of curtains going up, the conversations just beginning over the first round of drinks, and in that moment I was seized. My blood hummed in response, and my grip on the sill tightened. Down below I saw Pseudo grin a little wider. She could hear it too, the dance-steps going restless up the boulevards and along the avenues amidst the jazz and purr of voices.

“Isn’t this what you want?” Pseudo said, not needing to raise her voice for me to hear. I teetered on the edge. My fingers remained frozen on the sill, and I stared out, transfixed by the night and all the certain and uncertain wonder of a low blue sky without stars. Beyond the window, there waited for me a parade through the underworld, a place where I could live forever and never see another morning.

A shiver went through me. My fingers tensed on the sill, and I closed my eyes.

Then I was out. I met Pseudo in the flooded street and she grinned down at me, with a squeeze of my shoulder, as though genuinely sorry that my quiet evening of staring out the window, looking for the stars, had been interrupted. Then we were off, following the ribbon of water that ran up the street. We hailed a cab and it came sloshing toward us, water running off its doors as they swung open and we climbed in. Away from the flat shadows of my room I felt more real, my blood pounding across the back of my hands. Pseudo was talking but I wasn’t really hearing her; it was all the high talk she did when she was feeling thrilled and edgy.

What did she want this time? To blow up the bank, to rob the mayor in his own house, to destroy all the priceless works of art in the museum? It was all the usual, but to see what she really wanted when she got the gang rounded up at the club was another thing.

“What do you think, Bones?” She turned to me suddenly.

“Me?” I said, startled as always by the use of her name for me.

“Who else?” Pseudo said, and laughed.

“It’s like a dream,” I said, and turned to stare back out the window at the city running alongside us. The lights were all blurring together, and when I squinted, my eyes focused on my own reflection on the inside of the window, sliding quickly past all the whirl and color going on beyond it. I thought how difficult it was to look at Pseudo, so tall I had to crane my head back to see her, and so subtle and dynamic that she seemed different every time, even though she was dressed as always in the same black suit, so matte and utterly without shine that it sucked me in every time.

“You know what you might like to do tonight?” she asked, drawing me away from the window.

But I just smiled and shrugged. She was asking but it was only as a formality; she had all the answers, the hundred and one ways to stave off boredom. We were always in the city, but we never did the same thing twice: there were nights at the opera, where we sat in a box so high it made me dizzy, and endless drinks and dancing, and sometimes there were robberies and unexpected raids by the police, and then a chase through every highway and byway of the city that might end in a sudden, exhilarating plunge into the darkness under the bridge, the wind whipping up to meet us as we laughed into it, and all the breath was sucked from our lungs.

She had taken me once to the observation tower so we could look out at the sea, frothing and foaming away blackly for a hundred miles out. “Have you ever been in it, on it?” I asked.

But she had only waved her hand, brushing the idea away, and said, “Oh no. Too wet and cold, too deep – too far away! Too hard to get to.”

“But the North Tunnel?” I asked, remembering the only way out of the city, where I had never been.

“Maybe for another night,” she said, just as a cab came gliding smoothly up out of nowhere.

As I remembered this, I pressed my face against the glass and looked up at the windows of the buildings as we passed, but saw no figures craning, waiting. No one was asleep here, and already the streets were heavy with people surging forward in a tide.

The cab pulled up outside the club and stopped, and we got out, pulling our suits

straight. We were both dressed alike in identical tuxedos, but Pseudo looked better in hers, with her towering height. I'd maybe been asleep in mine, as I couldn't remember taking it off, but neither could I recall putting it on. We pushed through the double doors of the club, a big, low-ceilinged place, with a darkly glimmering dance floor and deep red booths. The floor was so dim that I lost my feet at once, and stumbled behind Pseudo as she made her way over to where we always sat.

"Gentlemen. Ladies." She sat down at the booth and I slid in opposite her. The others were all waiting; they too were dressed in identical tuxedos. My eyes watered for a second, making me blink, and in that second they all looked alike, leaning forward with their peaked shoulders and long, narrow faces. "How does this evening find you, my friends?" Pseudo said, spreading her hands. A waiter appeared at her elbow almost at once, and she spoke a word to him out the corner of her mouth. He disappeared, and she went on: "I hope you're all well. Let's have some fun tonight, shall we?"

The waiter reappeared, setting drinks down in front of us. Pseudo held her glass in her hand but didn't taste it. I, however, brought the short tumbler to my lips and tipped it back at once. The drink was cold and clear and tasted like nothing, but it warmed the pit of my stomach in a way that made me feel tense and electric.

"Let me grace you with this bit of news," Pseudo said. I watched the faces of the others as she talked, the way they watched her with their narrowed, shining eyes. There was talk of a train, a load of platinum, an absence of guards, no police—"A gem, a real gem of an evening," Pseudo was finishing. She looked over at me. "You agree?"

I nodded, as though I'd been listening intently all the while, and went to take another drink, only to discover that my glass was empty. Pseudo motioned to a waiter, and in an instant my empty glass was replaced by a full one.

"Thank you," I said to no one in particular.

"We've a bit of business to attend to first," Pseudo said, addressing the table at large again. She lowered her voice and they all leaned in except me. I was gliding my drink across the table in slow, smooth circles, watching the trail of condensation it left behind, the way each droplet formed and chased the others closest to it. The movement was soothing in the rising heat and clamor of the club. The air was getting close, and I could hear Pseudo's voice climbing in excitement, but the passage of the glass across the table was without eccentricity. I stroked the trail of droplets it left behind with my hand, and felt the chill settle in my fingers. I felt then how warm it was in the room, how difficult it was to breathe and how nice the coolness felt, and my breath escaped me in a sudden rush. At once Pseudo turned to look at me.

