

The Northridge Review



Fall 2013

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Acknowledgments

The Northridge Review gratefully acknowledges the Associated Students of CSUN and the English Department faculty and staff, Frank De La Santo, Marjie Seago, Tonie Mangum, and Marleene Cooksey for all their help.

Submission Information

The Northridge Review accepts submissions of fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, drama, and art throughout the year.

The Northridge Review has recently changed the submission process. Manuscripts can be uploaded to the following page:

<http://thenorthridgereview.submittable.com/submit>

Submissions should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the writer's name, address, email, and phone number, as well as the titles of the works submitted. The writer's name should not appear on the manuscript itself.

Printed manuscripts and all other correspondence can still be delivered to the following address:

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Awards

The Northridge Review Fiction Award, given annually, recognizes excellent fiction by a CSUN student published in the Northridge Review. This year's judge is Ben Loory, author of *Stories for Nighttime and Some for the Day*. The recipient of this year's award is "Hero Complex" by Jennifer Hutchinson.

The Rachel Sherwood Award, given annually in the memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes excellent poetry by a CSUN student published in the Northridge Review. The year's judge is Jeffery McDaniel, author of *The Endarkenment* and *Forgiveness Parade*. and the recipient of this year's award is shared between four poems: "Happy Hour at the Tender Glow" by Elizabeth Arana-Moreno, "Where Are You From Originally" by Anna Austin, and "Dirty Postmodern Bedtime Poem" by Christopher Pruitt. Honorable Mentions go to "Pacoima Corrido" by Juan Alvarado and "Scrap Metal Collector at Encinatas Beach" by Tobi Cogswell.

The Northridge Review is also honored to publish the winner of the Academy of American Poets Award. This year's judge is Adam Clay, author of *A Hotel Lobby at the Edge of the World* and *The Wash*. The recipient of this year's award is "Pacoima Corrido" by Juan Alvarado. An honorable mention also goes to "Prometheus" by Gina Srmabekian.

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

We hope these pages find you well.

We hope these words speak to your subconscious.

We hope that when you walk upon them, you feel the concrete burn against your feet, the air teem with electric pulse that brush against your nerves like a whisper, in a language you can't comprehend but understand.

We hope they sit with you at dinner and ruin your diet.

We hope you can't sleep with them staring at you from your bookshelf; not out of fear, but from what fear is a symptom of: curiosity.

We hope they follow you to work every morning, that they haunt you as they have us for much longer than just the past semester. But year; lifetime. Those choice words, syllables, breaths, all linked together to create a resonant pattern that's been with us for quite some time now.

We hope they jolt the rhythm just to remind you they're there.

We hope they convince you your salary is a pittance, that money is no means of providing real substance.

We hope they make you brake fast, leave your car running on the 405, and walk for that nearest exit.

We hope you, dear reader, lose your way in their labyrinths.

And when you finally come out the other side,

You will find yourself

a writer.

We hope we can be there in person.

The Editors

Eric Barnhart & Gina Srmabekian

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CODED ARTICULATION

ASHLYN MORSE

That woman, held in
silent stitching suddenly
becomes the hospital;
in the woven wake of word purls,
that woman could push
the folds of other lips
into static sound gems,
crystalline syllable beads
that give the living
a look-of-bone.

Here,
body is about bone.

Here,
the I.V. cries
O-negative.

Hear
how blue falls
soundless onto paper
skin. How when her
glass lips close
the ballpoint ink hits the table
as the lobby cries,
"Next."

And when that woman's lips
finally open again
in the dimly lit red
of another bedside,
words will emerge;
her silent syllables
the misty restless bells
of Cavicide, articulation
enough to turn
even microbes
mid-sleep.

THE CANNIBAL ARMAGEDDON

DAVID MORCK

sounds much worse in the mind than experienced. As long as the strike is true. It's as if the rendering of the fat, the crock pot'esque slow cooking, instilled by the secret herbs and spices are felt, or the forced infusion into the muscle tissue. Cooled, heated, cool heated, the expulsion of marrow into broth and oils. Cannibals! Don't just tell us what happens beforehand. Let us imagine the worst as the final blow. Not the marination, steeping, reduction. If this is my fate, I hope there is a richness that washes over the palate, a shudder of intense flavor. We'll meet again, striking against each other in the ether of the universe, having been together before, before the heat death.

MOUTH WISDOM

KARLEE JOHNSON

1. I learned wisdom the way my tongue learned the shape of my teeth.
2. When parents hold their child's hand, they begin teaching a lesson their child will remember forever or forget immediately. Things that I could teach now yet have no recollection of having learned. 'What is ___?' 'How do you ___?' 'Why?' There are plenty of other lessons in my memory that have the same mundane setting that somehow work their way into my consciousness. These moments must have been unremarkable to my parents, but somehow I can still smell hydrangeas and recall Velcro. Perhaps this lesson will be one of those for this child. Perhaps the back of my head as I walk in front of the parent and child, a milkshake in my hand, will serve as a time marker in the child's memory, like all of the strangers in the background of photographs that make me wonder, 'what were they doing there? Where are they now?'
3. Why do I want to send you photographs meant for my former lovers?
4. He has kept my mouth open for nearly half an hour now. My nerves feel pressure but no pain. I can see the dust from my teeth fly into the light shining above my mouth as though it were glitter. The reflection of my mouth is in his glasses. I have very straight teeth. I can open my mouth very wide. 'Atta girl.' I am told that, in thirty years of dentistry, this is the most stubborn wisdom tooth he has ever had to pull. I am not surprised. Sweat is on his brow and blood is on his gloves.
5. Sometimes I type out poems that others have written. It makes me feel like I have written them. It is only when I am done, after I have not gained any knowledge of how the poet thought to combine their precious synecdoches, that I realize how incredibly lackluster the process was.
6. How is it that you can provoke microcosms in me—command an orbit by ringing your finger around the lip of a water glass—while all I can offer you is a few burning pages? The edges are charred, smoldering.
7. There is a bowl of apples mocking me.

8. With two black holes in my mouth, smoking cigarettes is like smoking incense. I unpack the tobacco, roll it between my fingers until the paper crinkles and the head starts to vomit. The filter is cut in half so it will hit smoother. My inhales are half-hearted—I am still too paranoid that the invitation of bacteria will loosen the blood clot protecting the nerve in my mouth. The gum may dry up and my bone will meet the air.

I cannot smoke under these circumstances.

9. After my teeth were plucked from my mouth we went into the wilderness. I abstained from the incense, preferring the combination of antibiotics and alcohol. My liver was irate, and when it began to kick I put your hand over it and said, “do you feel that?”

When we walked to the sand, over the strip of black pavement that divides the forest from the shore, I could tell I was getting pneumonia. My lungs were filled with campfire and they were fanning a smoke signal that commanded only the blockage of my nasal passages. I took off my shoes and put my feet into the ocean anyway. I even said to you, ‘this is probably a terrible idea’ but my head was elevated and I heard the words ‘high’ and ‘kite’ and ‘gypsy curse’ in the same sentence.

We stood on a rock. I looked at the ocean. You looked at the shore. You said, ‘this is kind of romantic.’ It was funny that you said that, as at the very same time I was pondering how my feet had felt in the sand and the expanse of the sea and how most things are finite and whether or not I had ever really been in love.

10. Stellar limiting magnitude. The edge of observability.
 11. Fuck you, carrots.
 12. When I talked to my former lover on the phone, I told him about you. It was after my teeth were gone and I was still spitting blood out of my mouth. I would walk back and forth through the house, spitting red into each sink.

Calling him my former lover makes it sound like all I ever did was love him.

13. ‘Keep irrigating your mouth,’ is what I am told. The holes in my mouth, deep and black, will eventually close. No more event horizon. Time will no longer slow the closer objects get to the holes if I irrigate it. It is as though my mouth is a plain. As though there is a field. As though some bountiful crops will take the place of space, a departure from the celestial to the painfully terrestrial, the voids in

my mouth will close. The holes will be demagnetized. From these black holes, objects will be allowed to return. There is no need for time travel, just irrigation.

I can still feel the metallic prodding on my tender gums after I have left the crunching paper beneath me, left the indigo, rubbery fingers. This tells me I am not healed yet.

He tells me, as he is pressing on my gums, pausing, then lifting his fingers, that if I keep the holes hydrated, keep them clear of debris, they will close. That if I do this often the holes will be gone in two, three, four weeks.

When he says 'no rigorous activity' I am positive that he actually means 'no oral sex.'

This is a precaution to you. Or an apology letter. Please, don't encourage me even if—and especially when—I ask you to. Let's abstain from rigor. Though it is hard to argue that the protein would not benefit the crops. Please, think of my voids.

14. One day I hope to see a child learning the word hyperbole.

'Say it, "high-per-bow-lee."

15. When I tell you that you are attractive, I use the following words: incredibly, irrevocably, indescribably.

You say the springs of my mattress sound like your body.

My mouth aches and I imagine your fingers on my bare shoulder, my bare chest. Your lips on my neck are charcoal pencils. The fingers you trace down me are the roots of trees, you shade each one as you go for likeness. Each of my wide sighs bring leaves to life and this is what our skin sounds like together.

16. Creating the cosmos is like creating a poem. Everything must be in place, or else it will stick out. Everything is purposeful. The difference between a yellow dress and a green dress. Trivialities are sore thumbs.

17. Do you remember a time before voracious appetites? The tension in the dark between our knees was resolved with one hand, but that same hand would catalyze a libidinal fascination. So I refrained, until I had too much wine and fell asleep in your lap in the back of your car and you rubbed my ear and when I got up I said, 'I'm going to do this' and I kissed you and you kissed me back and you later said, 'If you didn't do it, I was going to.'

Our galactic core is surrounded by clusters of time that we gather by the fistful. If only we had parsecs left.

18. I listen to my former lover on the phone. He talks about his lover and

his lovers' lover. He says the words 'boundary issues.' In his story, he is either a pariah or a courtesan. I spit in the sink again.

He tells me about all of the shortcomings I had as a lover, explaining that his current lovers don't mind when he puts his mouth on their armpits.

How pleased was I to realize I forgot his birthday?

19. Children disobeying their parents is a site for guilt. I want them to be obedient so their parents will stop looking so old, but I am also hoping that they will refuse to brush their teeth. They will learn when they mark their calendars by the cavity.
20. You write poems like they are letters to a new year.
21. No longer can I measure the currency of friendship in loins. For decades I didn't owe anyone anything unless they had helped me achieve orgasm. But now I go to sleep at night and try and recite all of the phone numbers I have ever memorized.
22. In the wilderness the coyotes howled loudly and in a high-pitched syncopation that I had never heard before. They sounded less like coyotes with a kill and more like a rapid generator on a far-off machine, or the record to the universe skipping.

We shared a blanket and it was so dark and our noses were so close that all I remember was hearing the words 'closet' and 'sentimentalism' and 'tapeworm' in the same sentence.

23. Voluminous life in the parenthesis. Navigation is our folly, but when my children tell me that they want to be astronauts I will tell them that they already are.
24. The cover was smooth and matte and it had a woman and a man embracing one another, simultaneously holding the moon and being part of the moon itself.

'That's us,' you said. 'That's me holding you.'

This isn't a metaphor. This is our portrait.

25. Sometimes I type out stories that I have already written because I long to remember a time when I thought that every story I began to write would end. When I am done I realize that I have not copied the words in front of me, but rather written the inverse of the story. Twin skins.
 26. You say to me, 'I'm going to miss you.' But you have no idea how close nebulas are to one another where we live. Be grateful for the art and science of navigation. Be grateful for each point of the compass.
- 236.25. 56.25.

27. My teeth are packed into a manila envelope the size of the world's smallest document. My teeth make their way out of the envelope in four parts: one whole tooth, and three pieces of the other tooth, each varying in size, that do not quite fit together. The blood on each of them is dried brown, and its amazing how bones fit in the body the way they do until they become anomalies—then it is amazing that they perform as tree rings.

28. Relics, relics, relics.

Retelling old fables, appropriating them our own purposes. Same stories, adapted for different laps. 'And this will be the one.' This will be the one that mints the metaphor. This will be the one that creates the origin. This will be the one that reorganizes the constellations for sweet, sweet myth-making.

29. The only thing I identify with is imagination. I am terrified of the day that I become immune to wonder.

30. My mouth is like space, infinite and full of mistakes. One day I may have to apologize to my children for raising them like stars. Apologize that not everything is clockwork, it is imperfect and sometimes things are destroyed for no reason other than their reliance on a cosmic pull to steer them in the right direction. They will be beautiful while they're doing it, though. Just before they combust.

31. When I sat outside and listened to the coyotes, I looked up at the sky, graced with the overwhelming knowledge that each mark on my body somehow correlated with the stars. I have been marked by important coordinates that, if I should chart my course properly, should lead me to exactly where I am supposed to be in the galaxy. When I get there, I don't think I will find space to be cold and desolate. Rather, I think the sky will breathe and its pulse will welcome me into the spiral arms of blood flowing through its arteries.

And space will be quiet. But it will be alive and rich in philosophy.

32. Or maybe I'm wrong. And the above me is just paint and what I call stars are just birds resting in the sky, moving only when we look away from them.



Miles Lewis | Body and Mind



NIGGA, WITH OCCASIONAL GUN

OLVARD LICHE SMITH

Then came the car, a Cadillac at that, and all I could do was obsess about the Potential Niggas inside. I stared into its red paint and my mind took me inside the vehicle, into that mini-world of guns and tattoos and more guns.

You'd see it too, right? Of course you would, if you're American at least.

And can you believe that niggas in this country say shit doesn't get real here? When I was back in Inglewood, in the ghetto where I saw stereotype materialize into actual niggas, where caricature stepped off the page and expanded into flesh and skin, I heard a lot of shit like this:

In Africa you can cop an AK for the price of a Big Mac.

In Africa, ten babies died of starvation this very instant.

In Africa, babies are still born, thank God, but half of them are born with AIDS, mah nigga, bound to get malaria and dysentery and grow those swollen malnutrition bellies, you know, mah nigga, in those late-night Save The Children commercials.

Kill that noise; I've long since adapted to crazy Inglewood static that in so many useless words says, *It could be worse, thank the Lord God, mah nigga*. As if Inglewood *isn't* so bad—which is bullshit. Inglewood is essentially sirens, but that's a blessing in disguise if anything. Warnings, that's what I took the sirens for, which had always given me a sense of comfort in knowing where not to go. The same with gunshots, and I've heard my share of those. If you hear danger, avoid it, and if you hear a gunshot, drop. Best way to dodge a bullet—trust me. A healthy fear is good for survival. Something I learned from Mom, a woman from a small Philippine village that upon moving here, didn't know she was trading in one jungle for another, though quickly decided that Inglewood life wasn't any way to live (thank God). Even I was glad when we moved from the hood to the valley, from the cut to the cul de sac, from ghetto ass Inglewood to quiet Henderson Street where I now listen to bluebird songs fill my bedroom air instead of distant (or not so distant) sirens.

There was noticeably more peace—and noticeably less black people. I

like to think that's incongruous, but it feels like a guilty pleasure.

Sometimes I close my eyes and think real hard like I'm trying to brainwash myself or something, but after a couple minutes concentration gives away to a headache, and I open my eyes to blurred vision and dizziness. In these moments I reflect on all that Africa shit those Inglewood niggas were spewing, going on and on and on and on, speaking not only of the Apartheid refugees that wished they had a siren, a DO NOT CROSS, DO NOT COME warning; but speaking of the East Asian sex workers that wished their damp alley shortcuts home had a DO NOT ENTER sign to prevent their initial abductions; speaking of my mother's family on those god-forsaken Philippine islands, hoping, praying, that Catholic faith is enough to guard them from the body-snatchings of the Abu Syyaf radicals; they speak of the Filipinos that wished they had more reliable STOP or YIELD signs for hyper-aggressive jeepney drivers because red lights, sidewalks, and small children aren't effective enough signifiers for SLOW THE FUCK DOWN, YOU'LL KILL SOMEBODY (maybe me)—

I am a black man, and also a Filipino—nothing but third-world blood boiling with enough history to make me a modern day slave. In short, a mixed kid, and as such I also have a healthy respect of anything distinctly blacker—

Like the red car, that fucking nuisance of a car. And, because you've looked left and then right and then left again, no *African Americans* in sight, you can go ahead and study *The American Formula of Violence*.

It goes like this: Cadillac = McNigga-car.

So listen, check it, witness, observe:

Neighbors had been hiding behind their screen doors watching the same sight as me. A red Cadillac was rolling through the neighborhood at a mere five miles per hour, blasting explosive rap with the windows up so we couldn't make out the lyrics. We were left to hear and feel the bass' hum. Vibrations from the bass drop rattled the screen door and the windows. The Caddy had fresh paint and dark tint and it sat on 22-inch rims (22's in nigga-speak). It was old and souped-up and the driver was clearly the type of nigga we someday hope to banish from suburbia. Ask any of my neighbors: Mr. Garrett, the Goldberg Jews, even Mom. If we had a vote, even my brown ass would be back in Inglewood, exiled to a liquor store or chicken joint.

The passenger-side window rolled down, doing so one chunk at a

time from a manual cranking mechanism. We could then hear the song at full blast. It was an old-school cut from Mac Daddy Gat Daddy.

Pop off in her face like I pop my gat
Shoot sperm in her face like ratatat-tat

The song is called “My Dick is Bigger Than My Gat,” a cut that made Mac Daddy Gat Daddy a legend. I had (and still have) mad respect for the nigga. Hip hop—another guilty pleasure. Needless to say, my neighbors felt quite differently than me. And the mere mention of a gun had likely chilled every oh-so-fragile suburban spine. Even though the song provided us a context, Henderson Avenue had ignored it, resulting in Mac Daddy Gat Daddy’s failure in communicating with his legendary flow that the song’s gun can’t kill, because it’s only his dick, firing off on bitches with Magnum-like recoil.

This much was clear: the niggas in the car had guns.

Not simply nig-*ga*, but nig-*gas*—plural, because they were also gang-members. It was just something we knew.

Our suspicions confirmed by the car’s make and model, noise output, and eerie slowness—we’ve all seen drive-bys on T.V. For Henderson this was more than enough evidence to stamp the Caddy with an unfavorable verdict:

GUILTY, GUILTY, GUILTY.

Mom was in the kitchen cooking and, knowing that she couldn’t compete with the 90-decibel rap, had instead settled for avalanching her frustrations upon me, “So loud! Po tang ina! Tell your people to have respect!” I let that one slide because I was used to it, and because I wanted the rice, pansit, lumpia, and adobo she’d been slaving over. Then she continued ranting to me about My People without realizing that I (thankfully) couldn’t hear her, the rest of her complaint drowned out by raw sound.

Or did she let her voice trail off?

Big, big voice so I had to wonder if she held back, restraining the natural Philippine hysteria in her tone, knowing full well that if these fools really were criminals of any sort (or color) then her frantic I’M GONNA DIE, I’M GONNA DIE chatter may have come into fruition, the firepower she’s imagined becoming real, solidifying out of thin air, taking the form of blue steel, Teflon handle, gunpowder, safety, clip, trigger, bullets.

Props, though, for no one else had half her gall, and I imagined the rest of Henderson Avenue grumbling about the disturbance with their

inside voices.

I imagined Mr. Garrett, an Obama-colored office-slave from across the street wanting to yell, CUT THAT RACKET, I'M A DECENT TAXPAYER, but instead whispering *you assholes*, having quickly learned that brown life in America (and Henderson, too) is easier when you play it smart, safe, and discreet in the presence of yuppies and niggas alike.

And the elderly Goldberg couple next door must've also been affected, stiffening before their TVs, unable to hear Fox News over Mac Daddy Gat Daddy but smiling politely, refusing to say a thing, unable to so much as stand and look outside because they knew from the bass and the rhyme that there were black people afoot. Fear had long ago whittled away their resolve and reduced them to asking me to take out their trash. Which I did, once, taking on a load far too heavy for their old bones, and upon finishing I announced, I'm done ma'am. And then I got my reward: Mrs. Goldberg had reached into her coin purse and flipped me a nickel, Get a peppermint, you deserve it boy.

And then the next moment: the red Cadillac loomed forward another few feet, the passenger-side window went down by yet another chunk, and Mom, Mr. Garrett, The Goldbergs, and others were still negotiating their distinctly American conditions:

Anxiety. Neurosis. Clinical depression.

And all in very different ways. Variety: the spice of life. Do you really expect a deer to stand in headlights the same way each time? To feel the same skip-hop of the heart upon hearing a lion's roar (or in this case rap music)? For adrenal is creative as hell in telling the body YOU'RE GOING TO DIE NOW (or the next moment, or the next) so the sight of a historical nigga car had hit everyone differently as it loomed past our living spaces, inspiring thoughts like:

Why oh why are we so afraid of a Cadillac? Why does this hood-hop make me feel like dying?

And Mom continued putting up a strong front of muted lip-service while half-thinking about the potentially dangerous gangbangers inside the car, rolling maybe five or six deep with vandals or ex-cons; the other half of her immigrant brain conjuring an image of her sometimes son and sometimes half-breed monkey watching Rap City on her couch. "Change the channel!" she'd sharply say, "You're endorsing violence." It happens every single day; I'm fed her bitching for every meal. I can't even listen to Outkast, or even that soft nigga Drake. She likes the Black Eyed Peas though, because there's that Niggapino halfie in it.

And Mr. Garrett, someone with whom I have little to do with, one of several neighborhood recluses, had once more gone M.I.A. His near-outburst was all the excitement he could handle, and it was quite literally just four or five seconds of Mac Daddy Gat Daddy before he slammed-locked-chained his thick wooden door the same way he sits in his cubicle and pretends his co-workers have vanished. He had long ago mastered turtle defense: the art of squeezing inside his shell, turning up the T.V. volume from 15 to 100, and falling away from the world.

