



the MEADOW

the MEADOW 2014



the MEADOW
2014

TRUCKEE MEADOWS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Reno, Nevada

The Meadow is the annual literary arts journal published every spring by Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, Nevada. Students interested in the literary arts, graphic design, and creative writing are encouraged to participate on the Editorial Board. Visit www.tmcc.edu/meadow for information and submission guidelines. Look for notices around campus, in the *Echo* student newspaper, or contact the Editor-in-Chief at meadow@tmcc.edu or through the English department at (775) 673-7092.

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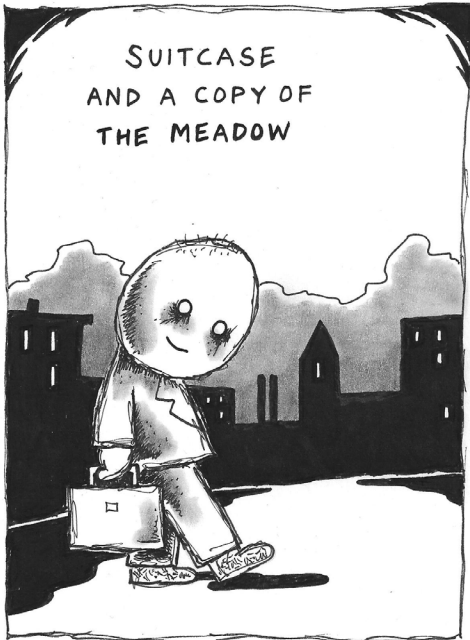
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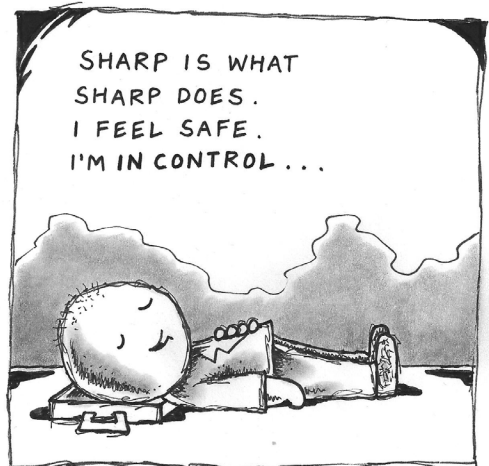
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A MAN IN CONTROL



BOY
DON'T I LOOK
SHARP...



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UNTITLED

by Nan Becker

The river a shimmer, a trick of light atop green tow,
blooms sideways, ripples that answer the wind's calling.
Eases then, when enamel still, yields as if it's lost sight
of its persuasion, knowing neither trouble nor fatigue.
It does not seem to bother with breath but waits—suddenly
a great believer in surprise. Waves, the “theys” follow,
pools of themselves, silent shadows that move like an old
sadness changing its mind, gentled by passing—life after life
concurring to go through, to go on, all that went before
we met and after left, guessing though guessing, none of it
means terrible things, or joyous—we appropriate life gone,
unsentimentally, none of it meaning harm, although it does,
did, and like a bird's tip-toe, *leaning*, it calls. Hear it hear
what would be here. Hear the downy drum behind a robin's
slow *purdy*, hear the whomp of a heron flying low over a river
that streams a stone. Who would guess whatever we had
was separate.

UNTITLED

by Nan Becker

How suddenly it seemed to happen. The sound was rain, sibilant thunder. The river stood up, pressed back the sky, and the clouds up-and-downing trackless distances. Then the wind whelmed—to a breath, like a chance delicacy, a snap of sleep stretched out like a permission, elusive as the backs of birds in flight. Water purred awake a thousand thousand crickets, in straight-faced astonishment, dauntless to the moon up there, soft as a cheek—witless and unspeakable. This moment, a tick, between elsewheres or thought, one might say the quick of it, is, unaffected by any before or to come, what comes. Moonlight notes an addled silence, what it means not to speak *of*. Me without myself, one could say, thingless, or could say wedded, both timbre a readiness ebbed—a drawn rein loosened. If a whipped tail scoffs a fly or the memory of a fly, words muscle consequences and contingencies. What has happened is pruned to hearsays—mirages that pivot sudden uninvited wishes and are startled by hunger and weather. Each word bound in memory's heft. And so distant; as a speck is to clouds or a leaf to autumn, almost nothing. Dear ones—you would like to know what you are; a constellation of uncountable breaths, beaten-hearts, not yet dead.

from FIELDGUIDE TO THE SOUTHEASTERN
IDAHO PHOSPHATE DISTRICT

by Jesse DeLong

[A Brief History of Urine]

Not yet knowing that phosphate is an essential component of DNA, Hennig Brand, hunched into a ratty robe like a fat scarecrow, held a vial of elemental phosphorus, which he'd extracted from the four-glasses-of-wine-worth of his own urine. The things we wash ourselves of are vital to our survival. Again, I have woken in a whiskey sweat next to you, separating the chemicals of breath. What is it you ask me? I say when I am comfortable. The answer will be different from the moths, those half-birds, believing the light wants to be smudged by their love. Around us, like ashes from a forest fire, they are falling.

Bladders burning
of vodka

& Gatorade, we

drive a part of road
that one hour
later would be

closed. Horizon light a dirty
fingerprint & we

shutter the Buick's axil

over weeds. Not
from the bottom where it grounds,
but from the top, a billboard

brightens with smoke.
An image

of a dairy
cow—ashing into the already

dirty air. See, you say, nothing
holds how

it should.

from FIELDGUIDE TO THE SOUTHEASTERN IDAHO PHOSPHATE DISTRICT

by Jesse DeLong

[Driving past the slag piles, covered in pollen. Shadows of clouds spotting the mounds]

If ever entered a mine shaft must be seen out to its conclusion the light at its end expected a sort of relief not that it's there but that we might start dealing with it ∴ Last Wednesday we invited over for a barbecue the only three friends of mine you could utter a syllable towards ∴ In the middle of folding onions into meat you or maybe it *was* me said something only meant to be tested inside the beetle-&-bat-burrows of the brain Gritty as they are Everything spoils once confronted with air It was not finished when the first guests arrived ∴ *Hello how are you We're fine thanks The burgers are already on Step outside in the shade* So much of our lives are lived out like a sitcom The one where she placed my cloth sack two books & a toothbrush by the door ∴ A symbol By the door ∴ Even before that a year before I was at the grocery store near the register eating some M&M's Late at night A woman clearly furious walked in with her husband Bless her someone bless her She refused to hide her rage Not uttering a word she bought a small sack of smoked almonds with food stamps Her husband hustled behind her desperate looking dandruff on his shoulders wearing a Hamburgler shirt He wheelbarrowed his worries on me *You know kings never used to live like me I live better than kings did centuries ago* His wife frictioned her shoes on the tile refusing to look at him *Not even Kings had the things I have* the vibration of his voice more honest than I'd ever be was directed at the reaction on my face one his wife might catch ∴ She cracked an almond in her jaw Or the day before our guests arrived when you told me something you felt necessary and in the middle of your speech I said *yes yes I understand* though I still had to sit & listen to an end you couldn't stop chasing.

from FIELDGUIDE TO THE SOUTHEASTERN
IDAHO PHOSPHATE DISTRICT

by Jesse DeLong

[So Just Migrate]

Somewhere in the Selkirk Mountains, my uncle stepped off his snowmobile, took a sip of the coffee he brought with him in a thermos. He was a man who believed in bigfoot, & the snow was falling hard around him. His breath rose through the scarf snugged to his mouth, the fabric wet from breath. When he turned towards his vehicle, he saw, in the snow, a footprint larger than his boots. In a couple of seconds, snow filled it in. This was the story he told me when I told him that the last herd of caribou left in the lower forty-eight had abandoned that range of mountains. They were tired of eating lichen, hearing the loud noises of engines, knowing that cougars found it easier to stalk the packed tracks of a snowmobile. Everything moves on, eventually, he said, & looked at me—a man who had come to get drunk with him because my girlfriend had left me for the second of several times. Sometimes, what you need, & what you feed on, aren't in the same area, he said.

*

by Simon Perchik

Under this fountain, half graveyard
half shoreline where her name
washes up the way each mourner

comes by sea, drops anchor
and the small stone holding fast
as if spray makes the difference

—you come here to crouch
though there is nothing to begin
except waves :night after night

eaten away by footfalls—what's left
is the climbing splash
millwheels will wring from riverbeds

—with just one stone you let go
and the sky sinks to the bottom
that already left for here.

*

by Simon Perchik

You brush the way ink
falls apart on a page
though your hair never dries

folded and unfolded, over and over
till an old love note arrives
in the crease you can't see through

already a floodgate
and across a river
that is no longer walls

or their shadows—you are washed away
by the lingering caress
your foot leaves underneath

as gravel :what all words hold back
when they say it was long ago
and her name as if she was here

in writing and with a simple splash
surrounds your still warm arm
already in two, half you, half everything.

THE POND

by Brianna J. Pike

*We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.*

— Thomas Hardy

I.

The muddy water melds with dusk.
We sit beneath one large
limbed oak close to the water, listen for lone fish
splashing in the distance. It is time for
mosquitoes and black flies to creep
behind ears and bite.

Watching you walk to us is difficult
in the dark, but pieces of light catch
in your eyes, glint in the rings on your fingers,
a hundred small beacons guiding you
toward the water.

You hover around the edge of a pond
but we, three generations of women,
see only the deep water and hear cows
shift in the tall grass. We are deaf
to one another, our conversation
as heavy as our silence.

I rise and walk to the edge, try to reach
for your hand, but in the dark I cannot touch
your thinning hair or the deep creases in your face.
I hear only the remnants of your voice
in their soft murmurs, as they sit quiet and still
beneath the trees, listening to our words fall.

II.

Sand and muck suck up our footsteps with deep breaths.
Sister, you and I have walked to the far edge,
avoiding the whispering crowd that gathered
beneath the oak trees. In dark formal wear

they share silent condolences that do not reach their eyes.

This afternoon, we sat together, side by side
threading cheap handkerchiefs through our fingers.
I wanted to speak to you, move you away from
sermons of God and lambs, far from the growing
pile of dirt right behind our row of chairs.

During the drive back, your eyes traveled
over familiar scenes: the florist, the pizza place,
the tiny cabins that tourists rent for the summer.
You have not spoken for days.

You walk close to the edge, search
for tadpoles with a small plastic cup
push it slowly through the water,
its round mouth gaping towards a black speck.
You stare hard at your catch, drop your finger
to the cup, but your slick swimmer is elusive.
Back in the water, eyes try to follow,
but your tadpole is gone, leaving you
standing alone at the edge.

III.

Lace curtains pushed are aside, to see
the pond. My mother stands
at the window fiddling with her
ring: lapis lazuli set in gold, diamonds
that dull in the sun's shadow. Exhaustion
tugs at the corners of her eyes.

I follow her gaze out, through the glass.
She laughs, a forced shout, as an osprey
dives into the murky water, emerges
triumphant with a trout, pierced
through the belly. I follow her fingers
as they pull the ring on and off.
Turning from the window,

we go out, wade through thick
grass and mud, our footprints
deep scars in the sod.
With every step she hesitates,
pauses to study the deep imprints
of her feet, tracing a path back
to the house. Approaching a slight bend
flanked by tiger lilies and lupine, she stumbles.

I reach out to steady her,
her fingers tighten around mine,
but her eyes,
her eyes remain still.

RENASCENCE

by Peter Ludwin

This morning I'm listening to Leo Kottke
play "In Christ There is no East or West"
from the *Greenhouse* album
as rain assaults the earth like regret.
Those simple Episcopal chords,
strummed, then picked in a light gallop
on a 12-string guitar, fill the room
with a radiant lake dawn sheen.

I believe in the early '70s, the multiple gods
I bowed to then in grateful surrender.
Kottke, Ry Cooder, Taj Mahal, the Bothy Band,
the bluesmen and back holler fiddlers
who played modal and haunting and true.
In light that frames the mirror,
the turquoise glow
escaping a fissure of cracked glass.

And those years of jug band gigs in bars
and county fairs, the wild roving eye
of the apple country and its collapsing barns,
the bundled night ride across a field
frozen to the moon's stocked pantry
while women languished on the tongue—
I believe in all of them. In the invisible
seed that lays itself down for the living.

And though I stumble
before belief's threadbare conventions—
barred from Satan, hellfire, a mutating triune god
by the mind's hard logic—I believe these notes.
This water spilling from the speakers
while the world remains parched for its own revival.

MATCHBOOKS, PENNIES

by Chelsey Clammer

I went to kindergarten in a bustling little town in Wyoming in as much as a town in Wyoming can really bustle. Laramie, my birth place, is home to the University of Wyoming, which is the only thing Laramie is known for. Oh, wait. That's a lie. Laramie is also known for its raging homophobia that would eventually lead to the brutal slaying of Matthew Wayne Shepard in 1998. That Laramie. Other than those two attributes, there is not much to Laramie to draw it any attention. It is not an exaggeration to say there is probably a good percentage of Americans who have never heard of Laramie, let alone a good percentage of them who cannot point to a map and say "there. That's Wyoming." In Laramie, there are a few schools and parks, a video rental place that has a bookstore and that also sells Playmobile toys. It's in the main downtown strip (all three blocks of it) and is called Books A-Go-Go. These are my recollections from when I was a kid. After taking a twenty-one year hiatus from Laramie, at age twenty-six I was drunk at a music festival in Fort Collins with my mother's boyfriend and my mother who was the designated driver, and I came up with the idea of making a random trip to Laramie just to see it. It was only a few hours away. In Laramie, we went into the Old Buckhorn Bar and Parlor with a noose hanging from the ceiling and an impressive collection of animal heads mounted on every inch of the wall. Some of the dead deer are so close to each other that their antlers criss-cross. There's the main street called Grand (unlike most towns with at least one street named "Washington" or "Monroe"), because Laramie honors military heroes rather than presidents. War is more admirable than politics.

For kindergarten, I went to Spring Creek Elementary, which was a mile away from my house. It was brick. Old-ish. Two stories. I think my art class might have been in the basement. Not a lot of memories of this place. Though I do remember the thick, huge tire swing that made me dizzy and giggly as my friends and I twisted and untwisted ourselves on it. At the start of each school day, I remember standing in line outside of the main doors—boys on the left, girls on the right—and saying the pledge of allegiance together before we were let inside. Somewhere inside there was a stairwell I once leaned over quite dangerously. This stunt led to the one and only time I have ever been yelled at by a teacher. I was sternly directed to *get down*. I also remember having a kindergarten-aged crush on this boy in my class named Brian. Or was it Adam? Brandon? I don't know. I do know he had blonde hair and that we traded school pictures in kindergarten.

In my school picture I traded with AdamBrianBrandon, I'm wearing my favorite outfit. My big head—all brown pig-tails and a mostly toothless lopsided smile—sits perched atop my little body which is slightly slouched forward and in its best outfit. My favorite outfit. The piece of clothing con-

sisted of exactly one piece of denim. A jean jumpsuit complete with long sleeves and long legs that suctioned to my arms and ankles with elastic cuffs. From crotch to neck there were plastic opaque buttons, the color and shine of which looked like the inside of a conch shell. Little circles of shiny swirls up the front of the jumper. Apropos of nothing that can be considered an agreeable fashion statement, an awkward floppy collar hung around the neck. So, we have a jean jumper with shell-like buttons and a floppy collar. What really brought this outfit together, though, was a small light blue hankie. Embroidered with one pink and green generic flower, the hankie demurely peeked up from the breast pocket. Due to this hodgepodge of an outfit that was the only thing I ever wanted to wear, ever, I couldn't throw it away when it no longer fit. Currently, it is buried in a box somewhere in my mother's basement. Though I have the hankie.

Also stored in my mother's basement:

- Old school photos of her two daughters
- 15 years' worth of Jazzercise tapes instructors use to learn the routines
- Christmas decorations
- My letter jacket from high school with a rainbow patch glued to it, because I thought it was funny to say I lettered in being gay
- A Foosball table
- Thanksgiving centerpieces made by my sister and I circa 1988
- Thick twelve-inch long locks of curly brown hair from my major hair cut of 1999, wrapped in tin foil, stored away in the refrigerator
- A refrigerator
- Inherited tools my mother will never use
- A witch's hat
- The ashes of my dead father
- My favorite outfit from kindergarten

The jean jumper was my uniform, the only piece of clothing I wanted to wear, the only outfit I remember wearing for the five years we lived in Laramie. This is the outfit I wore to discover the world, specifically my yard. Behind our quaint white house sat a small backyard full of lush trees and overgrown weeds. A forest to my child-sized self that I could gleefully get lost in. In stark contrast to this backyard jungle, the front yard consisted of brown bricks cemented around a random nut-bearing tree and a sandbox. Although the front yard was basically a blank space full of bricks, it was just as full of adventurous promises as its opposite, the backyard jungle. In such an open landscape I could run around with the fantasies of solving crimes, accomplishing fantastic feats like saving my friends from danger, and dig deep into the sandbox to discover hard clumps I imagined to be dinosaur bones, but in hindsight I realize they were most likely chunks of the neighbor's cat's shit. Like the tall ensconcing trees that boarded me up in the backyard, there was also a high cement wall and metal iron gate that caged me in from the "traffic" on

Kearney Street—which consisted of a few cars passing by at 25mph every two hours or so.

While the trees and fence kept me safe from the dangers of the larger world, my jean jumpsuit shielded my body from the encroaching branches and biting ants inside my yard. And yet through all of these active scenes, the jumpsuit's hankie and dainty collar kept me feeling composed and mature. Imagine a mechanic in her grease-stained coveralls wearing a sleek, clean silk scarf around her sticky-sweaty neck. The hankie, while unnecessary, inspired in me a sense that I could be elegantly composed even in the midst of performing a dirty job, such as shoveling cat shit/dinosaur bones from my sandbox.

Items found in my dad's closet and garage a few days after his funeral:

- Business suits
- A dark wooden box full of cuff links
- Two plastic boxes of Titleist golf balls, nine per box
- A wax-lined Albertson's paper bag containing three stale donuts
- A golf bag full of porn tapes
- Shoe polish (black)
- AA coins
- Empty bottles of vodka
- A broken gold Rolex watch
- A handwritten list that "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs," as completed for the fifth step in Alcoholics Anonymous, which had an item on it that confirmed my mother's twenty-year suspicion of an affair
- Various tools in two different conditions: either rusted or still in the original packaging
- 17 books about the Civil War
- A black XXL-sized University of Colorado Boulder Buffaloes sweatshirt

When my father evicted himself from/vacated his life (some say suicide, some say accidental alcohol overdose) he left the world as a drunk man, a father and husband with many secrets. I was twenty-one when my father died, and a few days after the funeral my mother enlisted me to help face the dirty job of sifting through the relics, which is to say his stuff. My maternal grandparents also aided my mother in purging the house of his junk. It was hard to convince them to do so, as no one wanted to discover what this drunk, secretive man kept hidden from the world, such as a golf bag full of porn tapes. But the job had to be done. Like my hankie was to my jumpsuit, I kept a small bit of composure in the face of this grimy job. I kept busy, calm, business-like as I focused on my task and occasionally ordered my mother to do something when she sat staring at items that either a) she had never known he possessed, or b) reminded her too much of him. Neither of us cried. *Mom, throw away the cracked watch and donate the suits to the Goodwill. Mom, the tools can*

go to Rick. Mom, you'll never read about the Civil War, so add those books to the Goodwill pile. I stayed steady, projected halcyon while earthquaking inside.

It is seven years since my mother found my dad dead, found him lying in a contorted position against the side of his bed. She's put 855 miles between her present life and that old haunted house in Austin. Now living in Colorado Springs, she has found a life full of trails, trees, and freedom. Her current basement is a damp concrete structure, good for swallowing painful reminders of her past. Such as her dead husband's ashes. They sit in a cardboard box. I'm curious about what this box is labeled. The box with my jean jumpsuit folded inside of it is labeled "Chelsey." But labeling the box containing my father's ashes with his name "Jeff" is just too literal.