"Sound good to you, Bones?"

I looked up at her. But she was watching me like a hypnotist, and I had to look away. My eyes rested on my hands and, despite the rich amber lights of the club, I found they looked weird and cold and silvery, as if I was still outside in the strange light coming off the water in the street. My hands pressed themselves flat against the table, and I felt I was being pulled deep into the bright metallic depths of Pseudo's eyes, drawn deeper still by magnetic insistence into her chilly core.

I had not yet spoken and Pseudo jumped in, impatient. "You seem unsure," she said, with a quick laugh. "What is it you want?"

My lips pressed together.

"A little magic?"

I looked up quickly. But Pseudo's eyes were no longer on me, and I heard a wet, spluttering sound. I looked down at my glass, and found that a tiny silver fish was darting around inside it, tossing up little droplets with its quick, flickering tail. I opened my mouth to speak, and as I did, Pseudo reached forward. I saw her long, gloved hand seize the glass and bring it up to her face, where she tipped the entire contents down her throat. She swallowed, and set the empty glass back down.

She raised her eyebrows.

"I don't think so," I said faintly.

"No?" Pseudo said, keeping her voice light.

"Maybe not," I whispered.

They were all staring at me, and I was at a loss. I knew I wanted something, but it was hard to say exactly what. It was something like wanting to take a hot bath and get into clean sheets, to hear someone reading a book out loud, to stand out in the middle of a street and listen to a piano being played somewhere inside. But it was only something like that; it was hard to get at the whole thing.

"Don't think, Bones, just talk. What is it you want?"

"I – I don't know!" It burst out of me, my own voice, sounding so shocked and upset. I closed my mouth at once, but it was too late, the others were already leaning back with appraising looks on their faces, as though what I'd said had been answer enough to impress them.

"No, no – that's not it," I said. At once all eyes were on me, and I was still at a loss. "It's like this," I began again, and stopped. What was it?

I could feel the weight of Pseudo's stare on me, and it was making it difficult to think. All around me the noise of the club was swelling, building into a wave that rose to sweep over me and push me down, filling my nose and ears and eyes with a crushing black foam, an inkiness too heavy to swim through.

"What's that, Bones?" the others were all saying.

"Well you see –" I tried feebly, but my voice was shaking so badly that it was terrible to hear it. Desperate, and starting to panic, I clutched my own hands under the table, grinding fingers against knuckles, terrified. My heart was flipping in my

chest, and the back of my tongue was on fire. I thought of my glass, a drink to quench my sudden burning thirst, only I remembered it was empty, and when I looked my stomach lurched to see a dead fish lying small and limp at the bottom of the empty tumbler. All the voices in the room pitched a key higher and swung into a frenzy of noise, seeming to send all the tables and chairs galloping 'round and 'round the room like carousel horses. The room spun. The heat grew. I felt sick. Pseudo was leering at me while the others looked on, their faces terrible with expectancy. I wanted then to vanish into a calm place, to disappear.

Yes, that was it.

I cleared my throat. "How about we go for a drive?" I asked, addressing the table.

"Right now?" Pseudo's voice was tight.

I turned to her, and met her gaze squarely.

"Yes."

Pseudo's aspect changed at once. She fixed her eyes on me, and my breath caught in my throat. I tore my gaze away from her again, and this time it was harder than anything else. I had made my choice, but the desire remained, and it was not my own. It was Pseudo's own desire that had coaxed me down from the window and compelled me still, strange as a second heartbeat inside my chest. But something had changed between us.

"Sure! Yeah! Of Course! Why Not!" the others all exclaimed. Pseudo said nothing, but sat back with her arms folded as the others and I rose in a body. We rushed out of the club, leaving a flurry of loose change and flapping bills behind us.

We were out on the street, running toward the car and piling in, and the instant I got into the driver's seat a calm fell over me. This is what felt right, the smooth wheel and all of us packed in tight like a beating heart. I revved the engine and the others cheered me on, their voices alighting one on top of the other, building in a chorus of excitement. I didn't look back, even as I brought the car springing away from the curb with a squeal, because I knew that if I did I would see Pseudo standing alone on the empty sidewalk, staring after us, her face stony with disbelief. She would watch us as we went tearing away, taking with us all the rush and noise of the city, leaving nothing but night and silence behind, so that the inexplicable magic river in the street would dry up and leave the fish melting like beads of mercury and draining away down the gutters. She would stare after us, her eyes pale and without power now, and maybe she would even say, "Please," a word I had never heard her say before, her voice just happening to fall on my ear like a radio signal bouncing lost off of the sky. And one by one all the streets and boulevards and avenues would go curling up on themselves like a dead man's toes, and the city would shrink. And without the theater curtains and parties and blaring cab horns and high talk on the streets to sustain her, Pseudo too would

shrink. She would shrivel up and become nothing more than an empty black suit and black shoes that would themselves fade away like a shadow at dawn, so the only thing left would be the distant, ice-sharp crackling of the stars coming out again, one by one.

A laugh escaped me, and I gripped the wheel.