And it's clear to me that the Goldbergs were paralyzed, reaping what they had sown with over five decades of N-bombs, and additionally the past three months of patronizing half-smiles directed at me. Just last week the Missus tried to give me *two* nickels, this time for picking up her meds from CVS. No I can't take this, I said waving my hands in refusal, and then a pause, both of us expecting me to continue speaking, which I did: OK bye. And then I turned tail, went home. So I'm sure Mrs. Goldberg was treating the red nuisance as my personal Harbinger of Brown Doom, something I had sent to inspire panicky thoughts in her along the lines of, *next time I'll give him three nickels—four—five—my God maybe even the whole change purse!* as if karma from rewarding me what could buy maybe half a Jolly Rancher would stop the Potential Niggas in the car from cramming her grandchildren, black garbage bags over their heads, into the Caddy's formidable trunk space.

And me? What toll did this obnoxiously loud car have on my psyche? I only watched as the defiant red motorbody crept forward, closer, with the song progressing a couple more bars (which I whispered to myself low enough for Mom to not hear me from the kitchen):

*Just kidding, I don't have a gun
But show me her face, I'll shoot it with cum*

Real talk, though, I used to bump that same shit in Inglewood—everyone did—and it took far more than bass and rhyme to leave these niggas shook. For the everyday hood nigga is used to jarring noises—fights, gunshots, sirens, and the like; used to limiting their movements to restaurants, shops, streetlamps, sunlight; used to avoiding east of 104th and Crenshaw, wisely keeping west toward LAX.

And although I remained true to my upbringing, facing the Caddy without fear, there were changes in me that had taken root when I moved to Henderson. I began to play music at a quarter of its former volume; to say *dude*, *guy*, or *bro* instead of nigga; to fanboy more openly about indie music—Ducktails, Alabama Shakes, Arcade Fire—instead of sharing my

dreams to live out various rap fantasies compiled from all the make-that-ass-clap songs I'd heard at college parties, advertising in what exact way I'd degrade the girls (code name: Bitches) that I wanted to fuck.

So I stood at the door flat-footed, caught in the limbo between Inglewood and Henderson, becoming angry, annoyed, fed-up, and I could only think, *Holy shit, didn't we move away from this?* Yet I wondered if I really meant that as I pressed my face against the screen, wishing I could rap along with tons more feeling than this bitch-ass whisper but knowing better; aware of my responsibility to disguise this side of black; the side that should only exist in Mrs. Goldberg's imagination, Tyler Perry flicks, Inglewood, and on Fox News; proving that My People were decent, respectable, and African American.

A few more seconds passed with the Caddy progressing in pretty much the same manner: slow, imposing, invasive, loud.

And the passenger window kept cranking lower and lower and in the steady, methodical rhythm which struck me as awfully familiar, one I've seen dozens of times on T.V. (particularly on BET), and even *my* heart jolted me with an extra hard thump as I thought, *No way, that would be so stupid...* but my brain's hard drive was charged with nervous energies to fuel its break-neck rpm, rendering my mind utterly vulnerable to the possibility that maybe, *just maybe*, I was watching a real, live hood-drama drive-by shooting.

In less than a minute the fools in the red Caddy were undoing my months of playing Benign Token Blackie, enunciate-ING every G, omitting all slang, smiling wide, greeting strangers, making eye contact, and generally appearing jollier than my former urban grit would allow. I felt that I had been doing Black image some good as a Niggapino poster-boy, slowly but surely transcending patronizing labels such as *well-spoken*, or *behaved*, or *charming little niglet*. But I couldn't ignore this particular car that demanded so much attention, parading through Henderson, triggering the neighborhood's collective intuition which to me took the form of a magic eight-ball, shake-shake-shaken by the speaker's treble, revealing to us in neon blue letters: ALL SIGNS POINT TO NIGGAS.

Pointing to what? Everything, clearly, because we know niggas did it. Niggas are doing it now. And niggas are so amazingly crafty that they've already committed future crimes.

So I ask again: Who are these niggas that say shit doesn't get real in America?

Clearly not the niggas in that car. And clearly not my neighbors that

watched, shifting focus, no longer obsessing over the music, rims, and general swagger of the car. But rather on the very visible black guy in the passenger side, and the invisible gun he might've been holding.

And the nigga looked violent, too, mad-dogging every passing house in silent repose, even resisting the urge to bob and vibe to the beat. Instead he readjusted his do-rag, maintaining the same expression, the same fierce Tupac eyes. And I've seen my share of that look on niggas posted up at liquor mart entrances, long lines at the post office, and bus stops where every once in a while someone steps off the curb to scan traffic for the Metro. I had grown used to those eyes. Yet this instance differed because the man's eyes were burning fresh fears into me, for I couldn't pinpoint his origin, or game-plan for a possible encounter since this wasn't Inglewood anymore, but Henderson, a hood rendering my street-smarts useless when faced with the mystery of whether this nigga was the harmless LAX type, or a cold Rollin' 60s banger northeast of Crenshaw.

"GET YOUR FACE OFF THE SCREEN!" Mom had shouted from the kitchen. I almost jumped but instantly recovered so Mom didn't notice. "The screen's dirty! Oi, come here! You'll get bugs on your face." But I was too smart to fall for that one, too stubborn to bend to her will, and so completely enthralled with the Caddy crew that at the time I quite literally believed it impossible to move my firmly planted feet: I was a goddamn tree.

Mom wasn't one for bullshit though, and quickly blurted out her God's honest truth, "Get away from the door! You'll die! Why are you trying to die and leave an old woman alone? Don't you see that person out there?" *Whatever, I'm used to this*, and kept my eyes trained on "that person" as if he were a lion at the zoo. My confidence sky-high because I was sure he couldn't see me, or if he could, then just like the late-great Eazy E, the nigga didn't give a fuck.—"COME BACK!" Mom had been yelling over and over, "COME BACK COME BACK COME BACK COME BACK!" for a while without my noticing until finally breaking my focus, causing me to face her with a contorted Are-you-fucking-kidding-me-Calm-the-fuck-down look, giving her my undivided attention such that she could express the core concern of her frantic immigrant mind, "You know how your people are, son, don't stand there, don't get shot..." And I almost felt like defending the one confirmed black person plus the Who-knows-how-many-others in the red Caddy, but I feared them too, wanted them gone, to turn tail and never violate local noise ordinances again. "I

won't lose you. I pray all the time, I pray so hard, just move away from the screen..." And Mom continued on and on and on and on but at that point I began ignoring her. When I looked at Mom, she appeared as a signal flare, everything about her warning me to avoid conversation. I saw the light shimmer in her dampening eyes, picked up certain timbres in her shaky voice, and immediately realized that her plea was not even close to a quarter or even an eighth way done: she was going to tell me DON'T DIE, DON'T DIE, HE'S WEARING A GANGSTER HEADDRESS for the next twenty minutes.

"Anak ko, I just want you to be safe! And—"

"OK, look Mom, just calm down. Breathe—I need you to breathe..."

In the meantime Big Red had made it more than halfway up the block, closing in on my home about four houses away. At that moment it was passing Mr. Garrett's residence. By then the passenger side window, which faced that household, was all the way down. And the nigga continued fiddling with his do-rag, temporarily de-stressing Mom because we could see both empty hands. No weapons, not even a clenched fist. And he continued searching the neighborhood with fiery The-fuck-you-looking-at eyes. Intimidating, yet I still fed Mom a source of relaxation by telling her, *Well if shit's gonna happen, it's gonna happen on that side of the street*, at least until remembering that Henderson is a cul de sac and that these niggas would—by necessity—have to swing the car around and maybe kill us dead five, six, seven times.

I didn't tell her that though.

I began to feel like a dumbass. I wondered why we were getting so worked up about rap music, a lowered window, and a black man. Mac Daddy Gat Daddy had essentially served as a siren signaling future crime. But sirens were meant for shit that had already happened and by then I was pretty sure these men were benign. Yet I still couldn't shake the image of my own gangbanger death, as if watching a John Wu flick of my own murder, a skinny Niggapino fool getting peppered with clip upon clip of bullets that ripped through the screen door and into him—*into me*—falling into Mom's arms in slow-motion to accentuate the proper fixings of heavy drama: tears, blood, and guttural lamentations.

After a minute Mom had calmed and I could relax. But as quickly as we had found peace a single unmistakable sound rang out, putting the thought in our brains and quickened pulses that we would die now, or the next moment, or the next. For what we heard was without a doubt: *bang*,

bang, bang.

Mom froze as if she'd been shot, as if rigormortis were happening to her still-living body, which was slow in processing the fact that she had managed to survive a shooting. I was still standing by the screen door; I saw and heard the whole thing, and wanted to go outside to check it out. I gripped the door handle and before I could twist-turn-pull Mom tried to stop me, "Wait! Don't do it!" And then the lame excuse, "That was probably from the"—interrupting herself to build venom—"Music." Never in my life had the word "music" sounded like "nigger."

To be honest, I had to laugh, I really did.

"Sit! I think the food's ready!" she said while crossing herself three times (first the head, then lips, then heart), but instead I stood as I bit back chuckles and flung the screen door open. "Sorry Mom, gonna get some air," I said, knowing exactly what this was, recognizing the gunshots as a stock sound file used in like half the rap songs ever made, including the one that had been playing. I wished I could hold up my hallowed hoop-hop knowledge to Mom's face like the discovery of fire, but I knew full well she'd refuse to hear a word of it, and fine by me, too, because no amount of the ensuing DON'T DO IT, DON'T DO IT's were going to bar me from good air, good sunshine, good music.

Then I stepped outside. I stood before the door frame, exposed, continuing my study of Henderson Ave. My eyes focused on sensing the hidden, quiet lives in the neighborhood, certain that everyone else had heard the gunshots too. I imagined Mr. Garrett getting ahead on office work in his soundproofed den and the Goldbergs watching yet another news report about Obama's kill-list and trigger-happy employment of drones. And I even imagined Mom, living life at a high-strung crackhead pace, trying to relax her heart-rate, slowly but surely working to bring it down by breathing in, out, in, out, before checking on the food she'd left behind in the kitchen.

But back to reality, to chaos, to being the meat in a sound sandwich: *Just kidding I don't have a gun/But show me her face, I'll shoot it with cum* blasting from the street (I was vibin' to it, too) and Mom's piercing commands only three feet behind me from the threshold of the main door. So I closed the door behind me for the sake of "keeping the flies out," playing dumb as if I couldn't hear "YOU'RE SKINNY, YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE!" over The Loudest Cumshot in the World.

And the car was closing in like a missile too, having passed Mr.

Garrett's house, and was three...two...and then just one house away. I watched the red Caddy loom forward with its gleaming paint and Ashanti rims that spun independently of the tires' movements. Then I fucked up, made eye contact with the passenger.

His eyes were dark, angry, and a little bit bloodshot. Maybe he'd been in a fight. Maybe he had smoked some weed. Maybe he was prepping his psyche for murder. I wanted to believe in his harmlessness, but my brain had been contaminated with wails from my inner bitchness. *I should've gone inside, I should've just listened.*

The car was right in front of my house and the nigga had yet to avert his eyes. He stared right into me, sensed my fear, and smirked. He turned to the driver, who I could see from that angle was another nigga, and said a few words. I became nervous, my joints stiffening and light sweat chilling my back as I wondered: What next? I couldn't see the nigga's hands. I hoped they were in his lap, or pulling fries from the bottom of a Burger King bag. But then I thought: What if they weren't?

And what were these niggas thinking when they had stopped the car in the middle of the street? What was the conversation that made the driver turn on the hazards, and his passenger to step out of the car? Do-rag nigga remained staring dead in my eyes as he began his steady beeline toward me. No gun, though he could've made a fist, could've opened his hands wide as he could and throttled my neck. Then he shouted completely unintelligible words, the music overpowering his voice. But that didn't stop him from shouting at me, his face tensing as he got louder, and louder still, and increasingly clearer with each utterance. But I wasn't listening, and all I could think about was escape.

If only this nigga had been a pushover. If only he didn't look so threatening. If only his eyes lacked conviction; something I was starved of and desperately needed. For decision time had come and I had yet to make up my mind about these niggas. And his voice was becoming clearer still, his homie lowering the radio volume, and I think I heard Do-rag say:

"Where is the freeway? I need to get to the 405!"

I hope not, though. My imagination had been running wild, that's all. They were fine, didn't need help, so it was perfectly OK when I skipped three feet back to the entrance, hopped inside, and slammed-locked-chained the main and screen doors.



THIS IS HOW YOU TELL PEOPLE TO FUCK OFF

NIC ALEA

i'll tell you, i've been listening to mother, i've been cracking my own eggs, peeling my own fingers back to the muscle, i've been listening to shouting inside my head, the petty fog that thinks it has a hand in all this garbage. the six am work day where the city is still wrapped up in bandages and the gutters are all throwing up their own insecurities about being the channel that shit travels. shit travels when you yell it loud enough.

god damn, i said to myself, you became something that day, you became further rusted, you became a weeping owl, you created something that day only to let anxiety burst out your chest like a hollowed bone, so i say, let the cauldron speak like a burnt tongue and let everything else slowly gravitate.

3:00 AM

ASHLYN MORSE

Tonight, the ER falls
with the circular sun
below the horizon
of the nurse's station;
rapid hands shoot like comets
across the paperwork, double-crossing "t"s
and arteries across space
with impressive trails, IV lines
linking meteor to man;
water, linens, pharmaceuticals
as tenacious as the orange
love between nail and digit skin
season the room, the nurses make note, nod,
all the while keeping time
in your Big Toe
with a pulse oximeter.

Outside, the ebony shawl of morning stars
hugs the shoulders of the universe—
while here, trapped in the finite
boundaries of another fabric curtain,
the mask is drawn down
over your face.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

EMILY GREEN

“Have you ever heard of ‘Schrödinger’s cat?’” Hanna asks, standing outside of the bathroom door. Her roommate does not respond. “I guess this is kind of like that right now. You’re in some closed off area, I can’t see you. You’re both alive and dead—I think that’s how it goes.”

“You’re mental, Hanna,” a voice inside replies.

“No, it’s a real thing. You put a cat in a box with a vial of poison and some sealed container of radiation, and if any radiation leaks out, the vial of poison is broken, and the cat’s dead, but up until then, the cat is technically both alive and dead, because you don’t know for sure.” The shower in the bathroom is turned on in response. Hanna sits down in a chair and places her toiletries on the floor and thinks. What an odd theory that is, and how interesting, being both alive and dead in the same moment. Not unlike ghosts, she reasons, or zombies, but this is more real than that. It’s not someone dressed up, or a fancy display of computer graphics, it’s a real-time moment. Even now, even though her roommate just spoke, Hanna feels she is in that state of perpetual uncertainty. She could open the door and her roommate could be dead, or, she could get an earful. Hanna decides to remain sitting, not wanting to chance either.

How awful would it be to walk into a room and find someone dead? Someone she knew? More awful, she figures, than to walk into a room and have her ears blown out by angry yelling. Hanna wonders why that thought even occurred to her. She needed to stop repeating odd things she hears in her classes. Jack takes forever in the bathroom. Usually Hanna is first awake in the morning, first in the bathroom, and takes hardly any time at all; this is in consideration for the others, but Jack takes hours. Two in fact. Hanna kept track one day for sport; it was the only thing she could do while waiting. She doesn’t have a smart-phone with games; her phone barely has a GED. Once, after getting fed up with waiting, she got up to make herself breakfast first, and came back to find one of the others entering into the bathroom as Jack was exiting. So now, Hanna sits by the door and doesn’t leave the spot. It’s not all bad. Hanna learned that on the mornings she was waiting for Jack, she was able to get a lot of thinking done, and she loved to think.

That was an odd trait, people would say, that she loved to think. Most

hate being inside of their own head for too long, but Hanna would just smile, point to her temple and say, 'you'd love it in here.' That typically never received a favorable response, just more odd stares. On these mornings, where she found herself waiting for the bathroom, Hanna would let her mind wander where it wanted to go and she would be a willing passenger. Sometimes she would think on a dream from the night before, if she could remember it. Other times it would be just fine-tuning her list of responsibilities for the day. Mundane, but it helped to pass the time. Now, her mind was stuck on the impossibility of Jack being alive and dead at the same time—which eventually led her to wondering which state she would favor more.

It depended on the situation. Does monopolizing the bathroom in the mornings better qualify Jack for death? This is the one instance where Hanna begins to steer her thought process; no need to think on these kinds of things first thing in the morning. Save that for mid-day, before she's had her second cup of coffee. In that moment, she smells the scent of freshly brewed coffee attempting to coax her from her chair. Later, she tells herself, after a nice hot shower; that's when coffee's best. She must keep her resolve. Hanna feels an itching urge to knock on the door, to see if Jack is still alive—no, maybe just wait a little longer.

She wonders if the bus is going to be on-time today. It was late yesterday, making her late to class. What made it late? Well, she knows all the completely plausible reasons it could have been late: traffic, passenger difficulties, or just a late start from the depot. All likely things that could have happened, but that's not good enough. What about that movie where Sandra Bullock drives the bus, and if it goes under fifty miles per hour it explodes? Hanna figures she can be the Sandra Bullock character. She'd drive that bus all around town, screeching tires and all, but who would save them? Keanu Reeves? She thinks about all the movies where there's a woman in danger and some dashing man comes to the rescue. She thinks stories have been like that for too long. Hanna squirms a bit in her chair and looks at the bathroom door. What if Jack was Keanu Reeves? She shudders. It doesn't matter, because he might be dead. Maybe the bus movie isn't such a great example. It's the only one she can think of straight away with a bus in it, but she's not feeling very comfortable with it anymore.

She really wants coffee. The smell is starting to get to her. She can hear movement in the kitchen and wonders which of the other roommates is up. Hanna runs through everyone's sleeping schedules in

her mind and decides the likeliest candidate, other than Jack, is Rachael. That doesn't help things because Rachael makes the best coffee. Once, while Hanna was sitting at the kitchen table working on a story for one of her classes, she took a small break to watch Rachael make the coffee. Nutmeg, cinnamon, and a little cocoa powder mixed with the grounds. Hanna attempted to recreate this recipe, but there was preciseness to the measurements that she could never master—it seemed only Rachael could. Obvious fact: writers drink a lot of coffee. Why do writers need to drink a lot of coffee? “Their brains are so burdened with thoughts that they can't muster up the energy on their own to reconcile them,” said one of Hanna's peers once. Hanna remembered feeling a little depressed about that, and put off from drinking the coffee she had just bought. “Writers can't help but have thoughts. It's in their nature. It's a blessing and a curse,” her friend went on to say. Hanna quit drinking coffee for a while after that, but had to start again when the caffeine withdrawal headaches turned to migraines.

She'd had migraines since she was fifteen. The doctors said there was nothing wrong with her, that some people were more prone to getting them than others. Her mother would joke that her migraines were magic powers. At first, Hanna, being fifteen and not a child, was unable to appreciate the gesture but as time wore on, and the migraines continually punctuated her life in scattered instances, she began to recall those words more and more. Her migraines made her hypersensitive to everything. She could suddenly hear the smallest sound that she normally couldn't and her eyes were far more sensitive to everything the light touched—but at a painful cost. She never became a superhero. She just shut herself in her room with a bottle of painkillers, curled up beneath the covers in her bed and waited it out in the comfortable dark. She still has migraines every so often, but not as much as when she was younger, not as much as when she started drinking three cups of coffee a day.

It wasn't healthy to have all that caffeine, her mother would tell her. “It's my kryptonite, mom. It kills my magic powers,” Hanna would reply. Her mother never liked that answer. It always made her quiet. Hanna hears a cabinet close in the bathroom—Jack is alive. For now. She sighs and slides down in her chair, lacing her fingers together over her stomach. Her mind wanders to the story on her desk in her room, ready to be turned in, and it makes her stomach churn underneath her fingers. It's pretty awful, she thinks. Hanna hates the cycles of elation and detestation for writing. Perhaps the reason that writers struggle with language is

because they can never properly translate what is inside of their head—the brain has a language of its own, still completely outside human understanding and, as with all translations, meaning is lost. Only when she thinks, without the necessity of having to put those thoughts to paper, do things really make sense. She's just a vessel.

Hanna could never find her “sea-legs,” both literally and figuratively. Never mind that the term “sea-legs” is ridiculous. Every time she stepped onto a boat the nausea was almost immediate. When her mind proved too capable an enemy for ginger root to work, she would pop a couple Dramamine and be good to go. It was the same in cars. Unless she was driving she would have to make sure she was focusing forward, or else things would start to spin. Like the rides at the amusement park. Her friends always wanted to go on the spinning ones and Hanna always caved after vehement protest; she always ended up throwing up after. It was a vicious cycle. She needed to be more assertive. Like now. She could start by getting up, knocking on the door, sternly, and telling Jack he needed to stop taking forever in the bathroom. More movement from the kitchen causes her to look back in that direction. And also, Rachael needed to be called out for taking her things. Hanna looks down at the toiletries beside her chair. It's a pain carrying them back and forth every morning.