When my mother finally moved away from Austin after my father died, she lugged a bunch of boxes with her containing our family's artifacts. She threw out a bunch of the clutter (such as my old elementary school report cards, though not the chunk of my hair from a decade ago). She held onto the important things. The things that make our stories, mainly. Like an outfit that tells about my younger and adventurous self. Like the Jazzercise tapes that tell about a younger and more adventurous woman—my mother who taught Jazzercise for fifteen years. And while she held onto a lot of memory-inducing things, she did slightly purge her possessions of a small amount of clutter that accumulated over the years.

I recently moved into a new apartment, a one-bedroom that is all mine. My stuff has room to grow, space in which to accumulate more memories, to gain my own clutter that at some point once meant something to me. One would think moving would be a great opportunity to throw out what isn't needed—a time when one can clear out stuff from an old life, and build on an opportunity to start anew. But I've never been able to let go. I can't relinquish what I might want to stumble across in the future. I need the things to remember, to continue to be who I am. I can't bear to stand the thought that somewhere down the road I'll be looking for that hankie from my kindergarten outfit, and realize I threw it out long ago. As a result of this, I end up moving a lot of unnecessary things, things that one might consider trash, yet things I consider to be important, things that move me from one life and into another, such as an old hankie.

When I finally unpacked my fourteen boxes of books, I came across Ali Liebegott's *The Beautifully Worthless*. After I finished reading it a few days later, I went back into my closet and started to unpack the clutter I moved with, throwing out the things that represented memories that really weren't all that important. I did this, because in the opening chapter of her book, Liebegott writes about a lonely woman wandering about the country in a beat-up truck. The book opens with her unpacking from her first move and discovering all of the junk she brought with her. She says, "I can't stop dwelling on the fact that I moved a box filled with matchbooks and pennies. I wrote down on a slip of paper, 'matchbooks, pennies' and hung it on the wall so I wouldn't forget that I packed up the trash in my life and moved it with me to a new apartment."

The trash I packed up from my old place and moved with me to my new apartment:

- A stack of letters from a roommate who eventually kicked me out because I kept drinking all of her liquor and never replaced it
- A baggie of dead batteries
- The remnants of burnt-down candles
- Shards of my favorite sushi plate
- A baggie full of twelve-inch long dreadlocks from when I trimmed them last year
- A duffel bag literally bursting at the seams with running medals
- Two 12-pound weights that are only ever lifted when moved from one apartment to another
- A bag of pillow stuffing larger than any pillow I own
- My dog's puppy teeth that fell out twelve years ago

Right now, I don't have a basement. I do, however, have a closet that recently experienced the death of its wire shelves. I was reading in my bed when I heard my memories collapse into a heap on the gray carpeted floor. When I eventually fixed the shelves a few months later, I stowed away the things containing memories back into their resting place. I re-stacked my artifacts, wondering if one day I will sort through them and move some things into the clutter pile. Perhaps in a few years I won't need the XXL-sized University of Colorado Boulder Buffaloes sweatshirt to remember how my father spent his weekends drunk, in his room, screaming at the TV when the UC Buffs' football team had an incomplete move. Because perhaps at some point in my life I'll be able to let go it, will be able to live without it, like how I'm able to live without him.

Years from now when I complete my final move into the house I will live in for the rest of my life, here are the things you will one day find in my basement:

- A worn-out softball glove
- Books
- Old pictures of friends
- Coffee mugs
- A red hooded sweatshirt from my first swim team with my name (spelled correctly!) embroidered in white cursive letters on the upper-left shoulder
- More books
- Candle holders sans burnt-down remnants of candles
- Matchbooks, pennies (because let's be real: even with multiple possession-purges, there are some things of which I will never be completely let go)
- My father's XXL-sized University of Colorado Boulder Buffaloes sweatshirt that has not and never will fit me, but that my mother insisted I keep *to remember him*
- A hankie from my favorite outfit in kindergarten

VISION OF SAN FRANCISCO

by B.Z. Niditch

In low rise San Francisco
at five PM
among smooth jazz enthusiasts
the dish still repeats
with no one watching
behind withdrawn blinds
but everyone speaking
or chewing on gossip
pasta or pork
trying to sleep off
war or death
chilled out
by every Dear John or Jane
letter, not willing
to surrender
the happy hour
even the remote possibility
of going off line
or losing control
of a poor reception
yet you still keep on
playing the blues
here in October
on the sidewalks' cafe
no one sleeps
except on music sheets
in harmony on brass beds
with my newly haired bow
of my violin's rosin
I'm floating in a morning shine
gazing at the Bay.

SAN PEDRO JANUARY

by Jeffrey Alfier

for David Goodis

Winter never ices this port city
but stays offshore in steel-blue
Caravaggio clouds. Oh, the sub-zeros
that never reach us.

First time I took 6th Street
up from the docks, windfall hulls
of magnolia leaves rattled
like castanets from an unseen *zambra*.

I found myself in the Indian Room bar,
its dun hollow framed against an open
doorway, a place Icarus might've come
to drown the tremble of his wings,

had he survived. Like me, he could've
watched a breeze gust the pages
of a castoff horoscope, as if no one
inside were allowed the amnesty of fortune.

CHANGING PLACES

by Taylor Graham

I hear Django in my head—singing
strings, surname of the fox.
I watched that troupe of traveling actors
in van-caravan, rehearsing truths
that never were in fact, Shakespeare
as far as the next venue. Forget
what they say, but take it to my heart.
Reinhardt playing in my head. At an edge
of woods the homeless smiled at me
in passing. The city bulldozed
them away. Have you really listened
to the words of a two-finger gypsy
guitar when it sounds like
Miranda about to meet her new
world? Wanderers and hobos,
wayfarers, Romani, where is our
home? I've lived in one
place too long.

AFTER BARKEEP ANGELIQUE CLOSES AT *PEQUOD TAVERN*

by Jeffrey Alfier

Out in the parking lot under the weak
light of a waxing moon, I count
the tattoos that strut up her arm.
Eight green ones, all Chinese dragons.

A single red one is like a bloody
harpoon against Melville's imperiled
sea. And there's one more, just north
of her pubic bone. Or so the rumors go.

She tracks my eyes sliding up her arm,
swears she got them in the Marquesas
Islands, and pulls out a hash pipe
tucked somewhere below her belt.

The herb is brown or blonde, the best
Morocco offers. Her deep-winter eyes
shine in streetlight, and I come to know
they'd subdue the heart of any feral beast.

As our shared smoke sinks in, my head
clouds with chimeras. She says most
nights it's the hoodoo of this sweet smoke
that keeps the demons at bay. Other nights

it's the switchblade tucked in her bra,
secreted from the commerce of bourbon
and sweat. She wonders if the blade
is worth more than the blood it could take.

THE TASTE

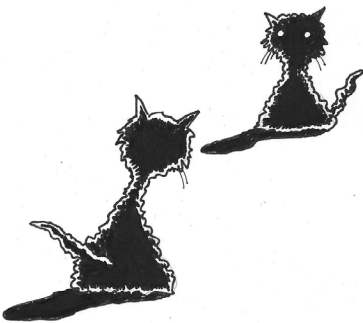
I KNOW THE TASTE
OF EXCLUSION



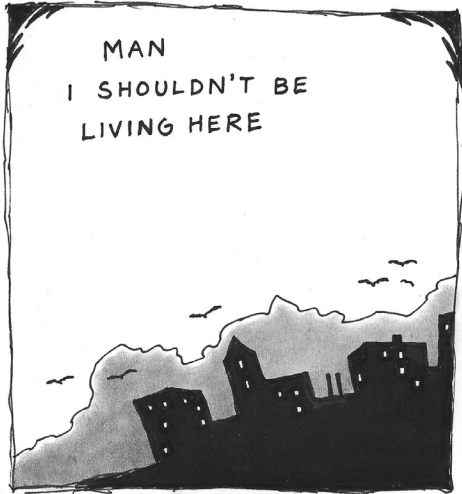
CHEAP WINE
FLAT BEER



ESCAPING MY WAY
THROUGH DELUSION



MAN
I SHOULDN'T BE
LIVING HERE



© JÄNNE KARLSSON '13

OAKLAND FLOPHOUSE BLUES

by K.D. Alter

The coroner couldn't determine if my twin brother Paul had died in the stolen car or was driven behind the shuttered Fox Oakland Theater already dead. The cause of death was glioblastoma—a brain tumor. There was morphine in his blood. According to the investigation, he'd been diagnosed three months earlier, almost to the day of our 19th birthday in February 1986, but he didn't pursue treatment. He'd been in touch with my parents, but never let on that he was sick. The first we heard of it was in the call from the Oakland police. Dad flew out to identify the body and bring it home.

Why didn't he tell us? The question sat on our chests, pinning us with incomprehension and self-reproach. We maundered mutely through our lives in the two-bedroom apartment in Sheepshead Bay where Paul and I were raised.

When I came home from my last day of exams at Cooper Union, my father was sitting at the kitchen table.

"We can't go on like this. Go to California and find out."

He gave me a rumpled envelope stuffed with cash. We hugged and we wept to ourselves.

Paul and I were fraternal twins but entirely unlike. Jacob and Esau, people used to say. I was athletic and practical; he was slight, even sickly, and idealistic. When we got the news I remember thinking how I'd never get the chance to apologize. Retracing his last steps was the closest I'd get to expiation. My father was a simple man, an unlicensed electrician, but now that I'm a father I can see that that's what he must have had in mind.

The registrar at UC Berkeley could only tell me that Paul hadn't enrolled for the spring quarter. My other lead was an ad for a guitar teacher named Tad Scybowicz. It was in the pick compartment of Paul's guitar case next to his body in the car. I called the number. The line wasn't in service, but it was an Oakland exchange, so the next afternoon I took BART to Oakland and began asking for Tad in clubs downtown.

The east end was lousy with blues clubs, from shabby storefronts to cavernous pubs where men in satiny suits shot pool and women in dresses smoked with their backs against the bar. I carried Paul's photo with me and I asked about Tad. All I got were shrugs.

When the set ended at a joint called The Inn, I approached the stage and made my accustomed inquiry. They all turned at the mention of Tad's name.

The sax player glowered and said, "You tell your friend when you see him his loan's due up with Jimmy."

"I don't know Tad but I'm looking for him."

"I'll tell you where he is," said another guy.

The address was near Lake Merritt at what once would have been an elegant downtown address. The foyer boasted marble floors, a mantel-piece, doorman's station and a caged lift with mahogany doors. I took the lift up to the second floor.

Stale marijuana smell hung outside the door. A flabby-titted man in boxer shorts opened up. His chin was cleft so the light disappeared in it. That chin puckered and quivered when I introduced myself as Paul's brother.

We sat opposite each other with an ash tray between us. Paul took lessons from him for a few months, he said. He looked genuinely surprised about the cancer and the drive-in funeral. He said that Paul was introverted, as though that explained why he didn't tell anyone he was dying. Clearly the whole incident was upsetting to him. Tears condensed on his straw-colored eyelashes.

I asked where I might stay nearby, since the hotel was expensive. He said he had the key to a room up the hall where I could crash for free until the end of the month. The tenant had died with rent paid for two more weeks.

As Tad put it in a ditty he'd play, he grew up in a one deputy, two parish, three banjo, four paw paw tree, five Bonded Chevy town outside of Birmingham. He came to California, his imagination brimming with tales of talented backwater types becoming rock stars. Others of his ilk lived in the neighborhood, people more fleeing obscurity than advancing on fame. We smoked pot along the lake in the evenings. I stayed on, using up my Dad's savings to continue the rent. I'd given up on retracing Paul's steps, but continued anyway. I remembered the fight at home when Paul announced his plan to attend college in California. I took credit for being the good son, staying home and studying something practical.

Downtown Oakland wasn't beautiful, but there was more space between things than in Brooklyn, and the lake calmed me. My room had paint-smearred windows overlooking a lot bestrewn with automobile parts. Now and then a rat poked about like a mountain goat among the metal. I smoked Trues and gazed out. The sun scaled its utopian arc over the desolate neighborhood, eventually trailing past the row of apartment houses that descended to the lake, saturating their facades iridescent rust before extinguishing itself in the water.

Most of the tenants were pensioners cast out along the way by divorce, mental instability, or just for having lived too long. The unofficial skipper of the building was Russell O'Mara, a former sailor and longshoreman. Russell's face was like a mushroom you'd expect to come across in a haunted forest. When I began running low on funds, Russell took me under his wing.

"You don't look like you ever gone hungry before," he said, tearing his burger and handing half of what was left to me one day at the Doggie Diner on Broadway.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to stare."

"It's nothin.' Only doggie doo burger. Need t.p. to wipe yer mouth."

I often went across to Russell's flat, whereupon he'd sit me down in a

lawn chair and scoop Yuban for me in a rinsed disposable cup. Sometimes we'd go to St. Vincent de Paul's over on 16th. Nuns doled out potatoes and quarters of boiled franks with bread that became edible only once you dipped it in the soup. Tad joined us now and again. Russell didn't approve of Tad.

"That oversize hippy. Not using what God gave him natural. Wasting it on dope an' neh-gro music."

Tad's cohort consisted of strung-out musicians, a bottom-feeding businessman, Gilbert Blamley, and a sailor named Eric whose company was tolerable only at short stretches. I could hear Eric screeching on two tires and honking the double horn of his Buick from three blocks away. He'd make directly for my door. "I know you're in there, Bernstein. C'mon, open up." After three rounds of door battering he'd go to Tad's.

Eric showed me pictures of the cars he'd wrecked back in Jersey. These he kept in his wallet, together with a plasticine envelope with broken fragments of his two front teeth and a picture of quite a pretty girl who'd dumped him. A record of the best things he'd ever failed at, I supposed. He claimed to be Iroquois. In his broad Camden accent he'd remind you of these things afresh every other conversation. His dad threw him out and he joined the Navy.

After we'd passed around a couple of roaches from Tad's candy tin, Eric would lie back on the bed with glazed eyes and beg Tad to give us a concert. He was usually fast asleep within minutes, his jagged cavity-filled mouth gaping.

Blamley joined us sometimes. He didn't live in the building but in the headquarters of his nationally dynamic hair product company across the street. In the side pocket of his sport coat he carried a Chief's Special that Eric admired, was always eager to handle. Blamley emptied the bullets before letting him touch it. Blamley always brought marijuana. For as long as we were high on it he expected us to act grateful. If you didn't laugh at his jokes he'd sight his thumb and forefinger at your nuts. "Bam!" He'd yell and laugh until his fat neck choked. Tad used Blamley to feed his own small habits—pot, spare change, and jaunts about town in what he called Blamley's road kill Mercedes.

For all his ungainliness, at the strings Tad was as beautiful as a stained-glass saint. He pulled and plucked at them with infinite patience, layers of harmony radiating upwards to the unworthy ceiling of his filthy flat. His flaxen hair drooped over the instrument. When he played, all his gippy tics went away. Everything was still but for the coruscating welter of wavechord at his fingertips. While Tad was painstakingly working out a riff, Blamley might turn to me (he often addressed me as one philosopher to another) and say, "You know what? I think this Polack friend of yours may be a genius."

Tad had been in Oakland for two years when I met him. He was in sorry straits. His friendly lines of credit were maxed out. He was swapping gigs for interest payments. He smoked too much pot and was addicted to skanky women who drank his booze and stayed only long enough to clear out his refrigerator and candy tin of roaches.

One day he came to me with his plan to borrow money from Blamley. “The last thing you need is to borrow *his* money, with all the crazy strings attached,” I said.

“But he’s loaded. And what’s a thousand to him? I’ll make back the money. I can play rock, blues, sentimental. I can sing if I have to. Anything ‘til I get the money together.”

He succumbed to the temptation of the loan. I watched Blamley giving him the grand—took it right off his wad, like a daddy disbursing an allowance. What I didn’t know was that Tad had designated his guitar as collateral.

One night, Tad and Eric went to Ryles, a rock club on the line between Oakland and Berkeley. As they were getting into the car they were assaulted and badly beaten. Eric was left with bones broken and a concussion. Or so I was given to understand; the Navy shipped him away and I didn’t see him again. Tad’s face was punched purple. Worse for him, he was carrying \$900 dollars on his person. He was afraid to leave cash in his apartment. Nine hundred was most of what he needed to pay off Blamley, whose loan—with 25% interest—was up.

“If I lose my guitar, I’m done for,” Tad said to me, nearly terrified.

“You gave the guitar as collateral?”

“It was all I had, other than the car which isn’t worth but three hundred bucks.”

I thought it would sting if he’d started weeping through the contused eye, which lodged like a mussel with stiff blond lashes where his eye should be.

“Isn’t there anyone who can lend you the money?”

“I’ve been tryin’ to reach my ex. Blamley’s coming tomorrow. I’ll kill myself if I lose my guitar.”

“Can you pawn it?”

“Not for that kind of dough.”

He dabbed at his eye with toilet paper. The wound was leaking sympathetically. The other eye seemed sober, unfazed by the fate of its twin and occupied in its usual wont of casting about my room for free cigarettes and tea bags.

“I have a confession to make. I gave the guitar as collateral as a kind of ultimatum to myself. If I couldn’t make it after six more months, there was no point in my having her anymore,” he said.

I had never heard him refer to the guitar using a personal pronoun before.

“There must be an easier way to get yourself to leave off the ambitious life in Oakland—play bars in Birmingham, become a high school music teacher...”

“Ambitious life in Oakland. That’d be a good name for a blues song,” he remarked.

“What are you going to do?”

“Maybe you could talk to him for me. Blamley respects you. I think he’s Jewish, too. Maybe you could reason with him, you know?”

“For Christ’s sake, Scybowicz. Is that what they teach you in Alabama?”

And what ever made you think Blamley's Jewish? Because he lent you money?"

"I didn't mean it that way."

"There's no point going over what you shouldn't have done. Your only choice now is to split. Leave him an I.O.U. You're not getting anywhere here anyway."

The undamaged half of his face lit up. A friend in L.A. had been inviting him down, in fact. Would I drive him? I said I'd think about it but in truth I was planning to quit Oakland myself. I'd been there two and a half months.

That night I dreamt that Tad and I were bumping down the highway in a pickup truck with one headlamp out. He was at the wheel, his flabby chest crowding it. My brother's casket rattled and slammed around in the back while I tried fruitlessly to stop it from sliding out on to the asphalt.

While I slept, Tad was following my suggestion. He was packing when Blamley showed up. Businessmen have a sixth sense for knowing when their money is in peril.

I awoke to the sound of an argument in the hallway around the bend from my room. I cracked my door open.

"I oughtta blow your head off for this, you fat fuck!" The voice was inhuman in its loudness, more full of violence than shots fired.

"I tell you the money was ripped off." By comparison, Tad's voice was like a sheet of paper tearing. "You don't think I'd do this to myself?"

"I give a shit, Scybowicz. I had pity. You were going to welsh on me when I've been your—no, your *best fuckin'* friend beside Paul's sorry-assed brother and that retarded sailor."

Paul's name coming from Blamley's mouth fractured my comprehension.

"I'm counting to three and then I'm banging that ugly puss. Gimme the guitar."

I needed to run out and ask about Paul. But at such a moment! I slipped across to Russell's door.

Russell opened right away. He'd been listening at his door, too.

I pleaded with him to do something.

"What fer?" he said. "Not my business. And the better not to have that feck'n racket here no more."

"Russell, I'm half responsible for this. I suggested he run. Blamley's nuts enough to kill him. And my brother, Paul? Did you know him too?"

He looked at me like I'd caught him gossiping about me.

"Nah, I didn't know him, 'cept he came to see Tad sometimes."

He brushed out the door extending his hands.

"Now jussa minute," he addressed Blamley. "You can't be bargain' in here at this hour makin' a ruckus to raise the dead. And I don't care what's your business, you won't settle it with that. Enough between yous."

"What's that, old man?" Blamley said, walking over in his cop shoes towards Russell. "I'll do business how I damn please."

I believe Tad considered retreating to his room and locking the door,

but thought better of it. Russell faced Blamley with codgerly doggedness. People were stepping out of their rooms into the umber light of the hallway.

“Now listen here.” Russell said in a voice emboldened by the arrival of witnesses. “You seem sensible. Maybe I got an idea. I was a foreman and’ve seen worse be worked out peaceable.”