With the screams of the others in my ears, we barreled down the disappearing avenues. My pulse leapt as I wove through traffic with my light, bold touch on the wheel, the others laughing with the power and danger and freedom of such an escape. With every underpass we went through I cut the lights on the car and we streamed through the darkness, a hot shadow, a thing that could never be touched. I wanted to take us along all the boulevards leading up and out, out onto the highway, and then out to the sea cliffs, where the high salty air of the ocean could roll in across us and soak us like our own sweat. And after that, we would go on, onward until we sped through the tunnel and out onto the other side.

The high line of skyscrapers around us soon diminished, and then it was only the night stretching huge and silver in front of us.

I was ecstatic. A tear rolled down my cheek. The others were all laughing and shrieking, craning their heads to stare out the windows and up at the blurry light of the stars. Someone leaned over, with a light touch of a hand on my knee. "Are you alright?" A voice as soft and clear as someone speaking in an empty room on a summer day. How could I tell anyone, that at this point it wasn't sadness that compelled me, but a deep, thrilling joy, the wonderful uncertainty of not knowing whether I would always feel this way, or else never feel this way again.

We took to the high winding road over the sea. We rolled down all the windows, and the sharp, stinging air and grey mist came tumbling in, like a breaker rolling down the coast, buffeting our hair and jackets, making us catch our breaths. We lost our laughter for a moment, and listened for a time to the soft crashing of the waves down below, rushing under the empty sound of the wind that meant we were the only ones out on the road tonight. There were no other headlights to be seen. I cut the lights and, as we slid down the first of many slow curving hills, put the car into neutral. We coasted like a phantom, light, speedy as a dream, dropping down one hill and rising soundlessly up the slope of another. The water roared away beside us, a hundred feet down. To the other side the wind ran away over the fields, rolling the grass like a muscle under skin.

The curving highway sloped to cut along the cliff sides, and we were brought by slow degrees down through thin layers of fog and sea smoke. Lower and lower we dropped, passing almost soundlessly by the long, pale grass that grew up everywhere. From the open window I could see the gray waves curling up to lick the shore. The highway veered down the cliffs and now elbowed up against a low stone wall, beyond which the ocean crashed and roared and welcomed us in its

deep, wet voice. I brought the car coasting to a standstill on the soft shoulder and we climbed out; the air was surprisingly chill and bitter, but refreshing after the long hot corridors of the city. We crossed the thin median of sand between the highway and the barrier, scrambling over the low wall, and then we were standing on the long, gray shore that stretched away from us in either direction until there wasn't anything to see but a hazy sweep of blue.

We walked down along the shoreline, picking up little stones and flinging them away, shuffling our feet into the cool, damp sand. The others moved along in a little knot, like so many seabirds chattering and flicking their heads, walking parallel to the tideline, moving ever northward. But I went on alone and walked down toward the water, which slushed and sighed and retreated as I drew close.

When the first wave reached up and touched my foot, I pulled back, a little afraid. It was all much bigger than I'd thought it'd be, so much more uncertain, and as I stared across it, I realized I could see the disappearing horizon for the first time. In the city, I was always looking at one line of buildings rearing up behind the others, so that my view was always interrupted as if by a series of set pieces rolling along on casters.

After my initial hesitation, I pressed on. The water pushed sinuously around my ankles, filling my shoes. I stopped to push them off, hooking the toe of one into the heel of another, and watched as the next wave came in and they went bobbing away without me.

With the water now swirling around my legs, I looked down and saw that my tuxedo was even thinner and shabbier than I remembered it. Even as I realized this the wind sloughed little bits of it away until I was left with my old white dress shirt, which was quickly soaked in the mist. The air moving against my wet clothes was cold, so I waded deeper into the waves. The ocean lapped around my knees, then rose to my waist, my chest. I wandered in with my arms held high above my head, and behind me the voices of the others called, coming so indistinct through the wind cutting crosswise across the water that I couldn't tell if their shouts were those of jubilation or warning. I went in deeper. The sand was starting to shift loose under my feet, and as the next wave rolled in I lost my footing. The water sloshed around my neck, and some of it splashed into my open mouth. I expected it to be saltier than anything else, but instead it tasted like the drink I'd had back at the club, a kind of cool absence, like the end of a fever. I brought my arms down and went moving like a sleepwalker, half walking, half floating, my feet trailing through the deep churning currents. I was right up to my chin now and the voices of the others were nowhere to be heard. I turned my head, bobbing up on the swell of a wave, and saw that the shore was empty.

They had left me, just as we had left Pseudo not so very long ago. But I wasn't devastated. This was so much better, this going out alone into the big ocean that

moved against me neither cold nor warm nor wet.

I craned my head and looked back over my shoulder again. I thought I should be able to see the city from here, but where the skyscrapers should have been there was only a low haze, like a fog bank that had rolled in and gotten trapped. There were no lights, no buildings reaching up to pierce the sky; and above me and all around there was only the sound of the waves and of the wind, and underneath it the sound of my own breathing, beating steady with the tide.

I faced the waves again, and swam on.

The world was opening up ahead of me. Even as the water lapped against my chin, I could lift my head a little and stare out across the horizon, which stretched on and on, so wide that I could see it curve and knew I was looking at the whole world.