Rachael is cooking pancakes. Hanna can smell them mingling with the scent of the coffee. She fidgets and looks back at the door. Jack needs to either come out of that bathroom or die, but definitely one of the two, because there are going to be pancakes on the table. Rachael is the only one who can cook—well. There's four roommates total, but the fourth person is someone of no contest. She likes to stay out late and sleep in. Hanna looks down at her bare feet and makes a mental note to buy slippers before she comes home from class. The last time she wore slippers was when she stayed up until 4 AM on Facebook with a friend, playing around with meme generators and wondering what patty-cake meant, and how awesome it would be to play that game with “Eye of the Tiger” in the background. She begins to instinctively tap her foot to the beat as it runs through her mind. She thinks it's the most appropriate song to describe this moment as she waits for her turn in the bathroom. One of her professors walked into the classroom playing this song once—it was in the same class she heard about Schrödinger's cat. At what point, by the way, was it ever appropriate to even imagine putting a cat in a box with poison *and* radiation? It was overkill, without the pun intended—or

maybe with the pun intended, it depended on who she was speaking to, but both materials could kill equally well.

It's still too early for this, Hanna thinks, wait for coffee at least. There was going to be a poetry reading that night—some of her peers were going to read. Hanna hopes they'll provide coffee. She has always admired people who could write poetry because, for her, writing it now is no longer an option. She wrote poems in High School, the typical angst-ridden, darkest-night-without-a-glimmer-of-hope-for-the-light-of-day kind. They were still saved on her hard drive—buried deep, deep in the dark recesses of her computer's memory. She dredged them out every once in a while when she needed to steal lines for stories. They were so putrid that they could actually pass as acceptable in prose. It was a shame that writing was nothing like Rachael's coffee. Like ingredients could never work well together on the page.

Her last boyfriend never worked well either. He could never be in two simultaneous states, he could never be present and somewhere else—he'd always be annoyingly distracted on the phone. He could never focus on more than one thing, and right before Hanna dumped him she figured if that one thing had mainly been her, she could have forgiven his lack of duality. "I'm just a guy, babe," he said when she dropped the bomb. Instead of putting cats in boxes with poison and radiation, it would be much more worthwhile to throw ex-boyfriends in there. Alive, dead, who cares? As long as she never has to hear the sound of animated gunfire on the phone while she's talking ever again. Hanna always thought the inability to walk and chew gum at the same time was just a myth or, at least, an astronomical rarity, but nope, there it was, plain as day, staring her in the face, telling her this bit of information over lunch one day in a tone so serious she couldn't even laugh at the strangeness of the confession. She laughed later, of course. She had barely made it to her car before the laughter just burst out of her—but at the time it was just cute. In all the somberness of putting a cat in a box with poison and radiation, her friend told her it was an ill omen that meant he had limited focus. Her mother said that was weird, and she never thought that actually existed. Hanna looked it up on the Internet and found out it translated to being unable to walk and do another task at the same time.

He wasn't dual-functioning. The Internet told Hanna that him being a guy had nothing to do with it. Him using that excuse told Hanna he wasn't creative enough to come up with a better reason. Hanna mumbles quietly, ashamed at how long it took for her to finally leave him. It's like

now. It's like how she can't bring herself to just yell at Jack, it's like how she'd rather have Rachael's pancakes than have to tell the girl to stop using her stuff, so she doesn't have to haul it to and from the bathroom all the time. It's like how she just sits in-between the two in this little box hallway—Jack the radiation and Rachael the poison. Why is Rachael the poison? Because Rachael cooks the food. Reason it out. Hanna's hips already have. It's like how she can't just make a decision about her piece.

Maybe it means she should change her story. Make it about a cat in a box. Why not? Make it about a cat in a box that falls in love with a fish, but can't do anything about it because one wrong move would trigger the succession of events that would lead to its demise. An impossible love story, like Romeo and Juliet—only with a fish and a cat in a box—and a vial of poison and sealed radioactive material. It's modern and edgy. It has animals; it could be a kid's movie. It could be edited for content. Then Hanna would storm the studio in a fit of artistic rage, and demand that things be as close to the original story as possible. Everything was written as it was for a reason. For dramatic effect and deep emotional impact. It would be better than the story she has now. She hears movement near the door of the bathroom and Jack finally emerges. He slings a towel over his shoulder and looks down at her, gesturing for her to take her turn. Hanna gathers her things and stands.

“Rachael made coffee and pancakes,” she says. Jack smiles and winks at her, then walks down the hall towards the kitchen. Hanna turns and shuts the door.





GROWING

JAYSON AIMES

Your world in color,
survival sustaining process,
self-discovery through voluminous discoveries,
the medium of questions and answers.

Birds to feathers to pillows to beds,
a dream about a sewing machine.

Finger ballet with every stitch,
a knick marking each misstep,
hands decorated with cherries
and eggplants, each injury,
a voice of history.

Collect lopsided patterns,
experience to the utmost,
reach out eagerly,
fulfill the orgasms the imagination seeks.

MULCH

KHIEM NGUYEN

You are like the maple tree in our front yard, grand and tall, with countless branches as your tip reaches for the sky. But the old trees here are disappearing. My mother told me that back in your homeland they didn't really keep track of birthdays, because when New Year's came along, everyone would celebrate as though that was the day they all grew one year older. When a dead tree is cut across its body, you can count the rings inside it, each one a year the tree lived. Around the turn of this year, I got a call from my brother saying you were in the hospital. You had an accident while trying to fix your car. Two of your fingers were cut badly, and the flesh was almost gone. I was reminded of a story I was told long ago. I'm not sure how true it is, but it keeps creeping into my mind. It goes that for an old tree to make new ones, it must fall and sink into the soil, its branches becoming trunks of their own. I remember how your fingers looked, so frail the skin and bone, almost as though they'd fall off at any second. I am only a twig attached to a branch on your trunk, ever still sturdy yet so slightly on the surface threatening to collapse. Every year, I hope you gain a new ring within, all the while I hold the secret fear

 this will be
 the year
 I will lose
 you. I am
 not ready to
 take the fall,
 separate from
 your support,
 grow out my
 own roots in the soil and be
 my own trunk, reaching up. But this
 perpetual cycle of growth and decline must
 go on, and no matter how much
I want to stop it, I can't.

PSYCH THERAPY

RAJA VISWESWARAN

SCENE I

Summer. Indoors. LILY, late twenties but appearing to be in her teens, with a beautiful face and figure, is sitting down at a dining table, catty-corner from a PATIENT who is talking to him/herself. Everyone who is on stage either has light blue hospital gowns on, or maroon scrubs on if they are STAFF, as this is a psychiatric institution. There is a kitchen counter in the corner with a few dirty dishes on it, and a trash can next to it. LILY seems frustrated and nervous. Every few seconds she eats from her plate or drinks her juice, but with no evident appetite. MARCUS, late teens to early twenties with long black hair, tall, dark and good-looking, sits directly across from her with a smile and a greeting. Author's note: If an actor's dialogue is stopped by a "—" and another character begins his/her dialogue with a "—" this means that the 2nd character is interrupting the first.

MARCUS. Hello.

LILY. *(With a bit of a smile now, then continuing eating)* Hi.

MARCUS. I was wondering when I'd see a hot chick around here.

Marcus. *(Extends his hand; they shake hands. LILY titters. They eat, smiling.)*

LILY. Lily. I was...hoping to meet someone new myself.

MARCUS. Well, look no further. So what's *your* deal?

LILY. Pain pills. Attempted suicide, they *say*. You?

MARCUS. Meth. Fifty-one-fifty. *(Pause.)* Why'd you wanna kill yourself? *(Pause.)*

LILY. I didn't. Well, I got pretty bad with the pills, after an accident, to help with the pain...me and my husband aren't really getting along and—

MARCUS. —Ahh. You're married... *(Looks at her ring disappointedly.)*

LILY. Yeah but...I don't know how long it's really gonna last. I mean, he's a great guy and all but...it's just not the same as it once was. We've been married for eight *years* now and—

MARCUS. —Eight years?! How old...are you?

LILY. *(Laughing coquettishly)* Twenty-nine...you?

MARCUS. No way! You look...sixteen? Haha! Uh, I'm nineteen.

LILY. Haha, I get that a lot. So you're just a young'un, huh?

MARCUS. Well, yeah. So what do you like to do? (*A STAFF worker enters.*)

STAFF 1. Okay, move along now, guys! Lunch is over. Med line starts in five minutes if you want 'em early.

LILY. What do I like to do...besides Vicodins and Oxy's? And younger men? Haha, I don't know. I like listening to music. (*Getting up,*

MARCUS *dumps food from plate into trash bin, slides plate onto counter.*

LILY does the same.)

MARCUS. Yeah? What kind of music?

LILY. Rock, mostly.

MARCUS. Oh, cool! Me too...well, I actually write music.

LILY. Haha, I knew it. You have that look. Metal, right?

MARCUS. Yep. How'd you know? Ha! I'm so glad to meet you!

BLACKOUT.

SCENE II

The stage is now a corridor, with a rather nice psych hospital bedroom upstage that is covered with luxurious sheets and pillows. There are sounds of activity along the hallway. We hear a PATIENT every now and then whistling or making animal noises, and a STAFF worker or two periodically calling patients' names or yelling orders. MARCUS and LILY enter. MARCUS grabs LILY, looks behind him, and then pushes her against the wall by the door to the bedroom.

MARCUS. God, you're so hot. I want you so bad right now. (*Kisses LILY and gropes her frantically. She does the same.*)

LILY. Oh. Yes, Marcus. Now. Please.

MARCUS. Mm hmmm. (*MARCUS sees the bedroom, glances around, sees no threat, then pushes her into the bedroom. LILY laughs excitedly. They rip each other's clothes off. Then MARCUS shuts the door. For a moment we are only left with dialogue, psych hospital noises, and our filthy imaginations.*)

STAFF 1. (*Offstage*) Afternoon meds. Med time...last call!

(*Enunciates the next line as if talking to children*) Last call until 8 pm, folks!

MARCUS. Mmmm. Will you look at that. (*We hear wet noises, and LILY's moans.*)

Mmmm. Yummy. I could do this all day. (*Pause.*)

LILY. Oh. Oh. Oh! Don't stop. Ohh. (*Pause.*)

STAFF 1. (*Still offstage*) Lily? Lily?

LILY. (*Shouting loudly, over the same wet, sucking noises*) Yeah! It's okay!

I don't want my meds! *(Softer now)* Mmmm.

MARCUS. Yeah. You like that don't you, you sexy thing?

LILY. Yes. Yes. Yes! Yes! YES! YES!! YESSS!!!

STAFF 1. *(Still offstage, but the voice approaches and gets louder)* You have a visitor, Lily... Lilyyyyyy.

LILY. *(Panting)* Oh, my God! Marcus...that was amazing. *(STAFF 1 walks onstage, followed by a huge, six-foot-plus man.)* Umm. Let's put our clothes on—I think I hear something.

MARCUS. I didn't hear anything. Hey. I'm not done yet.

STAFF 1. Lily...your husband is here. *(Knocks on door. Pause.)*

LILY. *(Whispering)* Stop! My husband's here! *Shit!* *(Singing)* Comiiiiing!

MARCUS. *(Whispering)* What? Shit! Uh... *(He very quickly and expertly hides underneath the bed.)*

HUSBAND. Lily! Open up this door! *(Steps around STAFF, begins to open door.)*

STAFF 1. Sir! I'm afraid I can't authorize you to enter the bedr—oh! *(HUSBAND pushes STAFF 1 aside, enters the room. LILY's clothes are halfway on and she has a seductive smile. MARCUS's face peeks out from under the bed, but the HUSBAND doesn't notice him.)*

HUSBAND. Ohhhh. Looks like you got yourself all ready for Daddy.

STAFF 1. Sir! I'm terribly sorry, but you cannot come into the room! There is a room for you to visit in the east wing and...

(The HUSBAND doesn't hear, or care. He falls onto LILY hungrily.)

LILY glares at him but begins stroking his body and eventually kisses him.

HUSBAND takes his shirt off and shoves STAFF 1 out the door.)

STAFF 1. Security! *(Runs offstage, the same direction s/he came from.)*

HUSBAND slams door shut.)

HUSBAND. Ohhh, how I've missed you...

LILY. Yes. My baby. Me, too. Oh yes...yes, my dear. Yes. Yes. Yes! *Yess!!*

(There are footsteps from offstage, then two STAFF members approach from stage left. STAFF 1 directs STAFF 2, a behemoth of a man with handcuffs and a walkie-talkie, to the bedroom.)

STAFF 1. Yeah, he shoved me out the door! Hanky-panky is *not* permissible here. Uh...he's pretty big, too.

STAFF 2. Don't trip. I'm probably bigger. *(And he is. He grabs a foot-long hypodermic needle from one of his pockets, squirting out excess liquid, then shoulders open the door. HUSBAND has LILY naked and is about to take his clothes off.)*

HUSBAND. What the—?! Can't you see I'm getting busy? (*Turns around, glaring at STAFF 1 & 2.*)

MARCUS. Okay. Fuck this. (*Head peeking out from under the bed, he bolts out of the bedroom and down the hall.*)

HUSBAND. Who the hell was that?! (*Buckles his belt. LILY covers her face with the sheets. She moans, but not in pleasure.*)

LILY. Oh...

(*HUSBAND gets up to chase MARCUS, but STAFF 2 is in the way. They stare at each other as only alpha males do. They square off, circling each other, with theme music from The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly playing in the background. STAFF 2 and the HUSBAND stop and look around as if wondering where the music is coming from, but then shrug and continue to circle each other. HUSBAND rolls up his sleeves, swings once or twice, but STAFF 2 violently stabs the HUSBAND with the needle who slowly, gradually, stops resisting. STAFF 2 blows the needle as if it were a pistol.*)

HUSBAND. Ohhh... (*Sinks to ground dramatically, checks himself for blood. Then, with a Mexican accent, appealing to STAFF 2*) Blondie! Don't leave me hangin'. Blondie! Blondieeee... (*Voice fades as he crumples to the floor in a catatonic state. The music continues until the beginning of the next line, then stops.*)

STAFF 2. That'll teach him. (*To STAFF 1*) Better put him in one of the rooms for now. Till we can sort this out. Jeez, what a mess...

LILY. I want to press charges.

STAFF 2. Poor Marcus. Such a good kid... Glad nothing happened to him. (*To STAFF 1*) Can you go find him?

STAFF 1. Yeah. He sure is. (*Begins walking out.*) He might need his Thorazine a bit early today.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE III

The stage is now a group therapy session conducted in an institutional room, with a bruised and disheveled MARCUS, a nervous LILY, and the HUSBAND, along with a schizophrenic PATIENT, and a DOCTOR.

DOCTOR. I think that you need to stop focusing on the alleged incident, sir. This is a psychiatric institution, not a courtroom, and what we're talking about *here* is our feelings—

HUSBAND. —Look. Doc. What the hell would you do—uh, excuse me—how would you *feeeeeeeeeeel* if you caught someone boinking your wife, man?! Shit.

(The PATIENT begins softly whistling a well-known Justin Bieber/Lady Gaga song and otherwise behaves in a schizophrenic manner.)

LILY. I told you already, honey, we weren't doing it. The creep was hiding in the bedroom for some reason. I knew you were coming—you're my only visitor, and so I, uh...I got ready to greet you—

HUSBAND. —Yeah. Whatever! *(To MARCUS)* Still acting like you didn't do anything, huh? *(MARCUS is silent, avoiding eye contact.)* Whatever. I'm over it. Just don't go anywhere near her. Sorry for punching you in the eyeball. *(To DOCTOR)* I guess...I guess I'm feeling okay. Just waiting for the cops to clear me of the assault charge—

DOCTOR. —Good, good. And you, Marcus? You feeling okay today? *(MARCUS shrugs, then nods, silent. Pause.)* What about you, uh...let's see here. *(Long pause while DOCTOR looks through the charts in his hand.)* Uh...Yes. Mister...Handlecutt?

PATIENT. *(After another second of humming the tune)* Hmm? *(Becoming awake and alert quite dramatically)* Yeah...I'm okay!! I mean, the coffee here makes me feel...more awake than the Haldol, that's for damn sure, and the crickets, the crickets, they just—

DOCTOR. —Uh huuuu. Well, the Haldol is for your own good. *(Speaking as if to a child)* So is the Thorazine. And last, but not least, Lily. How do you feel today? *(Pause.)*

LILY. Look, Doc. This is uh...really awkward for me. I came here basically because of pain pill addiction and marriage problems and now—

HUSBAND. —She was frigid. Preferred the Kardashians' shows to me. Pain pills more recently and now she—

LILY. —And nowww, I'm glad that my husband is here. I mean, not *here*, but at least we're able to uh...communicate. We haven't had any quality time in maybe three months. He's always at work. Twelve-hour days. I couldn't take it so I ju—

DOCTOR. —Good, good. And the uh...Zatilwerkferutin [*Pronounced "zaddle work fur yootin"*] is working? Let's see here... Fifteen milligrams, twice a day, right?

LILY. *(Sighing)* Yeah, I guess. Kinda hard to tell. Been here for just 5 days now so I—

DOCTOR. —Good, good. And the drug cravings? Is the...let me see here... [*Pronounced "useless'n"*] Uslisin, sixty milligrams, three times a day helping you with that?

LILY. *(Again sighing)* I suppose...to be honest, it's pretty tough. I was in the hospital for three days after that O.D. I almost died! That was

rough. But, it's almost rougher now than it was detoxing though—
DOCTOR. —Good, good. Glad to hear it. Well, our five minutes of therapy are up, so as there aren't any pressing needs or questions or concerns, I suppose we can call it a—

PATIENT. —Doc, I'm sorry, but I have to interrupt here! (*In complete lucidity*) You ain't doing *shit* for your patients. You can't continue to lie to your patients, to your coworkers, to your wife, your daughters, the entire *world*...but especially to *yourself*. Stop lying to yourself. (*Pause.*) Don't mind me. I just channel God. He tells me to say things at certain times, times such as right now. You need to be more honest, Doctor. This is a complete charade. Oh, and you're gonna have to tell her—your *wife*—about...*her*. Know what I mean? Yeah. She already knows, but if you mess this up, she's gonna leave you for good. (*The PATIENT resumes humming the Gaga/Bieber tune, then stares at the ceiling or an inanimate object with interest. The DOCTOR stares open-mouthed at the PATIENT for several seconds. MARCUS snorts, then seems progressively amazed. HUSBAND grimaces. LILY impatiently taps her foot and shakes her head.*)

DOCTOR. Uh...excuse me. (*Hurries off nervously.*)

MARCUS. Holy shit! (*Pause.*) See, that's why it never fails—whenever you're lacking in excitement, all you gotta do is get emotional or do drugs, and then get 5150'd! And *then* you end up in places like this. Always *some* kinda crazy shit going on.

HUSBAND. Hmph. Well...yeah, that was...interesting.

(*The PATIENT starts actively singing the tune, then dances in a circle on his/her way out of the room and down the hall. ALL stare after him/her.*)

LILY. Just a schizo. Nothing special about all that.

(*MARCUS and HUSBAND frown at LILY simultaneously, then look at each other for a moment.*)

HUSBAND. Babe, can you excuse us for a minute? Don't worry, I'm through, kid. I'm not gonna hit you again—and I'm sorry.

LILY. What are you guys gonna talk about that I can't hear? I dunno. I don't feel comfortable with this.

MARCUS. Lily, it's cool.

LILY. Not really.

HUSBAND. Babe!

LILY. Okay, okay! (*She reluctantly, nervously, leaves after a few more seconds. HUSBAND shuts the door.*)

HUSBAND. Marcus. Like I said. Sorry.

MARCUS. Nah, nah. It's cool.

HUSBAND. Look. I'm over it. I mean, if you did anything with her—

MARCUS. —Nonononononono we didn't do anything. Like I said it was just a misunderst—

HUSBAND. —Like *I* said...I'm *over* it. Now. Tell me the truth. Look me in my eyes...tell me...what happened? I'm not gonna do anything to you. I swear to you. Okay? Now. Man to man. What happened, Marcus?

MARCUS. (*Looking into HUSBAND's eyes, he then looks away.*) Shit. I'm sorry, man. I had to lie to you. Yeah. We did it.

HUSBAND. It's okay. I would have too, in your position...maybe. (*Pause.*) Anyways... yeah...

MARCUS and HUSBAND. Ah, shit. (*They then laugh simultaneously.*)

MARCUS. Look. I'm sorry, man—

HUSBAND. —No. It's not completely your fault. Again, sorry for the eyeball.

MARCUS. Doctor says no damage. I'm starting to see again.

HUSBAND. (*Sighing heavily*) What do you think? If you were me, what would you do, I mean..?

MARCUS. (*Pensively*) Honestly? Hard to say. I'm not you. I don't know her that well. I haven't been with her for eight years, I'm not married to her—

HUSBAND. —Eight years? Ha! Try thirteen. (*Starts staring off into space, lost in memory.*) She was sixteen, I was seventeen. First saw her was in P.E. class. Instructor was showing us some gymnastics exercises, see, he was an Olympian.'84 silver medalist. Some of us thought, "What kind of pansy shit *is* this?" but he wanted to get a gymnastics class started at the school, showed us some exercises...and she arrived, all dressed up like she was competing in the U.S. Nationals. Had on one of those little outfits, you know. (*Gestures with hands.*) Breathtaking. I'm sure some of the other guys were staring too, but I don't really remember that...I just remember her doing one of the exercises. She split better than a banana. Incredible flexibility—

MARCUS. —Hmph. Yeah, she is pretty flexible.

HUSBAND. Shut up, Marcus! I wasn't done yet! Anyways. Yeah...

(*Gets the faraway look again. A pause. During the HUSBAND's next lines the PATIENT enters, creeps up stealthily behind the HUSBAND and MARCUS. S/he grins or otherwise acts in an odd manner before interrupting.*) You see, married life was decent—before I turned eighteen. My dream during those years was to be a—

PATIENT. (*Screaming like a crow, right behind HUSBAND*) —

CAWWWWWWWWW!! CAWWW! (The following, immediate lines from HUSBAND and MARCUS overlap each other.)