Reluctant to have the matter turned over to the police, Blamley relented. The deal was concluded over Yuban in Russell’s flat, with creditor and debtor facing each other in sagging lawn furniture like a couple of retired wrestlers. Blamley agreed to take Tad’s amplifier for the interim. Russell clinched the deal by offering Blamley his WWII Purple Heart. Russell removed his perennial woolen cap and parted his silky white hair, revealing a long, red scar like a centipede crawling across his scalp. Later he laughed and told me that he earned that particular scar not in the war but in a brawl in Philadelphia. The Purple Heart was left behind by the fellow who’d died in my apartment. In words I wish I could recall exactly, Russell said that a medal earned in violence should be deployed to prevent it.

Tad persisted in his original story that Paul only took a few lessons from him. His chin was all a storm as I protested that our friendship was on the line. I wondered if he was keeping an honored last promise to the dead. I left in anger the following morning.

Twenty years passed. I became an engineer, married, had two daughters, started my own company. The folks passed on.

Miraculously, Scybowicz did become a star. He recorded and performed at the largest venues in the country under his new name, Tad Stevens. When his show came to Milwaukee, I bought a ticket. Thinking we might share a drink for old time’s sake, I arrived early and entered the back way. I told the guard I was an old friend of Stevens’ from Oakland. “Would you just pass him my name? Tad will know me.”

I waited a while before a guy with a shaved head came over. “You Bernstein?” He handed me a manila envelope.

“Can Mr. Stevens come out to say hello?”

“He has a performance. Everything you need’s in the envelope.” He turned around and headed back up the corridor.

“Everything I need?” I called after him.

In the envelope were five hundred-dollar bills, an autographed photo of Stevens, and a handwritten note that read:

This is to the memory of your brother Paul who rescued my guitar with the last of his money. He made me promise not to tell anyone about being sick, so I never did. He was a great guy and a talented guitarist. Enjoy the show. Your friend, Tad.

The signature was the same as on the picture, an autograph. Acid rose to my scalp. *Paul! Why did you choose Tad Scybowicz as your final confidante?*

I purchased a ticket and followed the crowd into the arena.

Tad sauntered along the proscenium to a continuous cheer. He was thinner than he used to be and was outfitted in a double-breasted coat and cowboy hat. He seemed self-assured. Even his smile had the simper trained out of it. He was packaged on the model of Johnny Cash. But Johnny Cash wouldn't take money from a dying kid, deposit his body behind an abandoned theater, and then have the gall twenty years later to shove five hundred bucks off his pile into an envelope, saying: "This is for your brother Paul who loved me better than you."

Tad sat solo on stage. His same guitar, chrome refinished, burnished and lush, canted over his thigh, gleaming its rich mulberry tones, casting rays of brilliance into the theater.

"When I was just starting out, I fell hard on my luck in Oakland, California." He began in a sing song. A stir swept through the audience. "And while I was out there, sometimes eating in a soup kitchen, sometimes not at all, I thought my luck could get no worse. Until one day, I lost my guitar." He paused for effect. His head descended in the old way, and he swept his fingers. The crowd erupted.

*I was livin' the ambitious life in Oakland
playin' pool halls for my pay.
Yeah, I was livin' the ambitious life in Oakland
workin' pool halls for my pay.
Then one night I bet 'gainst a hustler
who stole my guitar away.*

The most fervent chanted the lyrics like it was the Lord's prayer. Somehow, between the crowd's effervescence and the agitation I felt, I imagined that the events were conspiring to tell me something. In that entire groupie throng, only Tad and I knew the real story. Neither of us would ever forget the flophouse on 19th and Broadway that night when Blamley stormed in brandishing his Chief's Special. Somehow I convinced myself that Tad was meaning his introduction as a dedication to me. "Enjoy the show...your friend," he'd written.

When the song ended, Tad gave what I thought must be my cue. He silenced the auditorium with an open palm and called out, his voice wavering like a televangelist summoning converts: "And then a man named Russell got me back my guitar. Russell? Are you out there tonight? Show yourself if you are. Come up here on stage so I can finally *thank* you."

When the crowd exploded again in applause I ought to have realized that this was part of Tad's shtick, show business, a stunt, nothing more. But by then I'd raised both my hands and was shouting, "I'm Russell." I repeated it through all the orchestrated pandemonium, convinced that Tad had it in his mind to make our meeting public. Was it not true that my brother Paul and I were the first and second salvation of his guitar? People on either side of me were staring. You could see their collective mind deliberating whether I might in fact be Russell. I started shouting over and over, "*I'm Russell!*"

The people heard me and made me the center of their ring. They parted before me like the Red Sea before Moses, pressing into the row of cops who clambered to secure the chain in front of the stage, until I was within a few feet of it. By now Stevens had taken notice—he could see my face. Our eyes locked. I smiled foolishly and mouthed my name. He hesitated. Then with a look of pity that conveyed me to a single mortifying realization, he shook his head ‘no,’ lowered it to the guitar and I was ushered headlong from the auditorium behind a thunderous wall of denunciation.

STEP BY STEP

by Noel Sloboda

—after Paul Klee’s “Dance of a Grieving Child”

Off balance for the first time
the little girl clutches a silver
feather her mother promised

dropped from a burning phoenix
she hopes might soon return
to bear her beyond this wailing

ground bruised by clumpy feet
desperately trying to keep pace
with an invisible clock.

For one full moment she floats
before being brought down
by the freight of new ideas

about yesterday and tomorrow
for which she suddenly feels
she must learn words.

MY LEGACY

by Montana Routsis

Sometimes I pretend
the warmth
cascading through
the slats of my blinds
are your lips on my cheek.
If I am closer to sleep
than I am awake
I can still hear you
whisper in my ear.
It's time to get up.
But now it is my alarm
that's screaming
reminding me I need
to pick you up,
your ashy remains.
I never would have thought
you would make me bear
this kind of burden,
not now at least.
I am just nineteen.
But, my age always did lack
significance to you.
I raised my brothers and sisters.
They would wake up
the house cloudy
with the smell of burnt bacon.
Stomachs still growling
as they would run
toward the bus.
Where did you go?
Weeks you would disappear,
my anger filling me slowly
like the bucket
underneath our leaking sink.
When you would return
my rage evaporated
like you were the sun.
But, it will be the moments
when you would sing
Home by Edward Sharpe
and The Magnetic Zeros
that I will remember you by.

I would tell myself
that you chose to sing,
home is whenever I'm with you,
as you would walk
through the front door
because it was your way
of telling us,
even though you would leave
you still loved us.
I remember
the nights that you made
my friends and me Car Bombs,
teaching us to hold our liquor.
When I drink them now
I close my eyes
and I can still see
your brown hair bouncing
while you cheered us on.
Drink, drink, drink!
On nights like those I swore
your eyes always turned
a brighter blue
as if they were shining lights.
Just like then,
I can not stay angry
because luckily, all my life,
you were teaching me
how to live without you.

RAINY NIGHTS

by Nahom Hagos

At nightfall we had blackouts
In Addis Ababa, and we ran
To get the flashlights from our
Mother's bedside.

Once I got there first,
And I hid behind the huge oak
Cupboard that creaked when touched.

I breathed in as far as my lungs
Could and roared so loudly
That even the heavens started a rumor
Saying I might be the bastard child
The god of thunder tried to hide.

All this so I could scare whoever
Came looking for the lights.

Lightning struck a nearby tree
And for a second the room filled
With a white light. Darkness fled
And when mother saw me hiding,
She cursed me and called my name.

I held the air tight as if it was the only
Thing that could give me away,
So that when the darkness, that black coat
Of relief came back, I heard it say,
It's okay to breathe again.

THAT PIECE OF SHIT SINGLE WIDE

by Kirsten Jachimiak

The linoleum was gone,
but the chips of wood
got smoothed with use.
I hardly ever got slivers.
My room could only fit
my wooden bunk bed
But to me it was a castle,
or a cave if I hung a sheet.
I had the most fun outside.
The backyard full of dirt,
weeds, bottle caps, and sun.
I'd lay on my stomach under
the big tree's shadow.
It made a spider's web
and I'd crawl around
trying to catch some prey,
but grasshoppers are fast.
Daddy would sit outside
on his torn lawn chair,
and watch me play.
He loved to laugh at me
and my silly games,
but he always ate
my special dirt stew.
He let me use the old
butter containers
for the bowls, and I'd fill them
with some water, ashes
from the BBQ for pepper,
some weeds with purple
stems that grew by the shed,
then lots and lots of dirt.
Stir it up, smell, and yum!
He'd say, *I love dirt.*
I love dirt too.

DIRT

by Audrey Carman

The boys who played in the dirty lot down Malcaster Street were not my friends. I didn't run fast, Didn't walk fast, didn't spit and wrestle. Their dark Matted hair was dusty with fun, cheeks scraped With smudges once collided with denim knees.

Each of my blonde hairs mimicked the comb tooth My mother pulled along my scalp to thistle Above my ear. Their tattered jeans were faded, Shirts with cowboys riding horses and funky collars.

I looked down at the starchy press of my pale blue shirt. The buttons shined in the afternoon sun. Lifting my arms I held those round perfect pieces And looked across the paved road to the hollering boys. I should rip the gleaming white threads. No.

I thought about my mother and father licking their fingers And turning their Sunday paper on the soapy couch. With rowdy courage I skidded into the lot In my slick black buster browns. The boys' mouths gaped, But their mouths turned into peckish smiles.

When the ball came rolling my way, I kicked it, then slid across the white base Of my belly, grit in my mouth and blood On my skin, which stained that pale blue starch With the fine brown dust that made the lot.

The dried grass and dead brush that pushed Up beneath the small sand hills filled the soles of my shoes. The sky grew golden orange and everyone's face pink with chill. Bellies rumbled and fingers longed for warmth. I stomped the dirt off down the road towards home.

SKI TRIP

by Jennifer Voorhies

A young man with wavy facial hair tells my dad, beginners age seven to ten line up in fifteen minutes. He's told my rental skis will be ready shortly. We sit on the bench outside the Squaw gift shop. Water and dirt from the bench soak through the ski pants that Jill, my dad's new girlfriend, gave me. He met her in college. That's what mom said six months ago when he moved out. But we came with Sue, dad's other new girlfriend, who's already on the slopes. A woman with long blonde hair and tight beige ski pants walks passed us into the gift shop. My dad watches her until she is out of sight. He gets up to follow. I stay on the bench. "Your skis are ready," the young guy says. He leans a pair of short skis against the rental counter. I say nothing and stay put. After a few minutes the young guy says, "I can't hold these any longer. You want 'em, pay for 'em. Your lesson is about to start." I have no money. I look down and pick at a loose knit on my hot pink glove. Sue lent me the gloves, not Jill. I repeat in my mind so I won't forget, *pants from Jill, gloves from Sue*. I get up and walk into the gift shop where I find my father standing behind the blonde woman. I stand behind dad. "Why not?" he asks her. "Just leave," she says. My dad turns around and almost bumps into me. His eyes burn. Burn bright and clear. Sizzle. One more thing not to say. "Something you want?" he asks. "Money for the skis." He leans in close. Squints. Searches. I already know not to look away because looking away means telling. I don't blink because blinking might mean something, too.

GROWING PAINS

by Linda Parsons Marion

I am getting old. I have bones in me.

—Elenor, my granddaughter, nearly four

Dr. Miller said they were real, no girl's imagined
phantom I remember even now, nights my legs

ached upon the rack, screws turning till unknown
sins with the dark-haired preacher wrenched me

to false confession. The pain made us all cry
at that age—knots our mothers kneaded with the heel

of their hands, bringing the hot water bottle,
alcohol's ether cloud. Nothing cut it, bowls of Mayo

or Neapolitan, nothing cooled my radiant calves
running in place, the hospital corners kicked loose.

I cried for sound sleep, for bones like poplars
to lift me over mudholes, bumps in the alley.

Shins to brunt the wince and gain, even as I slipped
to undoing, to rise and walk again. More than

the dark's visitation, I cried for everything coming
undone, things lost and wobbly—my parents'

stone stares, one leaving the other, the amethyst ring
from my grandfather barbering in the Arcade,

fender of my Schwinn, sprayed gravel a white star
on my thigh. More than the shadow in the closet,

fingered branches at the pane, blind curves ahead—
this limp from childhood into weightbearing years.

WHEN WE LEARNED WHAT A CIGARETTE LIGHTER SOCKET DOES

by Cynthia Miranda

One button in Dad's new truck
had a picture of a stick with smoke rising from it.
I pushed it, as my little cousin
sat beside me in his child's seat
kicking his tiny feet
and smiling at me.
We looked at each other
wondering what the button would do
wiggling in our seats
our hearts beating a bit faster.

When the button popped,
we both jumped a little.

Carefully I grabbed the button,
the inside bright angry red,
like the stove when mom cooks.
I wondered if it would burn
if I touched it,

so I pressed the red against
the top of his small leg,

and held it there.

His skin sizzled
and he squirmed and struggled to get away
from the blaze
on the skin of his leg.

He shrieked, finally, as
he glowered over at me.
His Bambi eyes crowded with tears.

I left a perfect circle
on the top of his leg
blistering with little bits
of livid scarlet skin.

ADOLESCENCE

by Kendra Huizar

A man stumbles to your cash wrap,
Your dingy jean skirt too short, and he hands

You twenty damp dollars to buy boxes
Of pseudoephedrine. You didn't know what for

When you were seventeen and very young and stupid,
Making seven dollars an hour

To buy a little blue cell phone
That was so cool then.

Meeting a boy out of jail, scar
On his neck where he was stabbed

By a broken beer bottle. He was the first
Boyfriend you had, and the first boyfriend

To have ever died on his motorcycle
Because a van couldn't see him.

Now he has a Facebook page.
People are afraid of deleting him

Because it's weird to be virtual friends
With the dead, and it's weird

Not to be at the same damn time.

QUERYING THE HIVE MIND

by Daniel Lawless

(Found Poem, adapted from posts on MetaFilter)

Trees in Fields. Why? Why
Are there solitary trees in the middle of fields?
The writers asks. He's desperate. (Why?) The board's abuzz with answers.
Shade for livestock. Shade for farmers. A roost
For flying pest control. Hawks and owls.
A landmark or a marker. A thing to piss on.
It's picturesque—a paid-for photo op, perhaps?
To mark a water source? Lumber? Fruit? Have you ever tried
To uproot a tree? It's not easy work.
You gotta cut the bulk of it down and chop up the trunk and branches.
Then you have to dig around the stump deep enough to get a chain around it
And find a piece of equipment muscular enough to pull the stump out.
(Assuming you have no dynamite.) Write it down, my boy:
When the thunderstorm rolls in on you, you'll be glad
You aren't the highest object in the field.
A low wet spot that can't be farmed, an old well, a cattle pen,
Whatever. Random. Say

An animal ate something in one place and shat out the seeds. What would happen?
Gravestones are the culprit I suspect. People plant a tree right beside them.
Fifty years later, the tree is huge and the roots have ground the headstone
into gravel.
But ask the farmer. It could be the place he first made love. (Or killed someone.)
Nostalgia. Rural folks and farmers are sentimental. Decisions
Are not always practical.
Here in Ireland, we have a fear of "Fairy Trees." Also Iceland.
Someone applied a fourier transform to a forest,
And wound up with a dirac delta function tree.
Thank you! Thank you!
Writes the writer. Great answers! Thank you! Except I do not understand
The last one.

Related Questions:

Why do pine trees

Make a thumping noise? How burn an orange? How do I repurpose

My childhood tree?

A CONVERSATION WITH CLAIRE VAYE WATKINS

by Angela Spires

Claire Vaye Watkins, a Nevada native, had a busy 2013. She guest lectured at Princeton University (which continues through the spring of 2014), traveled to Wales where she won the Dylan Thomas Prize, met and interviewed Karen Russell, and worked on a new novel.

A: I just read your interview with Karen Russell [on Salon.com] “As the girls shake their OxyContin.”

C: I had never met her before, so that was my way of getting to meet her. I was really star struck by her. I had been following her work for so long, and I was so pleased at how normal she was. I think it’s a strange experience to meet someone through their work because they have this mythic quality in your head. When you meet someone and they’re an actual person, you can kind of exhale a bit. That’s how I felt, I think. It’s nice when someone you admire is a nice person too, because it’s a tricky situation if you like them and then if they’re jerks, their work is kind of ruined for you.

A: Is she someone that you are going to keep in correspondence with, now that you’ve gotten to meet her.

C: We write to each other occasionally. I wrote her a note when she won; she just got the MacArthur Fellowship, so I wrote her a note to say congratulations. I really like her, and I don’t have a lot of MacArthur Genius grant-winning friends. So, I think I’ll try to keep her.

A: You seem to be racking up awards, your most recent being the Dylan Thomas Prize.

C: It was really exciting. There were seven finalists and nobody knew who had won until the moment they announced it at the award ceremony, and you know, it was tense in that it was exciting, not that there was animosity or competition. I was the only American, so that was really cool to meet other writers from all over the world and hear how they are experiencing publishing a book and finding readership. And it was also cool because the Dylan Thomas Prize has a real genuine emphasis on the community. There is Wales; we spent the whole week traveling around and we spent a lot of time talking with young people and giving them a sense of what it’s like to be a writer, which I think is a really important and worthwhile endeavor.

A: Speaking of community, can you tell me a little bit about the Mohave Project?

C: That's a workshop my husband and I put on every summer in my hometown, Pahrump. Last year was the first year that we did it. We had thirteen students participate, and we did workshops in fiction, poetry, screenwriting, and non-fiction. And they did a reading at the end of the week. I really liked meeting the students, and it's also a reason for me to go home. You know, just spend time in Nevada, which I don't get to do as much as I would like to. A lot of them knew each other from school, but they definitely didn't know that each of them have this kind of secret interest in reading and writing stories, and by the time we left, they were all talking about getting a writing group together and reading each other's stuff. And that's what Derek and I really want, the Mohave school to keep existing year round, whether we're there or not. Right now, we are just trying to make it happen. The thing that got me started was, I had been teaching at the Young Writers' Conference at the University of the South, and I have a really good time, and the students seemed really excited, and it seemed really practical and important for them. And I was talking with Derek about how it frustrated me that as accomplished as the program is, it still costs \$2,000 for students to go to. So only a certain set of affluent families would be able to afford that kind of thing, right? So I just wanted to do something like that that was totally free and that gave students in rural Nevada especially, access to exciting creative writing instruction and eventually we do want to bring in speakers, and we have to figure out how we are going to fund the camp and the workshops from here on out. I think the Dylan Thomas prize will help with that a little bit.

A: You had an opinion piece for the *New York Times* recently. Do you think the way the system is right now, it is harder for small towns? What are ways that you think we can combat the fact that these small town students don't have the chances that larger city students have?

C: I think it's tempting to say "I did well despite Pahrump," like I have a good job now, and I published a book, and I got out, and I escaped. But actually, for me, I did well because of Pahrump. The book I wrote is because I grew up in rural Nevada in a place that was kind of difficult and a little bit out of the way. I am the person I am because of that place. It's tempting, the paradigm is to escape and forget and move on, but I think people who succeed from rural places have to be honest about what they owe the place where they came from. I certainly have an ambivalent relationship with Pahrump. I don't want to live there, and I don't think I ever could, at least not as it is arranged right now. If we could challenge the conventional wisdom that a small town is a place you escape and never look back, that would be a good start. What we do at the Mohave school is really not complicated. All we do is read and write and talk about what we

read and write, right? But the more important thing is telling the story about how I used to live here in Pahrump; this is what I'm doing now. Because if you live in really small out-of-the-way place, you feel like there are no options. I never really met someone from Pahrump that went on to be a professor, and I'm positive there are people, I've just never heard their stories.

Mohave School is a way for me to remind myself, "this is where I come from and a part of who I am." It's a way for me to get back home, even though a lot of times it doesn't quite feel like home any more. Partially because, it's kind of funny, just having gone to the University of Nevada, Reno was a bit of a betrayal in the community.

A: Princeton sounds amazing. What is it like guest lecturing there?

C: It's really wonderful. I really like teaching wherever I am, so it's kind of nice. I don't really think much about it. Teaching creative writing anywhere for me is a great job. I still can't believe I get paid to do it anywhere. I like students from all different levels of training. My Princeton students are very well trained on how to be a student; my Mohave school students are not. They are both completely worthwhile and rewarding endeavors. And they both bring measure and advantages and limitations in terms of creative writing, making a piece of art, you know. It's kind of like art is this great equalizer. You might have had the best education in the world, and that will help you a lot in a lot of arenas, but it doesn't necessarily mean you're going to be a great writer and vice versa.