Skipping Stones at Lake Xochimilco

Antoine Bowman



Melissa's mother had recently died. Instead of dragging herself back into the drab hotel room to grieve with her older sister and her father, she stood at the edge of the lake, fingering a stone as smooth and white as a pearl. While doing so, she contemplated the young biologist who had appeared before her when she arrived in Mexico City and who had disappeared right before her mother passed. She dropped the stone in the murky water. Since she couldn't see the stone sink to the bottom of the lake and turn brown once it disturbed the sediment, she imagined it suspended in the center of the water like a star surrounded by planets. She smiled, and at the same time began to cry.

When a doctor diagnosed Melissa's mother with stage four adult fibrosarcoma, Melissa was forced to withdraw from all her classes to go to Mexico City with the family. It's an experimental treatment, her father said on the phone. They're going to save your mother. The stupid ass doctor who diagnosed her said she has no chance but the doctors in Mexico are going to save her. But dad, Melissa protested, I'm about to defend my dissertation – Your dissertation can wait, he said. Right now we all have to be with your mother.

Melissa wanted to tell him that treatment was pointless, that her mother may as well already be dead. She had a habit of speaking without sympathy for the feelings of others, passed down, her mother thought, from Melissa's father's side of the family to the firstborn girl. According to the mother's theory, the insensitivity had skipped Maria, Melissa's older sister, and found its way into the second born. Melissa also found futility to be an enormous waste of time. Why try to resuscitate what's already gone? she thought. But before she hung up she decided that she wanted to be with her mother to say goodbye when she died, and told her dad that she'd go to Mexico with them.

You're making the right choice, her father said. For a moment Melissa said nothing. She thought about her dissertation on mid-twentieth century American literature and the hours spent reading novels, stories, plays and poems and the possibility of graduating at the top of her class at the University of Southern California and her dream of teaching at an Ivy League school. She imagined her diploma crumpled up in a wastebasket. We'll see, she said.

When Melissa first saw Roberto the biologist, he was simply a tour guide who showed reddened tourists the city via the brown canals of Lake Xochimilco. She

stood on the bank of the lake. From where she stood, she could see the façade of the hospital, which seemed to be perpetually peeling away, and the bright boat that Roberto stood on. He spoke about the history of the city in fluent English. He'd even gone so far as to suppress his accent.

Melissa watched as the boat became a rainbow colored dot in the distance. She stayed at the bank while rain spilled into the lake and wondered whether the water would rise and flood the streets. Deciding that it wouldn't, she walked back to the hotel where she, her father and her sister were staying while her mother was treated.

The next day she went back to the same spot at the same time, hoping to see the tour guide again. This time the tourists were sitting at a table in the center of the boat, finishing a meal while the guide sat at the steering wheel reading a book. She stared at him until he looked up and stared back. Neither of them relented in their gaze and Melissa took the opportunity to focus on his eyes: they were gray and in the harsh positivity of the boat's paint-job they seemed to her like lamps in a lighthouse or a sign that she was facing the correct way.

Meet me at the coffee shop when you finish, she yelled to the guide. Which one? he said. The one across from this hospital, she said while pointing to the building where her mother was being treated.

On the outside the coffee shop seemed spacious, but, upon entering, Melissa found that it was cramped. There were only a few seats opposite the mahogany service counter and there was only a single person behind it, a young girl who acted as both the cashier and the barista. In cracked Spanish Melissa, ordered a café latte and took a seat. She felt the smallness of the coffee shop wrap itself around her. The sensation that her throat was tightening began to take hold so she closed her eyes and counted ten deep breaths – a technique her mother taught her when she was a child and suffered from crippling claustrophobia. It was the only thing that ever calmed her down.

After two hours, ten unanswered phone calls from her sister, twelve text messages from her father and two more drinks, she saw the tour guide stride through the door and sit down opposite her in – what seemed to Melissa – one motion.

He ordered a drink from his seat and stared at Melissa. So what brings you to Mexico City? he asked. My mother is dying, she said. That's unfortunate, he said, but you came all this way only to watch her die? She told him about the cancer and the treatment and how she knew it wasn't going to work. He told her his name and that he wasn't a tour guide but a doctorate candidate at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

Sunlight began to slip into the windows, signaling a setting sun. Melissa and Roberto left the coffee shop and began walking along the edge of Lake Xochimilco

where trees and grass grew out of soft earth.

Do you believe in the sanctity of life? Roberto asked Melissa. No, she said, if life were sacred it wouldn't be so fragile. Roberto stopped walking. Look, he said, pointing to the dense blackness of the lake. Melissa stopped and leaned over the water. This water is so polluted you can't see even an inch past the surface, he said. Since Lake Chalco was drained to save our lives from the flooding, this lake is the only home to the axolotl, a majestic creature that's probably extinct now. We called them monsters then killed each one. So I agree, there is no sanctity of life, only choices made by us and the randomness of the world. Roberto put his hand on Melissa's shoulder. Your mother is going to die, you know, he said. She nodded. But, he said, that doesn't mean you have to die with her.

Roberto walked with Melissa back to her hotel. She expected a kiss, but he only pulled at her hair, caressing each strand before letting them fall back in place.

The night was heavier in the corridors leading to the hotel room. With Roberto, Melissa didn't think about her mother even though she talked about her, but as she made her way to her hotel room she felt as if her mother was there, dying in her head while at the same time trying hard to protect her daughter.

When Melissa slid the keycard into the door and cracked it open, she saw the dim light of the old porcelain lamp leaking into the hallway. She opened the door further and saw her sister Maria sitting on the bed. The television was hushed to a low din and the curtains were peeled back, revealing a little sliver of the lake's shiny black surface.