HUSBAND. (Jumping, completely surprised) Jesus!! What the hell! Are you kidding me?

MARCUS. (Equally completely surprised) Shit! What are you, some kinda twisted parrot?!

PATIENT. (Softer) Cawwww! Cawww. (Voice gets more and more faint as s/he dances in a circle out of the door. MARCUS and the HUSBAND stare. Offstage now) Caww. Caw.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE IV

MARCUS and LILY are talking in hushed voices along the hallway of the psych ward, stage left. The therapy room is stage right, unoccupied.

MARCUS. Nononono. I—I just can't.

LILY. Oh, come onnn! He's in the other room! He's talking to the director of the hospital. That shit takes an hourrrr. Nobody'll ever find out. Stop being such a bitch. (Pouting sensually.)

MARCUS. I really don't wanna do this, Lily. It's wrong and I just can't continue to—

LILY. —Oh, fine. (She grabs him by the shirt and kisses him.)

MARCUS. Nononono. (He returns the kiss, grabs her butt, then stops. More firmly) No! I can't. Let's just be friends, ok? Not here at least, you crazy woman. Not here and not now. Your husband is here. God! What the hell is wrong with you, anyway?

LILY. (Disgustedly) Fine.

DOCTOR. (Offstage, left. Approaching them. Singing) Therapy tiiiiime! All patients, come with me. (Enters stage, looks at them all for a moment. PATIENT eventually follows him onto stage.) Hello! Marcus. Lily. (All enter therapy room after the DOCTOR.)

LILY. Some other time then. And place.

DOCTOR. What was that?

LILY. Oh, nothing. I was thinking to myself.

MARCUS. How are you doing, Doc?

DOCTOR. Oh, I'm okay. How are you, Marcus? (Notices PATIENT for the first time, looks at him/her in horror. The PATIENT looks back, blandly cawing, then whistling the Bieber/Gaga tune.)

MARCUS. Oh, not bad. Just trying to do the right thing. (Looks at LILY meaningfully.)

HUSBAND. (*Offstage left*) Hey, guys! Great news! (*Enters shortly, sits down with a smile.*)

MARCUS. What's up, man?

DOCTOR. How are you feeling today, sir?

HUSBAND. (*To MARCUS, then LILY*) I'm getting released on Sunday. Cops dropped the charges.

MARCUS. See? I told you, man!

LILY. That's...great, honey.

DOCTOR. Hmm. I didn't authorize that. I actually argued against release...however, I do wish you the best of luck, sir. Anyways. How are your meds working for you, hmm? Let's see here...45 milligrams, Fixitnotitol?

HUSBAND. Makes me wanna throw up. Or scratch my arms and legs until I bleed.

DOCTOR. Just a side effect. How about your sleep?

HUSBAND. Nightmarish. Can't wait to get off these meds—

DOCTOR. —Good, good. Only a few more days of this before you stabilize.

PATIENT. (*Lucidly*) You're doing it again, doc. (*Begins whistling the Bieber/Gaga tune nonchalantly. Then begins slapping at his/her own face.*)

DOCTOR. (*Trying with difficulty to ignore it*) How about you, Marcus? You seem to have a better grip on reality these days. I think I did argue for your release—as long as you continue to improve your condition from here on, that is.

MARCUS. Yeah, Doc. Like I said. Trying to do the right thing.

Sometimes those thoughts come back into my head, maybe twice a day for five minutes, but I've been doing better, so yeah. As long as I don't go back to those patterns that we talked about...I mean, once I get out of—

DOCTOR. —Good, good. And you, Lily? You seem paranoid or... anxious. What's going on?

LILY. Oh. (*Long pause.*) Yeah. I mean, I'm okay. It's just...I don't know where my life is headed, to be honest...I'm just not sure if this is all gonna work out. I have no clue what I want anymore, and I just—

DOCTOR. —I see. And the meds..? Let's see here... (*Pause.*) Are you still on the...Zadlwerkferutin? And Uslisin?

LILY. Yeah...I dunno. I sleep too late, and I feel like a complete wreck most of the day. Anxious, yeah, and I also have this uh, this desire to—

DOCTOR. —My dear, it may just take some time for these meds to stabilize you fully. For now you're going to have to take it day by day.

There's no rush to get back on your feet. I've looked at your case carefully and this is just what you're going to have to do.

PATIENT. (*Lucidly*) Better. Much better, Doc. (*Whistles the tune, then gets up and dances abruptly, then stares with a huge smile at the ceiling.*)

HUSBAND. I miss you, babe. You're right here in front of me. But it doesn't *feel* that way. I miss the old days. There's too much distance between us now. And I want to *bridge* that gap...more than anything in the *world!* (*Pause.*)

LILY. I miss you, too. (*Smiles. Pause. The HUSBAND gets up, embraces LILY; she hugs back.*)

DOCTOR. (*With sudden feeling*) There. See? I knew I was good for something.

PATIENT. (*Lucid again*) I didn't.

(*During the DOCTOR's monologue LILY and her HUSBAND begin to kiss, then to get more and more comfortable with each other's bodies, shall we say. At this time MARCUS leaves with a smile. The PATIENT begins dancing in a circle, exits. The DOCTOR speaks while facing the audience, but doesn't seem aware of them—staring into space. During the DOCTOR's last lines the HUSBAND and LILY rip each other's shirts off until the DOCTOR notices what is happening.*)

DOCTOR. That's what this room is all about. Improving your emotional and psychological conditions in a humane, comfortable way. For some cases it takes longer than others, but as long as we remember that we are who we are, and that we have to take our prescribed medications, and talk about our *feelings* in a confident, self-aware manner, we can begin that road to recovery and—whoa! Hang on a minute, this is a—you can't do that here! Security! (*Runs offstage.*) Security! (*Pause.*)

HUSBAND. (*Between kisses*) I love you, babe.

LILY. I'm so sorry about everything, honey. I love you too. I don't know what I was thinking.

HUSBAND. Oh, shut up, darling. Daddy's here. Oh yes. Daddy's here.

LILY. Take me.

HUSBAND. You're mine. (*They kiss, embrace, etc.*)

STAFF 2. (*From offstage, his voice loudly approaching*) Back for more, huh? Get ready to say hello to my little friend. (*STAFF 2 enters the therapy room with the foot-long hypodermic needle. HUSBAND notices, pushes LILY behind him. Theme music from Scarface plays. HUSBAND and STAFF 2 look around as if wondering where the music is coming from, then stare at each other. The stares turn into glares. Turn into comical looks of fury.*)

They circle each other slowly. STAFF 2 begins to stab the HUSBAND with the needle, but the HUSBAND suddenly blocks STAFF 2's arm, then knocks him out with one punch. The HUSBAND scoffs at his unconscious body.)

HUSBAND. *(In a Tony Montana impersonation) I'm still standin'! You fucking roaches! (With imaginary assault rifles in either hand, his entire body shaking, animated) I'm still standin', you fucking cock-a-roachessssss! (Pause. He then resumes kissing and groping LILY. The PATIENT enters, stands in front of the couple.)*

PATIENT. *CAWWW! (Pause. Looks at the audience.) Did you like my song? It's my favorite. (Pause. Doesn't seem aware of the audience anymore, s/he then slaps his/her own face twice. S/he then whistles the Gaga/Bieber tune for a couple of seconds, then slaps herself/himself again, now staring at the ceiling or an inanimate object with a huge smile. Scarface theme music continues, as does LILY's and the HUSBAND's disrobing as they hurry offstage.)*

END.

Psych 01

4:00 4:5
3:40

TEST ① THURS: 9/18 chap. 1 + Appendix A.

Research - 2 categories - Descriptive / or Experimental (manipulative)
↓
observations: Describing what you saw. ↓ Generates Hypotheses
↓
Doing something to the subjects



Schizophrenia → for Hallucination Delusion one of the psychoses

I Descriptive research subtypes

1. Naturalistic observation

Naturalistic observation is done in the "field" as opposed to the "lab". It's goal is to observe "natural" behavior.

- A. participant - observer is involved w/ subject
- B. non-participant - opposite - (Favored for more "natural" results?)

2. Correlational study

(normative, post hoc, Quasi experiment)
Tend to involve more people than Naturalistic observations.
- you're asking them to do something they don't normally do.
one outcome is we get "norms"

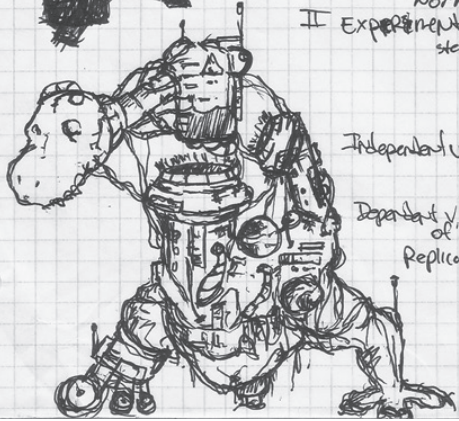
II Experimental

steps - Formulate Hypothesis
Isolate features of environment
Keep environment stable.
Record, carefully, results.

Independent variable - environmental condition experimenter manipulates.

Dependent of "IV" - reflects the influence

Replicability - an experiment must be able to be repeated.



CASS AVENUE SOLOIST

JEFFREY ALFIER

By now he's long mastered the open range
of city streets, their wilderness of discount
parking lots, easing himself each night
into the gravity of curbs to face the burn
of drifting diesel smoke. Self-taught sax
player, he's amid the realm of weekend nightclub
traffic, hoping coins are tossed into his upturned
fedora as he blows a halting *Summertime*
for throngs who descend on the avenue, seduced
by the fugue and funk of exquisite blues.

His island throne was challenged briefly
by a lone woman who'd play across
the corner, her wintry Strauss nocturnes
on a French horn—too solemn for these festive
streets, he'd tell her. She was too thinly
clad in her weedy clothes to last the cold
hollows of the city, finally leaving him
the frangipani she'd pin to her red beret.

Awaiting the whimsical designs of foot traffic
to grant his playing the mercy of loose change,
only his cashmere trench coat fortifies him
against wind off the river, Its filthy pockets
hold bills he pays too late each month,
just to vie with nights spiked with laughter,
brass, and the heaving thrum of fretless bass,
guitars slipping through doorways, up and down
at avenue's long, infinite, imperfect curves.

SUBSTANCE CHAUVINISM

GEORGE FEKARIS

Look at the moon, how it mimes *The Thinker*.
Night sky's my best mirror,
a performance of sculpture
attended by afterlives of flames kindling in a closed church
—I'm nothing more and thankful for it all
—being I had a thought worth all the dust
and dream in space. I thought
a sun would burn-out
to play me, as gracefully as I
when believing, "I thought," in the face of my pale.

NAUTILUS SHELL

NICHOLAS BURDEN

987 –

Randal hissed “Fuck!” through clenched teeth, agony etched in pulsing facial veins. The pain was getting worse, and he couldn’t afford the distraction before the shipment cleared customs. Already, rain was pounding the tarmac, and the oncoming storm made him nervous. The guns had arrived at the Miami International Airport stashed in canisters of vegetable oil and in the constant warring between the cartels and the police, a smart runner would never assume that the person he’d bribed wouldn’t get caught, fired or offered a better deal. The cartels would shell out a fortune for the arsenal, but losing a shipment was a fatal infraction even for a longtime ally. A hurricane was no excuse.

There was literally no pain in the world more excruciating than a jaw infection. Randal had been shot, shocked, stabbed, sliced, and shrapneled; he had suffered during his various runs, but none of those pains came close. That included having razor wire slice through the bottom of his nutsack and upper thighs, narrowly missing his femoral arteries, jagged and almost fatal, but he could shunt that agony aside and get the job done. The pain in his mouth was immediate and inescapable, the flesh on the right side of his face fiercely swollen.

This was all Emily’s fault. He could have kept working as a dealer, keeping his head down and earning decent money, but Emily demanded more than decent. She was a high-class lady with classic daddy issues. She liked his scars. The thought of her drew up memories around the pain. Emily’s hands knotted the sheets into spirals as he slipped inside her, already half in love. When she wrapped her legs around his pale buttocks and breathlessly urged him to cum for her, he was subsumed. Randal had never quite gotten over the shock of her body spread on the twisted hotel sheets, the small nautilus tattoo in the curve of her pelvis. Later, he’d asked her what it symbolized, but she just told him he wouldn’t understand, so he didn’t try. Emily was a woman accustomed to having style orbit around her, and if ‘Randy’ wanted to keep his position as her paramour, then he had to gild his proverbial shit. Leasing a Mercedes, renting a townhouse, accruing an appropriate wardrobe... that was the

easy part. Food was the real killer—the exclusive restaurants with caviar swirls atop white chocolate medallions. Meals shouldn't come with thousand-dollar price tags! It had been a pearl atop an oyster entrée that cracked the tooth, decorative to everyone at the table but him. Emily was so mortified when Randal pretended it was an intentional joke. She represented success, but she came with a hefty cost.

Eduardo, the customs official, interrupted his painful reverie, rapping the manifest on one of the plastic-wrapped metal barrels with a low bong. The metallic ringing sent waves of pain ricocheting through Randal's head.

"The manifest is for 48 barrels. You've got 60."

"Yeah... I... extra pallet, no chance to..." Randal trailed off, clutching his jaw as pain paralyzed him. Eduardo narrowed his eyes at the slick bastard in front of him.

In that instant, with throbbing anguish overwhelming him, Randal was done trying to pull off this charade.

Oblivious to whatever response he was getting, Randal raised a shaky hand to forestall any further questioning, still tenderly holding the side of his face with his right. Once he had a goddamn second, he dropped the free hand to his pocket, rooted around and came out with a thick roll of twenties. Without a word, he set the roll on the agent's clipboard. More than anything Randal wanted out of there then and now—whatever the cost.

Openly shocked by the size of the bribe, Eduardo's practiced eyes danced around the hangar for observers. The cash vanished, and Eduardo ushered his new best friend towards the hideous-yet-functional offices that took up the entire left side of the hangar.

Somewhat mollified, Eduardo offered Randal a seat while he went back to the office to finish the paperwork. Randal groaned in acquiescence and slumped into the warped metal chair. Rivulets of rain mingled with sweat on his forehead. First thing he was gonna do when the storm passed was haul some serious ass to the closest dentist, someone pricey with a bunch of degrees, and get this fucking pain taken care of. Madre de dios, this shit would not stand!

Nameless men were shuffling into the hangar to move the heavy pallets out to the newly-arrived truck. Eduardo singled out one of the workers and beckoned him over. The two men spoke rapidly in Spanish. Randal was hurting too badly to mentally translate.

Eduardo turned towards Randal. "My friend Miguel here, he was una

dentista before things got bad, you know? He thinks he can help you out, if you want. They're saying that the hurricane is almost here."

"Si, por favor, gracias." The shipment was almost loaded, but every minute was an eon that made him yearn for the absence of pain. Maybe the storm surge would drag him out to sea, drown him in a whirlpool. Death wouldn't be so bad. He'd finally stop hurting.

Randal barely noticed the men guiding him into the bathroom. Inside, stark fluorescent lighting gave jagged edges to everything in sight. Randal briefly caught sight of his reflection in a cracked mirror, but turned his head away sharply enough to sting.

The dentist was talking in accented English. "The infection swell the jaw, pressure build up and cause pain."

Eduardo pulled a boxcutter out of his pocket and handed it to the dentist.

The man leaned in and made a precise cut.

Thunder cracked overhead. Pain blossomed and exploded outwards.

Randal leaned over the sink, watching blood and pus spiral down the drain as the pain blissfully, thankfully, finally began to ebb. The wind raged now, hammering heavy rain into the hangar.

610 -

Like so many catastrophes, it began innocently enough. On a tree branch covered in pipe vine, in a piece of rainforest south of Cooktown in Queensland, Australia, a caterpillar broke free of the chrysalis to emerge triumphant as a butterfly. The male *Ornithoptera euphorion*, a resplendent green and black Cairns Birdwing, shed his larval prison and greeted his new life. He unfurled and stretched his wings, fanning them slowly in the sun to dry. With such an inauspicious beginning, the inevitable was set into motion. All know that correlation and causation are one and the same here.

The area air currents were incensed by this intrusion, and shifted their shape to complain to each low-pressure area, cloudbank and terrain feature they met. Naturally, such grumblings and rumblings amplified in the telling, for how dare a tiny insect defy the power of the winds. When the inflated word (clouds in particular are prone to hyperbole, especially those overly dramatic cumulonimbus) reached the trade winds, the story became a searing ember embedded in the unconscious, a lash to goad into

action. All know that winds blow across space and time.

The trade winds are great and powerful, but they could no more resist the smoldering rage than a tinderbox. The great winds grew angry, but they knew what must be done because it had already happened, and they had already sifted unseen fingers through the rubble that remained in the aftermath. They sent forth their children, far across lands and seas, to spread the word. Unfortunately, as expected, the winds in the Gulf of Mexico were prone to vain laziness, because after all, who wants to work in fair tropical weather? Rather than carry the message to their siblings, they stopped to gossip with the warm ocean water. The conversation grew heated, and together the winds and water danced, regaling each other with rhetoric and whipping both of them into a furious frenzy. The spinning continued for days and nights, invitations extending to atmospheric phenomena to join the thunderstorm ball. Lightning arced across talkative skies as it all came together. All know the monster that arose.

Out of a thousand storm clouds came a single I. The Hurricane opened its eye, and knew only hunger. Black, roiling clouds spat lightning down into the tumultuous ocean as wrath was given flesh. The Sea, having played her part in the birth, waited for her abominable child to seek out a meal. She is a mischievous mother, the Ocean, never quiet, the giver of life and bringer of death. She is beyond justice and always claims her due. The children who nestle in her bosom and suckle at her teat for life know she may dash them on the rocks or steal them forever at her whim, but they love her still. The Sea makes no distinction between her children. All know that she turns a blind eye to fratricide.

The little ant people swarming that land gave the Hurricane a female name, but what need does a primal force have for sex or gender? Names imply feelings like caring or empathy. Names imply mercy. The waves that pounded the land at the Hurricane's feet did not know mercy. The Hurricane loomed, stretched thundercloud tendrils over the land with an unceasing howl, and tried to devour the world. No matter how much it ate, nothing could satiate the hunger or fill the void in its center. Trees snapped. Houses collapsed. Bones broke. Thousands died. All know the power of the Hurricane.

Why did the winds not strike down the butterfly? Fear. All fear the creature that brings death to thousands simply by fluttering his wings.

377 -

She fears repetition, but I don't understand why. After all of the years of struggling in her own skin, the nights of lost identities and shifting selves... I just don't get it. I don't think I was ever meant to understand what she has suffered. Sometimes I catch a look crossing her face, the way an abused animal looks when even though everything is hunky-dory the poor beast is still expecting another beating. The look infuriates me. I've given her every ounce of love I have to give, but some wounds never heal.

I thought that repetition would mean safety for her. Stability. That I accepted her as normal. Okay, normal is a super-loaded word, especially for her, but you know what I mean. I held her and kissed away her tears when her father disowned her. Whenever she came home exhausted and wanted space, I went out jogging. Whenever she cried, I covered her in the veil of my hair and traced kisses on the top of her head while she buried her face in the warm comfort of my breasts. If I hadn't stopped swimming in high school, maybe I wouldn't be drowning now.

We've both made sacrifices for this relationship, damn it. My brother called me the worst lesbian ever. He meant it as a joke, but I see the same fear of emasculation in his eyes that she sees in any man she knew "before." We have an unspoken moratorium on certain subjects. She never talks shots, I never talk periods. At the same time, we share joys. The nights curled up together on the couch with *Law & Order*... the days where she passes perfectly... the evening she learned why cooking stir-fry topless is a terrible idea. As far as I'm concerned, she has always been she to me, my loving girlfriend and the intellectual introvert puzzle piece missing from my life before we met. I hate it when she looks at me as though I might bring the past into play as a weapon. I hate it because it's not her fault she was born with the wrong genotype, and I hate that nothing I say or do can ever remove the stigma she faces because she used to be he.

233 -

ingestion

spores

tastes disgusting

worth the suffering

must escape this pretentious reality
jacks head swelled like an iridescent soap bubble
a couple hours pass and jack and i just sit listening to floyd
the lights are black lights and my eyes see everything and nothing at the
same time and why do we breathe
the walls were breathing now but not in time with his breathing and
jack was jacked up no pun intended on two eighths and flying off into
fantastic worlds with his own unseeing eyes
the dog is watching me quizzically i wonder if it can smell the chemicals
inside me and it looks upset and i dont get how it can tell that something
is wrong with me and who the fuck names their dog fibonacci anyways
jack always calls him fibo like fido with a b anyhow
my head is spinning and blackness calls and fibo is barking at me worried
but jack doesnt even know what is happening i do i know that the
blackness is eating me alive from the inside and i should have known
better and listened to my mother father whoever told me drugs are
bad and the façade is peeled back like flesh on a skull and the grinning
skeleton beneath knows that i am going to be just another statistic
because i have to end this once and forever
death beckons

144 -

Petros and I are dancing a waltz. I feel his gaze on the room behind me and the warm, strong hands firmly guiding my steps. I'm doing my best to enjoy the wedding, the whole trip to this tiny Greek island, but the mosquito bites dotting my neck, arms and legs are annoying. Nobody told me Greece had mosquitoes. I see the evil little bloodsuckers circling around the glowing globes overhanging the patio. I wish for one of the massive Bug-zappers that Grandpa and I would sit out watching during the annual weeklong summer visit to the Florida cottage before the hurricane killed him. Petros senses my mourning and compliments my beauty, a rogue English phrase in an overwhelming swarm of foreign consonants. His eyes are only for me; I remember the first time falling into their clear brown depths. We just keep dancing.