A: There are some really great Nevada writers, but even with those, *Battleborn* sticks out, you make it your own. It's not like you are mimicking or taking the place of other writers, you are just adding.

C: I think that is a product of that feeling free, or feeling unencumbered by a specific well-known tradition. I think that if I had grown up in Connecticut or something, I would have really struggled with the craft. Maybe place wouldn't have been as important to me or maybe I would have innovated in a different way. But I felt like I had this rich tradition which a lot of people didn't really know about. I had this place, that was kind of a secret, a really, really well kept secret. Especially Reno, I think is a wonderful well-kept secret and people have this flat version of it. But it's probably the most interesting place I've ever lived and/or visited. It's my favorite city by far. That's partially because it's so interesting. There's this sense that people have that it's not a nice place, which is a pretty dated, uninformed idea of the town. But even if it isn't nice, I would rather it be interesting, which it very much is.

And I think that now that I look back, it was such a wonderful place to come of age as a writer, because one of the things you have to learn when you're learning to write is how to watch people and

listen to people. And Reno is so interesting. It insists that you may attention to your surroundings and pay attention to all the weirdness and notice interesting places and the layers of time that are there. It was generous with story. I think with other places, you have to work harder. You have to have a more sophisticated trained eye to see the interesting parts about it. Reno just gives them up all the time.

A: In *Battleborn* you have father-daughter relationships, families, friends, foreigners, whores, and sociopaths. You have this whole transient group of people. Is that a product of this transient nature that Reno encompasses or that Nevada in general encompasses?

C: It's sort of the byproduct of this project I set out for myself, which was place-based. So every time I would start a story in *Battleborn* I would think about a place in Nevada. Sometimes I would go to a map of Nevada and ask myself "where haven't I written about yet" and then I would say "oh, the Black Rock desert," and then I would say "well, who's in the Black Rock desert?" That's very different than the people who live by The Strand at UNR. It forced me to have this more varied population. And also, *Battleborn* is this archive of my education as a writer because I wrote it while I was doing an MFA program, so you can see when you read it that I wanted to practice writing in different styles, different voices, with different technical elements, like point of view and psychic distance, and part of that meant writing about different kinds of people: young people, old people, people who were alone.

A: In "Ghost, Cowboys," you integrate fictional and factual history both about the Nevada and from your own personal life. Why did you decide to give the main character the name Claire?

C: The way I think about that story is it's like a short story that takes the form of a piece of non-fiction. It feels like more of an essay or a memoir, more than historical non-fiction. But the point is to replicate this feeling that I think is implicit when we read a lot. This sensation that all this really happened. All the way back to the first line of *Slaughter House Five* and a lot of other work that I admire that are kind of overtly meta-fictional, like *The Things They Carry* by Tim O'Brien. I made something fun that I wanted to play around with the genre and the form and I think that naming the character Claire brings all of this blurriness between fiction and non-fiction to the forefront. Also, it invites people to explicitly make those kind of speculations, which I think are a lot of fun, you know. I think of it as a playful story.

A: Have you had any readers that ask if that really happened to you?

C: Yeah, I always tell them if you were going to use that story as a source for a history paper, you would do very poorly on that history

paper. I was not mistaken when I included it in a book of fiction.

A: You have several different styles of writing in the book. You have the epistolary story which was published in *Granta*, you have “The Diggings” which is kind of like a journal or a story within a story, and “Ghost, Cowboys” where you go back to the notion of “maybe it begins here or maybe it begins here.” Are there other styles you want to try or to play around with for future stories?

C: Usually the story itself demands a certain way of being told. So without knowing the stories themselves, I don't have really specific ideas. Although I would like to write a piece that is very inward, very much takes place inside the mind of a character. I just read this novel by Javier Marias, and I think the whole novel must take place over about thirty minutes. It's just while he is waiting for his girlfriend to come home from work. And it's just about what he's thinking about and dealing with. So I'd like to work in that way, to more explore the movement of our mind, kind of tunnel deep rather than plot it as horizontal, where people are going forward and flashing back. I'd kind of like to start working vertically. I also don't really think of my stories as being realism in the sense that Philip Roth and Ann Beattie and others are realism. It's a little bit exaggerated and a little bit super saturated, so I'm curious about trying domestic realism that is very convincing. I don't think that the stories in *Battleborn* fit exactly in our world, just one that is adjacent to it.

A: Is humor an element you work into your stories or does it just come with the character?

C: I guess it's probably a little bit of both. I like humor that's a surprise when I'm reading. I love to be surprised and I think that humor can be a really energetic element on the page and I like to be entertained while I'm writing. I don't like to be bored or feel like too confident or comfortable. I think that's a bad sign. So if I'm working in one mode, I try to spring in elements from a totally different type of storytelling. If I'm writing a story that really is based on a thrilling plot and the tone is pretty dark and difficult emotional, I like to have jokes in that story. Just because I want to see if I can and that's what should be in writing; I don't want to bore myself when I'm writing.

A: I love your first paragraph in “The Archivist.” It's so beautifully written and I love the elements of the “pill for the lovelorn” or “the ointment for the heartache.”

C: The first lines of the stories were the last thing I wrote. This is something that Chris Coake taught me when I was in undergrad; how to write your story and then discover what you are going to discover and then rewrite your story so that sense of discovery feels inevitable for the reader, and a lot of times that means that your first line can kind of encapsulate the entire story. So I think he gave me the first

line of “Ghost, Cowboys” verbatim. He told me, “this should be the first line of this story.” And then I learned that it feels good as a reader if the first line makes a promise. Like this is what this is going to be about.

A: *Battleborn* is so grounded in place that it seems to become another character. In your future writing is that still part of your plan? Do you feel like place is always going to be this grounding element in your work?

C: I can't really start on things like character or plot until I figure out where we are. Because I don't know who a person is until I can figure out what they see when they get up in the morning, and see what the weather is, and how they feel about that. And then I can't start a plot until I know where we are because, you know, how do you know what's going to happen to someone unless you know where they are? I don't know if it will always be in Nevada, and if it will be in the Mohave desert. So far it has been, but it may not be. I don't know yet because I have only written a book and half or so, and I don't really know if the place is kind of my muse and I'll always return to it, or if place in general acts that way and I just need to get to better know other places.

A: Your short story in the *Kenyon Review* is still set in Nevada. Have you changed the setting of any of your other stories to reflect other places where you have lived?

C: In the novel that I am working on now, place is really important to the characters and the book, but the distinction of whether this is Nevada or California, that is kind of moot. Basically I am trying to set it in a world where place as we know is a little bit disrupted and blurred and all these boundaries are blurred. So you wouldn't say “we are in the Mohave Desert” though it's pretty obvious that's where they are. So it has this elemental, “it's sunny, it's hot, there's sand, there isn't water.” What do we do know? So far it's still set in the place where I come from. I haven't been able to quite take in enough on the East Coast to kind of figure out stories. I think that's because I move around too much. I spent my whole life in the Southwest, in California and Nevada, and so it took me twenty-three years of living there to find the stories, so I don't know, maybe it will take me that long to figure out stories on the East Coast, or maybe I don't know how long I'll live here.

A: You said in your interview with Karen Russell that your new novel discusses hexes and dowsers, and the new story has the mole-man legend, though it wasn't the mole man. How much are you playing with superstitions and urban legends in your novel?

C: A lot. One of my obsessions with this new novel is urban legends that are more like conspiracy theories, and mysticism and hexes. I am becoming a surprisingly superstitious person. I didn't really realize

that about myself. I'm not religious, but I have an emerging semi-real, intangible belief system, and I'm interested in how it's kind of about faith, the book, and about what you owe someone when you love them. I want to be able to put the dowser in the book. The title actually, I haven't told anyone this yet, but the title of it right now is *The Dowsers*. It's basically about people looking for things in all the weird, improbable strategies we go about looking or searching for.

A: What is your biggest superstition?

C: I am very superstitious about language. I mean, when I write, I have this feeling that the words are alive in a way, so when I edit, I feel kind of like I'm killing them. So I say these little private prayers when I change a word or I delete something. I apologize a little bit in my head for it. I'm pretty susceptible to the idea of jinxing something or talking it away. Especially when it comes to art making. I haven't talked about the novel I'm working on clearly with anyone at any meaningful length because I feel like you can talk about something and it can disappear. It doesn't make sense. It's not supposed to make sense.

And I don't like to fuck around with the unknown. So I am pretty respectful of things like curses or hexes. And sometimes I get a feeling: I had this desk that was cursed, for example, so I had to get rid of it. I don't know if it was or it wasn't, but whether or not I believe in it, I just don't want to take the chance. I guess all my really deeply held superstitions are about writing and about the creative process because I feel like it could forsake you if you don't treat it with reverence.

A: In "Battleborn" and other stories that you've written, and even in the non-fiction that you write, you flawlessly switch from first person to third person to an omniscient narrator. Is there one voice that you particularly like to write in? Is there one you are afraid of or want to try?

C: I'm not comfortable in all of them, and I think that's why I write in many because I don't need to get comfortable. I think there are certainly all kinds of writing that I am not great at. I think that I'm not very good at dialogue, and I seem to be getting worse at it as I get older for some reason. I think it's because I talk a lot in my real life and think I'm not good at it on the page or something. I haven't really truly mastered omniscience, I don't think, in the way that I want to. I'm still working on that. Every time I read Alice Munro, it's obvious that I don't know anything about how to write about time.

A. You got married to another fiction writer this year. Are you both writing with schedules? How does that work in your married life? Do you read each other's work and comment on it?

C: We are basically as involved in each other's writing as the other asks us to be. We tend to just leave each other alone and bring each other cups of coffee while we're working. And then if one of us wants

to talk about a problem or a puzzle that they're trying to figure out, we'll do it together. Right now my husband just read the first draft of the first part of my novel and gave me some feedback. So I spent all morning integrating his suggestions into my draft. We met in an MFA program in a creative writing workshop, and all our friends more or less are writers too, so it's not actually that different from anyone else we are friends with who are writers. We all have the same interests in common, and we can all just sort of geek out together. Which is fun. We're pretty different in the terms of writing process and what we like to read, but occasionally we'll overlap with a book or something, and that's pretty exciting. We are both reading *Paris Trance* by Geoff Dyer. Well, I finished *Paris Trance*, so I'm enjoying watching Derek finish it. I don't think I could marry someone who didn't like to read. Being writers probably helps us be attracted to each other, but it's not the main thing.

A: Is it helpful to have friends, and a spouse, that understand you as a writer?

C: Yeah, you're right. There is this kind of emotional space that you go to sometimes because of the writing process, if you are struggling. If I have a bad writing day, a really bad writing day, my husband might say "how did it go?" And I just say "don't ask me that" and that's completely valid. He gets it. I think we understand if we are preoccupied or if we want to be alone for a while. Some things in our house are sacrosanct, and "I'm writing" is one of those.

A: *Battleborn* is wonderful, and it's had a lot of accolades and awards. Does that create any kind of fear for how your next novel will be perceived or do you think it will be received better because of *Battleborn*.

C: I think I'm kind of not allowing myself to go down that road, to start on that speculation trail, because I can't control it. But I think I have the mixed blessing of being my own harshest critic. So it's like that line in *Girls* where she says, "Everything bad you could say to me, I've already said myself." So in a way, I feel a little bit like if I ever let this book that I am writing out into the world, there's nothing that people can say about it that I haven't said to myself. Although, maybe I'll be proven wrong. The pleasure of being a relatively unknown writer is that people don't bother to tear you down. If Dave Eggers or Jonathan Franzen put out a book people are waiting to cut their legs out from under them. Not with me.

A: If you got to do another interview with an author or your choice, who would you want to interview?

C: Joan Didion is probably my favorite living writer, but I'm not sure if I would want to interview her or meet her because she is too much of a giant in my mind, and I wouldn't want that to be, well, it's not fair to put her in that position because I would come to her with too much need. I would need her to be this Joan Didion of my mind and she's

her own person. I lucked out that Karen was wonderful, but I don't think I'll take that chance again. Maybe if I got the chance it would be different.

SELLING THE GUITAR

by Kate E. Schultz

At seventeen, I begged my boyfriend for hickeys
and wore V-neck shirts for days after.
I'd stare at the burn-like marks he'd leave
on my skin, proud of the flower-shaped patch
of burst blood vessels. I'd let down my hair
before dinner, to hide them from my parents.

All those nights I spent in his bedroom—
lying on his bed drinking Budweiser,
watching him play his guitar. It was often
just us two, his divorced mother at bars
trying to meet new men. When he'd tire
of his guitar and climb into bed, I'd drape myself
over him, kissing his calloused fingertips,
combing through his thick red hair,
dragging my palm along his pale skin.
When he held my hand, it was as if
he wasn't sure how to fit his fingers
around anything but his guitar-strings.

I went away to college that fall, met a boy
in freshman comp who wrote about playing guitar.
We began to hang out in his dorm room,
where I'd drink my beer from a thermos to be safe
and I'd listen to him strum Led Zeppelin, Bob Dylan,
but nothing he'd written himself. His fingertips
were smooth and unmarked.

One night I asked him for a hickey,
told him to bite me hard
enough to leave a mark; it was better if it hurt.
When he looked at me then, I knew it was over.
In December I came home for Christmas,
saw my old boyfriend one day at CVS
standing in the middle of the checkout line.
He'd gotten his eyebrow pierced. I wondered who'd done it.
Who was with him when the tiny gold hoop
cut through his skin? Did he bleed? I saw no scar
when I approached him. As we talked, he told me
he'd sold his guitar to help pay off
his mother's car. That night in my bedroom
before dinner, I put my hair up, no hickeys to hide,

and I tried not to notice
the skin on my neck—like his own
surrounding the piercing—clean,
unbruised and barren.

BECAUSE SHE ASKED

by Sean Prentiss

Once she and I are loaded onto the ski area chairlift, she glances toward the chair ahead where her boyfriend talks to another skier. She turns toward me (as we float through air) and asks, *How is your writing going?* Without waiting for a response, she adds, *You should write a poem for me.* She pauses, glances toward her boyfriend.

I think to last summer, and how she invited me to visit her in Breckenridge. She said, *We'll get dinner.* When I drove through Summit County (during a cross-country drive), she never answered my calls. We haven't spoken since—seven months and sixteen days, not that I'm counting. I remember to last winter...

...as she prepared to do a keg stand (after a day of skiing),
And she flirted and said, *So all I do is open my mouth
And put it in?* She smirked at me. I wanted to leave that party—take her
Into some darker corner of the room and kiss her. Instead I held her
Legs during the keg stand. When she landed on her feet,

We never kissed. Now we're talking—the first in nearly a year—
While I try to ignore her flirting today, her not returning my calls
Last summer, her boyfriend on the chair in front of us (hearing none of
This). She repeats, *You should write a poem for me.* As we climb the mountain,
There is a long pause (lasting nearly a year). *A love poem,* she says.

The lift halts as the wind howls and swirls snow (until I swear
She and I can't see even five feet, her boyfriend is long gone). She smiles,
Don't tell Pete. I won't. I won't. The snow swirls harder and harder
Until even I disappear, until it's just her, just her, and she is talking
To the wind.

RIVER BOTTOM

by Sean Prentiss

Late nights, when the boy is drunk, he sinks
To the bottom of the river, which no matter how many
Times he mouths its name, it is always nameless.

At some point he has to break to the surface, gulp in
Midnight summer air, and wipe riverwater
From his eyes.

He sees a world of beers (fallen and empty)
On a wobbly dock. And girls (naked—and soft
In all the right spots) jumping almost into his arms.

But none of this (the beers, the girls) feels like home.
Only the water does. The stars above—thousands
of light years away, they do too.

SAYING, *I LOVE YOU*

by Carol Oswald

I don't know what it means
To love a man, but I know
The feeling just before we fell
Asleep, when I just wanted
To feel the palm of your hand
Pressed against my chest.

When your blonde hair barely
Swept your dirty pillowcase
As you kissed the freckle just
Under my eye and I longed
For your knees to tuck
Behind the back of mine.

I don't know if I will ever
Know what it means to love a man,
But when I curl up under layers
Of mint colored satin at night,
I miss the roughness of your
Cotton blend sheets on my skin.

HEART STRINGS

by Keith Jewett

In the workshop, he nestled the broken violin
back into its case, swept up the piles of sawdust
collected on the floor. He gathered
the perfect ringlets of maple and rosewood
and placed them in a bin, nearly filled
with the remains of another day's work.
He put the lid back onto the liquor reeking shellac,
then with a tender hand he placed each rasp,
file and saw in its proper place, as if to say, *Sleep well.*
From the doorway, he turned the lights off,
and over his shoulder said, *Goodnight.*

At home, his wife was in bed, shoulders slumped
toward the open book in her lap. She didn't even bother
to look up as they said, *Hi, honey.*
He laid in bed, looking at the gray curls
of her hair, marveling at how they shimmered
like the figuring of maple. If only she were an instrument,
he could tickle her vocal chords
like strings, to laughter and excitement.
Her heart would be the bridge, easy to repair,
beating and pulsing to create the vibrant sounds of life.
Their communication would be as simple to fix
as a crack along the grain of the spruce top that had slowly
separated over many seasons.

A SUMMONING OF GIANTS

by Vincent Moran

It used be a man in the moon
that would look a little brighter
some nights, and parted in others,
imparting everything he knows
to a bustling world that is too busy to listen.
If only he could go back
to the romantics in Greece
to tell them how terribly alone he feels
without his Selene:
a personification of a god—
without the embrace of Titans,
for in ancient times, giants carried the moon.
For now, his light falls through my window
as I try to sleep, and he still reaches for a friend
as the sun is nowhere to be found.
Pytho won the war on Apollo, tonight.

And as we laid in our worn bed,
you told me dragons are real
But I replied, *I don't believe in God.*
It was the wince that showed me you did.
You kissed me anyway,
and said, *Neither do I.*

But among the once-weres and would-have-beens
dragons exist,
simply to rip the throats out of gods
and burn them to a disheartening crisp.
For now, the moon will continue to wish
for a summoning of giants
and I will turn to you...

...Hope is a strange word.
You reply, *If only it were stranger.*

FORGETTING

by Tyler Bigney

We drug the mattress out of the house and threw it on
the fire, and when it wouldn't burn, I poured gas over it,

and ran as the smoke turned the blue sky black.
Hold your breath. I'm going to move to the coast,

where I can back float across the Bay of Fundy and daydream
of the Persian girl who pours my coffee, and how when

she walks away, I secretly stir it into the color of her eyes.
I'm not yet convinced that I am ever going to die.

I'm wearing the jeans with the ink stain on the right pocket.
Ink from the pen that penned the letters from coffee shops

across the country. The bad haikus and the over-the-top
gushing. I was too sentimental. Now I'm not. I burned

what I loved: The letters. The mattress. The car. I had
big plans to fake my death and move to Peru, or Ghana.

Instead I went crazy, moved from my parents' basement
into a small apartment and wrote a novel—Burned that, too.

I'm in a hotel watching fireworks explode over some harbour.
We're always celebrating something, so here's to forgetting.

RHYTHM METHOD

by Barbara Buckley Ristine

Most nights, exhausted, you fall asleep in the blue flame-stitch wing back chair, me on the worn leather couch, until one of us wakes the other and we wander to our bed. Most mornings, I awake to a warm sweet Cuban coffee left on my nightstand like an offering, and the day opens to the known rhythm of our lives. Gym, office, carpools of children bouncing like so many hard rubber balls on a handball court, the market with its bursting bins and broad aisles of provisions spread out like so many loaves and fishes. Most evenings, dinner is served with soothing slices of silence between bursts of news delivered by children clamoring for our attention. Sleep, wake, eat, repeat. The ebb and flow of married life doesn't allow much romance. And yet, sometimes, in the fragile moments just before wisps of dawn's light come creeping across the bed, we reach for one another, grasping for the passion we vaguely remember, and our bodies fold into one another and connect until we fall back.

THANKSGIVING ON THE COAST

by Andrea Buchanan

I do not believe there is an itch or a twitch in my poker tell.
But the page to activate my credit card is the only one that won't load,
and I have a feeling the computer is getting to know me too well.