Where the hell were you? Maria asked. I went out for coffee, Melissa said. She took off her jacket and sat on the bed. The sisters were silent, their bony backs facing each other. They were less than a year apart, Melissa following her older sister as if they had planned it that way before birth. Still, Melissa thought, they couldn't be any more different. While she was harsh and hardnosed, Maria was peaceful, always one to avoid an argument and the first to end one before it truly began. And while Melissa wasn't satisfied working at anything that didn't involve her ambitions, Maria had settled – as Melissa called it – for a job working as a paralegal for a small law firm. In the face of the impending death of their mother, though, Melissa grudgingly observed, they seemed to trade roles, with Melissa avoiding her mother and Maria reprimanding her little sister.

The doctor said the treatment won't work, Maria said. They said it's spread too far and that she only has a couple more weeks left. She began to sob, her short, wet breaths filling the air and wounding the room's silence, which Melissa had grown used to in that short time. Melissa tried to cry with her sister. She couldn't. Not then. So she turned off the television, watching the Mexican weather woman fizzle out, then cut the lights, laid her sister down in the bed, and held her. She

stayed awake until she felt Maria's short breaths lengthen into long, restive beats.

The family chose to stay in Mexico City until Melissa's mother died. Actually, it was her mother's idea. She had never been outside of the United States until that journey and she told Melissa, Maria and her husband that she wanted to die a citizen of the world.

Melissa's mother moved out of the hospital – which seemed to grow more and more transparent to Melissa's eyes every time she crossed it – and into Melissa's father's hotel room.

For the next two weeks, Melissa would walk to the bank of the lake where she first saw Roberto on the rainbow colored tour boat. She'd watch him repeat the same words over and over again and listen as Mexico City's history trailed away with him. She would take note of where in the history she could no longer hear him: usually it was during some violent event or a revolutionary moment that had enough romance to force her into a reverie.

When Roberto would vanish from Melissa's sight, she would pass the time by searching the water for the axolotl and, when she couldn't find any, searching for stones up and down the lake's bank so she could practice her stone skipping.

She would pick up the cleanest stone she could find – usually one with water stains on its face and pores deep enough to lose a needle in – and throw it at the lake without any technique. She would throw them and hope they'd figure out the rest. They never did. They would plop into the water and disappear immediately, as if the polluted lake were a wall she couldn't see past.

Roberto would show up where Melissa was and he'd show her a place in Mexico City. She found each one to be enigmatic yet at home in the city, like the theater that only showed movies in English and the art gallery that displayed all its paintings and photographs on the ceiling rather than the walls and the golden Angel of Independence, which she found more elegant and daring than the Statue of Liberty. But nothing fascinated her more than the lake, and she asked Roberto about it each time she saw him, when the conversation and caresses stopped.

People dump all sorts of things in it, Roberto would say. Then we drain it occasionally to avoid flooding. Like Lake Chalco, Melissa would say, not expecting anything new. Exactly, he'd say. And the axolotl? she would ask. If it hasn't, it's having its life drained away along with the lake's life. And one day he added: That's the nature of dying things, to take something with them so they aren't alone when they're experiencing the loneliest feeling life will offer.

One day Roberto took Melissa to a sauna. She had never been to one, likely because she didn't find spending time for the sole purpose of relaxation at all pragmatic. He carried a small stuffed duffel bag into their private room. She let the steam run over her face and ignored the smell of marijuana escaping Roberto's bag

while he occasionally answered knocks at the door, tucking the bag under his arm each time.

When the bag began to sag, Melissa asked about the contents, hoping he'd tell the truth. Don't worry about it, he said. Some things are not meant to be answered. The steam slowly devoured his countenance and Melissa couldn't see him. She thought the steam was mocking her, eliminating a temporal love before she had the chance to do it herself, before she got the chance to return home and leave the biologist alone. But when the steam thinned Roberto was still there, his head resting on the wooden bench and his legs stretched to their limit. I'll put some more water on the coals, Melissa said. She did so and waited for the steam to thicken once again before putting her clothes on and slowly and imperceptibly leaving the room.

Mom is dead, Maria said on the phone moments after Melissa left the sauna. The words shuddered and shivered in her ears: in Melissa's mind, the phrase, that definitive phrase that captured her mother's last months, was lacking weight. The words were skinny, no larger and no more important than the hungriest child. They felt false precisely because they were so true. She tossed the words around in her mind. Tried to give them something, another word to help out. Life, maybe, Melissa thought. Then she thought about the cemetery where they'd bury her, and the gray slate of a headstone, marking her final location. Thinking of a good epitaph, she landed on a phrase that lifted the phrase she heard from Maria: Here lies Monica Arquette Baldwin, She died because she lived, She lived because she died.

When Melissa arrived at the hotel room, her father and Maria were standing over her mother's body and weeping. Without saying anything, she hugged them both, kissed her mother's motionless cheek, and left after a few moments of listening to the crying.

At her spot by Lake Xochimilco the next day, Melissa felt the full presence of the hospital for the first time since arriving in Mexico City. She waited for Roberto to show up on his tour boat, but he never did. Using her shirt as a makeshift basket, she began collecting stones. She emptied out the contents into a pile between her feet and began tossing them, one at a time, at the lake's slick water, angling them so the flattest area on each stone would meet the surface. She did this for hours and for the first few the stones would only sink into the water. She imagined the last axolotl down there, dodging her rocks and avoiding inevitable extinction. Her technique tightened. She threw the stones low and whipped her wrist, but they still wouldn't make it to the other side where the sun was setting and looked like

a prisoner in between the leaves of the juniper trees. With two stones left – one in her right hand that was whiter than any other she'd found, and the other in her left hand – she began to worry that she was wasting time, that these moments would need replacing with more buoyant, more precious moments. She threw the stone in her left hand. It bounced, flew, fluttered and skipped before finding its way to the other bank. She dropped the white stone in the black lake and saw herself in its reflection, smiling and crying all at once.