89 -

You wake up to the first dawn rays stroking the edge of your petals. You are a sunflower: heavy golden seed-filled head nodding agreeably towards the celestial body that named you. A solitary drop in a sea of yellow, you relax; the low susurrus of the bees is like waves in a bay. A tiny tickling reminds you that aphids are feasting from your stalk, but a trio of eight-spotted ladybugs provides salvation. As night falls, the cloudless blue sky is supplanted by the stars of the Milky Way.

55 -

so it follows that the mathematical equation ensures that despite the outward expansion of the pattern, the distances between the turnings increase in a geometric progression, so the whole remains constant despite the exponential expansion of the input value. This pattern shows a similarity to the so-called "golden ratio" that appears in the background of

34 -

Frugality had been infused into Petros from birth. Anyone else would have thrown away the pecked chicken carcass. He didn't notice when he was being frugal any more than people consciously notice they're breathing.

21 -

Emily sat in the doorway, a mute piece of plastic in her hands saying she was about to become her mother.

13 -

You can only truly reveal the beauty in the nautilus after it dies.

8 -

She fears repetition, but I don't understand why.



5 -

Sight comes from fractal nerves.

3 -

Hawk meets prey.

2 -

Spira mirabilis!

1 -

Insects.

1 -

Galaxies.

0 -

PACOIMA CORRIDO

JUAN ALVARADO

I'm from wild ones
on the corner of Sepulveda
with atom-smashing
tattoos on arms
for each year in juvy,
earshot of negras bachata
palabras
about their next fix,
who at night walk
by graveyard guards
finding brown bottles
filled with silence
in their beds,
that drive past
glass smoking junkies
dying with stars silently,
singing "una copa mas" to them,
their voices like names autographed
on concrete with thumbs.
Sleepers
under the 5 on Nordhoff
watch everyone with
harlequin silence hear
stories about those
layering their lives
like bricks to
make it new:

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●□❖ℓ

Across the street at cheap
chicken at Wendils,
chula Filipinas say,
"Where's my tip?"

I'm from those who go to
Norm's at 5 a.m.
ordering black coffee
and Liverwurst,

counting billetes,
hearing nearby talk about

Rick's Blood on the Tracks—
Shar-tay's Illmatic—
Julio's Un Canto Al Pueblo—
Diego's The Band—
Oscar's Damaged—

I'm from those who have
bullet-tongues
with baleen teeth
who conspire
on the 166 for
change,
always passing
the projects on Pierce:
sundry
colored Legos.
People live within distance of
Blazon joints in zip bags,
mouth-drum moms,
fixies on cement sand,
vagabondos on nowhere shorelines.
I'm from nopaleros who had nothing
but dirt-hearts
and 99¢ dreams.

MOTOR CITY CHRISTMAS EVE

JEFFREY ALFIER

The late sun that threads the dusk-lit
city yellows the face of a rising moon.
A rescue mission van trundles down Dix
and Dragoon where the Norfolk Southern
railyard has gone the quiet of a tideless sea.
As the van reaches city center, a mission
worker steps out, hunches her shoulders
and burrows into her thick coat. The twilight
streets are near vacant. She searches
for a legless man who rolls his wheelchair
over the ice-stung pavement, on past
the few still-lit windows and on down
to frail-bone winter trees in Cadillac Square.

She's come to know him as a sparrow falling
homeless through the eye of God.
Gusted from out behind Shelby Street,
papers glide above her on the breadth of air

as she turns into the blade edge of wind.
The lights of loading docks shade to dark
in the depth of the alleys. The day's last
remaining shoppers pass each other by,
like those whose friendships have cooled.
The legless man thought he heard
his name shouted-out, looks behind him,
then upward at the sky, as if it were a lost,
distant country of wide, unfailling streets.

Elizabeth Fordham | Trent Reznor



KNUCKLE DRAGGER

DEAN SHAUGER

I.

I have lost my way, it can be said, as the smoke fills up the room and Dog struggles to hold onto her scent, but it isn't the way that it used to be. Now as the room creaks and groans under the weight of a dying house, in a dying world; Man lingers with the hunger to be pleased, to express his dominance. It becomes painfully clear that there had to be some other form of my self that I have lost as the other voices began to grow. As the world gives way and the cigarette slowly burns out, the smoke dances to cover her naked body and Dog is ever aware of her scent that we cannot wash away; that we cannot smother. Dog moves us closer to fill ourselves with her fragrance, her touch, and man longs to feel her again; to press into her.

There is something that we lost that we can't gain back by burying ourselves into her. She can't give us meaning, but I can hear myself cooing "Angel" as we press closer to her body and Man tries to wake her. "Angel" Man growls as he slides our hand over ribs. She stirs and places her hand on our face, bathing Dog in her warmth "Angel" he whispers as he presses our face to the nape of her neck, filling our nose with her to wash away the bitter smoke. He is home and Man is close to what he wants, but somehow it doesn't feel the same. I can't help but feel that this isn't it.

II.

I am machine—because somewhere along the way being a man has lost all of its meaning. As malls, schools, and old buildings that were once important slowly faded away from the world, the act of trying to remember their purpose stopped serving any purpose in its own right. Man tasks himself with the responsibility to take the Old World and make it something new, something usable. He digs through the bones of old buildings to pull out shards of copper and glass to reassemble into any semblance of the old comforts of life. He busies himself while Dog stands ever alert and aware of the dark places that scatter across the burnt skin of the city. Old words are pulled free of walls and shelves to be torn through the sky like ashes, meaning slipped away like fog, and still Man pulls old husks from the stone and turns them into new treasures. He can

manufacture anything concrete with the right materials, but he is never able to rebuild the old meanings, to piece together old songs. Dog is ever aware of how silent the world had become as I hum old melodies and Man works.

III.

One day the cigarettes will run out and we will have nothing left to remember how it was. They burn away, like how the world ended, giving way to the gray smoke that spreads into the sky. Man busies himself with the taste, letting our mind wash out as the car speeds down the road past twisted fingers like burnt out trees and alien street signs. Dog watches as the burnt out relics of the old world fall from view and the smoke mixes with the stale heat that bakes the shattered road. Here had been something, some soft meaning that reached into the heavens and tried to gather humanity, but what was left was a vacant lot that man couldn't even trouble himself to categorize as anything more than rubble and stone. Somehow he knew there was nothing of use, so he entertains himself by letting his smoke once again wash it from view. Dog whimpers slightly for that old world, for the things he wasn't able to protect. The only world he had left to know spreads out like crumbling headstones deep into the corpse of the dead city.

IV.

I am Man—though sometimes I find it hard going in between my bouts of being beast and machine. She is gone—I can tell though her scent still lingers, and Dog is contented. I am alone and she moved beyond the need for Man or beast. Man can feel that bit of himself that is satisfied yet can still feel that deep hunger that defines something other than Dog. He longs for what he thinks is the best and he thinks it would be best to feed his hunger while I think it would be best to shower and wash away the results of Dog's actions. "Smoke," speaks Man, his urge driving into Dog and into me, long and low he urges, "Feed the need." Dog lulls content with his violence and action, and together we feel the dull ache in our bones. Somewhere I know this house has been sacred once, a place that could not be disturbed but the new world burned that away and we stumble around waiting for Dog to start the shower. One of us leers from the mirror, discolored and deformed. Man can taste old blood and knows it means profit, he smiles a thin smile and I feel sick.

V.

Dog is violence. When he takes over all that is left for us is to feel the dull pain; Dog tears his way through whatever needs to be destroyed; to be deconstructed inch by savage inch. Man finds a way to turn a profit from Dog's destructive nature, so he leads us into cages surrounded by hungry eyes and forces Dog to tear shadows and faces apart to win payments of cigarettes and items that we are unable to scavenge. Dog has no need for pain, he has no need for conscience; he gives himself to the violence in a twisted need to protect us. Dog thinks there is purpose in the things than Man makes him do, but he is ever aware of the regret that tears threw me as we give way to the savage that consumes like fire.

Dog clamps and squeezes.

Dog is visceral.

Dog is destruction.

Man knows how to twist the beast, how to get him to jump and consume wantonly, and does not need to concern himself with the aftermath. He concerns himself with the payment and the ends that the violence will bring about. Man smiles as Dog smashes heads off the concrete floor and the sinister crowd cheers on the violence. He doesn't need to remember times before the need for this violence, he does not need to remember the music that drove us to the swirling acts of violence as a sense of identity, now he only focused on the cause of destruction and the comfort it awarded him.

VI.

She sings the most haunting songs as she flits through the house in little more than a tattered top. Her's is a life of whimsy as she is made center stage, and Man silently bristles, hating the girl who steals our cigarettes and smokes them in an imitation of actresses that burnt away with the Old World. She concerns herself with the trivial as she chirps away in her fantasy, Dog doesn't so much pay attention to her words as he does the swirling arch that she makes across the cracked wood floors. There had to have been a time where she meant more than this, but I can't move myself past Man's ever consuming urge to use the situation and Dog's want to be held and sheltered from the violence that consumed our life.

VII.

Dog knew she was coming; he heard her voice before he ever picked

up her perfume. Whoever it was that tore into the house was being led by Angel, and Man knows this meant we were betrayed. Dog bristled as he gave way to the machine that tried to plan an escape route. Man knows the only answer to the situation is violence but I won't let him unleash Dog on the one thing that makes him feel safe in this world. Man wants to destroy Angel, destroy any memory that she lords over us so that he can give up the last ties to that weakness he knows consumed Dog. Dog shudders in the corner, burying us deep into the closet like a child hiding from the monster that danced up the steps, singing her mournful song. Dog bares his teeth out of fear; he wants to run, wants to give into the fear and flee; Man wants to destroy her, and I can't move because somewhere I needed it to all make sense. Angel draws closer as the wind tore through the cracked walls of the dead house and nothing felt safe anymore.

VIII.

The car ride is the static cough of dead radio. Dog doesn't drive as much as Man doesn't focus, and I just stare out the window, lost with empty thoughts. Something has been taken from us. This is evident as man thrums his fingers on the steering wheel and the dead world spreads out, blocked by the car's windows. We are safe for the moment, encapsulated in the car as it tears down the barren world, and Man can't help but worry about the way the Old World slips away. Dog is ever aware of the copper taste that slides down our tongue as I observe our shattered nose and split lip in the mirror. Our knuckles swell as Man continues to tap out an impatient rhythm. The smoke does nothing to wash away the taste of the blood or the smell of sweat that pervades Dog's senses; I am aware of the pain only in the sense that Dog and Man busy themselves covering it up. In the seat next to us are bundles of cracked cigarettes like stale chicken bones. Man must re-purpose the tobacco; Dog eyes the books on the floor, torn to shreds, and is tormented by the knowledge he was not able to protect as Man casually rolls another cigarette with the pages of an Old World story. The motions cause our knuckles to pop, our cracked skin to bleed, and Man complains that the cigarette still tastes like blood.

IX.

I am beast, like Old World monsters that stalk the night. I do not

need to feed as much as I need to consume and be made whole by the act. Man consumes cigarettes and fills our eyes with things that he wants, while Dog completes himself with the urge to protect and through that act possess the things he loves. I am unaware of the things I lost in my transformation to beast, to machine, but I am aware of the hole that we try furiously to fill with food and goods and memories of Angel. The beast is keloid and muscle as we drag our hands through the ashes of the dead and bloody our knuckles on the few unlucky enough to still be alive. We are alive when Dog destroys the hope in someone's eyes and Man presses possessed into Angel. We are alive as we loot the corpse of the city hoping to find anything to restore our old sense of comfort. We are alive when our sense of humanity is far from our mind and Man tallies his gains while Dog demolishes threats and I let them control the body. We are alive because we have no worry or want outside of the ever-pressing urge to consume and give way to the knuckle dragger inside of us.

X.

Man is calculating as he surveys the room for an advantage; he knows ways around the need for Dog and his violence, and smiles malevolently as he crouches, waiting for the intruder to stumble through the door. Man does not need Dog to abolish the rage but instead basks in it pulling it over himself like a blanket, feeling it dance off his skin like smoke. When the time comes he lashes out and grabs the intruder, pinning him to the wall as he slams this other's head against the corner. He knows what has to be done and weighs the options: for his desired goal he must destroy the other. And he relishes in the economy of his force. Dog whimpers behind the wall of hate that Man has constructed and I am only faintly aware of when the other falls limp in our hands as Man continues to smash his head into the wall. Man does not need Dog's violence; man has violence of his own. Man relishes in what he has done, knowing that he denied Dog his need to escape.

XI.

As I walk on, Man is cast large against the baking floor and Dog reflects back from the shattered glass with blood on his split lip. I can't hear them clearly, but I watch them, follow them deep into the twisted corpse of the dead city. Man takes inventory of the rubble we pass. On one corner, we pass a school, or at least the foundation and basketball court for what had been our school. He sees the ghost of it; Dog sniffs

the familiar parking lot. The school is just ash in a forest of melted houses. Here, when we were young and less defined, we met Angel, we met the shadows, we met hundreds of people that were licked up in the wind and spread like ash. The streets we walk past hold the specter of our old theater, the shell of a bar that sold us our first beer, a long glassed section of dirt we had walked a thousand times, been driven past in buses, driven past in our cars when we clouded ourselves in pot smoke. The park is untouched, save for the dying grass, while the streets beyond it are cracked and dressed in toppled houses and dead cars. We never wanted to take account of the world, we just shut it out from our steel cage, but walking in the open gives Man the chance to categorize it all. He walks up the hill to our shattered house, passing the graves where our neighbors burned, past the corner where the trash smoked. Man allows himself to be the curator of what the world lost. He lets Dog rest safe in the fact that this portion of the world burned away far before it became a threat. I pass a street sign without even reading it. I know what it marks; it's the one place we felt safe at all: we call it home.

XII.

I am Dog, although you will never hear them call me that though you can see it in their eyes. She is Angel, though you will never hear me call her that, not the way they do as they are trying to get into her pants and they are always trying. She is drunk, again, like the last time I found her, and Dog cries out against Man's hunger. She pays no notice as she pulls us closer to her, purring in our ear: "stay." Dog knows we chased the others out into the street; Man knows we are alone, and I can't help but fight against the urge to press against her until she pulls us closer and slips our arm over her. Her ribs slide under our hand as Dog tries to pull back and she slips closer to us, guiding our hand over her body. Man presses into her eagerly as she plays our hand across her hips and ass, over her chest, down her legs; she kisses us and pulls out the hunger in Dog. We know this is wrong—outside the world is burning and here in her bed we are fighting each other. "Be smart." I hear my voice break the surface as Dog beams in our chivalry and Man curses a missed opportunity. We shift from her bed, slipping the door back into its frame, and walk down the long hall studying our unbroken face. The world is dying and we won't be the same. Man fumbles for a cigarette as Dog staggers to the car drunk.

XIII.

As the singing draws closer Dog sprints for the window, shattering what remains of the glass into the cold night. Man is aware of the sickening pull of gravity as my body shatters to the ground and glass sprinkles the floor around us. Her singing is more distant now but it draws closer, frustrated screams take one of the intruders as they must have seen the body on the floor. Dog tries to pull us away and Man is faintly aware that our ribs are broken, that our leg won't work. I plead and panic, Dog has to drag us to safety, Man needs to find a way to set our bones, I give into the pain as they draw ever closer. Blood tastes alkaline in our mouth. Old wounds split open as new ones pour steadily down our face and arms. Man needs a smoke, he needs to watch the gray clouds blend effortlessly with the still night air; Dog needs a fence to stand us up; I give into the ebbing darkness that slips over us.

XIV.

Man smokes partly to have something to do while Dog loses himself in the smell of the smoke and I watch it swirl and dance into the stale blue air. There will be a time when all that is left is the memory of the smoke as it slips away, but for now Man lights stale tobacco wrapped in old books and longs for the old taste of menthol. He wonders through streets where Dog used to fill himself with the rich smell of foods and I watch strangers wag by in short skirts and tight tops. Man tastes the Old World and lets it pass our lips to spread out into the dawn of the New World. I am aware when my lip split and the blood cakes out, when Dog shifts low and tries to absorb the surroundings, and when Man drops the cigarette and curses himself for allowing the smoke to pervade our clothes. Whatever is out there will pick up on the scent of the tobacco and we will be forced to run or fight. Dog's ever vigilant nature leaves Man paranoid and makes us overly alert. Nothing moves. Nothing shifts. Man curses Dog for his false alarm and wonders if he can save the tobacco we had grounded into the ashen dirt.

XV.

Man can feel Dog searching the city for more than just scrap, and he is aware of our tired body, but he tries to set his mind to his task in order to forget about the car which does little more than remind him that at some point the new world will run out of cigarettes and our last connection to how life used to be. Dog is unaware of the doubt, but he

is able to feel Man shake and lets the desperation sink in. He places our back against the false security of a crumbling wall, he gives himself to the silent world. Man weeps because he can only remember the things he's lost, Dog shudders, and for the moment, he is lost trying to comfort the troubled Man. Sometimes we find ourselves more joined that we had ever been, and it is only when we are lost that we are able to give into the weakness of our single mind. We weep for a loss of anything tangible to take for granted.

XVI.

We find the car half-buried in a crumbled driveway, and Dog spends the better portion of a frantic afternoon digging it out while Man worries himself with the logistics of finding gas to keep it running. Man is elated: in one action the world opens up to us and new possibilities of loot spread deep into our mind. Dog longs for the feel of wind pulling across our scalp and knows this car will be something we can call our own. I find the key pressed under the rubble, held in the crushed hands of an old key hook. In one swift motion, Man pulls us in the seat and sets to the task of getting the car's engine to turn over. With two coughs the engine kicks over and Man cheers, consumed with the overwhelming sense that this will make everything so much easier. We drive the car down roads strewn with rubble while Man lights up a stale cigarette he found in the last unopened pack uncovered before everything ended.

XVII.

I am ghost, because I let myself just fade away. I am lost on tragic thoughts and indignity. I have seen the world in a way that it can't see me. We are sometimes strong, yet I am always weak. I am a vapor in a smoke born city street. I am myself, and I am aware that there are others here with me. As long as I make myself a specter I am safe, if I let Man and Dog disappear while I concentrate on nothing, maybe the others will pass by. We wait in the dark room because we know what is it that hunts us. I am consumed by what we lost, the things that we were missing, the ones that troubled me where the abstract. We lose the car and the cigarettes, but those only really worry Man. Dog is troubled because we lost the things we had used for comfort, the things we used to protect and hoard. Yet there is something else we had lost long before the world settled down into the ashes and rubble. Something died, something had to give way in order for us to survive. While Dog dreads her song drifting closer,

I lament knowing we will never know what it was we lost.

XVII

She hums the first song I hear since the world ended contentedly into Dog's ears as Man holds her close. Outside the world is filled with silence and we are filled with her soft rhythms. I drag my hands through her hair, her soft lips pressing close to my neck, her breath flitting across our skin. She is whole and tangible; she fills Dog with her warmth, feeding his need to belong. We do not sleep, consumed with the feel of her body pressing against ours. For a while even man is contented. He watches her breathing slow as she gives way to sleep and he maps the lines of her face. Dog smells her hair as she rests her head across our chest and we sink into her bed. Man does not long to smoke; Dog does not long to protect her; instead we are consumed by the feeling of being whole and finally belonging.

XIX.

When we leave the cage and walk through the throng of people, Dog is all too relieved to escape the cramped spaces and imposing crowd. Dog is always on edge when he is around others, knowing that the simplest way to free himself from the oppression is to strike out against those that offend him. Man is aware that the car is not parked where he had left it, instead there is only the shattered glass reflecting Dog's disappointed stare. Man had left a bundle of old cigarettes on the seat of the car and he blames Dog for taking so long with the fights while Dog snaps back, blaming Man's greed and slowly it settles on me that we were in for a long walk home.

Man spends the walk meticulously slamming our fists into any inanimate object that does not have the good graces to hit us back. He buries Dog deep in our mind, choosing to concern himself with the inconvenience of losing everything he has left in the world. He feels the weight of the two packs Dog had won in the fight and smokes cigarette after cigarette in an attempt to bury the uneasy feeling that with every step the world is being closed off. He knows we will not find another car and silently tallies the places we have already picked over. Grocery stores and gas stations have already been scavenged for smokes, the houses that still stood have already been torn through time and time again on the long walk home Man is painfully aware that he is smoking away the last of his memories.

XX.

They drag us into a dark room and I am only faintly aware of the pain in our broken bones. Dog gnaws at the inside of our mouth to try and wash the smell of her perfume away by focusing on the metallic blood that flows over our tongue. Man buries himself deep inside our mind trying not to count the number of blows that land on us. We are stomped by boots until long after we give into any sense of the pain and became numb. I am only aware of her presence by the faint humming, yet somehow I feel that Dog has lost control. Man tries to assess the damage as he mentally covers broken bones and shattered teeth, picking through the rubble of our body trying to find where they might have buried Dog. A part of me knows he is trapped by the unrelenting guilt that we could have been safe if we didn't hesitate. Man's fidgeting slowly draws farther and farther away as his voice settles on the thought of one last cigarette before breaking apart like smoke into the darkness. However dark the room is, however long the beating lasts, means nothing anymore. There is emptiness where I had once been, where I had defined myself, and slowly I feel my mind slip deeper into the growing black hole. From somewhere out beyond the darkness, I hear her singing.

XXI.

She smiles when she kisses me, and for a moment I think everything would be alright.