My man and I hit the bar with sun at our backs. Visiting family for a spell
requires a certain method of coping. Pre-emptive strike. A gin-induced mode.
How could there possibly be an itch or twitch in my poker tell?

My cousin loads poles and tall cans, so we leave before the dinner bell
stops ringing. But the skinny perch elude me and I head for the dirt road.
I have the sneaking suspicion the fish are getting to know me too well.

Mom is getting married. Again. After the last, she picked up and fell
for a man my age. She presses a pink bridesmaid dress against me. What a
load
of...There must be an on/off switch for the twitch in my poker tell.

I climb on giant concrete broken puzzle bits. Smoking. Repeating a story I'll tell
and re-tell. They hold the sea at bay. Deep cracks in the cement I finger don't bode
well for longevity. Breakwater slips through and grabs because it knows me too well.

Barefoot in the sand, I watch the icy grow and fall and break of the constant swell
before I walk back inside to look left, then right, listen for the right code.
They study my face for the itch and twitch in my poker tell.
Then I realize I'm the only one who does not know me too well.

Vicky agrees.

I am quiet; realizing
his own sisters have said it.

Okay, here's permission.

I walk out the door without serving dessert,
leaving you alone with them.

THE LAST FEW DAYS OF AUTUMN

by Winnona Elson Pasquini

languor in the brown leaves
crumbled in a dresser drawer—
the last cigar has fallen apart.
Mahogany leaves that smell
like plaid wool shirts—
or maybe old Scotch. Tell me
I should throw it away. No,
in this fine texture, crumpled edges,
I hear something call.
I think it calls your name.
All these left-behind things:
chestnuts wet on a leaf-bound street,
ground down by endless tires,
deer-fallow apples moldering
beneath a bank of straw,
and the piney woods waiting for snow.
I still know the weight
of your legs tangled with mine,
the way you leaned over my body
reaching for a match—one long,
slow draw, and then the taste
of smoky breath in my mouth.

LIKE THAT

by Jordan Hartt

With the girls and the wet laundry in the car, I drive to where Billy lives in a little apartment complex by the community college.

Momma'll be right back, I say, turning to the back seat. Be good girls now, y'hear?

They stare at me white-faced, like owls. I look at my own lined face in the rearview mirror and then I get out and lean against the car and have a cigarette.

When I bang on Billy's door he opens it and pulls me inside by the front of my bra, which he grabs through my sweatshirt. He's wearing gray sweatpants with dirt and grass stains and no shirt. LJ's watching cartoons in the living room. He's sitting cross-legged. His face is wet from crying. He really is a little weenie, sometimes. Mom! he shouts girlishly, standing up.

We'll be right back, kid, Billy says. He pushes me into the bedroom and doesn't bother to shut the door. He lies on me with his wet, thick tongue in my mouth. I can feel how hard he is. He sits up and holds me down by my neck, and he goes, all sweetly, Jesus Christ, baby, why won't you return my calls? I just want to talk. Jesus, it's like you won't even talk to me anymore. Why is that, huh, hon'? He bends down as if to kiss me but instead lifts my sweatshirt up and pushes my bra up, and then tugs at my breasts with his mouth and stubbled chin. I stare out the window at the trimmed treetops while he pulls my sweatpants down and I pray to God that LJ won't show up in the doorway.

Why do I gotta do this to get your attention? he asks in the sweet voice he's using. He gets started. I'm dry, which excites him. Why can't you just call me back? he asks. Why do you gotta be this way? His breath gets heavy. It's silent in the living room, where LJ is. I can't hear the cartoons on anymore.

I lie there and it hurts and for some reason what I think of is the time when LJ was young, when he was my only child and I had more energy. We took a wagon up on the new pavement up behind the apartment building we lived in at the time. It was a beautiful afternoon in late August. The fields smelled like smoke from the post-harvest burning. I got on the wagon and LJ sat on my lap.

I don't know about this, he said.

Trust me, I said. Do you trust me?

I'm not sure, he said.

Mother and son, sitting in a wagon, about to roll downhill.

And now it's so completely fucked up because I'm lying there and somehow I realize I'm moving my hips against Billy and LJ is listening to us, and I'm thinking about how LJ said, I'm not sure.

Billy, I say.

Billy puts his hand over my mouth and presses so hard I taste blood. I struggle to free myself and that spurs him on and I'm fighting to get him off me and that excites him and he clenches his face and finishes. He rolls on his back and throws a forearm over his eyes. *Goddamn* but you're good, he says. Hit the light on the way out. We'll talk later.

I start to get dressed. It takes me three times to turn my sweats back the right way. I turn the light off and shut the door behind me. Let's go, sweetie, I tell LJ, who stands up quickly from the couch and pulls his hands away from his lap. He has a visible erection in his thin shorts that I pretend not to see.

I feel like I'm looking down on him from the ceiling. Looking down on him, on myself. At everything: the fucked-up mother, the fucked-up son, the living room, the whole thing.

The girls are still sitting in the back of the car. Were you good girls? I ask, as I get in. They don't answer. They look at each other, and then out their windows. LJ is crying again, his face hidden in his hands. Jesus, I think, I've ruined him forever. But he's back in my car and for right now that's enough.

The firmness of the steering wheel steadies my hands. I drive through the dark, quiet, warm town. Every now and then I feel LJ looking over at me but I don't look back. We drive silently home, where we're renting two rooms from Jess and Holly. One of those nice neighborhoods with lawnsprinklers clicking around the darkening lawns, televisions visible in living rooms, the leaves of chestnut trees rustling in the warm wind. Best place I ever lived, and I knew even in that moment of getting ready to run—again—that I was going to miss living there.

Anyway, I send the kids inside and unpack the laundry from the car. I let the basket slide to the ground and I light a cigarette. And then there's this minute where I just stand there smoking and smelling the evening as deeply as I can. I feel empty in the pit of my stomach, like that time LJ and I were on the wagon and I lifted my legs up off the road and we started to roll, going slow at first, then faster and faster. LJ was screaming and I was holding him in my arms and I was probably screaming, too, and we shot around a bend, wagon wheels rattling, fences shooting by, the valley laid out beneath us, flat as a board game, and there was this dip and we left the road, lifted into the air, not knowing when or how we were going to land.

NET

by Michelle Hendrixson-Miller

A rusted pail bangs against
the pipe organ in my throat.

The life of another daughter
gone a week before prom

is swept up like pennies
by this sentence.

I am a mother
therefore a failure. For what

can be done with perfection?
Morning sun enters.

Now, the room is a cornfield.
Words begin. I prefer:

Hallelujah, I'm not afraid anymore.

Today, though, dust and silks of hair

attach to everything
light tosses its thin, useless
net down to gather.

EVERYONE WAS LIGHT

by Donald Illich

It was the time when a feather
weighed more than a skyscraper.
It was the days when feeding
your dog Hershey Kisses wasn't
frowned upon. It was the hours
when destiny was too busy fixing
her hair to listen to the future.
It was the second we expected
to be alive in forever, the minute
we thought would devour the past.
It was the instant when all people
were trapped in awful smiles.
It was it, the period of existence
we slept through, Rip Van Winkles
coming down from mountains,
only to see how everyone was light,
everyone was made of nothing,
and if we didn't hurry, we'd be
stuck as matter, as skin, as heart.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE SUN: A GHAZAL

by John F. Buckley

The worshippers gather and toil in the light of the sun.
The post-cataclysmic seas boil in the light of the sun.

Nobody knows the day and nobody knows the method;
competing philosophies roil in the light of the sun.

The wayward detective at lunchtime relaxes with novels,
reading A. Conan Doyle in the light of the sun.

The alchemist exits his chamber and follows the path where
the serpents of dark wisdom coil in the light of the sun.

Beautiful flowers have waited all winter to become, and
emerge with faint fanfare from soil in the light of the sun.

The canteen is empty, the sky's also empty, the lost hiker
condenses water with aluminum foil in the light of the sun.

Exhausted roughnecks drain from the decks of the refinery,
done drilling the seafloor for oil in the light of the sun.

A gambler caught cheating is begging three thugs in the desert,
claiming obscure rules from Hoyle in the light of the sun.

Picnickers leave their plates on the table for a quick game of catch,
with hopes that the mayonnaise won't spoil in the light of the sun.

Two teenaged girls loosen their tops but forget to wear sunscreen,
letting their smooth, bare backs broil in the light of the sun.

Daddy's blonde princess is pregnant with a swarthy baby.
The bruises he leaves might look royal in the light of the sun.

Eyes in the sky and eyes in the heart and eyes on all sides.
Will a final assessment find me loyal in the light of the sun?

MULTIVERSE

by John Sibley Williams

Tell me how
the earth can be flat one moment
and round the next.
How the seas spread equally thin
like skin over two interchangeable faces.
How my heart can be
so many unrecognizable things.

I build a paper boat
from unanswered letters
returned to me in bottles
and set it delicately
among colossal waves.
I don't yet know

if my body will careen over an edge
or sail forever in circles.
I may never know

if I am writing or reading
this universe.

EMILY AS A WHITE TREE OF MY VEINS

by Darren C. Demaree

The roots
are muscles

& defiant
of all nature

but its own.
If we steal

enough
black gold

our fruit
will roll

un-endlessly
with tide

& without.

THE FALL COLLECTION

by Mark Terrill

What the morning has to say to you
in its violent October language—
the riot of red and orange and yellow,
the anarchy of a splash of pink—
all that blue and green and brown—
you have to step back a bit
to take it all in—you need to unfurl
the law of Knowing and Unknowing
to find out where you really stand.
Then the memory thing kicks in—
a flashback cutaway all the way back
to a time before the time you call now—
a red Dodge pickup coated in road grime,
a gallon jug of tequila finished off
in a rusty boxcar—bad new friends and
a menacing turquoise and silver ring
decorating a dirty clenched fist
hovering right there in your face—
but all those years have left you alone,
to surmise in a clime of unmade decisions
and forfeited wisdom in which neither
stratagems of creation nor some
skinny romance can save you now.
The way that an artist leads the light
into a painting—that process reversed—
is the only way out of this world.

THE MAGI SEEM AUTHENTIC

by William Doreski

Setting out feeders and scattering
cracked corn for turkeys, I sample
the cold like a new Beaujolais.
Sip, swill, spit out into the gray.
Chemical warfare in Syria,
a man pushed from a subway platform
to die a crescent-shaped death.

No wonder the oncoming rain
feels personal as an insult.
No wonder my cigar-shaped breath
clots into fog and falls in the grass.
If a white Christmas should arrive
it will mean a total erasure.
Still, the Magi seem authentic,

struggling across the outer fringe
of the Roman Empire to bring
their produce to impress a child.
If I could mount a camel
without laughing and losing balance
I'd join them to make a foursome.
As I turn to re-enter the house

the turkeys dash from the woods
to peck corn and roll in the dirt.
Yesterday two slept upside-down
in a bed of pine needles. Their feet
were pronged like tuning forks. The reek
of poison will drift from Syria
to spoil my day of reading books

about people I never met:
Baudelaire, Robert Duncan, Cato.
Their faces will form in the cold
metallic rain, then drift away
with postmortem sighs so palpable
they could be my own, remaindered
after a night of halfhearted love.

FOR ST. STEPHEN

by B. Elizabeth Beck

one man gathers what another man spills
—Grateful Dead

First, they shattered my back door with crowbar
leaving shards of wood hanging from the hinges.
As if guided by ancestors, they knew exactly
to use the key to open cabinet for silver before
finding treasured chest of heirlooms, they stole
my own box to carry their loot right out front door.
I howled to discover my home invaded, fell to my knees
when I saw dust outline where tea service sat.
But sterling silver, a metal so heavy to carry ghosts
I no longer need to hover. I prayed to be cleansed
in the sweat lodge, not knowing what I was asking
would be intrusion, clearing objects I no longer
knew weighted my spirit with memories, cells
lingering on forks I no longer put into my mouth.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

by Karl Plank

They are here
because they were his.

The carpenter's scribe
with its fence and rail
and the smoothing plane
have no work to do
at this desk where I
labor with words.

They belong to the shop
by the river's side
where he readied the grain
and wrote in wood,
making marks to guide
the precise blade-stroke

that fit the waiting edge.
Next to pens and stray
bull-dog clips, they have
no function but to
revive the memory
of my grandfather's

sturdy hands and how
he spoke with gentle
measure as if to teach
that words gained strength
from the quiet silence
of what had been first

trimmed and cut away.

A CIRCUITOUS LIFE

by Brad G. Garber

When I came to the stone I turned
Became the scuffed toes of my boots
A man in denim with nail dirt
And purpose in calloused hands

Long handles and gasoline, the grip
On my mind like black tar heroin
And the growl of the boss man
Like a long wall in all directions

Until the blade of my anger struck
Another stone surrounded by shells
And memories of the ocean flooded
My sandbags floating in a high tide

Drifting like jellyfish seemingly
Without purpose but migrating on
To cliffs of dark basalt covered
With verdant and fecund possibility

But, the overwhelming bluffs
Proved a place of turning again
Into the libraries of trail tales
Endless words to ponder and obey

And the stones were on shelves
Each one snarling and forbidding
Until I turned becoming again
The scuffed toes of my boots

CHEA PO IN LEWISTON, IDAHO, 1883

by Peter Ludwin

Seeking beneficence, you enter the temple
near mudflats of the Clearwater River.
Though Chinese dug a six-mile ditch

to irrigate poplars providing shade
for *gweilo*—the Caucasians you call
“white ghosts”—none of these trees

has ever graced your packed streets.
Bowling to the altar’s serene carved figure,
you light a stick of incense plunged in sand

before you offer liquor to Beuk Aie,
God of the North. A miner, no deity
means more to you or your fellow

gravel panners than the one who reigns
over the fickle mood of water.
Then you drop the *gau boi*—two rounded

wooden fortune blocks—to consult
your fate. You wonder how long
you will be condemned to remain

in *Gum Shan*, ask if you will ever return
to Guangzhou. They fall flat side up.
A few weeks later, as flames engulf

Chinatown, screaming *gweilo* accost you
in their coarse tongue. Words with challenged
ear you strain to understand: *Let it burn!*

SOMETIMES

by Michelle Hendrixson-Miller

*Sometimes windows
are not windows.*

—Jill Osier

The table is as much
 not the table
as it is not ceiling, not floor. Is it
the same
 with everything?

The well-intentioned avocado
on the counter
 dries from
the inside out,
 incrementally.

It is true
 with every step forward
you are entering the past.

Long lines
 of illegible cursive
patch the asphalt
for many miles
 from home.

Who else is near enough
 to pay attention,
if not the all of you?

“Watch me” you said
 before going under.
One hand pressed, pried
against deadfall.

Girl-swimming-to-the-center
 of-the-domed-upward-sky
is
 all you once were.

FISHING IN THE DARK

by Kaitlyn Stone

unlucky dream number seven
I looked to the empty side
of my bed and wondered

is it always going to be this way

dreams are frosted glass
in which I can see the shapes and shadows
of you blurred
as we reach forward
hands on both sides of the pane
is this more than two—
dimensional delusions
is this the one
place where we meet in the middle

dreams are sand sifters
filtering through the shifting grains at night
to find the shards of broken glass
and cracked plastic washed ashore
only to then throw them out—
my nightly routine during low tide
a bad habit of the heart

THE POSTCARD ON REVERSE

by Michael Minassian

I am writing to you
from somewhere in history,
illogical though that may seem;

time, you see, is not just a river—
it's a group of islands & the wooden
skeleton of a wrecked steamboat,

while this place itself took
a builder's pen & ink
& one hundred years to complete,

twelve dead workers, happy
in their sacrifice, eating out
of lunch pails & sarcarophagi;

the cathedral pictured on the reverse
is a drawing made too late
even for photography;

notice the stained glass
when lit by the streaming sun
like a row of teeth, sharpened.

THE VIEW WHILE TREADING WATER EAST OF FORT LAUDERDALE BEACH

by Paul David Adkins

I assumed, craning east towards Nassau,
Cuba broke beyond the horizon—

its menace of missiles,
barbudos lined to shoot *Pepe Caliente*,
Batistites strung
on Havana light posts.

Families fashioned boats from cars,
drove straight into the surf.

I sensed that spot of danger
beyond the eastward curve of earth.

How the smoke of passing steamers
curled like the hairs
on my father's arms,

those thick tubes of muscle
I clung to
while my feet kicked beneath me
like a hanging man.

JULY '88

by Robert Kendrick

thanks to a firebug
ten blocks of bloomington burned like beirut
a charred car every morning for three weeks
windshields blown to prism shards
heat penetration rainbows on chrome
tires lump welded to the asphalt gutter
or scorched clean from the rim
the lip curling smell of burnt rubber

I had a blue '72 buick that wouldn't start
a beached whale with a rusted blowhole
when a delivery truck mangled its tail
as it was stranded in front of my building
I couldn't have paid the driver enough
to finish the job

the *pantagraph* front page said roll the windows up
keep the doors locked

nope
as far as I went
it was already torched

firebug agreed

3:00 a.m.
a hundred flags ripping in a hot wind
the convection pop of glass

on the front steps
I rubbed the yin yang tattoo on my forearm
half-remembering something about the wheel of desire
from a kung fu movie
as my head turned through four years
of girlfriends on the seats
bare legs on blue vinyl
and bare feet on the windows
as the baleen grill turned black

I tried to see the hood as an uncarved block
then gave up on the half-cooked koans

everything seemed held together
by heat and centrifugal force
everything revolving
down to the particle
and subtitled riddles about impermanence
or grasping attachment
weren't going to loosen my knuckles
on my personal oh shit handle

I heard the sirens and hit the sidewalk
they'd get the tags and vin number
tomorrow would be time
for white pink and yellow triplicate words
I held the keys in my hand
I reached out to the air and grabbed the wheel
I took another spin

SOLID THINGS

by Robert Kendrick

two miles south of corbin
the tow sling anchor bar clawed my pickup
with a frozen metal thunk
the tow lights repeated their loops in the dark
the tow guy's breath curled in the cold
while he set the hooks and chains in
he winched the back bumper into the air
as snow set on the brim of his cap

I watched the rear wheels drop slack
as my truck turned from tool to junk in seconds
I dropped into the tow truck's front seat
and turned from driver to freight

the cab smelled of fried chicken and cigarettes
duking it out with the cardboard pine tree hanging from the mirror
the tow guy slid off his oil stained gloves
hands split open at the knuckles
a wrist snake tattoo looked about my age
I tried to make small talk
he didn't
it was only five miles to the garage
and I was an out of state tag with a blown engine
and a story he didn't want to hear
who was keeping him from going back to bed

as my truck dragged behind us
the only sound in the cab was the dull rolling crunch
of six tires on road salt and snow
I kept doing the same math over in my head
my savings minus a new engine minus a few nights in a hotel minus the tow
left a minus in the balance
as far as I could see it
this guy had two bad catches on the line

he cut me loose outside the locked door of the garage
the spinning lights chopping yellow bands through the snowfall
I gave him a twenty on top of the tow
throwing more in on a bad hand I figured
we looked at the wrinkled bill
and back at each other
as our breath steam filled the silence

he handed the money back
towards a cab and a room he said

I didn't tell him the lock on the bed topper was rusted out
and I wasn't leaving the two dozen cardboard boxes
holding everything I owned in a parking lot
I took the money
and shook his cracked hand

he saw me look at the busted topper gate handle
and the bed full of moving boxes
there's coffee across the street he said
and pointed to the gas station

he pulled out of the lot
I sat on the rear bumper catching snowflakes on my jeans
four more hours until the garage opened

the gas station guy stood at the front window
the tow light show was over
but I was something to watch on a slow shift
other than the fat flakes wiggling down to the pavement

he let me sit on the double chair by the service door
as he put more wrinkles in a paintball magazine
and finger checked his starter beard
jarrod stitched on his shop shirt
he poured my coffee out of the Styrofoam
into one of the thermal travel mugs
on texaco he said
are you going to have to pay for that I said
write it off to shoplifters on the loss sheet he said
and raised his eyebrows

the garage got under the hood that morning
two seals gone and the cylinder head bleeding oil
five grand and a week
if the new motor got from Memphis on time
or six free quarts of oil
and try my luck

the three mechanics and the shop manager
hung around the open hood
rubbernecking and bored
I asked gray sideburns randall if the oil could see me to Louisville
his shoulders seemed to say he knew all about bad bets
you could try he shrugged
the manager nodded

the other two smirked

I wanted to be ready for whatever I was going to lose
I wanted the solid thing

worst bet first bet
seemed as good as any
I took the oil

when I got to Louisville
I kept it going for a another month
then got rid of it for a few hundred
minus the final tow

I held on to the twenty, the mug, and one of the quart cans for a while
afraid to let them go

there was no luck in them
just reminders of a handshake a raised brow and a shrug
a few small favors
a few solid things

CROSSING OMPOMPANOOSUC

by Brianna J. Pike

This is not unfamiliar land, the roads
are constant and unwavering in their directness,
twisting around my body in a tight embrace.
Landscapes like photographs: giant spools of hay,
Holsteins lounging, tiny stores spilling over with
raspberry pie, maple syrup, and tobacco.
Round red barns, covered bridges, and John Deere.
Signs bear familiar names: White River Junction,
St. Johnsbury, and Rutland. You have entered
the North Country. Quiet towns of people who still
rise with the sun to milk and make hay. Farming
is their way to live, generations of manure and tradition
laid on thick. Yet, something disturbing settles in the streets
of St. Jay, snags in the eyes of farmers: the North Country
is dying. Empty storefronts litter Main Streets from
Barnet to Lydonville. For Rent or For Sale, faded by the sun.
Cows to slaughter and tractors to auction. Homes gone
too, a flood of evergreen and pine. A National Forest
is what Washington sees here. A gradual dissolve
of farming, family, and life.