Spider on the Floor

Glenn Collins

(All facts in this story are accurate and accounted for, although some of them never happened.)

All people are afraid of spiders. They write songs and spin tales around the idea. This could be the moral of the story: although we mind our own business and we rid the world of harmful creatures that are far more bothersome, all people are afraid of spiders. They demand that we keep all eight legs on the floor. But it is in the nature of a spider to be free. And we are far from alone. Some people take after spiders. This story is about one of those people:

Once upon a time, many times actually, all young people were born inside of a little room full of manufactured suits. They were born and they were given a suit and then they went out into the world and everyone knew them for who they were. This went on for some time until one person tried to leave the room and go out into the world suitless, which was a cause for concern, considering that most people needed a suit if they wanted to be recognized, if they wanted to socialize and someday embrace another person and slip them into a fancy suit and show them off to the world. But this person decided that all of the suits were unsatisfactory, and they decided not to wear one, a choice that had never been made before. The person was only bothered because they weren't allowed to leave room, and they didn't understand why everyone was so upset. But the others didn't understand why anyone would choose not to wear a suit. They would scratch their heads and whisper in small gatherings and they let their hatred shine into the suitless person. They even tried to hold the person down and force them into a suit. One with a handle, one without, one with stripes and one with a protruding spinal column, but no matter what they did, the person would slip away, hiding in the back of the room, hoping to go unnoticed for another day.

Not long after this, the person grew tall and tired of that daily routine, of being forced into a suit that neither fit nor felt natural. A decision was made that it was time to leave the room. The person could no longer stand the people who all wore suits because they hated the suitless, and they would never understand the freedom of not wearing a suit, of not knowing what or who you are: all legs off the floor, at the mercy of the wind.

Walking on a white paved road under a bright yellow sun, away from the once upon a time, moving into the right now, following a path of insects trailing a flock of geese, the person moves ahead and spots the biggest, fattest bird wobbling

up front, leading the others with the kind of confidence that would normally be attributed to kings.

“Pardon me, Mr. Goose, but do you happen to know where we are?” At this point, the person was lost, or perhaps they never knew the way. The leader turns his head and spells out the directions with a red crayon on a brown paper bag. “Right heer” he writes, then sees the bewilderment plastered on the person’s face and asks: “Not enough? Then where do you want to go?” His words are like a honk but also a hiss. The person scratches their head.

This was a puzzling response: obviously, they wanted to *be* here, but where *is* here? It didn’t seem that difficult a question to answer.

The Goose let out a honk and brushed the person aside. “Mindful where you let your feet drop; can’t you see our flock of beetles below? We are shepherds and this is a shepherd’s walk.”

The person didn’t have any reason to argue; what was a shepherd anyway? And if you have a flock of insects, why not keep them in a jar or somewhere safe, like underground?

The gaggle and the flock and the person, now moving along together, come to a river crossing, the white road winding off to the right. The goose lets out a screech and his troops turn in formation and move on with the road. The person decides to cross the river.

On the other side is a forest. In the distance, a figure hunching over some stringed instrument, their strumming deliberate although feeble in the warm air. The person, who is already dry, not having a suit to get wet, makes their way toward the strumming. Another suitless person? No, a man, stuffed into a skintight suit that is barely visible in the sunlight, and he is sitting on a fence (was it there to keep the people in or out?) and he seems to be improvising on a guitar, and staring at the ground. The man strums and sings and the person listens.

When the song is finished they both clap, the man drops the guitar, which hits the ground with a rumble of thunder, the spider (my uncle, Steve) crawls away indifferent as to the melody, disturbed by the content.

“Do you know where we are?” The person asks the man.

“We are here, but if you keep moving, eventually you will be over there.” He points toward the direction of the river.

“But that is where I came from! What if I move that way?” The person points in the opposite direction.

“I don’t know, I’ve never been there, but I am sure it is just like everywhere else.”

The man slouches down and plucks up his guitar, slowly thrumming another tune as he spots a half moth half beetle that must have forgot all about patience, the secret to transformation.

The person walks away, narrowly missing the point, and hops the fence and moves into the trees.

When the forest is so thick that the person can no longer see the sky, they lie down on a patch of moss and fall asleep.

They feel sticky hands from every direction, no use fighting. They are carried out of the trees and back over the river, along the white road and back upon a time that was once many times.

They make a suit out of invisible thread and force the person into a self. The kind recognized by not being, which was all they ever wanted, or was it all they ever needed? At any rate, they never intended to let anyone go because every single body is needed if every suit is to be filled.

Sometimes you pick the suit, and sometimes you are forced into it by an angry mob, but either way you learn to accept that a compromise is really just giving the other side what they want, like a flock of insects, or a song about a spider, because in the end, they are always they, and you are always you, and we are always we, and it doesn't really matter what suit you wear, as long as you are comfortable not wearing a suit sometimes, which could also be the moral here, but probably not.