WHERE ARE YOU FROM ORIGINALLY?

ANNA AUSTIN

Halfway through the third date, halfway through spicy tempura and sake, halfway through our childhoods and our least favorite highways, the whole charade

falls apart. The dirty secrets come purring out of their bags, and you say Well! You say If I was raised by foxes, and you were raised by wolves, then oh pet, let's get the check!

Let's go. Pack nothing. We push the car off Mulholland, sail our passports down the concrete river. We leave Italian shoes for weather-beaten paws, wedding china for black lips. Make love

nests beneath roots and rich soil. I'll kill dinner. You steal dessert. And when they sniff us out, the cold muzzles and hungry guns, we'll snarl. We'll snap. We'll raise our hackles and howl

It's our nature. It's our nature.

ATOMIC A.M.

ASHLYN MORSE

With this plastic Dixie Knife,
the atoms split easily
as soft as butter. And as
the gleaming serrations
make the silent journey inward,
the nucleus will dream
of the place between
heaven and hell and Land O' Lakes—
its place among the restless
buzzing beads of orbital routine.
For now, the atom's in this pat
of morning butter. Enhancer
of toast. A dawn, a cup, a comb, a house
held together by the nano-force
of desire. For now, without bitterness.
For now, the atom, without fallout
or Marmite, is breakfast.

I measure the morning Folgers,
microns of coffee spilling over
and recollecting in static pools.
When the time comes,
how many of us will lean
into the maker, pat the grinds
into the bleary-eyed filter
before we notice the thin,
brittle candy glass between
us and the blooming clouds
that bump and moan against the sky—
us, with a grip on nothing
but the coffee spoon.

How many brilliant fission-
fusion suns that rise
do we expect will turn
their back on winter?
This breakfast that drags
my knife across and back
and over the coarse, velcro grain again

long after every atom
of butter has been spread.

A LOVE POEM

CODY DEITZ

for Fernando Pessoa et al

This is my poem for you, Fernando Pessoa;
it's not a happy poem. It is a love poem though,
aching with a dull love never returned—
a love fleeting like your happiness on walks down the streets
of Lisbon on sunny afternoons.

If I wasn't so busy tonight, writing poems and wishing
beer was cheaper, I'd meet you half-way.
We could walk together through the city,
tracing flowerbed geometry through public parks
and talking politics, the city spread out before us
like a book we've read too many times.

We could stop by the café and get the usual,
a young bottle of port, tasteless food,
and watch the people living their lives
one meal at a time and feel absurd.

After the wine is gone and cigarette smoke
is churning in the air like a rain cloud,
we could go out into the city again,
walking side by side on the beach of our disillusion
and talk about our dreams and how they're exactly the same.

I would point to your shadow cast by the streetlamps,
barely there, and say it looks just like your voice, like your book,
swimming in the air above cobblestone alleys,
lonely and sad and saying something important
about the world, about us.

Darcy Yates | Horn Player



CREATION AND OTHER DREAMS

CORRI DITCH

The Intertextual Land of Discontent

The nights filled with rain are those in which I sleep the most peacefully.

As I watch Señor São from afar I observe his contemplative temperament. I pretend to focus on my small meal. A bit of potato and meat and I am content; a glass of wine and I am silently overjoyed.

My dreams are grand and my life is quiet. The slightest gesture of kindness is a pickaxe to my heart. I must not get too excited for it will not last. It is not meant to last.

I peer through the dirty glass pane as I watch a rodent slowly investigate a possible piece of food, without the cares of the world pressing down on its tiny shoulders. I am miserable.

All things bad all the time. I am happy with that.

It appears that I am not pretending to focus on my meal and I slowly return my gaze to Señor São. Rain taps on the glass behind me. I wonder why I even bother.

“Cat!” An energetic man shouts this gleeful exclamation and breaks the silence of the small inn in which I am dining. The few patrons in the inn look around. There is no cat.

On my walk home this afternoon, I noticed a black and white cat in the doorway of an old house. As I passed he looked up at me. He gazed at me for many moments. Odd, I didn't know that cats were capable of such directness.

It is a curious thing, yet no one is alarmed. The man at the table near me explains to his supper-mate that Pierre, apparently this is his name, is an odd but harmless fellow.

The soft howling of the wind gently rattles the windows. I feel as if something is coming, but I am not ready.

The waiter gently approaches the man with the apparent fascination with felines, “Señor Menard, may I get you anything else?” The man merely smiles and shakes his head. He appears to be affable in spite of his strangeness. He is possibly a genius like me, as oddity is often associated with brilliance.

The tiny tree that I had been cultivating has died. I had named the small tree; this makes his death all the more painful. I will not speak the name aloud. I will not name another.

I rarely stray from my usual order of potatoes and meat—except when my purse will not allow it, on those days I order the vegetable broth and warm bread. It is strangely satisfying.

The darkness closes in, suffocating my joy. Was there ever very much?

I am resolved that I will not go to the company party. I do not dance well. I shall not go.

There is a large bush outside the inn. I find myself drawn to it. I am not apathetic; I simply do not care. I am uninterested in the ordinary. It is a conscious choice. I abstain from the outside world. I choose to take no part in it.

As I walk to the obligatory party, I observe the smiles on the people in the streets.

I think I shall name the shrub: Madeline.

I pass the black and white cat on my way to the gathering. He is comfortably sitting on the gray steps of the same house. It gazes at me once more. As I walk on, it begins to follow me. Unnerving at first, a few minutes into the walk and I find it unusually comforting. Many steps later I look behind me and he is gone. I must not form an attachment to a cat. I shall call him Ralph.

To hope is to weep. I shall do neither. I long for certainty. I am bombarded by doubt. Walking bits of doubt flood the streets. These people are shrouded in dark

veils of emotion camouflaged by smiles. I want no part of this.

All I want is to be left alone. I sit on a bench away from the rest of the party. All I want is to be left alone. I am filled with irritation. They speak to each other and think themselves so important, etc. etc. etc. Well developed and prideful. I disdain conversation that is fraught with such lack of humility.

I sometimes think of the man at the inn. Engaged as I was with observing Señor São, I barely noticed Señor Menard. Señor São—I initially coveted his ease of movement. His air of intimidation was fascinating, but ultimately it was Menard that I understood. His awkward comments mixed with a pleasant disposition. I hope one day my genius allows me to care as little as Menard appeared to care. I care too much and I suffer because of it.

Tedious. My interaction with others is tedious. My words become clunky and forced when I try to relate with another. The hierarchical society in which I am forced to dwell favors those that are linguistically inclined. In my head I gracefully articulate my awe inspiring words. I am a delicate dancer—spry and light on my feet. The reality is so very different. Self-conscious. Painfully self-conscious. I know when it happens. I astutely observe the shift in their eyes. Their happy and fresh gaze quickly becomes tired and impatient as they witness my verbal inadequacies.

I stumble over my self-esteem.

To be ridiculed for one's ideas—that is the most bitter of betrayals. I am detached from the dancing around me. I secretly wish that I could disappear. Fade into the stars.

I secretly long to dance.

What does it all matter? I hope to come back as a furry creature. Humans, their judgmental eyes are always upon me. I hope I see Ralph on my walk home from this disastrous display of disingenuousness.

The swamps of sadness have me paralyzed.

The man near me turns his attention to the women sitting near the fireplace. She wears a dark blue scarf. I detect sadness in her eyes. I am

immediately taken with her. I overhear her chatting about the titillating novel she is currently reading.

I long to titillate with my words, be they on the page or in person, but my awkward tongue and my feeble hand prevent me from doing so.

I feel the familiar burning sensation spread to my nose. My eyes become slightly glassy. I must leave. I cannot, I will not show this embarrassing sign of weakness. I raise the collar of my thick coat to cover my mouth. This way I am not tempted to reveal my true feelings—my helplessness, my impotence.

I fail. I fail. I am not the impenetrable force that I hoped to be. I fall short. My ideas are grand. My life is small.

As I hurry to leave the crowded party the blue-scarfed woman walks towards me. I immediately lower my eyes to avoid contact with her beauty. Her shoulder brushes mine as she walks past me to greet someone else. Her perfume, a warm floral scent, lingers in the air for a moment. I will keep this memory forever.

My tongue trips over my self-esteem. I know this, so I dare not try.

The damp air shocks me out of my discontent. The foggy wetness slowly engulfs my brooding thoughts. In it I find a familiar comfort.

I shall never marry for marriage consists of a never-ending performance. I refuse to act in the exhausting merry-go-round of marital scenes. Aloneness is better. In the end it is a better choice. Heart-aching, but better.

As I hoped, I see Ralph on my walk home from the party. He is not resting on his favorite step. He is ahead of me. He confidently veers around people as they walk through the gray cobble stone street.

Dearest friend, what is it that you desire? Are you lonely? Or are you content with your independence.

This time I shall follow him...

There is a crispness in the air that I have never experienced.

For Monty, his daughter was the sun. Her kind spirit and sharp mind filled him with more joy and pride than he ever thought possible. Life before Sarah was born was fine. More than fine, really. Monty had always had a cheerful disposition, but the birth of his daughter created a crack in the universe. A space through which warm sun rays poured out like raindrops of light. Each day Monty spent with Sarah he felt his heart open a little more. He felt the greatest satisfaction in the most ordinary things. He was delighted to teach Sarah how to fish. They would spend hours by the lake sitting quietly and contentedly. They always threw back whatever they caught. Sarah was resolute in this for her empathy for others, be they human or fish, was immense.

For a time it seemed like Monty's growing love for his daughter would eventually burst his heart. Then it began. Sarah fell ill. The drops of rainlight ceased. In its place darkness showered down as sticky pieces of tar began to fix to his soul. Papa I am well, no you are not, and it only pains me more to see you pretend that you do not suffer, but I do not, sweet child, you cannot lie to me. You are a part of me and I you, the facade is not necessary, please. Alright, father, alright. But I am strong and I will recover. Yes, my dear child, you most certainly will. I have no doubt. But Monty's doubts were so great he could hardly breathe. He was slowly suffocating with fear. A fear that he would never share with his sun.

The doctors assured them that nothing was wrong. Sarah is fine they would say over and over again. Something was not right regardless of their assurance. It was time for her to return. The drops of light that came together to form Sarah were slowly returning to their original form. People are usually unable to see these types of events; she was becoming invisible to them. Monty was the only one who was aware of the process. People would ask him less frequently about Sarah. When she was with others they often forgot she was there until Monty made sure to include her in the conversation. They then appeared slightly surprised that she was sitting next to them, "Ahh, yes. Sarah what do you think about the matter?" Sarah only smiled and said, "It's hard to say." She felt the change occurring. She vacillated between trepidation and elation.

Sarah was a particularly gregarious child, yet she formed no lasting connections to friends. As a young woman, the pattern continued. She had many lovers and thoroughly enjoyed the time spent with them, but there was a marked removal that the men always felt. She always left the

affair early, before they had time to grow too attached to her. This was her intent; however, the attachment the men felt was great. Sarah convinced herself otherwise. She was unaware of her own light.

She felt the change begin on her twenty-fourth birthday. Her left hand began to tingle. As she looked down for a moment it was gone. Her hand returned so quickly that she was certain she had imagined it. Like the flicker of a light. She attributed it to fatigue. When she returned home that evening she tried to tell her Papa, but what could she say? Monty was right. When Sarah was born there was, indeed, a crack in the universe, and now it was time for her to return.

Sarah sat outside their small home. She sensed the faint smell of rain in the air. As she looked up into the starless sky for signs of wetness, she felt the neighbor's cat walk between her legs. She reached down and gently stroked the soft creature as it wrapped its languid tale around her calf. She felt a peaceful lightness fill her mind and spirit. She heard a small voice whisper, "It's time."

The Pain of Possibility

He dreamed her into being. Thirty-six years of a solitary life created great contrast. He launched countless rockets of desire, but he was unable to feel genuine happiness. He thought of himself an intellectual and spent his time reading and journaling. Every thought he had he felt it necessary to record. He wanted them to mean something. *He* wanted to mean something. He read the great works of those that came before him. He tried to emulate their style and their tone; he did not have to emulate their suffering, for he was intimately involved with sadness and self-doubt.

He pretended that all was well, but he secretly and consistently longed for more, and therefore she could not come. He made friends with the oak trees and the willow trees. He envied the squirrels for they cared not for matters of the heart. Or perhaps they did. Perhaps they secretly longed for furry partners. For a chipper partner to help seek out and bury nuts. For a warm partner to snuggle with in the small hole of a tree. He laughed at his own thoughts. He finally gave up. He realized he would be okay. And then, she was there.



THE REVISION OF “THE BOOK CLUB”

JON BEADLE

It was a warm Sunday afternoon, the kind of day that was sunny enough to be pleasant, but still tinged with a certain shadow of nostalgia that made a person weary of doing anything. In short, it was exactly the kind of day that brought to mind R. P.'s famous quote about the body as a medium for stories. I was exhausted from the weeks prior, during which I had been involved in several trying events concerning the local book club of which I was a member, and if my own body bore a story, then certainly it was one that had suffered through a long revision process which had eliminated almost everything that had been good about it to begin with. What I wanted to do now, however, was forget all of that by burying myself in a book. I had recently acquired a copy of *The Book Club* by J. B. and, though I was not familiar with the author, the title had intrigued me given my own membership in such a club. Furthermore, on flipping through the book in the store prior to purchasing it, I had felt a strange attachment to it, as if the words on the page could have been written by none other than myself. Thus, I was excited to finally have the time to spend on the book and looked forward to indulging my love of reading for the remainder of the day.

As it was such a nice day, I intended to read outside. Indeed, after glancing out the window, I was unable to stop myself from stepping out into the garden at the rear of my home. My garden was unusually large for the area in which I lived and was home to a couple of trees, as well as a perimeter of brightly colored flowers and thick green shrubbery. Literature was my one and only passion in life and I knew nothing about caring for plants. Fortunately, whether by luck or the careful planning of the house's previous owners, the plants in the garden were able to sustain themselves without my assistance and I was provided a pleasing environment with minimal effort on my own part.

The garden was as delightful as ever and, after savoring it for a few minutes, I ventured back inside to retrieve my book. However, the book was not where I was certain I had left it (on a small table by the back door so that it would be easily accessible), nor was it among the numerous books collected in my study. A thorough search of the house brought me to the exasperating conclusion that my book was no longer here and that it had somehow disappeared from under my very nose. It seemed my plan for the afternoon was in shambles. While I certainly did not lack

other books to read if I wished, my heart was set on this particular one and I knew I could not focus on any other book until I found my missing text. There was something about this scenario that seemed to belong to a world outside of the one I knew; for a moment I felt like the protagonist in *Six Months*, one of J. G.'s lesser known works, who was abandoned in an unfamiliar country, and I almost expected to hear the sound of an air raid siren in the distance.

Instead, the sound that caught my attention was a mocking laugh that emanated from the garden. I proceeded outside to investigate and found, to my surprise, that there was no one in the yard, though that was not truly surprising since there had been no one there earlier either. This left me a little bemused, and I was about to write it off as a trick of my hearing when I again heard the laughter, this time clearly coming from above me. I looked up and caught sight of a hummingbird perched on a branch. Normally, I wouldn't have paid much attention to such a thing--the trees in my yard had no shortage of birds after all-- but there was something strange about this particular bird. As I looked up at it, it fixed its shiny black eyes on me and laughed, a high-pitched tittering unlike any bird song I was familiar with.

My face immediately flushed red in anger and embarrassment. I hated being laughed at and what right did this bird have to trespass on my property and mock me in such a manner? How I wished that a plague like the notorious Veil described by T. P. might descend at that very moment and strike the bird and all of its brethren dead! Disturbing memories of past mistakes began to rise up in my mind. How, during one book club meeting, I had been put on the spot when a young woman (I'll simply refer to her here as G. S.) directed a question at me regarding intertextuality. Without time to prepare, I had stammered out a response that was met by a heavy silence, before the conversation continued without reference to my contribution. I had slunk down in my seat and remained quiet for the rest of the session. I felt a bitter resentment towards G. S. for throwing that question at me. What did I know of intertextuality? Perhaps with forewarning I could have studied up on the issue, but it was unreasonable to expect me to come up with something clever to say at the drop of a hat.

Gradually, the painful memory subsided and when I had recovered enough to be able to look up, I saw the bird continuing to stare down at me as if waiting for an answer. Much like G. S., it seemed to expect things from me that I had no hope of fulfilling. In fact, the bird was worse as it hadn't even given me a question, only a silence to which I had no chance of responding correctly. I was doomed to fail, like so many heroes of literature before me (the situation closely paralleled that of the protagonist in *Something I Don't Know How to Write* by D. H.,

though, while both of us suffered an anxiety brought on by an impudent animal, the bird I faced was no metaphor and was, rather, a real creature. This distinction was made clear in how, unlike D. H.'s squirrel, the bird couldn't talk).

What made things worse was that, despite my finding the silence from the bird being unanswerable, I knew there were others who could answer it. That I could not conceive of an answer merely showed my own limitations. Take, for example, an associate of mine from the book club, a man by the name of S. P. (A short account of an event that took place a few months ago shall suffice to prove my point). As it had chanced, the moderator for that meeting was running late and the delay had forced the members, myself included, to engage in conversation with each other lest we appear withdrawn or arrogant. I had briefly spoken with S. P. on a prior occasion, following his very successful moderation of a previous meeting, and had found him to be an amiable fellow. Thus, not wanting to be cornered by some of the club's lesser intellects (I had been all too aware of a certain individual trying to make eye contact so that he would have had an excuse to regale me with the current status of the novel he was eternally planning to write), I had quickly removed myself from the pool of potential conversation partners by approaching S. P.

The book club meetings took place in a cozy room provided by the local library, which looked entirely as one would expect it to look: brown rugs, tiny tables capable of fitting only one or two drinks, light bulbs at half glow, and bookcases on which the books seemed to be entirely for display, their covers removed so that they formed continuous bands of solid color: red, blue, green. In addition, there was a circle of black plastic chairs, the kind where the principle feature of their design was to make them stackable for easy storage rather than to provide any comfort for the occupant, in which the members would sit during discussion of the current book and, as a further addition to these, there were a couple of large leather armchairs in the rear corners of the room. It was in one of these latter chairs that S. P. had seated himself, his brow furrowed in concentration over a bundle of papers in his hands.

I inquired as to the nature of his current project and he informed me that he was in the process of compiling a works cited and consulted page for his own existence. The magnitude of this project struck me as impossible; how could he account for every book (to say nothing of other media) that had influenced him, among which were surely books he had never read himself and even books that did not yet exist? He merely laughed when I voiced these concerns, replying that the goal was not a finished product, but a continuous work, a process that would pave the way for these books that did not exist: the novels of the future.

Something seemed off about this story even as I was recalling it,

which I attributed to my own sense of failure and jealousy clouding my memory. This man, who saw a path to the future where I saw only a dead end, could surely have responded to the hummingbird's silence. The bird began to laugh again and, frustrated with my own impotence, I kicked the tree, earning myself an injured toe in exchange for the bird's silence. I told myself to forget about it and go when, turning back towards my house, I recalled my reason for being there in the first place. I had to find my book. Even as this thought entered my head, the hummingbird began to laugh and I became convinced that the disappearance of my book was somehow connected to this bird. The juxtaposition of the two things, the bird and the book, was such that, if these events were themselves a story, there could be no doubting that a connection existed between the two. I started to search around the immediate area, parting bushes and peering into flower beds in case my book was concealed within them. My voracious reading habits had made me quite familiar with the literature of loss and thus I knew that, as in L. D.'s *I am Lack*, where the narrator must recover her missing shadow (though I hardly need to give a plot summary for one of the most notable works in the genre), the object I sought would likely be in the same area where I had first noticed its disappearance. Of course, I'm not saying that my life resembled literature; that would be absurd. For instance, literature would require an epiphany before the lost object could be recovered, whereas I expected to find my book with hard work rather than sudden personal insight.

Although it didn't make a sound, I could feel the hummingbird watching me from its perch in the tree. The bird managed to convey, without word or gesture, a thorough mocking of my ineptitude as I fruitlessly searched the garden and worked up a sweat that would, even if I found my book, require me to change shirts and take a shower before I could relax. This ability of the bird to say something without saying it brought to my mind another of my book club compatriots, a young woman by the name of M. M. Upon our first couple of meetings, I had found her charming, to be sure, but without anything that immediately recommended her to my attention. That is to say, my first impression of her was a sense of sensing nothing. That changed one evening when, after the club had concluded its discussion of the current book, I stepped outside to enjoy a breath of fresh air and eat a granola bar I had brought from home. While the library was happy to provide water to the club, we were required to bring our own food, which most members failed to do, and thus anyone who did was likely to find themselves besieged by requests to share and denounced as a scrooge if they refused. To sidestep that whole ordeal, I often ate my snack outside. On this occasion, I had been surprised to find that I was not alone as M. M. was also outside, eating salad from a plastic container that she had probably kept hidden in

her bag during the meeting, the starving vultures seated on either side of her unaware of its contents.

Since I was unsure of what to say to her, I did what any wise person would do: I kept silent and ate my granola bar. I had assumed we were on the same page and she would likewise ignore me, but my assumption proved to be false when she turned to look right at me.

“How are you?”¹ she asked.

Without a word, I broke off a small portion of the bar and passed it to her. She had dropped it into her salad and, using a black plastic fork to break it into tiny chunks, mixed it in among the lettuce. Perhaps I was simply thrown off by this unusual behavior, as, despite being usually quick-witted, it took a few more seconds of silent eating before I realized I had responded to her footnote rather than what she had said.

“How do you do that?” I asked.