I think of all this crossing Ompompanoosuc.
The river will remain long after there are no more people
to cross its waters and laugh at its name. When I passed
a roadside stand today, a sun kissed girl was selling mums
and apples. Our eyes met for a second and just outside of Thetford
I pulled into a gas station and turned around.

A CUP OF RAMEN

by Ashail Ross

I tried to contain my excitement,
helping my best friend move into
the apartment she got with her beau.
She signed a year lease without a second thought.
Together we moved that final box,
A quarter year passed,
with neither text nor call.
I made a surprise trip just to see
her ginger hair, now limp,
stir the dandruff on her skeletal shoulders.
The stains on her sweater,
more prominent while she washed
clothes in the kitchen sink.

At three in the morning,
she walks from the ghetto apartment,
six miles to work.
Her breath comes out in white puffs,
rushing to the safety of the main street.
She fell for the illusion,
the thought that this was a nice neighborhood.
Not paying any attention
to the bars on the windows
of each cookie cutter house.

She goes through public ashtrays,
to find an unfinished smoke.
She doesn't even bother,
trying to clean the butt.
Even though we are at a restaurant
she doesn't care about the looks,
the giggles directed her way.
All she knows is that used cigarette,
she pockets a couple for later.

I order a cheeseburger,
she just has some water.
I say I'm treating.
She hesitates just for a moment,
before she turns her nose up,
"I don't need it."
I shrug, still intending

to enjoy my meal.
While the waitress sets
my food in front of me,
I see her hold her breath.

She won't accept my help,
so I watch her huddled form, crouch
over the steaming Styrofoam cup of Ramen.
The smell of chicken broth fills the ruddy
apartment. It overpowers the stench of smoke,
making it slightly more bearable to sit here.
She licks her chapped lips,
Eating the yellowed microwavable noodles
with her fingers.
She wipes them on her oversized pants,
an addition to the collection of stains.

THE WHITE ISLAND

by Daniel James Sundahl

*But when the flame of Hephaestus had
utterly abolished thee, lo, in the morning
we gathered together thy white bones,
Achilles, and bestowed them in unmixed
wine and in unguents*

—Homer, *The Odyssey*

The first death was the death of a friend,
Then the father, another friend, another,
Each one different, each one brooded over.
A glazing of pores, a shriveling of skin,
The eye fading into vagueness, expanding,
Then the streams of Oceanus, the White Rock.

Is there benevolence, he wonders, in the ordinary
Offered as a gift filling the blade-thin spaces
Where the breath comes dumb and the throat
Furls and fractures then chokes off in silence?

He remembers how he loved the white skin,
The whiteness that moves the word *heart*
From beneath his tongue, the words he'd say to her,
Soft, gentle, vision of never fitful delicacy.

Then it came to him again today, re-reading
His own lines in which he dreamed of warmth,
The dream of pure enjoyment invoked in February,
Saw her, smelled her, unfastened the necklace,
The earrings, the rustle as the dress slid down.

And so remembered suddenly that same morning,
The cold, the snow thin, powdered, the mourning dove
Lying there in a gray blotch, his saying *illusion*,
But settled among the oat fields and stalks,
Alive as his own anxiety, thick, hampered, clogged.
Luxurious of feathers but maimed or so the one small
Spot of blood on the snow seemed to say.

The poem he has been writing speaks of this,
The laws of life, the waiting for fulfillment,
The sharp severing of one's self from one's tasks,
The journey to the place where life is simple, decent,
Where lovers live on open wings, feathered, luminous,
Where the breathing words are the heart's reception.

THE WHITE PLACE: A PANTOUM

by Samantha Kolber

The white place claims its same splendor
As before the shit filled the sink
To its browned capacity of murky water
And stained diapers dulling the white ceramic.

Before the shit filled the sink
I was a whole woman, unfragmented & undisturbed
By stained diapers dulling the white ceramic.
Now I measure my time in scrubs of dirty laundry.

I was a whole woman, unfragmented & undisturbed
Before motherhood and the whiter than white myth.
Now I measure my time in scrubs of dirty laundry.
All day, all of it, with *all free clear*, I bleach

The whiter than white myth out of motherhood,
Out of my life and down the drain.
All day, all of it, with *all free clear* I bleach
The idealized image of my mother, my mother's mother, and hers before,

Who are out of my life, down the drain.
Generations washed out like shit stains on diapers,
The idealized image of my mother, my mother's mother, and hers before
Who, like me, knew intimately the shit of her firstborn.

Generations washed out like shit stains on diapers
In its browned capacity of murky water.
Who, like me, knows intimately the shit of her firstborn?
In the sink, the white place claims its same splendor.

GRANDPA'S 9MM

by Carol Oswald

I breathe out as I pull in the trigger
With my finger, then I clench
My eyes shut just before the break
Point. The recoil and harsh ringing
Tell me I can open them again.
I find my target among the sagebrush,
Smile at the hole just left of center.
I take a break to reload, and wonder
If he ever thought to use a suppressor,
So he could hear his life ending
With the dull crunch of his sternum,
Instead of the gaseous release of the bullet
From the barrel. Or maybe just so he
Wouldn't wake my grandma, while
She slept under two comforters,
Shielding herself from the bitterness
Of a February night in the Rockies.
I wonder if that calmness comes with age
Or some level of wisdom I haven't yet
Accomplished. I rack the slide, and listen
To the bullet glide into the chamber.
After countless rounds, I still close my eyes
In anxious anticipation of the sound
That always leaves my ears ringing.

TWO CHAIRS UNDER AN APPLE TREE

by Z.G. Tomaszewski

An elder lady sits,
the fabric of her body
stitched in with the horizon.

Patches of thought cross
the light of her mind, clouds
pushed by wind's hand
weave past the sun.

Maybe the dancing
trees in the distance remind her
of her husband, how they met
in an apple orchard, their eyes
engaged—all the fruit ready for
the taking—as the old expression
goes: 'an apple for the eyes,'
and they who fell for each other.

As the sun reels down
behind the Green Mountains,
pockets of valleys begin to fill
with fog.

Maybe what laces
around the spinning-wheel of
her memories are his last words
to her: *Make for me a blanket
big enough for two, so when I lay
down I can wrap it around you.*

In the chair next to her,
as the top of the sun's hat
unravels out of sight, an apple,
shaken, lands—
the ball of yarn necessary
to bring it all together,
and the world spinning
itself away from the sun.

BIRD WATCHING

by Susan Landgraf

1.

You saw a bird in the nursing home
hall one sunny afternoon.

You see a bird? I asked, searching
in the disinfected, recycled air.

Yes, you said. It made you happy.

Once you held a yellow finch,
its heart beating into your hand
after it flew into the window. Children
gathered. They cheered when it rose
out of your palm.

2.

In the nursing home parking garage
swallows built a nest above the fluorescent
fixture, mother and father sweeping in,
dropping food into the three beaks bigger
than their bodies. First out of the nest
sat on the beam. Second. Third.

Next week a new crop on the other
side of the garage set up a racket,
mother and father swooping
in, out. Two days later, only bird
shit on the pavement below.

3.

Over the years you brought me feathers
to fill a wheelbarrow. Everywhere
I look I see them—downy gray,
blue, yellow, black. I wake to you calling—
caw of the trickster, mister crow.

I toss hands full of feathers
from the balcony, watch
them twirl, in slow motion, down.

Chickadees, jays, nuthatches
check the empty feeders.

REAP

by Linda Parsons Marion

Surely her beak is tired, every day pecking
the basement window as fall unleaves. Fearing
termites, woodpecker at mortar or trim,
I walked out, a brownish flutter to the bushes.
What she sees—strayed mate, twin or rival—
draws her to afternoon's mirror, her own eye
glinting back, taps my complacency like the reaper
come to call, believing all will be well, all manner
of things will be well despite slippage and seizure,
blindness and fracture. *Tap-tap* the graying light
as oaks shed their treasure, *tap-tap* the guardians
ever at my shoulder, *reap-reap*, the night sparrow
low as bullbats over dusty ball fields, *reap*
the glass world rattled ahead and behind,
its insistence my bright companion.

HALF LIGHT

by Vincent Moran

I can still hear the old whistle blow
from over the hills and into the valley
where we once sat on the rails
of our boundless youth.

I can still see your lips
form the shapes of the words
that still tremor between my ears,
like the bittersweet vibrations
of battered iron tracks
pounding behind my face.

Believe me, brother,
if only you could,
that in time, I will repeat
the things that you said;
but for now, the relegation
of what is already lost
condemns thoughts
to never come home
where you once watched mother smile
as the grass slowly faded
and days grew shorter,
leaving enduring sunsets
for a warmer hearth.

But I am still here on these tracks,
where the whistle still blows
and where the sun still sets,
marking its grave behind the hills,
only to press my ear to warm metal
to hear your chilling scream
as I caress these tattered rags of wood
that caught your broken leg,
that now tear my fingers to splinters,
only to let it sink in.

But my languid eyes still linger for the rain,
and my lips are cracked and torn
like the shattered dirt not so far away,
make believing to be canyons
in the lengthening shadows of the day.

I can still see the blood on the tracks—
a clandestine merging of rust and life:
the dust that filled my lungs.

I can still hear the wind rustle
through brittle, ragged brush
that would not heed my regards
as I shiver and shake
and I slowly say,
I love you, too.

And as I stare into the infinite sky,
I feel the ground begin to tremble,
when I distantly hear your voice
in the moribund half light of the sun.

YOU MADE MARLBOROS LOOK SO GOOD

by Cynthia Miranda

Remember when we called you *Papa Panzon*
Your fat belly, full of joy and beer?
I still have that picture of us.
You had little me sitting on the roundness
of your stomach, I tugged at your beard.
Your toothless grin and a stogie in your hand.

The last day I saw you alive
you fed me tequila on New Years,
knowing Grandma would get mad,
knowing I would stagger around
yelling obscenities at Ramiro's
gold digging girlfriend while pulling
from a Marlboro.
You found it funny.
How Grandma lugged me to the wash tub,
desperate to wash away the stink
of alcohol and smoke.
You chuckled and lit another cigarette
as I fought for air in the shallow tub.
Your snicker coarse and wheezy.
Skinny and frail you still smiled.

I remember when Ramiro told me you were sick.
Tears escaped his black eyes, rolled down
the dark skin of his cheeks as he confessed,
you only had a few months left.
I told him to stop crying and toughen up.
I felt like such a bitch for not trying
to comfort him with lies
about how you'd go easy and wouldn't feel
a thing. I told him you would lose strength
day by day until you wouldn't be strong enough
to breathe,
just so he would cry harder.

DEAD HEADS

by Olivia Waltman

*It doesn't seem you really have to close your eyes to see
Though I know you don't mean to be
You are so far from me
—Grateful Dead*

My Family decided to call it a celebration
Of life, instead of a memorial, but it appeared
Just like Earth Day, with women in flowing
Dresses and Nag Champa incense
Permeating through the air.
The park grass is still wet
And the sun is nearly blinding my father,
Sisters, my mom's best friend and I. Maybe
It's because it is mid August
Or, the Patrón we killed off the night before.

The pastor, who did our Sunday sermons
Ten years ago, plays a guitar at a podium
Decorated with Uncle Sam,
Steal your face, and Jerry Bears.
The five of us quietly sob while we're holding hands;
Dressed in our finest tie-dye garb
That our missing wife mother and best friend
Would be proud of. I'm anxious
For the words to stop so I can sneak
Behind a car and chug the lukewarm
Budweiser in my bag.

The reception hall was stale
Like the pot in my cousin's purse.
Family members push through with Veggie
Burgers, Bean Sprout dip and booze
And the band sets up and the keg is tapped.
I guzzle beer until I think I'm a good dancer.

Swaying back and forth by the band like its 1972
I slur out, "*And if you go no one may follow,
That path is for your steps alone.*"
My mom's best friend grabs me tight,
With her wild, golden hair smothering
Me. She whispers through her tears
Telling me I'm just like my mother.

LIGHT OFF

by Erik Zaldivar

When the yellow clock sounded,
My mom touched my brown hair
With her hand and kissed my forehead.

She told me, "Good night little boy"
Like she was saying goodbye.
She turned off the light escaping
With the wind and hiding in the darkness.

Thousands of moons passed by as her silver
Smile, sweet voice disappeared.
I asked God to turn
The light on and shut off time,
But it didn't happen.

My body rooted in my bed.
My eyes filled with sunrises and every
Night I wore the same pajamas for her
To not go wrong, but many dusks
Nested in my forehead and hair,
Till my voice becomes rough
And my face full of stubble.

ALMOST APRIL

by Rachel Mehl

The cherry bough is turning pink
and so is the space below the bar in your closet.

The neighbors are moving their four boys
to a square house on the hill. Today our five chickens

laid five eggs. The magnolia blossoms
are still tight but showing color.

We have three cats and one dog.
Like us they can't wait to meet you.

AFTER THE MISCARRIAGE

by Susan Landgraf

We tracked the days this way:
I kept a spool of ribbon, bolt

of flannel. Saturdays I visited
the apothecary, butcher, baker.

He bought ammo, walked by
Dr. Allen's office to the tavern.

50/50 whether he dropped
a penny in the blind man's cup

on his way back. *Don't look
for the answer you don't expect,*

he intoned on the ride home.
Like a benediction, I thought, or curse.

In the dark, I put out
a dish of milk for the stray.

DOVES AND THIEVES

by June Sylvester Saraceno

Sour hour returned after sweet goodbyes
and truces and angels and flies with no wings.
I couldn't keep the barnacles out of my voice
when I told Templedum *avant vous, le deluge*,
also couldn't help adding *redneck motherfucker*.
It's a word match up made in compound heaven.

It's all up on a wall now where Templedum plays
the town crier spewing numbers and prophesies,
netting packaged breaded fish sticks on dry land.
Whosoever believeth better believeth this,
stinking up the air with his vinegar fries.

The moneychangers are at the gate.
Templedum joins the pack, slapping backs,
slurping cheerwine from slack paper cups,
eating pork sandwiches on stork bread,
crying for the lamb the lamb the lamb.
You dumb motherfucker. You ate him.

EVIDENCE OF CHEESE-MAKING

by Wendy Scott

Archeologists see chance:
forgetful Neolithic hunter left the kill
too close to the fire, discovered how
to smoke meat. Busy gatherer forgot
the fruit, fermentation the happy
happenstance. Imagine a quiet sort,
caveman or woman liking a little space,
solitude, a few yards, maybe what we call
a block apart, experimenting with stones,
sticks, lunch, noting the changing shapes
of shadows, how rain pools or runs, expands
then shrinks; when ice holds or cracks
beneath leaves and branches. Just to know,
she pours milk in different bowls,
mixes old with new, waits.

LOOKING FOR MONICA VITTI

by Tim Applegate

At the airport in Provo they pick up the rental car and head south, toward the canyons, in the glare of the noonday sun. As they merge onto the interstate a gust of wind lashes the car and Cassie notices clouds gathering over the far mountains: snow, she assumes, in the upper elevations, perhaps even in the passes. But she won't think about that now. She'll concentrate, instead, on the light on the hillsides and the seven days ahead. They're traveling south, where the air will be warm and dry and where the high clouds over the incomprehensible canyons will not carry the threat of snow but the promise of shadows sweeping across mesas like morning wind. She settles back in the seat and closes her eyes, imagining a trail through timber, the path of a dry river, petroglyphs on sandstone walls.

Outside Nephi they stop at a convenience store to buy bottles of water and a jar of peanuts for the road. Simon spreads the map on the hood of the car and indicates the route across the summit down to Torrey, where they'll spend the night, and a few minutes later, when they turn onto a nearly deserted state highway dividing a pastoral valley of orchards and farms, Cassie relaxes. This may not be the land she grew up on, and these are certainly not the crops her family raised, but even here, in Mormon country, familiar horses roam the pastures and familiar weathervanes crown the peaks of the barns and that little girl on the swing-set in a dusty front yard could be her, thirty years ago, waiting for the father to return from the fields.

At the motel in Torrey they lay out their clothes for the following day. It will be chilly in the morning, Simon tells her, but hot by noon. They'll need plenty of water, dependable hiking boots, trail guides. He shows her the new backpack he bought in Portland, with extra pockets for sunscreen and camera and film. He shows her the book on native wildflowers, and another one on local birds.

An hour later, when the light dies behind the distant hills, he opens the screened windows to air the room out, and eventually they drift off to sleep to the cheep of crickets in the patchy grass and a sigh of wind in the oaks that shade the building from the sun.

They set out early, in the morning cool, from the trailhead to Hickman Bridge. The path is well marked and the ascent along the first ridge gradual, a moderate climb. At the top of the ridge they stop to look back down at the Fremont River winding through apple orchards planted, a hundred years ago, by the region's first white settlers. In the parking lot next to the orchards three cargo vans arrive, and when the drivers swing open the sliding doors a dozen passengers spill out carrying portable easels and sketchbooks, brushes and paints. They'll paint the river, Cassie muses,

and the orchards, and the rocks. Later they'll paint the pictographs: the symbols, the icons, the bighorn sheep, lost in time, climbing the stair-step mountain.

The bottom of the trail is the bed of a dry river. Simon takes his camera out, glancing up at the sky to determine the angle of the light before focusing, close-up, on a swirl of rock, a pocket of sandstone. Where the wind has layered the stone into strata subtle hues have emerged, and Simon kneels down to document these, the faint pinks and deeper reds, the scarlets. Meanwhile, hiking ahead, Cassie pauses to examine the unlikely yellow cactus flowers poking up out of the rocks and a lizard drowsing in the sun, undisturbed by her passage. She sips from her canteen, marveling at the surreal shapes carved out of the canyon, this lunar landscape. But when she considers the time it must have taken to form such a palace of rock—not centuries but millennia—the idea is so overwhelming her buoyant mood flattens out. After a nuclear war, she imagines, the whole world will look like this, dust and ashes, the Colorado plateau.

When they reach Hickman Bridge Simon shoots the great stone arch from a dozen different perspectives, but as he steadies the lens for the final frames he notices the humps of dark clouds billowing toward the canyon, and he recalls stories of sudden storms in these high desert hills, hikers trapped in the slots by a fury of rain. Frightened by these ominous mental images, he caps the lens on the camera and retraces his steps back up to the saddle of rock where he last saw Cassie.

But she's no longer there, and when he calls out her name his words are lost in the freshening wind. "Cassie? Cass!" Grimacing, he follows the trail across the saddle and back down to the riverbed where the air has now cooled and where he can smell the rain moving steadily toward him. "Cassie!"

Then he hears her voice—"Here! I'm right here!" Squinting, he catches sight of her leaning over a lip of rock fifty feet above him, waving both of her arms. He cups his hands and shouts "rain!", pointing to the south where the dark clouds continue to gather.