St. Benedict, a number of wild bees and the skeps

Christina Rubino



1

I am going to say
Benedict was a bee man,
like Sherlock Holmes,
humming honey psalms,
someone who wove
well-insulated meticulous skeps
to enthuse
the canticle of bees.

Not a farmer, crates hauled and stacked
on the frontage road or on the goat track leading higher up or back
among the black sage, and the purple sage
 and the white sage and elderberry,
and moved on crucial afternoons in the bloomtime,
to beeblossom,
to plum forest and
buckwheat,
its shined undulations seducing the sun,
the bee man was
not the cravated specimen hunter
with his microscope,
his glassed calamander cabinet,
beeswaxed and buffed
sweet under the careful, the placing hand.
Benedict
from the stoney workhouse,
out among the pines and beech wood,
did not steal the speckled robin's-blue egg
from among pine twigs beech branch.
Neither he nor his brothers,
coveted and tracked and lifted from the nest,
the wren's bee-long umbered 5-brothered egg
or the drizzled black and gray inkblot granite of the killdeer
stones salted on the beach.

The abbot up beyond the cave above the lake
and above the poison town in 532 a.d. when wolves may have overtaken the
cave at least for a season,
the town where they offered him a cup of wine

that by a miracle shattered and sunk
the poison through the cool the stone floor
the town that had asked him to come,
to be their abbot
and write rules on how to live,
wore a veil and sang bee songs, humming deep in his chest
a little rumble both strong and hypnotizing.

He did not berate the town,
the jealous poison bringers,
the ones with whom he shared the plum honey,
but said instead
to his good men,
Put on your aprons, Friends,
and they set to twisting cotton wicking,
spooling, gathering the honeycomb,
firing up the hot stone cairns,
to dip their candles just in case,
and the autumn, coming,

the darkening autumn
when even now the dragons steal up from the town
scale down from the far far
leaves brightening, leaving,
releasing the long held, the solid brown branch,
drifting down, piling,
crackling beneath the squirrel's pounce and race.

The men with Benedict
very fine in their stained aprons
have jarred the wild plum honey,
carving on the beeswax seals
little winged beasts.
Sometimes one or the other of the writers
will spell out in the sweet smelling honey wax,
Thank God or
Dolce.

2
Benedict and perhaps the other brothers
in the abbey
above the cave on the hill,
far above the reedy lake,
had a sister.

Scholastica, what did she know?

We Live in Waiting Rooms

Patrick Aldas



When we came into this world, with
bulbous skulls that squinted – rapid pulse,
contemplating all that was vast and terrible
in cramped rooms that were, for several hours,
the known universe, we waved our arms in
petulant indignance, unwilling to accept a
cruel new reality
that had kicked down the doors of
fetal perception.
Voidous pre-life
subverted by
sordid pre-death.

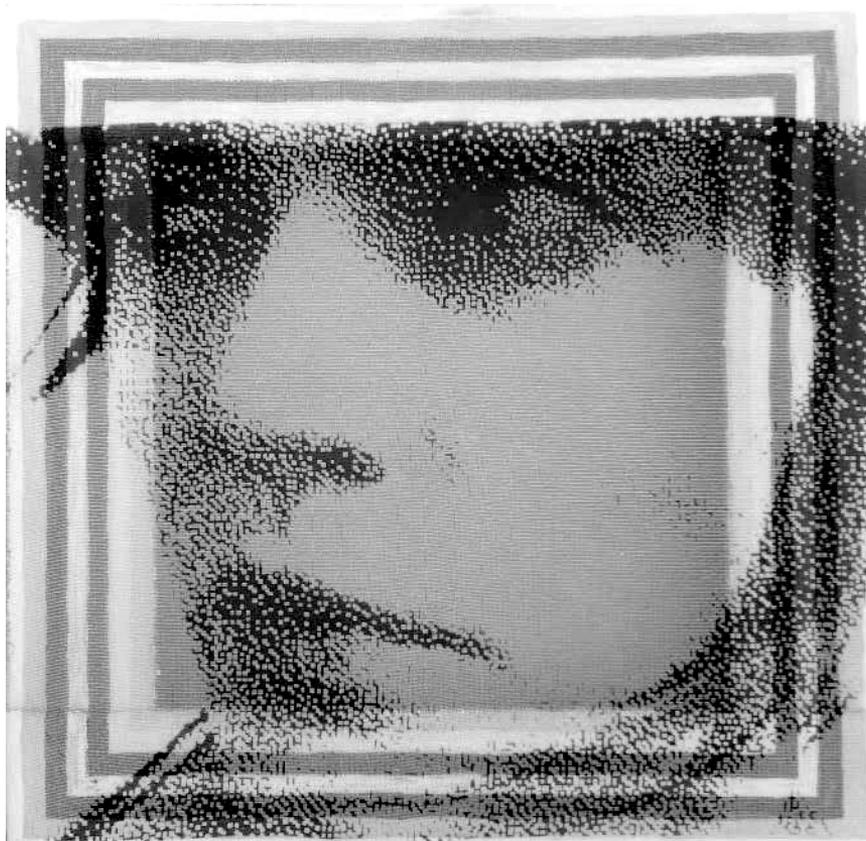
For several years more we sat bewildered,
willing to dig anything that pandered to
raw feeling,
our shrinking heads growing portly with
delusions
about “the way it is.”
As harmless investigations evolved
into bitter distractions, we
rejected our vain cultures and sat
smoking cheap cigarettes while pretending
to know
what we only understood,
desperately trying to waste time
and stave off the inevitable
boredom that would come to define a
generation
that was raised by crooning televisions,
and came of age nestled in
internet narcissism.