“Do what?”² she responded while crunching her way through the granola salad.

She had clearly been inviting me to attempt my own footnote, casually suggesting its ease in a manner which had made me suspicious. I had never been one to back down from a challenge, however, and so, crushing the now empty wrapper of the granola bar in my fist, I spoke.

“Not bad,”³ I said, instantly cringing from my utter lack of subtlety.

“Well,” she said, closing up the salad box with the fork inside, “I’ll see you later.”⁴

She walked back inside, leaving me to ruminate on our brief conversation. One might be tempted to think of footnotes as indirect, but, thinking about it, who of us could say anything directly? I had been struck not just by my failure to speak through footnotes, but of my inability to speak meaningfully in any manner at all.

Yet, even as the thought of my encounter with M. M. brought on an acute sense of my own failings, I remembered the incident was very similar to one I had seen while skimming *The Book Club* in the store prior to purchase. Was it possible I was merely recalling something I had read rather than something I had experienced? Regardless, there was no time to sort out fact from fiction while the bird’s watchful gaze recorded every second of my failure. I had to accept that the book was not in the garden or, if it was, it was not anywhere that I could find it. Though the garden was mine, it was complicit in the bird’s scheme to withhold my book and this betrayal by my own property aroused a great deal of ire within me. The feeling was similar to that expressed by O. S. in the 32nd volume of his autobiography in which he is unable to find a parking space and is thus

1. “Can I have some of your granola bar?”
2. “Oh this? It’s really quite simple. By the way, what did you think of the meeting today?”
3. “Not bad.”
4. “Next time, try to speak without worrying so much about intention.”

excluded from attending his friend's party. I too felt as if the world had turned against me, though, without belittling his suffering, my situation was significantly worse than that experienced by O. S. (since he had no recognized claim to a parking spot) whereas I was literally on my home ground.

Another difference was that I had a specific target at which to direct my anger: the hummingbird. I kicked the tree again (how strange, in retrospect, that I should attack the tree, as if it were an extension of the bird or, more simply, an enemy, which is completely at odds with the convention of the tree as a metaphor for life and inspiration, like the Salmon-Tree which appears to the despairing writer in K. M.'s *Tracing Lines, Drawing Circles*). This time, my strike was enough to cause the bird to vacate the tree entirely and it took to the air where it hovered in place with the low hum and frenzied blur of its beating wings. The bird continued to stare down at me and I became even more annoyed than before due to it doing this from the air. I could not help but think that the bird was deliberately showing off its ability to hover, an essential quality that was unique to hummingbirds. This kind of exceptionalism was abhorrent to me for a couple of reasons, one being that the bird had never worked for its ability and had simply been gifted it. Thus, showing it off was in exceedingly poor taste.

The other reason was a little more complicated and had to do with the fact that this kind of natural superiority was a quality I despised as it was often a sign of poor writing. I said earlier that life does not resemble literature; however, let me make it clear that I do not consider this a point in life's favor and I have always felt that life, despite its limitations, should strive to resemble literature. Thus, the bird's display of its lowbrow hovering was nothing more than an attempt to associate life not with literature, but with those other superficial works notable mostly for their lack of depth. It was, to put it plainly, a slap in the face.

I suddenly grasped the reason for my book's disappearance and my inability to find it. The book's existence as a work of fiction was at odds with life and its slavish devotion to realism, manifested in the form of the hummingbird, and it was this obfuscatory adherence to reality that was concealing the text. To retrieve my book, I would have to create a disruption of the real which would be most efficiently achieved by killing the bird that served as its avatar. But how to get at the bird when it hovered beyond my reach? I needed to bring it down to the ground where I could face it on even terms.

I retreated to my house and secured several books from my study to serve as bait. When it comes to books, I am something of a hoarder, reluctant to ever let any of them go, and it was with a heavy heart that I took hold of a few texts to sacrifice to the bird, among which were

ELEMELEMELEMELEM by C. C., *Drowning Sunflower* by T. N., and the sublime *When Earth* by S. M. Though it was not intentional on my part, the informed reader will detect a trace of irony in the themes of death and destruction that run through all of these works and perhaps this was a subconscious influence on my selection.

I returned to the rear garden where the bird was still to be found in the same spot as before. One by one, I laid the books down in a trail from just below the bird to a bush where I could easily conceal myself. Each book was opened to a particular passage that I suspected the bird would not be able to resist and, sure enough, it soon descended low over the first book, J. A.'s *Echoes of Sand* (in which I had selected a particularly juicy sentence: "I remember the stories of when my parents came with children strapped to their bodies, crossing the border with ease, no gray metal mesh fence, no barb-wire, no coyotes, only the ground below their feet where snakes dwell and the open sky, where birds call home"). It hovered above the pages for a moment as if it were reading and then, without warning, abruptly stabbed its pointed beak deep into the book. I grasped my chest in agony. It was all I could do to stop myself from yelling out at the bird's vandalism of a work of art. What followed was even worse, however, as the bird began to drink from the book, sucking up the black ink like nectar from a flower until all that remained was the blank white expanse of empty pages.

What horror was this! The bird was consuming the very words themselves! It was a nightmarish twist straight out of a novel by M. G. or J. L., an unexpected shift that left me confused and shivering despite the warmth of the afternoon sun. I had prepared myself to witness the bird attacking the books and perhaps damaging the covers, but this was beyond anything I could have imagined. Fortunately, I somehow retained the presence of mind to keep myself quiet and concealed in the bush. It was clear more than ever that the bird had to be destroyed, not just for the sake of getting my book back, but to protect all books. As I watched, it continued along the trail of books, devouring the words of each one (forgive me, M. F. and C. M., that I could not save your works, but know that *Action*, *Touch*, *Melody*, *Memory* and *Christa's Love Life* were not sacrificed in vain). It was almost more than I could bear to see entire stories, each story home to dozens of paragraphs, each paragraph composed of a multitude of sentences, all wiped from existence and replaced by a haunting emptiness.

I can't say how long I endured this torture or how many books were lost in total to the winged fiend, but at last it came to the final book in the trail, the one closest to my hiding place. The bird raised its beak over the text, preparing to strike. With a sudden start, I recognized the book about to be destroyed was none other than the very book I had been searching

for, *The Book Club*, which must have somehow gotten mixed up with the other books used for bait. I cursed myself for my lack of attention; I had delivered the very thing I sought to save right into the waiting jaws of the monster. I cried out and leapt from my hiding spot, my hands stretched out to retrieve my book, even as the bird, its eyes gleaming with malice, sunk its beak deep into the pages to obliterate the text.

I collided with the bird, wrenching the book free from it, and we tumbled across the grass while locked in combat. Despite the advantage of my size, the bird was quick and had a natural weapon in its beak, whereas all I had were my recently trimmed nails, which clawed at the demon without finding purchase. At last, I managed to get both hands around it and fixed it firmly in my grasp. I relaxed my guard, thinking I had the creature safely contained and, seeing an opening with its keen predatory senses alert to any sign of weakness, the bird lurched forward and pierced my chest with its beak.

The pain was indescribable. It was, to resort to a cliché out of lack of a better description, like my blood was on fire. I could feel the bird sucking out my very essence and I thought of the raindrop in R. R.'s *On Concrete*, its awareness and all the life it contained slowly being siphoned away by the scorching heat of the sun. Was that my fate, to be erased, to be silenced by the bird, by reality, as it had silenced so many others? Was I to be like the sister in *Tokyo Traveler* by K. W., to be washed away by the relentless force of the environment, this world of realism? Was I to disappear like all those books that the bird had consumed and be replaced by... what? Not an ending, but a silent cessation. A voiceless nothingness.

All things considered, I decided I would prefer not to. The bird was still within my hands and I focused my remaining strength into squeezing it as hard as possible. It struggled as I increased the pressure on it and something cold and pink began to ooze out of it, slow and thick like strawberry ice cream (possibly a reference to that infamous work by J. R., but I was quite delirious at this point so the accuracy of this detail is dubious). The bird pushed deeper into my body, but I held on, crushing the bird smaller and smaller until its body fell limp and I pulled it from my chest and flung it away, across the garden and into a thick rose bush.

The bird was defeated, but I was hardly in a state to celebrate my victory while blood was gushing from the wound in my body. Even that concern, however, fell secondary to retrieving my book. I crawled across the grass to where *The Book Club* lay and picked it up to survey the damage. It was in a bad way; most of the text had been lost with only a few passages remaining and there was a hole through the pages, much like the one in my own body, where the bird had pierced it. Despite my best efforts and all my struggles, it seemed I had failed. Or had I? As my shoulders drooped in frustration, the movement sent a drop of blood from

my wound hurtling down to the opened book where it splashed out in a puddle that looked almost like a word. I let a few more drops fall down, watching the red run together until, at last, I had a complete sentence. Then I clasped the book to my chest, feeling my blood flowing out into the blank pages where once there had been words, not recreating what had been there previously, but filling up the emptiness with something new, something unknown, and wasn't that, at least, better than nothing?



THE RIVER IS ROCKS

SUSANA MARCELO

in this part of *El Rio Jiboa*
where water flows between
crevices. My *chele* legs bare
to my knees. I look beyond
with shielded eyes.

*

In my memories, the river
touched my chest. My sister
fell and father pulled her
from the water by the leg before
the current drifted her away.

We came home with *pescaditos*,
chacalines and *chimberas*—
white fish—my favorite.

And not just because father
caught them with his bare hands:
They jumped out of the water
just for him, unafraid to swallow air.

*

My father nearby, shirtless,
hums a hymn while he cups
his hands underwater.

Chacalines shoot out of his grasp.

He stuffs a few in a burlap bag
for tomorrow's *buevos picados*.

The curve of his back outlined
by his spine like stepping stones
on the stream.

No es la temporada de chimberas, he says.

It's never the season anymore.

He nods for me to come over;
jumping rocks, I lean into him:

Nostalgia is a fish gasping for water.

CUBE

JUAN ALVARADO

I saved the last text you sent me,

“I’ll be at home ten.”

I stare outside our apartment window on Matamoros,
wondering how it felt for you that night. Were words spoken
into a phone? Did your last breath leave early,
between 4 and 5? Maybe chilaquiles in the stove gave you
hope but ant colonies of fear tunneled into your chest.

“Corazon, no more Marlboros.”

Days hug nights, evenings chase mornings,
months play chinche while I walk D.F.
You have no rent to pay, no pictures to develop,
no promise to buy Daniela ice cream for each A she gets.

“Stop drinking Tecates.”

Maybe your body’s in a bag
inside a black van, and all I see is—

“I won’t stop taking pictures of those men.”

I cried loud to the police like a baby wanting a bottle,
only to get shushed with silence and threat—
chupones.

“On la Reforma and Calle Gandhi...
Por favvvoors? Make what I always like tonight
:D...”

I wondered if they sent you to the desert
to dig a hole, make your body into a cube of flesh and bone,
look up to Orion,
and roll in.

COMPUTER SCREENS AND CRYSTAL BALLS

ANNA AUSTIN

On this day in 1945, Flight 19 went for a spin around the Bermuda Triangle and never came back. Five burly men in five torpedo bombers just vanished into that notorious, pointy slip of

thin air. They didn't know any better. In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII gave Heinrich Kramer the green light to round up all the witches in Germany, and in 1952 The Great Smog held its huge

coal stained paw over the mouths of 12,000 Londoners. The show didn't go on for at least 278 people who inhaled too much smoke after the Brooklyn Theater was gobbled up by flames on

this day in 1876. Studies done on the tsunami deposits in the Sendai and Ishinomaki plains reveal that there is a 99 percent chance of another wave washing away so many Japanese

people in the next 30 years. If I have not died from smoke inhalation, if I have not choked on the smog, I will be 52 and a half. Statistics say I will have been married and divorced 1.5 times. My

funny Labrador will be long dead, and the one after her. My heart will break and break and my children's hearts will break, but they will only get the chicken pox once.

BEAR

ANNA AUSTIN

There is something about sunken ships the way there is something about old houses that continue to whisper after the wind stops, something about your last boyfriend's cotton t-shirt that continues to kiss your fingers from the bottom of your underwear drawer. Objects go on remembering us for a long time after we have abandoned them. Your broken necklace shivers in the attic of your childhood home. Your crumpled first car can still remember what the sweat from the palms of your teenage hands tastes like. It keeps strands of your long yellow hair inside it like treasure. And, now, imagine what ships remember. There are three million of them asleep at the bottom of the ocean.

If you are not from the San Francisco bay area of California, then you do not have to drive over a bridge to leave home and you do not have to drive over a bridge to go back. It is not the big, ugly double-decker kind that kills people during earthquakes and starts off with its belly so close to the water that you are afraid you will drive off of it, and your car will become a sunken ship right beside the real sunken ship that sticks out of the water next to the bridge that you never have to drive across. The bridge has never seen you cry or sing Bruce Springsteen or look very greasy and tired. It doesn't remember you, but it remembers me, and it remembers the U.S.S. Bear.

The Bear did not sink next to the Richmond-San Rafael bridge, but she did live in Oakland in 1929 when she was 55-years-old. She starred in a movie based on a Jack London novel. She served as a maritime museum, there on the slate-colored bay where the cranes are now. She was a little bit famous for a little bit longer than fifteen minutes, but celebrity is not important to ships.

Like all the others, Bear was designed by hope, by enough hope and yearning to float like a bird on cold salt water, by the hands of men who loved her more than their mothers and wives and babies. They unbound trees and metal from the earth to craft her mighty rib cage and dressed her up with a sharpness that cut through waves like the body of the best girl in town. She set out as a Newfoundland sealer in 1874, scooping up the soft wriggling creatures whose doe-eyed faces were a worthy sacrifice

for meat, fat, and plush clothing. However, in ten years time she found a higher purpose after signing on for the Greely Arctic rescue mission with the US Navy. After spending the winter of 1884 stranded in the ice, the few surviving members of the Greely expedition found their long awaited savior in the U.S.S. Bear. The men appeared like ghosts from their doomed vessel, pale and skeletally thin, their surgeon dead by his own hand and their digestive systems gnawing at nothing more than moss and leather.

After returning from the mission, Bear was deemed unfit for the Navy, turning instead to the hands of Mike Healy, skipper for the Alaskan Patrol and the first African-American to command a vessel for the United States. Together they charted the Arctic waters providing medical attention to natives and travelers as well as law enforcement against criminals. Her body was a courtroom, a jail, a hospital, and hostel throughout the First World War and again in the second—a position in the Greenland patrol sweeping her back into action from her fleeting moment of stardom on the San Francisco bay. After wartime, a Canadian company considered her once more for a career in sealing, yet luck forced the cruel business to disintegrate.

So she slept. She slept on the Canadian coast for a long time before fate placed The Bear into the hands of a man who wished to turn her into a floating restaurant museum in the Philadelphia navy yard. A tugboat called the Irving Birch traveled up to Nova Scotia to retrieve Bear from the snowy beach where she had retired. Accompanied by a crew of only two, the Irving Birch tied the Bear's tired body to her own young and sturdy one, dragging the 89-year-old ship back into open water for the first time in decades.

I imagine her exhaustion. I imagine the familiar rush of waves lapping against her parched skin, reawakening every memory of every youthful adventure with such a flood of overwhelming intensity that the strength of the wind and the salt and the biting northern air that she once drank now makes her ache. Her arthritic timbers swell and throb as they move through the rough ocean. The towline grows taut, too taut, as she struggles to keep pace with the smaller boat. Did she welcome the final gale that snapped it, I wonder, that final shove that plunged her mast deep into her hull, into her heart, releasing nearly a century's worth of man's insatiable hope from her shattered bones and back into the sea from which he crawled?

She didn't take anyone down with her. The two sailors who were with her when it happened shivered and gaped from the rails of the tugboat that rescued them as she slipped further into the black water. Slowly. Silently. As if she were never there.

They didn't cry. She said, I'm sorry.

They said, I'm sorry. They said, We love you very much. They went home and drank heartily from bottles of whiskey and kissed the first girls they saw and slept until it felt like a dream of a dream.

And she remembers it all.



SCRAP METAL COLLECTOR AT ENCINATAS BEACH

TOBI COGSWELL

...Perhaps a dentist
would have looked at his smile
and seen dollar signs, but I just
saw happy.

Teeth wrapped in silver,
faded as the rusted color of his truck
but mouthed wide in song
to the Mexican radio, serenading
all of us at the red light.

His elbow bounced on the missing car window
while his fingers tapped on the steering wheel,
wrapped with leather from when he was
in high school in the '70s, when it was cool
and also cooler, the sun tearing hands
and plastic without remorse
in bare-as-famine Bakersfield.

Trains and tankers shared a landscape
barren of green, where even sunglasses
could not cut the wretched glare
or give him anonymity to watch the legs
of schoolgirls heading to the A&W
in skirts so sheer he had to look up the word
to believe it.

But now, by the beach, he is happy.
Running his route, his wide-brimmed

hat a little shelter for his wind-burned
vivid face, he comes home to his wife,
a pot of beans on the stove
and a beer just waiting to say
that blessings need no perfect weather,
and everyone deserves a little
serenade now and then, to hammer
a castoff world into precious grace.

Miles Lewis | Beach Gate



DRIVING HOME

CODY DEITZ

Driving home at dusk with night pouring into the valley,
slinking across the desert like a black cat,
I wonder if my Mom still considers missing
her right turn home and taking Avenue K all the way to the horizon,
its ruler-straight highway shooting into
the mountains and all their unknown.
I wonder if she ever did miss her turn, lost in the fantasy
and the melody of some country song on the radio,
only to turn right on the next street
and backtrack home, guilt sinking
into her like tea steeping, thinking
about the roast in the crock pot and her kids waiting
for it to appear on their plates, steaming and spiced.
It's been sitting all day in its own juices
with nowhere to go, waiting to be pulled out
and sliced up and stacked
beside green beans and potatoes and eaten in silence
because it's family time and everyone is thinking
about their own horizon gold and the road
you just had to keep driving to get there.

HOW UNCLE ALPHONSE RULES HIS WORLD SOUTH OF 8-MILE

JEFFREY ALFIER

Heaven for my uncle was the hemi on a '65
Barracuda Fastback, its paint job a clamorous
shade of red, speed a tumbling fire dance
of fuel and air, mordant roar and smoke,
the white glow of a gauge cluster all the truth
a man like him ever needed to churn
life through the summer scorch of asphalt
and concrete, long gray warp of humid
days, small mercies tasting good, sweat
or steam glazing everything that moved.

Scrap metal worker by day, that Barracuda
was penance for crushing car bodies to make
a living. His scripture was a musty mound
of *Road & Track* mags he was supplicant to,
sitting with them on crumbling front steps,
his head canted easy-like, as if reading
the simpler wants of a younger sibling,
or the pained charm of illiterate love letters
he'd get each week from an older married
woman who lived south of Tiger Stadium.

My aunt was a simple woman who cooked
his meals in a dented skillet. Diner waitress,
she heard men speak all day of bodies, drive
trains and gear boxes expiring into myth, drifts
of them withered to footnotes in scrap heaps,
forever out-lavished by the new, this patient
wife who waited at home for my uncle's return
from late shifts, her form backlit on the front
steps, hearing the Barracuda rumble up the street,
her shadow silent in the second-hand light.

KILLING THE KYLECLARE

NATALIE REID

...A broken lantern... shattered wood embedded in the sand... a bottle with a mermaid etched in the glass and bobbing in the waves... the remains of the Kyleclare slumped against the rocky shoreline...

I didn't know why the ship made such a racket of wailing and moaning. It was like it had never been sunk before. Why did it care so much? Yeah, it had told me of its life, of how it was born in a little dock in Southern Ireland to my father—a man with rough hands who had even lost one in the process of its birth. It told me that it felt the hand between two of its planks on its port side, squeezing and pulling at the fibers of its wood to guide it when the toughest weather struck. When the next big wave could send it crashing to the sea floor and into the grip of the giant squid that would wrap its arms around it so tight that it would turn into sand and melt into the waves. Its days in the Northern waters of Ireland didn't interest me, and its story about how it fell in love with a frigate twice its size made me gag at its sentimentality. I didn't know why Declan thought it was so great. Kyleclare was a whinny little ship that didn't know when to stop complaining.

A piece of its mast stuck out between two rocks on the beach, and I lifted it out and stabbed at the sand. Years ago raiders stormed these beaches, punching down their muskets in the sand just this way. They probably looked like angry crabs marching up the beach, digging their arms and legs in and making peg holes for their one-legged captains to trip on. I laughed. Kyleclare had never been involved in any battles. He wouldn't have known what it looked like. I glanced over at it. Its sagged sails flapped at me.

"This is how it was done," I explained, stabbing its mast into the ground again, making sure it could see. I felt it pull in my hands, going through the motions by itself while it was still alive. Or maybe that was just my father's hand rattling inside. It could have broken loose from its home and migrated into the topsails.

The sun peeked out from the clouds and warmed my face. It gave the Kyleclare some warmth as well, and I thought it was ironic that the weather was trying to make peace with it.

“Don’t forgive it so easily,” I warned the ship. “It’s the one that did this to you.”

The storm hadn’t surrendered any rain, but the clouds pulled at the waves with baker’s hands as if trying to knead a lump of dough. The power had been so great that the lanterns smashed across the deck, cracking like eggs. The storm was smart to knock out our lights so we couldn’t see the rocks ahead. Kyleclare really shouldn’t have been in that storm. Declan knew better. He shouldn’t have let me take it out. If he really thought about it, it was his fault. He had the fisherman’s brain. When he said no, he should have followed up on it. He should have kept me from sneaking inside and sailing off with it. If he really cared... he would have.