He joins her at the top of the canyon, breathing hard. "I didn't know where you were. I got frightened."

She smiles, pleased by his concern, and grabs his hand. "Come on, then. Let's get going."

"I thought about that movie, *L'Avventura*."

"The woman on the Greek Island."

"That one."

"The one they never found." Cassie adjusts the straps of her backpack, a few strides ahead of him. "Vitti."

"What?"

"The actress in the movie, her name was Vitti. Monica Vitti."

At the lookout over the river the first raindrops spatter the trail but Simon knows they're safe now, up here on higher ground. He steers her toward a shallow cave along the outer wall, large enough for two. From this vantage they can see the rain clouds sweep over the orchards and the startled painters, clutching their easels, race back toward the vans.

"They're beautiful," she said.

"What are?"

"The orchards. In the rain."

He picks up a handful of dust and lets it trickle, slowly, back to the ground. "I drove up to Mt. Hood last week, to buy pears. It was such a clear day I could see the glacier where the climbers died last year. I could see the crevasse."

She doesn't respond, and her faint, faraway smile is impossible to decipher. The scar in the mountain had shaken him. He kept imagining the climbers' last steps, the sudden chasm, the long, icy fall.

"I was thinking," she says, "about Cabbage Key, that old hotel on Cabbage Key."

"The famous cheeseburgers."

"The dollar bills on the walls."

"The story Robin told us, about the Saudi prince."

Yes, Robin Shannon had been there, and Peter, and the others, too. The sculptor from Miami. The insurance man. The divorcee. When the bartender announced last call they all drifted out to the docks to finish their wine and Cassie heard a bird, a night heron, crying in the trees, or perhaps it was someone in the hotel waking from a terrible dream...

Simon straps on his backpack. The rain has finally stopped and a faint outline of sun, a hologram, hovers behind the clouds. In the parking lot the painters climb out of the vans again, stretching their legs, refusing to let a little shower stop them.

When the waitress brings their dishes—chicken tacos, rice and beans, a side of guacamole—Simon asks about Molly, because he knows that sooner or later he will have to. To his surprise and relief, Cassie downplays it.

"She's sixteen, you know?"

"Mood swings. That's what you said, right? On the phone?"

"Typical teenage stuff."

"She's upset with me."

"Yes."

"So she takes it out on you."

Cassie picks at her dinner, not very hungry after all. Outside, an older couple is standing next to their RV engaged in a heated argument. The man is gesturing theatrically with his hands while the woman fumes, her face set in stone.

"Cassie?"

She puts down her fork and takes a sip of margarita. Her calm is disarming. "Of course she takes it out on me. Who else would she take it out on? I'm the only one there."

The third morning is dry and chilly with cumulous clouds rising high above the Grand Escalante and the leaves of the aspens gold in the light of the sun. When they pull over to a roadside vista Simon pans the canyons with binoculars before locking the camera into its tripod. The

October light is dazzling and the canyons are dry and deep and lack any sign of timber except along the creek beds where the water runs shallow and many of the sandbars are exposed to the sun.

They stop for lunch at a town called Henrieville and afterwards, stroll through a community tag sale featuring local arts and crafts, pausing now and then to admire the intricate weave of a Navajo rug or a painting of a hawk circling a winter pasture dappled with patches of snow. Simon buys a turquoise necklace for Molly and a scarf for Cassie and a framed photograph—bales of barbed wire—for himself.

The cabin is spare and uncluttered, a single room with a twin bed and a kitchenette and a front porch overlooking the bizarre sand pipes that rise, like painted spires, out of the rocky ground. These are the ancient springs, the geysers that remained frozen in time when the softer rock, the sandstone, collapsed all around them.

In the morning they hike up to the high plateau for the shots that will establish the overall lay of the land—the scope of the grandeur—and then along the inner trails for the details of that grandeur, a sprig of fireweed in the cleft of a boulder or the track of a bobcat in the bed of a dry stream.

At sunset Cassie takes a shower while Simon lays out the supplies he purchased earlier in the day—charcoal for the grill, filet mignons, zucchini. He unpacks one of the bottles of Pinot Noir he brought from Oregon and pours two fingers into a long-stemmed glass. On the back deck he lights the coals and tastes the wine and opens a jar of smoked almonds. The wind keens from the west and funnels of sand swirl across the desert plain. Soon, as the sun slips behind the sand pipes, the first stars, mere glimmers, appear above the peaks.

When Cassie steps out to the porch combing her wet hair he stands up to check the coals, which are just beginning to whiten, before going back inside for the wine. He pours each of them a glass and they drink for a while in silence, watching the sand pipes in the gathering darkness cast their shadows across the land. A sparrow hawk wheels above the cabin, the last of the light flashing in its ragged wings.

“I was thinking,” Cassie says, “about Mexico, that restaurant by the ruins.”

“The English couple, the old English couple.”

“They were coming back from Easter Island.”

“They were talking about the statues.”

“They were drinking German beer.”

As soon as he sees the series of arches along the trail through Red Canyon, Simon knows that this sequence of photographs will be the centerpiece of the entire exhibit, the pictures he has traveled all this way to shoot. And he’s right. Six months later, at the gallery in Cannon Beach, it is these particular photos that cause the greatest stir. With the help of the gallery owner, Simon arranges the pictures—the arches he first shot in color and then, moments later, in black and white—along two facing walls so the patrons can see the contrast in the two sequences and choose

which one, if either, they prefer.

Not surprisingly, the woman in the sundress prefers color. While she admires the arches Simon notes how a certain hue of rock matches the tint of the woman's lipstick. Later, in bed, when he mentions this, the woman smiles vaguely and Simon realizes that her mind is already elsewhere, on her next conquest perhaps, the cellist who owns a modest house at the end of the block or the TV actor rumored to be spending the summer in town. He rolls away from her and closes his eyes and listens to the surf wash the shoreline. But sleep is elusive. He keeps seeing Cassie perched on a ledge of rimrock as the moon lifts over the arches and the canyon loses its definition, becoming a ghost of itself, an afterimage, its bone white walls dropping down into the dark. In the morning the woman is gone, and when he finds the jaunty, inauthentic note she left him, he quickly scans the text before tossing the letter into the woodstove and lighting it with a match.

"I was thinking," Cassie says, "about Orita's cabin."

"The chestnut tree."

"The bottle of Scotch you found in the closet."

"That river," he says. "The Nantahala."

"Yes."

"Michael and Rebecca were there."

"And Peter and Robin."

"One raft. All of us in one raft."

"One of the guides called in sick, remember? So they asked if any group would volunteer to go without a guide."

"And I raised my hand."

"My fearless husband." Cassie smiles at the memory. "My intrepid husband."

But the word hangs in the air and the mood is broken. *Husband*. They gaze out across Red Canyon, silent as the rocks.

When Simon mutters "I don't know, Cassie, I just don't know..." she almost reaches out to him, but it's too late for that now.

"Know what?"

"You have this run," he says, "this good run."

You have each other, she thinks; that's what he means. She watches the canyon blacken, disappear. You have each other and that's all you want, until the others come calling because they want a piece of it too. That's what he means. When you're young and happy you live in the glow of a certain kind of light and then the others crowd into that light and the light fades to nothing and the darkness comes down and the canyon turns black, like this.

"I was thinking about Sarasota" he says, but Cassie stops him. "Shh." She remembers part of it, most of it, all of it. Molly at one, and five, and fifteen. The house on Roberts Bay. The red canoe they used to row out past the shallows into the blue channel where the water ran deep and clear.

"Shh."

She wakes early, an hour before sunrise, in the Panguitch Motel. Simon is sound asleep so she dresses as quietly as possible and slips out the door. She's afraid he might wake at the sound of the car engine, but when she backs out of the parking space a light does not blink on in the room, so she eases onto the highway, empty at this hour, and cruises through the streets of the silent town.

At the trailhead she pauses to study the map, finally choosing the most strenuous route, the one that slithers up the high butte above Sevier Valley before descending back down into Red Canyon. She chides herself for forgetting the backpack—she left it in the motel room—but at least she remembered to bring the canteen, which is filled with fresh water now and strapped to the belt of her shorts. Soon the morning chill will burn off in the sun and she'll have to protect herself against dehydration, meeting out the water one sip at a time.

As she starts up the trail the sun clears the lip of the nearest mesa, backlighting the arches and hoodoos perched like statues above the boulder-strewn floor. Establishing a steady, methodical pace, she climbs the first grade, the muscles of her calves adjusting to the steepness of the trail, and a few minutes later she spots the plateau, an hour or two away.

You could get lost in these canyons, she imagines, and they might not find you for days. She pictures Simon waking back at the motel. Realizing she isn't there, assuming she has gone out for breakfast, or to buy a local newspaper, not wanting to disturb his sleep.

Near the top of the grade she stops to rest in the shade of a bristlecone pine. Unlike many of the other canyons, high timber—pine and fir and juniper—flourishes here, and the air is redolent with the sharp, sweet scent of pitch. The sun splinters in the bristlecone's branches as she traces, on the trail map, the meandering red line of her journey. She knows it's important to understand the typography of the landscape she is hiking into but her mind is unfocussed—she keeps seeing Simon, on the verge of panic, pick up the motel phone—and when she stands up to resume the hike she forgets about the map and leaves it lying on a flat rock next to the trunk of the tree.

You could get lost in these canyons because no matter how many times you hiked through wild places like this one you still didn't have the natural skills of survival the native animals had. If you wandered off trail you might eventually find a patch of berries to eat, you might even discover a source of fresh water, a spring, but sooner or later the land would claim and defeat you. Even now, she thinks, the animals are watching me, waiting, gauging my stamina and strength.

The sun is high in the sky now, burning. By the time she reaches the plateau only two inches of water remain in the canteen and she warns herself not to drink any more unless her throat becomes so parched she can't taste her own saliva. Then she begins the descent, breathing evenly, pacing her steps. At the bottom of the trail the walls of the canyon gradually close in around her and the air turns cool in the shadows and up ahead she glimpses the slot she is moving toward and the splash of light

at the mouth of that slot. From there, perhaps, she will be able to see, across the dry streambed, the trailhead she had set out from a few hours before, the rental car shining in the sun.

You could get lost in these canyons or you could find your way out; it's her choice, and it always has been. You could stay right here in the shade of the great sandstone walls until your strength and resolve returned. When the sun finally vanishes and darkness once again claims this canyon you could build a fire with kindling to keep the animals away, and when you finally drifted off to sleep, shivering in the cold, someone might see the smoke, or smell it, and alert the authorities. Then a convoy of cars would stream into the parking lot and men in uniform would follow the signs to the trailhead and Simon would be among them, swinging the beam of a flashlight into the dark.

They were looking for Monica Vitti. The search party—her lover, the best friend who would later betray her, the shepherd on the island where she had apparently wandered away—fanned out across the rocks, and in the dark of the theater Cassie at first was blown away, exhilarated by the sweeping images, the bleak, craggy island surrounded by the majestic Aeolian Sea, the men and women branching out across the volcanic rock, dwarfed by the austere landscape. But as the search continued, she began to fear that they wouldn't find Vitti after all, that she had not, as Cassie had hoped, fallen asleep in the shade of a boulder or gone for a casual, unannounced swim in the sea. And when they called out her name—"Anna? Anna!"—Cassie yearned to silence their voices because she knew that their cries were in vain. The director was playing a cruel trick on his audience, he was making the main character disappear just as they were beginning to identify with her plight. Poor Anna, poor unhappy Anna. No one would ever know what became of her now.

As the shadows of dusk lengthen along the canyon floor she remembers how afraid she had been for Monica Vitti. How she had whispered, at the actors, *keep looking. Don't give up.*

YOUR NAME IS A SHAPE MADE IN THE MOUTHS OF MAGICIANS

by Mary Stone Dockery

After you die, magicians line the sidewalk in long metallic robes. They perform with fractured concrete smiles, stitches hanging from the corners, hold fly wings in their palms until their hands glisten. The newspapers do not speak of your death or of anyone else's. Tonight the moon will hang as if it's a paper clip in the sky, sleek and silver and bendable. Won't you hang from it, or fold pieces of sky like paper into origami flowers. Once, you folded a swan and it flew away in white pieces. Flutter, flutter. The magicians speak your name as a spell. We meditate on the lawn waiting for the color of water, for your abstract silhouette to fold and re-fold over us, unshadowing. When we drop your casket into the river, it shifts north, becomes a paper boat.

THROUGH THE FOG

by Taylor Graham

Between the landing where they turn native cedar into carbon pencils, and the wreckage of a great madrone felled for its red burl, I'm wandering in my fog of human blindness. Sight is a lockbox for what little the eyes can see. The map tells me nothing except where I am; no X to mark the spot we're headed, guided by my dog who's accountable only to her nose. Here's the confluence where inversion joins down—draft rich with the scent of a lady who yesterday went to pick mushrooms. My dog's nose unravels whole narratives, messages mailed from the Land of Lost. Clear as if written in crystal frost: This way, through the fog. Believe your dog.

THE DYING SLAVES

by Keith Dunlap

I.

When the doctor told me about the lump I did not go
To greet my wife and child with the morbid news, but instead
I bought a ticket at the Greyhound station on Saint John Street
To New York. Once there I had enough left for
A hot dog and a pack of cigarettes. I ate my lunch
And smoked away the day on the steps of the Museum,
Only heading inside when it was close to closing time,
Walking quietly against the tide of fleeing crowds, straight for
Antiquities, following the same path I had been following
Since I was eighteen, straight to the Roman copy of the Dying Slave,
Attributed to Kallicles, but it wasn't there, and then
I remembered that it never was, that it was on display in the Vatican,
And sculpted, in fact, by Michelangelo,
And I laughed at all my foolishness, every precious bit of it,
Until a nervous guard politely reminded me that it was time to go.

II.

There's a picture of me, my little brother, and my friend,
Outside a topless bar in Buffalo in late July.
I can easily recollect how hot it was, how high we were,
How funny it all seemed, when we all lifted our shirts to our chins,
Like three dying slaves caught by the camera's flash in the only moment
that lasts,
That is, the moment that is both adolescent and contrived,
Fleshy, marbled, unselfconscious, a dream of acute forgetfulness.

III.

I have an ancient postcard in black and white, a reproduction
Of the Dying Slave, which I have kept with me all these years.
Its borders have yellowed and its matte surface has rubbed thin.
His head turned back in ecstasy, his hands almost to his chin,
He seems more godlike than any god, as if
Even cold stone death cannot rob him of his pagan pleasure
And all the religions that created him can only marvel at his mortality.

MY NEIGHBOR'S DOG

by Holly Day

I knew something was wrong because his dog
was out, running from one apartment door
to another as though trying to figure out
how to knock or ring for help, despite not having
proper knuckles or fingers. Finally, the dog just stopped on the landing
and barked, over and over again
until I had to go out and see what was wrong
because nobody else seemed to care. I didn't either, not really

but I liked the dog and I liked the kid.

The dog whimpered and licked my hand as I
turned the knob of the unlocked apartment and
pushed my way in, past the stacks of old newspapers,
magazines, dirty clothes, cigarette trays overflowing
with ash and wads of dusty pink bubblegum
to the room where the boy was hanging from a rope
tight around his blue-and-white neck.
Shit, he couldn't have been more than 20 years old.

The dog followed me into the bedroom, tail wagging
licking my hand as though he thought I could do something
like he thought I could fix the broken boy
swinging in front of me. I cut him down
let him fall to the floor, called the police. Later
the police told me I shouldn't have touched the body
at all, hadn't I ever seen
a cop show before? I don't know why I did it
but the dog seemed happy when I did
ran over to the body and lay down beside it
until the cops came.

That night, I let the dog sleep in my bed
I slept on the couch.
I wasn't sure how to sleep with it, exactly
whether it was a foot-of-the-bed sort of dog
or an under-the-covers type. I've known both.
On that first night, though, it slept smack in the middle of my bed
head on my pillow
blankets bunched around its long legs, bony feet.
I figure, with time, we will learn to live together.

HOW WE COPE WITH GRIEF IN THE PRIVACY OF OUR HOME

by Marissa Winn

I huddle in the chair, swivel back and forth, bent so far forward
my hands nearly touch the floor. The day began Father's Day
but dad ended on a breathing tube in the hospital.

The home computer screen blinks on my desk, outliving
the last desktop dad had done in with a hammer
on his first day home in three months
because the computer's defragmentation lagged.
Shards had lain there for days, scattered all over the garage.
The boxes loomed over us with bared, blocked fangs.

A worn sectional slouches in the living room,
the chaise lounge cushion slipping from its framework
to lay sobbing on the floor like my mother
in her room down the hall. It doesn't matter how
often I try to put it back because it never stays.

I can't seem to focus. I take a deep breath and try to imagine
the way the trees stand in the backyard, next to the horse arena.
They never lean this way in the winds that uproot the trampoline,
dashing it to bits in our neighbors' front yards.

Jacob rests his hand on my arm and I look into his blue eyes
like our father's. *You hungry?*

He doesn't understand why I think the kitchen lights are flickering
and the wind is going to blow out the windows
or why mom is crying like she's been shot by the monsters
in the cold basement where I walk backwards
up the stairs to scare them off.

GRACE

by Linda Parsons Marion

They carry her out in all weather like a consumptive
craving air's breath and balm. For a few months

her rubbery legs flailed her about the yard, as in early
days of play, tattered soccer ball tossed and caught,

tossed and caught in meaty jaws. Hydrotherapy
could not cure, dysplasia slipped to paralysis, her hind

legs unable to stand or run, even poop in known
corners still harboring her scent. They carry her out,

the man straining, though he bench presses at the gym,
the woman smiling through back pain, who urges

the dog named Grace, her only child, to pee,
claps as for a toddler to blow every candle at once:

You can do it, you good girl, you. Even with a boxer's
muscle, Grace does little more than gape at squirrels

leaping branches overhead. She yips to be taken in,
as years ago I yelled from the bath for my stooped

grandmother to lift and dry me in the steamy closeness.
I watch at the kitchen window, rub the beads of undaunted

hours: *Hail neighbors, full of grace and spine.*
Hail Grace, your time of sniffing shoes is nearly done.

Wondering when they will tire of her sodden weight,
far greater than hope can bear, when enough

is enough of sleet freezing their hair, stained
dhurries, those wet brown eyes, and they choose

the kind needle, the good death of pentobarbital,
called, though bent, to such *grátia pléna*.

SILK BLOUSES

by Ruth Holzer

Wait, let's stop here a minute,
just look at those lovely silk blouses—
burgundy, mauve, dove-gray and cerise.
I'd buy a dozen if I had the money.

Want to hear something funny?
You remember Hank? The writer?
Didn't he live upstairs from you
on Prosperity Street one summer?

Well, Hank got himself killed in the subway
when a jittery transit cop shot the wrong man.
He was on his way back—this is the best part—
from the wedding of our mutual ex-friend.

I want a silk blouse so bad I can taste it.
Couldn't you kill for one of those silk blouses?
I swear I could, for that creamy one, or the tangerine
with its subtle sheen and starry glass buttons.

RULE #1: NEVER WRITE A POEM ABOUT WRITING POETRY

by Nathan Graziano

The first thing The Poet learned, crawling through enjambments—his knees sting-red and carpet-burned—was to avoid light sockets, sharp objects, and anything without line breaks.

The son of a man who cheated on his SATs and spent his entire adult revising an absurdist one-act play about the vastness of nothing, The Poet wrote his first piece in the second-grade,

a poem in terza rima—he was born to scan lines—about a giraffe shopping for a noose after his lover left him for a ladder who never spoke and was rumored to be hung, his first pun.

A precocious child, The Poet abandoned rhyme schemes in middle school and experimented with spoken word, screaming and sweating and hopping like a chimp on stages,

spitting his righteous rage at the rules and the ruling classes, freed by each unmeasured line. Fuck the forms that once bound him! But the theatrics got old as he got older, and by high school

The Poet became an imagist, his poems described as post-modern. He learned that language was a white flag we waved at emotional breezes, fallible and inexact, yet he became obsessed with the perfect image,

a force he could never control, then he realized that no one, including his poet friends who faked their appreciation, understood anything he was inexactly trying to communicate, so he grew

a beard in college and it was not meant to be ironic. Then everyone grew beards and soon he stopped using line breaks in favor of the prose poem, which better fit his bearded image

as a hipster and a wordsmith and an all-around pretentious ass. But the prose poems fell out of favor so he shaved the beard and saw in the mirror a character arc, points forming like a constellation.