Illusions dissipated as our broken psyches
grew gravid with
nebulous hope that our indifference
would attract god or whatever monster

governed Fate,
as if we could hold our own lives for
ransom in exchange for
direction immutable.

But sterile patience yielded nothing
in particular, and like so many crazed
Persephones we kick cans around in the
underworld
of America, waiting for Spring.
Lacking grace,
Death-obsessed,
drug addled and bored out of mind,
simultaneously too young and too old,
Hell-bent on the hackneyed assumption
that destruction can serve as a path
to creation.

And when finally the finale manifests
as a culmination of our vices matching
the speed of our lives,
there will be nothing left to do
but hike our knees up under scabbed chins
and laugh hysterical at the
subtle comedy of it all.



In My Mind

What I Learned at the Creation Museum

Chuck Von Nordheim

before the Flood

white-bearded patriarchs kept
herds of dinosaurs for meat pie

wives never about wrinkles wept
with the sun's harsh rays filtered by
permanent oceans in the sky

before the Flood

angels to young daughter's beds crept
as Adam took eons to die

giants walked and unicorns leapt
while Enoch in a blink of an eye
heaven-bound in his cart did fly

before the Flood

What she means when she says I love you



Leah Manacop

She's cutting 90 on the 210 edge, so dizzyingly close to the suspended cliff you wonder if she's forgot you're terrified of heights, how nauseous you've gotten on every roller-coaster she's urged you on, muttering "I love you" right before a drop.

But

you can't resist the relief of a nice rounded number: "90 on the 210" produces such a perfect sum with your Perfect 10, and you muse about this Perfect 300 – like, if she decided to take her pill today or if you didn't ditch that class today, or if addition didn't exist (dooming all obtuse quantities to abstract seclusion), and if the wavering needle on the dash didn't tell you, would you ever be aware of how well this speed complemented the –

"Way we were going?"

Wait. You blink at her (hard when the top's down at 90), at least recognizing a question – always tinged with the tone of accuse.

"Way?" Way her red hair shines when you blink back tears, and how, on the verge of confess, it seems to be woven with yearning, love-spurned silence speaking of veiled grins on the other side, flowing away from you. Then you think about how

"we" dissipates with forlorn distance, even when she's standing two feet away.

"Were" they ever really true? When she said "I'm crazy about you," sprawled against hours spent, spread-eagled, coming carelessly on drafts for papers due the next day.

When she said "I could die tonight" happy-spent on moon-soaked sheets, so soon twisted around your neck.

Your ears are ringing two-toned moanings, but you wonder where you're really – "going?"

What?

She groans; you gulp. "Are you ever going to say anything?"

Question, accusation...threat? You choke back a response or two, and swallow the third for a knowing grin, all too familiar, to flit across her face – divert your gaze to the dash to see the needle push past 90.

A screech (from *your* mouth?) as cars careen and swerve when she shudder-smokes, then merges into an imperfect number, eyes still lasered in on you – through the hyper scream of whipping wind, the grin splits to sing “I love you.”

Blunt, you think, with a dead thud, as three flanks of red-lit back bumpers scream to a halt in front of you, before you, above you, through you, and when she shoves a shriek from your steaming tires, still staring you in the eye, you finally mutter (and wonder if) “I love you too” (is really what you mean).

Whitewater Reversed

Shetachai Chatchoomsai

1.

The caravan of my feet beats like a war drum:

(i) Bangkok, (ii) New York,
(iii) Chonburi, (iv) Los Angeles,

– I'm –

tired of	sleeping in
my	decayed
aunt's locust, my	Asian
boyfriend's	dream
Valley,	far from
the grooves of	white's
Hollywood	caucuses.

2.

Home the word that binds like Nirvana,
I call Grass River, where I drank the pleasure of leaving no "I" to be crossed,
the border that split North America. Come back to me.

The whitewater, the chaste Spring, shrill-gorged
Un-drown me.

Dissimilar hued sky bruised under cool breeze
young ears shuddered under eagle's screech
A microscopic dust beneath your magnificent air,
I was visible with greatness on that bridge.
The sexless desire – stripped and painted bare –
feet above cascading whitewater,
my yearning puberty willed into an abrupt, stretched pause.

3.

strike my root in your ground &
family
brown, brittle
with hopes of
rain
and shoots

I

left my
home,
malnourished
seeing the monsoon
that comes
in vain.

4.

Flesh drifted down the desert.
A bald eagle, hawking.

You Are In a Little Box

April Shih

just like the shoebox
my shiny black Louboutins came in;
the pair that clicked under my feet that night
on the marble floor of the Venetian
as we got high on swirling lights
and the artificial scent of Christmas;

the ones that dangled from my fingers,
red soles flashing like an ambulance
as I stood barefoot in the elevator
melting in the embrace of whiskey
and your cologne. In the morning I was gone.

The next time I saw you – the last time
before the last time –
was outside a faceless
dive bar in Flagstaff. You hugged me
the way an old friend does,
like we'd missed each other
all this time. Together
we did shots of Jameson,
as we had that night in Vegas, as I would

a year later,
alone in another dive
smothered by Sinatra's *Silent Night*
after seeing you in that little box,
after they put you in the ground,
after you put a shotgun in your mouth.
I took the shot
and you were gone.