I raised the mast in the air like a sword and pointed it towards the wailing wreck. “He wanted this!” I told it. I squinted in its eyes, those shells of broken glass. I knew it didn’t want to believe me. It thought of Declan as its friend. He had sewn its ripped masts, knotted its ropes, scrubbed at its water-logged chest with suds and more water, rubbing and rubbing at invisible creatures that it swore plagued its skin. Declan was a fool for believing his father’s ship. I knew the truth. It made up all those things just to steal away his time. If it hadn’t crashed, it probably would have made up another story, or maybe it would go back to its old favorite about the squid in the water that wanted to rob it of life.

Kyleclare loved to tell Declan about this squid. At nights, in the open sea, he would rest his head against the side of the boat so that he could hear it whisper to him. The squid loved to eat ships, though it couldn’t say why. But the squid wasn’t always a squid because monsters did not make good lures. The squid would turn into a mermaid and this beautiful girl would cast a net over the hearts of good fishermen like him and guide them to the deepest parts of the ocean where the waves were high enough to throw the man’s ship into its lair. I tried to tell Declan that this wasn’t true. When the girl with the thick blonde hair looked at us in the Port of Cork and gestured to her father’s pub with her eyes as if to say if you marry me all this plus three kids and a small house will one day be yours,

all Declan could think of was the mermaid and the squid.

That night he etched a mermaid onto an empty bottle of whiskey. The Kyleclare thought he was drawing a picture like a warning, but I knew what it had done to him. The mermaid wasn't a squid, she was a girl in Cork, making lamb sandwiches and serving warm beer with a green sweater and a smile that said, "Our pub's stew is always hot and meaty." A girl like that wouldn't complain as much as a ship. A girl like that would rub *your* chest with suds and water and not have to be told stories of invisible bugs.

Kyleclare moaned louder, and another of its masts snapped in half and came crashing down. It was the highest mast—the one that our father had etched his name on using his only good hand. He was about as sentimental as the ship he gave birth to. Declan's first day out on the ship, he had told him to climb up to the top and carve his name in the wood as well. It was a stupid gesture and twice as dangerous for a nine year old boy to attempt. But dad never could look past that ship. Maybe if I killed the Kyleclare sooner, it wouldn't have killed him with all its crazy notions of giant fish and scores of make-believe salmon that had somehow found their way to the deep corners of our ocean. It had already taken my father's hand. I should have known it would take his life. Declan should have known. Why was it that I had to figure everything out for him? I had to save his life when he didn't even know what it was that was killing him.

I yelled and charged forward on the beach. Even in death, Kyleclare made a point to drag things out and make them hard for me. I gripped the mast harder. The skeleton of my father's hand bounced inside of it, rolling around like weathered stones growing smoother and smaller with each collision. My sword was aimed at its heart. I would make sure that it didn't try to come back to life after this. I would finish the job that I was created to do.

"Declan!" a voice shouted, grabbing me tight around my shoulders like the tentacle arms of an invisible force. "What are you doing? It's lost. You have to let it go!"

I broke away and looked back at my uncle. How could he have thought I was trying to save that monster?!

The Kyleclare gave a last howl over the sea-side, its last complaint to

the world, and sunk further down into the ocean.

“Did you see? I killed it!” I shouted at the sky. “Declan, I killed it!”



GHOST OF THE PULSE

GEORGE FEKARIS

black of a math
prior to sense
deep, down, and gone

in human gut
and torso,
in human brain
and breath worn flight

out from death,
counting by nil
nihilate sums,

ghost of the pulse,

silhouette of
sun, cast 'fore space,
arcane glow, how
do I appear?

THE GHOST

NIC ALEA

when i see the man,
i mean, when i see the tree,
when i see the tree growing backwards
from the silt of the earth,
its own roots betraying the meat of it,

when i see the man,
i am sure of it,
i am sure it is him,
the park is dark,
he and his neck twisted,
the branch buckled and the air
howling through him,

when i see the tree,
i mean, when i see the man,
the road is quiet,
the road is emptying its silence,
something inside me beating to get out,
i do not think to run to him,
i do not think to leave my bike
in the middle of the road
and run to catch the man swaying in the breeze,
i do not think about what the bruises will look like on his neck,
how the morning light will show us what a rope can do to a man,
how a body can only discolor for so long before it begins to rot,

i am not sure anyone else can see him,
because when i look back down the road
the tree is empty handed, the rope disintegrated into wood,
the fabric of his clothes lost into the stillness of street light,

i have seen many things in the dark,
but the road has offered up something static,
something that hangs like cloth from a power line,
how the danger is in the snapping,
in receiving a deep bruise from the pit of gravity,
the place where we are hooked into the earth,
where the roots quarrel in low hums.

QUAKING FOREST

GLENN COLLINS

In a garden of soot watered with milk, I grow the bones of my father. He was laid to rest before his time, and so virility pounds in his mixture of mud and nerve-root and his skeletal tendrils begin to rise.

Tireless flies flick their tongues and test the routine flesh, waiting to pluck what is suitably dead. Sleeping in the guts, a chorus of maggots breathes hallow air out of empty thoughts, a song that cannot be sung in solitude. Whether feeding on flesh or fixing a frightened beast in chains, power over life is a will to survive, and so the white bones sprout black stems, and my skeletal-father grows, and I grow.

* * *

The tired fox was zealously consumed by dark and ravenous wolves. There was no time for justification, killing required precision, and no questions were asked. My daughter Emily arranged the funeral. We spread the ashes of the poor fox-bones unburied along the shore: a gesture of peace. The moon-dogs howled and the waves accepted our offer.

Hours beat against the calm shore as a mild flower bloomed on the horizon, pretending to be something brilliant with less yellow and less black, exposing the nature of light.

Emily builds a fire out of rocks because she does not yet know how to properly strike a match. The world begins to burn. In the warmth, she falls asleep and wakes up in a forest of blue aspen. The fire burns steady. She flips through a book about sun-tigers and hopes that I will allow them as pets. She misses the fox and she hates the wolves but she is fascinated by orange strips or anything shared with the sun. Emily is usually on her own because I am always watching the garden, but she does love me, and the garden, and she is happy to sit and read about sun-tigers. She has also read about spiders and the sun and bones and now, of course, fire. Emily danced with the pages.

* * *

I buried my mother in a garden of palm. The same tears that spilled from my pores welled inside my father's eyes. He knew that sunlight would never again touch the milk of her bones, and that is why he is so determined to grow. I buried my father in a garden of milk and soot.

* * *

Emily danced in the fire, spinning between the blue and the red. The once fierce wolves now blackened by the coal of venality, servants to the wonders of medical science and the guilt of getting away with murder, they howl their approval at the emberous tree-sap, while the ocean reflects with a newfound affinity for action, rising and falling with the wind, pulling up the earth and ripping out the sky.

* * *

Some watch from the vacuum of space—at least one moon and at least one sun. The sun asks the moon, can you see the mist as it rises like smoke and calmly drifts along the shore? Water begs to be free.

But now the world is on fire, and the marbled surface becomes familiar in the blaze, and the moon and the sun spin, as Emily is spinning.

* * *

Before dancing, the sun-tiger always takes off its shoes. That is their way. Most people are unaware that sun-tigers wear shoes, but they are extremely cunning and elusive animals and if they don't want you to know something, you won't. Emily tried to explain this to me—like dogs and spiders, sun-tigers dig up bones, and they leave no tracks. But I said listen to me Emily, there are no tigers in this part of the story. I knew she meant well, but this was not her story, not yet.

Emily always listened when I told the story because she always learned something new about the bones.

* * *

Water twice a day. Once in the evening when the sky is dark purple but not yet black. Once in the afternoon at the same time that you wouldn't water your grass.

* * *

I tell Emily to picture the face of an alien and then to imagine one who has no face at all, but he is slender and beautiful, rhizomatic in form, unassuming in philosophy. I paint her the picture of my garden. I tell her to listen to my father chewing worms and spitting clods of dirt. He will not grow where we guide him. No, the forest calls to him.

Emily can hear his voice in the resonance along my neck, and when I speak, she hears that forest of bones and white rock grinding together, and we bind the old man in string and wait for him to grow teeth.

* * *

And so the garden grows, outrunning the wind, but not Emily, and not me.

I watch a new generation of brown fox and gray wolves howling at the moon and through the smoke and clouds, through the red fire and pale aspen I see ashes spilling into the notches of my father's spine. I watch as his coral limbs tunnel through rock and root, waiting to break the surface and form a new forest, a forest of quaking white bone. Sharp and smooth edges. Fingers and femurs. Needle and nails.

* * *

The silent watchers stand in awe and horror as the bones and the fire devour the earth. One moon and one sun watching us live within glass. They have no sense of envy or ill will. They do not want to know the pleasures of breathing in noxious vapors. They only wish to spin as Emily is spinning.

It is said by some that those who cannot feel ask the most pertinent questions. When the sun told the story, the moon wanted to know, why does the water no longer fear? Why do the bones take root? How does the milk and soot mix to make that cool liquid of life?

But some questions have no answers, and some answers are unknown, even by the sun.

* * *

In a forest of milk and soot and blood, grow the heavy bones of my father. Emily plays alongside his grave and waters the roots with fire.



FOR THE RESISTANCE OF MY SKIN AS IT ALL FALLS AWAY

GLENN COLLINS

There was a butterfly with bandaid wings sleeping on a dry stem
he wanted to believe in vaporous flight and the elegance of detachment
there were feathers growing out of his legs

The wind forced him to notice human toes
the honey pointers that would remain
after life stole away

He tore from flesh one lash of hair
like a pencil
and held it
with impossible digits

Then wrote in a language without body

Lordly currents	lost planktons	Blackness
Flee the watchers	thick inflight	avian shrew
grinning diamond rat on wing		

This dialogue hollowed in dust
fade
and the day began to

There was a butterfly with bandaid wings lost in life as he was in sleep
he could only believe in direction and the apprehension of physicality
there was time growing out from his antennae

I TOLD SHOES TO THE ROADS

MAYA BORNSTEIN

I told shoes to the roads, and bare
feet sometimes on temperate days.

I told water to feet to erase the grime
of movement, rough and dark on thickening soles.

I told movement to the earth, who didn't notice,
lost in the spirals of its own vast propulsion.

I told loss to proximal faces, but it too went unseen;
they have fruit and fallow soil of their own to till.

I told owning to the creatures who travel light,
but they turn eyes blankly on our human things.

I turned blank into solid and grasped with both hands
because these are my things on this alien earth.

I told hands to the world in fits of blindness
when dark edges of sight drew their curtains in.

I turned blank into earth and set bare feet to it,
to tell distance to loss, to find something to own.

Natalie Mouradian | Untitled



THE ONE-HANDED CLOCK

MELANIE GRAFIL

In the tender ovum of Mister Knudsen's clock shop, a baby was born. Mister Knudsen himself had been witness, though he stood at a distance behind the mother, gazing only at the back of her head and her wild hair slick with her own grease. Mister Knudsen's apprentice was a young girl, who went by the name of Yogi, and she was the one kneeling between the mother's legs and coaxing the baby to come forth. Mister Knudsen only gave instructions, which he was reading from an encyclopedia.

You see, the doctor had gone to golf on that particular day and the village midwife was indisposed (she had refused, stating a case of a head cold), so the fourteen-year-old girl who studied clocks and their mechanisms delivered the baby.

It was such a sudden occurrence, really, because Mister Knudsen had been, for more than one hour, trying to sell her the clock his grandfather's grandfather had crafted using dark cherry wood and a single wrought iron hand, with time marked by notches etched between the numbers to divide time by quarters. Quarter past one. Half past two. The mother, delighted by this, reached for the hand and he pulled the clock away from her. One must not ever touch the hand of a single clock, he said, and when he turned to answer a question Yogi had posed while she herself was preparing a handheld clock for the town's watch, the mother collapsed and the clock with one hand fell with her.

The mother knew she was pregnant. Every day she had a strong desire to buy something new. She was prayerful and she prayed like any other young woman who prayed for those they love. She prayed until she became pregnant with the son of her prayers.

It so happened on that particular day, in Mister Knudsen's clock shop, with the doctor gone, and the midwife ill, this mother birthed a son into the arms of Yogi, who instantly fell in love with his chubby feet and pouty smile. Yogi was reluctant to give the baby to his mother, since she had fallen asleep on the floor in the puddle of birth fluid and sweat.

Mister Knudsen closed the shop for the rest of the day and lifted the mother to his office where he allowed her to sleep on a small couch. He

asked Yogi to keep watch over the mother. Yogi brought the boy to her one-room flat, on the floor above the shop. She formed a crib from terry cloth towels that she tossed over the furnace for a few minutes to warm. She sang to him a lullaby taken from clouds of melodies floating above her head.

The next day the mother came to. She followed the stairs which led to Yogi's room and saw the baby asleep in his towel crib. Yogi stood naked in a tin trough filled with boiled water and soap, washing herself. The mother went to her and poked her stomach, a pinprick of fire from the finger. Her stomach gave way to the touch and the mother, reddened by an impulse to place herself in the moment, wanted to know about the first hours in the life of her child.

Yogi, dripping and soapy, said he was perfect. She explained about the crib of towels and feeding morsels of bread crumbs she had hoped his newborn mouth would take. She hadn't much in the pantry, since the boy who delivered groceries had gone to caddy for the doctor.

The mother, still standing there and gaping at Yogi, asked about the one-handed clock. Yogi, who was still standing in the trough, continued pouring hot water over herself as she spoke, to stop goose bumps from rising.

One must never touch the hand of a one-handed clock—so many effects, innumerable, Yogi said. She twisted her hair to let the water drip into the trough. Then she pointed at the baby boy, who was now folding the towels of his crib into fours.



DROWN

GLENN COLLINS

No hair, fingers webbed, plastic eyes reflected nothing.
It was curious to watch—the little cylinder overflowed,
all that thrashing and kicking, but no screaming.
Baby in a bottle, baby alone

in a tube of static-glass. What is so grim about
making bodies? They are all liquid transfiguration
silver fluids and red syrup, no sinew, no bone.
Blood that flows freely through skin

and vein. I thought water and dust were all it took
to harvest life. My sacrifice was not time, flesh is temporary,
and value is only one idea of the freedom of decay.

I trust in observation, believe in refraction, worship air
waves of violet light, the bending between intervals
of love and agony; I have seen that something golden
will turn gray and timeworn, and always fade—

Replaced by enigmatic bone child, baby stands upright
wielding a fist, pounding at his bottle walls, pleading for scales
and bits of anything but milk—little lovely has vanished.
The cylinder sits in a garden growing mold and blonde roses.



RABBITS

KARLEE JOHNSON

There is something about an old man, or maybe just a man, searching for his watch in the woods. He is in the woods where he walks every day and feeds the rabbits. He speaks very little, not even to himself. His companion has been dead for a number of years and her name was Gloria and his family never met her but he was quite happy with his life with her which consisted of the following things:

1. drinking maté in their backyard
2. drinking wine on their front porch
3. drinking coffee in the bed that they shared mostly in the sense that they each went to bed there at night and woke up there again in the morning

They loved each other, but what they really loved was not having to talk to one another. They also loved walking in the woods behind their home which they shared for thirty years or more and did not raise any children but once had a dog.

That is where the man lost his watch, his pocket watch, which he got from his wife because second to his love for her was his love for specificity. He required that most things in his life be clearly defined for him, the following in particular:

1. sheet music
2. the periodic table of elements
3. the types of trees that grew behind his house
4. time

The pocket watch that he is looking for has an engraving on the inside of it in very small writing that says, 'To you.' This was what Gloria had asked the engravers to etch into the pocket watch before she gave it to the man as a gift for an anniversary of a birth or a love. He was very grateful for the pocket watch because at the time he received it he had recently come to the decision that he had reached a point in his life where he was distinguished and sage enough for one. It was not long after he had thought this to himself that Gloria gave him the watch on one of their walks through the woods which was made special already by the blush wine in their stomachs and the celebratory hand holding which

made each of them a little giddy particularly when they came to the frequent dilemma of a forking tree in their path.

The man is moving a large stick back and forth over the leaves and dirt and sticks on the ground on the way to his usual spot in the woods where he sits and reads and feeds rabbits. He sits and reads and feeds rabbits under the same quebracho tree nearly every day unless it is raining and he can tell it is the same tree because it looks different from all the other trees though he is not entirely sure why but he thinks it is because this tree seems friendlier. He sees the spot where he feeds the rabbits which he always feels guilty about doing for the following reasons:

1. he does not feel it is his place to interfere with a natural order of things which he will never understand
2. he interferes with a natural order of things which he will never understand anyway because he likes being a part of things because he is lonely

There is no sign of his watch but there is a sign of a rabbit that in his mind he has named Buddy even though he has never spoken it aloud and he surely never will because that is not the rabbit's name because rabbits do not have names at least not any that he would be able to understand because he does not speak rabbit and even if he did he would hardly find Buddy to be a suitable given name for anyone. He sits down under the friendly quebracho and looks at Buddy. As he sits down these thoughts enter his head and he numbers them as such:

1. why did Gloria die so long before he did?
2. should he take this stick home with him to keep as a cane?
3. making love to Gloria was a remarkable experience that he was glad he never did very often
4. he will take this stick home to keep as a cane because it will look nice and will compliment his ensemble once he finds his pocket watch
5. he enjoyed the conversations he had with Gloria when they would speak
6. the stick does not belong to him but to the woods and it is probably best to keep it here where it belongs



PROMETHEUS

GINA SRMABEKIAN

-after Louise Glück

Fennel is a laxative;
(as if to further
degrade), used to improve
sex, bowel movements, lactation,
(though not recommended,
as an anesthetic).

I stick a fennel patch
to the soft side of my arm;
any softness left in me is a physical flaw,
not of *my character*.

I am a porous, spongy poultice;
the skin, lax in snapping
back, makes small hollows
to drink from when I
press it down.

Once, I used fennel
to bring back
what was lost; gods
hid it from me in caves;
my humans, I gave our sun
to bring you back.

Didn't I carve you from clay?
Earthbound by proxy, a thing that crumbles
when left out. Too long
I suffered for my thievery.

Don't I know the muddled
countenance of this body?
I should have made you stone;

an eternity nailed to it
has taught me to appreciate
the inanimate; the intimacy
of feeling nothing
with gods.

No matter.
I am not here to serve you
any longer; you are your own
gods now.

II

Imagine my surprise when I awoke in this body:
a sublime reprieve,
the healing stigmata, the eagle
harvesting my organs, its beak
a nightmare lost
on historians and children.

And a woman, at that.
Should have been my first
warning (haven't I been taught
about being life's blood?
Haven't I been taught
how it frightens
even thunder?)

As the story stands, I stole
fire and for that Pandora
undid the lid of the jar
inside me, then out of
the milk of her breasts
unleashed the miraculous
beginning of the end.
Mortality

must have been a relief
from the boulder and chains,

the eager pecking,
pulling my long life out.

I do not remember the place between
rock and womb; I will tell you
what no one knows; it was not for fire
that Zeus punished me but for loving too much—
itself a punishment from love.

Now,
I am awakened to the true
nature of my punishment; I chained myself
to my own invention; by my own
invention I was chained.

III

These are the stories you have invented
about the body of my lover, Pandora.
A perfect thing for you
to decimate

in your scriptures,
an apple and a snake.
In your fairytales,
a curious porcelain
doll, adjustable arms.
Blueprints to bring
destruction.

She stole away
the knowledge of loss
from the spider's web,
she wove the ferns
around the stars and drowned
them dead,
So you could know
the beauty of them
when they burn.

The miraculous is every
where it pains to look.

For that, my love
was reduced to clay.
In a kiln made of her father's
rage, he formed her body
to my own.

Don't I know
the countenance of this body
that even in dreams
I cry out the name
of a lover closed
inside me, a jar
that never opens
no matter how I turn.

If I am your father, she,
too, was your mother.
I am no more than the hand crafting.
The blueprints were perfect.
I love my faults, too well.

IV

Now,
I drown my apologia;
In an oven, my lover
and I, out of a womb,
sprang hopeless;
In my face I see
none of her curiosity.

More so, my eyes resemble
your seriffed irises
before we lit the
curves of the universe
for you to see

what was burning
before us?

I don't need to know anymore.
It is winter in the country
of my providence. I warm
myself on amber
in glasses. I am slurring
the lips where
words are suffered.

I am not
the first woman to turn
blind eyes
to her own womb.

These were just stories you invented
about my body.
A thing more broken
by parable than worshipped;
but I am a living

conduit for my lover
escaping me in shudders
at every grasp of another
man's hand, says

It was mine, rightfully,
says, It was mine, rightfully.
And who are you that should be spared
when I am damned?
What have you done
with my fire? My children

were hungry, insatiable,
inspired by a spark
to become so grand.

I must have been relieved.

But what comes after the iron
age? Am I still here? Am I
still a god

unaccustomed
to bouts of shame; but I say
if fire
was not meant to burn my heart
let it then
burn my liver.

FOR MATTHEW AND MATTHEW

ANNA AUSTIN

When I come to bed, you are already
asleep. You are asleep with your feet
on the pillow. You are asleep with your
head at the foot of the bed where I kiss
your eyebrows twice and your mouth once.

“I don’t know how to tell you this,
but someone with the same name as you
died on TV tonight.”

Sleeping upside down on the bed
sleeping upside down like a swan
diver, like a vampire bat. Sleeping upside
down, you are a baby
about to be born, and I shimmy

up to your legs. I press my lips
into your heels. I wrap my arms
around your shins and slip my legs
through the loops of your elbows,

and you take my foot in your hand.
You kiss my toes and paint them
blue and press them into the fur of your
chest and say, “I’m sure he would want you
to be happy.”