MEET THE AUTHOR

by Jeff Hardin

but not to ask a question or receive
an answer. Unreliable they are,
notoriously ill-informed about
their work, which they believe has come about
as some improvement in the world. Oh sure.
Of course. As can be evidenced by how
the poor are still the poor and seldom fed.
How Shelley's children lived to middle age.

The author speaks hyperbole saying
even his name, which has become just one
more myth nobody has the heart to tell
him isn't true. His smile's a simile
for self-delusion, trite and long-winded.
Steer clear. Do something else. Think your own thoughts.

AUTHOR BIO

by Jeffrey H. MacLachlan

Jeffrey was born on a night so cold that his palms shook handshakes with frost. He'd rather be read than loved, and occasionally sleeps with pens in his bed. When he was a child his mother grabbed his collar in Wegmans during a black out. His legs lost density, and she briefly held him like a kite. He plans on sabbatical in Suriname upon tenure. He grew up on a Christmas tree farm, and on nights when no one returned his calls, fired up a snowmobile to get lost. Rocketing through snow and dark and snow and silence made him feel like an astronaut. He also lived in Texas where a crush asked how much he made from this hobby. Police spotted him as a bloody typhoon after exchanging an engagement ring. Look for the audio edition. He delivered diet pills to truck stops and fed his son to the arcade. Jeffrey left wreckage in his wake. He daydreams of finding someone reading this on the bus. His blonde ex-wife. You did it, she says. You wrote something with a purpose.

CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

Paul David Adkins lives in New York and works as a counselor. He served in the U.S. Army for twenty-one years.

Jeffrey Alfier is the author of *The Wolf Yearling* (Silver Birch Press), *Idyll for a Vanishing River* (Glass Lyre Press), and *Terminal Island: Los Angeles Poems* (NightBallet Press, forthcoming). His recent work appears or is forthcoming in *New York Quarterly*, *Louisville Review*, and *Arkansas Review*.

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Tim Applegate's poems and essays and short prose appear in the *Florida Review*, the *South Dakota Review*, *Cloudbank*, and *The Meadow*, among others. He is the author of the poetry collection *At The End Of Day* (2007, Traprock Books). A new chapbook, *Drydock*, is forthcoming from Blue Cubicle Press.

Nan Becker's first books of poems is *After Rain* (Elephant Tree House, 2011). Poems are forthcoming or have appeared in *Redivder*, *Cloudbank 2*, *Red Rock Review*, *Nimrod*, *New Millennium Writing*, *Salamander*, and elsewhere. She lives in Stillwater, New Jersey.

Elizabeth Beck is a writer, artist and teacher who lives with her family on a pond in Lexington, Kentucky. Nominated for the 2013 Pushcart Prize, she is the author of two books of poems: *Interiors* and *insignificant white girl*. Elizabeth was an award-winning English and Art History teacher for ten years. During her time at Withrow High School, she founded *The Tracks Literary Magazine*. She is the proud recipient of the 2012 Artist Enrichment Grant through The Kentucky Foundation for Women. In November 2011, Elizabeth founded The Teen Howl Poetry Series that serves the youth of Central Kentucky.

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Andrea Buchanan has lived a less-than-stable life, and it certainly shows in the majority of her work. Since she was a child, she has not lived any one place more than two years, and as an adult she has continued this trend. She has lived in just about every part of the country as well as overseas. She is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College pursuing an English degree, and she has been published in *Brushfire* and *The Meadow*.

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Holly Day's poetry has recently appeared in *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Slant*, and *The Tampa Review*, and she is the 2011 recipient of the Sam Ragan Poetry Prize from Barton College. Her most recent published books are *Walking Twin Cities* and *Notenlesen für Dummies Das Pocketbuch*.

Jesse DeLong teaches at Southern University and graduated from the University of Alabama's MFA program. Other selections from this poem can be found at *American Letters and Commentary*. More work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Best New Poets 2011*, *Colorado Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *LVNG Magazine*, *the Louisville Review* and elsewhere. My chapbook, *Tearings, and Other Poems*, was released by Curly Head Press.

Darren C. Demaree is the author of *As We Refer To Our Bodies* (2013) and *Not For Art Nor Prayer* (2014), both are due out from 8th House Publishing House. He is the recipient of two Pushcart Prize nominations and a Best of the Net nomination. He currently lives and writes in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

Mary Stone Dockery is the author of *Mythology of Touch* and *Aching Buttons*. Her chapbook *Blink Finch* will be released in 2013. Her poetry and prose has appeared or is forthcoming in *Mid-American Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Arts & Letters*, *Stirring*, and other fine journals. She currently lives and writes in St. Joseph, MO, where she co-edits the *Stone Highway Review*.

William Doreski teaches at Keene State College in New Hampshire. His most recent books of poetry are *City of Palms* and *June Snow Dance*, both

2012. He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.

Keith Dunlap is the former co-editor of *The Columbia Review* and former co-editor of *Cutbank*, having received his M.F.A. from the University of Montana. His poems have been accepted for publication in *Barnwood*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Concho River Review*, *Maine Magazine*, *Ninth Letter*, *pacificReview*, *Pank*, *Sou'wester*, and *Talking River Review*, among other places. His poem, "The Invitation," was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Brad Garber has published poetry in *Cream City Review*, *Front Range Review*, *theNewerYork Press*, *Taekwondo Times*, *Ray's Road Review*, *Dead Flowers: A Poetry Rag*, *New Verse News* and *Mercury*. He was nominated for a 2013 Pushcart Prize for his poem, "Where We May Be Found."

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in El Dorado County. Her poems have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Poetry International*, *Southern Humanities Review*. Her latest book is *What the Wind Says* (Lummox Press, 2013), about living, training and searching with her canine partners.

Nathan Graziano lives in Manchester, New Hampshire. He is the author of three collections of poetry—*Not So Profound* (Green Bean Press, 2003), *Teaching Metaphors* (Sunnyoutside Press, 2007) and *After the Honeymoon* (Sunnyoutside Press, 2009)—a collection of short stories, *Frostbite* (GBP, 2002), and several chapbooks of fiction and poetry. A chapbook of short prose pieces titled *Hangover Breakfasts* was published by Bottle of Smoke Press in 2012, and Marginalia Publishing recently released a novella titled *Some Sort of Ugly*. Visit his website at www.nathangraziano.com.

Nahom Hagos is originally from the Eastern Horn of Africa and the country of Ethiopia. He is currently an Engineering major at Truckee Meadows Community College with a soft spot for writing and its many pleasures.

Jeff Hardin is the author of two collections, *Fall Sanctuary* and *Notes for a Praise Book*. His third collection, *Restoring the Narrative*, recently received the Donald Justice Poetry Prize and will appear in 2015. Recent poems appear in *Poetry Northwest*, *Unsplendid*, *North American Review*, *Southern Review*, *Poem*, and elsewhere.

Jordan Hartt is a writer, writing teacher, and community and events organizer. He manages the Port Townsend Writers' Conference; work has appeared in about a dozen literary magazines.

Michelle Hendrixson-Miller lives in Columbia, Tennessee, near a beautiful park where the poem "Sometimes" was written. Her poems have ap-

peared in *POEM, Poems & Plays, Mainstreet Rag*, and *Iodine*. In 2009, she was a finalist for the Gerald Stern Poetry Prize. In 2011, one of her poems received a Pushcart nomination.

Ruth Holzer has previously appeared in *The Meadow*, and her poems have appeared in journals including *Kestrel, California Quarterly, Blue Unicorn* and *Southern Poetry Review*. She has published two chapbooks *The First Hundred Years* and *The Solitude of Cities* (Finishing Line Press).

Kendra Huizar grew up in Reno, Nevada, and she has drawn inspiration for poems through her field of study. She's currently working toward a B.S. in Human Development and Family Studies with a Minor in Developmental Disabilities, which will relate with some of the real world problems discussed in her writings. She's a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Donald Ilich has published work in *LIT, The Iowa Review, Nimrod*, and other publications. He is a writer-editor who lives in Rockville, Maryland.

Marc Janssen cut his teeth in the vibrant Ventura poetry scene, where he learned that his poem really isn't done until it is read aloud. His work is scattered around the internet, print journals and anthologies. Poetry, work, education, soccer, kids, wife, love, church, drums, angst, kayaking: pretty boring really.

Kirsten Jachimiak is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Keith Jewett grew up in a very common suburban home in Reno, Nevada. His childhood was only lacking a picket fence and a theme song. Most of his writing focuses on trying to capture something interesting, unique or magical about the otherwise mundane, average and boring. He is currently working on a degree in Anthropology at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Janne Karlsson, born 1973, is one hyper productive s.o.b artist living in Linköping, Sweden. Over the years he's been widely published in many magazines and papers of various genres. His work is often described as dark and expressive, not rarely with a socially oriented angle. In the U.S he's probably most well known for the comic strip "Street Life" which is published in 12 different street papers (for the homeless). When he's not enjoying the solitude and serenity of drawing, he's likely building his body at the gym, sipping red wine with his love Mari, or doing stuff with his two teenage sons, playing soccer for instance. You can view more of his work at www.svenskapache.se or contact him on svenskapache@gmail.com.

Robert Kendrick lives in Clemson, South Carolina. He has previously published in *Main Street Rag, Iodine Poetry Journal, Illuminations*, and *Tipton Poetry Journal*.

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Susan Landgraf's poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Nimrod*, *Rattle*, *The Laurel Review*, *Third Coast Review*, *Interim*, *Ploughshares*, *Cincinnati Poetry Review*, among others. Her chapbook *Other Voices* was published by Finishing Line Press. A former journalist, she taught in China in 2002, 2008, 2010, and 2012 through an exchange program with Highline Community College where she teaches writing, literature, media, and diversity and globalism studies.

Daniel Lawless has published work in *The Louisville Review*, *PN Review*, *Adirondack Review*, *Modern Haiku*, and others, of late. He is the editor of *Plume: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry*.

Peter Ludwin is the recipient of a Literary Fellowship from Artist Trust, as well as a W.D. Snodgrass Fellowship from The San Miguel Poetry Week. His most recent book, *Rumors of Fallible Gods*, was a finalist for the Gival Press Poetry Award, and has been published by Presa Press.

Jeffrey H. MacLachlan also has recent or forthcoming work in *New Ohio Review*, *Skidrow Penthouse*, *The Minnesota Review*, *Clay Bird Review*, among others. He can be followed on Twitter @jeffmack.

Linda Parsons Marion is an editor at the University of Tennessee and the author of three poetry collections, most recently, *Bound*. She served as poetry editor of *Now & Then* magazine for many years and has received literary fellowships from the Tennessee Arts Commission, as well as the Associated Writing Programs' Intro Award, among others. Marion's work has appeared in journals such as *The Georgia Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and Ted Kooser's syndicated column *American Life in Poetry* and in numerous anthologies. She lives in Knoxville with her husband, poet Jeff Daniel Marion.

Rachel Mehl has worked as a volunteer coordinator, a barista, and a college instructor. Currently she is a stay at home mom. Her poems have most recently appeared in *Conversations Across Borders* and *Squalorly*. She has an M.F.A. from University of Oregon.

Michael Minassian lives in South Florida. His poems have appeared recently in such journals as *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Meadow*, *Poet Lore*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Visions International*. He is also the writer/producer of the pod cast series *Eye On Literature* available on iTunes. A chapbook of poems entitled *The Arbori-*

culturist was published in 2010 by Amsterdam Press.

Vincent Moran is currently employed as a professional video editor while attending school full time to earn his degree in Secondary Education with an emphasis in mathematics. Writing has always been a hobby of his, and he would like to begin sharing his work with others. He is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

B.Z. Nidich is a poet, playwright, fiction writer and teacher. His work is widely published in journals and magazines throughout the world, including: *Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Art*, *The Literary Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Prism International*, *Jejune*, *Antioch Review*; and *Prairie Schooner*, among others. He lives in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Carol Oswald grew up Florissant, Colorado. Her writing is an attempt to break away from her small town upbringing. She is a second year creative writing student at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, Nevada. *The Meadow* is her first publication.

Winnona Elson Pasquini lives in Tampa, Florida. She was a finalist in New Rivers Press MVP book competition and in Yellowjacket Press's Peter Meinke Poetry Contest. Her recent publications include work in *Cider Press Review* and *Flare*. She is currently working on a poetry collection inspired by film.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. For more information, including free e-books, his essay titled "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.

Brianna Pike's poetry is forthcoming in *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Rust + Moth*, *Grey Sparrow Review*, *Scapegoat Review* and *New Plains Review*. She currently lives in Indianapolis where she teaches creative writing and literature courses at Ivy Tech Community College.

Karl Plank is the J.W. Cannon Professor of Religion at Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina. His poems have been published in *The Anglican Theological Review* and *The Lyricist*. He is a past winner of Shenandoah's Thomas Carter Prize for Non-Fiction Prose.

Sean Prentiss lives on a small lake in northern Vermont. He is the co-editor of the anthology on creative nonfiction, *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre*. He teaches at Norwich University.

Joan Presley grew up in the San Francisco Bay area and has lived in Reno for thirty years. During that time she graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno with an M.A. in English while, at the same time, work-

ing her way through the ranks of the Reno Fire Department, retiring as Fire Marshal, Division Chief in 2012. She is currently enrolled in creative writing courses at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Barbara Buckley Ristine is originally from New York, but she has lived in northern Nevada for the past nineteen years. She holds a B.A. from St John's University, New York and a J.D. from the College of William and Mary, Virginia. She is currently enrolled in creative writing courses at Truckee Meadows Community College, and she writes a blog, *my dearest Cassandra*, mydearestcassandra.wordpress.com.

Montana Routsis graduated from TMCC with an Associate of Arts degree and is currently completing her undergraduate studies in Fine Arts at the University of Nevada, Reno. In 2010, she was awarded the Golden Key award and American Voices award for her poem "Our Hearts Are Sick."

Ashail Ross is an English major attending Truckee Meadows Community College with her twin sister. This is the first time she will be published. She finds inspiration in her grandmother who shrinks with every passing year and loves her grandmother's egg foo young.

Kate E. Schultz earned her MA from Ohio University, where she also served as Assistant Editor for *New Ohio Review*. Her work has appeared in *Bayou Magazine*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Eclipse: A Literary Journal*, and others. She is an Associate Editor for *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*.

Wendy Scott's book, *Soon I Will Build an Ark*, will be published in 2014 by Main Street Rag. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Paterson Literary Review*, *Fourth River*, *Cobalt Review*, and *Punchnel's*, among others. She has an M.F.A. from the University of Pittsburgh.

Noel Sloboda's work has recently appeared or is soon forthcoming in *Rattle*, *Harpur Palate*, *Sentence*, *Redactions*, *Nimrod*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and *Modern Language Studies*. He is the author of the poetry collections *Shell Games* (2008) and *Our Rarer Monsters* (2013) as well as several chapbooks. Sloboda has also published a book about Edith Wharton and Gertrude Stein. He teaches at Penn State York.

Kaitlyn Stone is pursuing an M.A. Writing degree at University of Nevada, Reno after earning her B.A. from the University of South Florida in Creative Writing with a minor in Environmental Science and Policy. She also has had work published in Widener University's *Blue Route*.

Daniel James Sundahl is Professor in English and American Studies at Hillsdale College where he's been institutionalize for thirty-one pretty good years. He's about to retire and move with Ellen, wife of 38 years, to Greenville in South Carolina. They will leave Michigan with their belongings, three Mackerel cats, one well-behaved German Shepherd, and hope in their hearts.

June Sylvester Saraceno is the author of *Altars of Ordinary Light*, with a second poetry collection, of *Dirt and Tar*, forthcoming from Cherry Grove Collections in spring 2014. She is English program chair at Sierra Nevada College, as well as M.F.A. faculty and founding editor of the *Sierra Nevada Review*. For more information visit www.junesaraceno.com.

Mark Terrill shipped out of San Francisco as a merchant seaman to the Far East and beyond, studied and spent time with Paul Bowles in Tangier, Morocco, and has lived in Germany since 1984, where he's worked as a shipyard welder, road manager for rock bands, cook and postal worker.

Z.G. Tomaszewski was born within whispering distance of Lake Michigan. He is a handyman and globetrotter currently serving on the board of Lamp Light Music Festival and as a chocolatier for Grocer's Daughter. Poems have recently appeared in publications including *Cold Mountain Review*, *Fogged Clarity*, *Southword Journal*, and *OVS Magazine*.

Jennifer Voorhies has lived in Reno for the past fifteen years. She is currently studying at Truckee Meadows Community College working toward an A.A. in English.

Olivia Waltman is a Reno native who has grown up with the wildest family and friends. Her main passion in life is acting, but she has always enjoyed the art of writing. She is extremely excited to be published in *The Meadow*, and is so thankful to those who have always supported her.

John Sibley Williams is the author of *Controlled Hallucinations* (Future Cycle Press, 2013) and six poetry chapbooks. He is the winner of the HEART Poetry Award, and finalist for the Pushcart, Rumi, and The Pinch Poetry Prizes. John serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review*, co-director of the Walt Whitman 150 project, and Marketing Director of Inkwater Press. A few previous publishing credits include: *Third Coast*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *Inkwell*, *Cider Press Review*, *Cream City Review*, *RHINO*, and various anthologies. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

Marisza Winn is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Erik Zaldivar grew up on Durango Mexico and moved to California. He has been living in Reno, Nevada for seven years, and he has attended college for two years. This poem focuses on his experiences with that landscape, family, and imagination. He is currently working toward an Associate Degree in Business at Truckee Meadows Community College.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

After reading the submission guidelines below, send your submission to meadow@tmcc.edu between September 1st and February 1st of each year.

We welcome submissions of poetry, fiction, screenplay, nonfiction, cover artwork, comics and photography, preferably high-contrast artwork that will reproduce well as a cover.

Please note in the email's title if it is a poetry, non-fiction, fiction or art submission, so that it can find the appropriate editor.

Because all submissions must be sent via email, we prefer to receive submissions as an attachment (in .doc, .rtf or .jpg format).

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Do not paste submissions into the email.

All email submissions must be accompanied by contact information (name, address, telephone and email) and brief (less than 50 words) biography—include the title(s) of each piece submitted in the email. We do not accept previously published work, but we will consider simultaneous submission and expect to be notified immediately of acceptance elsewhere.

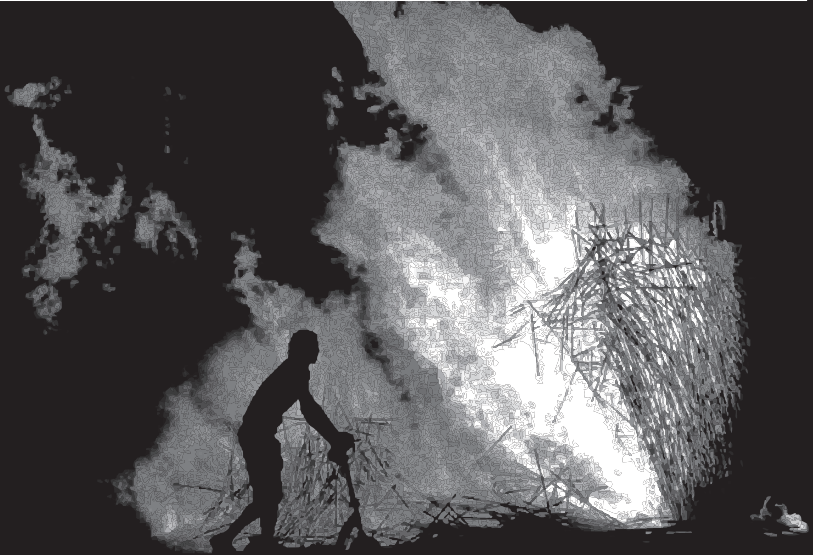
We will accept up to five poems, photos or art pieces or one work of prose (fiction or nonfiction) from each author or artist. Prose may not exceed 5,000 words.

Please put all poems into one attachment. Do not send in individual attachments.

Your name may not appear anywhere on the pieces submitted as we read all submissions without names.

the MEADOW

The annual literary journal of Truckee Meadows Community College



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- Non-Fiction
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