

**“The fire station wasn’t far from my house and I had gone there after hearing the siren to see what was going on. With the initial word that some of my friends had been in a terrible accident, and two of them were gone, I stayed until the word came through who had died. I couldn’t sleep much that night.**

**The stark message from the cosmos was that no matter how small and powerful we thought we were – we teenagers were not invincible.”**

*Ed Evans, from **What My Father Knew***

# Breaking Ground 2017 BOUNDARIES

Sharon Slilaty | *Where Water Becomes Ice*



This edition of *Breaking Ground* is the collaboration of  
the Spring 2017 English 175 Class

Professor Christopher Origer  
Paul Archer  
Abigail Clain  
Haley Marie Lipps  
Miranda Moses  
Alex Plesnar  
Careline Ramirez  
Jasmine Thorson

As well as the many bright minds of the artists and writers represented within

BREAKING GROUND 2017

# BOUNDARIES

SUNY BROOME COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
LITERARY MAGAZINE

BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

Please direct all correspondence to:

Professor Christopher Origer, Editor  
*Breaking Ground*  
Department of English  
SUNY Broome Community College  
P.O. Box 1017  
Binghamton, NY 13902  
email: [origerac@sunybroome.edu](mailto:origerac@sunybroome.edu)

Copyright © 2017 SUNY Broome Literary Magazine *Breaking Ground*  
Printed by Bob Carr 2.0 Printing, Binghamton, New York

All rights to the works contained here are retained by the individual writers and artists represented in this issue of *Breaking Ground*. No part may be reproduced without their consent.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Extreme gratitude goes out to Rose Pero and Amanda Truin as assistant editors for all the late nights and numerous hours it took to get this edition of the magazine to completion; also to Josh Lewis for his sharp eyes in proofreading during the spring break; to Michael Bodnar, once again, for his helpful technical assistance; to Abigail Clain and Patrick Mulderig for final work on the cover; to Sandra Cohn and Maureen Schwarz for the technical wizardry in the final hours of production; and to Ciara Cable for sound InDesign advice before going to press. Thanks also to all the wonderful students of the Spring 2017 ENG175 class, who pitched in with enthusiasm in the several weeks of readings it took to sift through the numerous submissions.

# TRANSFORMATION

≈ CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS ≈

## *Breaking Ground 2018*

Send us your best original poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, memoirs, artwork, photography, or graphic stories for our annual theme issue. As with past issues the only criteria are vividness, vitality, depth of thought and expression and, above all, excellence. Open to all SUNY Broome students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The theme of the 2018 issue is transformation in all its permutations, which might include transcendence, migration, metamorphosis, and transmigration.

READING AND SUBMISSION PERIOD:

September 1, 2017 to March 1, 2018

For submission guidelines, and to submit your creative work during the submission period, go to [www2.sunybroome.edu/english/breakingground/](http://www2.sunybroome.edu/english/breakingground/)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Alla Boldina – <i>Fragmentation, or Breaking Through</i> (painting) .....	Cover
Sharon Slilaty – <i>Where Water Becomes Ice</i> (photograph) .....	Inside Front Cover
<i>Introduction: Breaking Boundaries</i> .....	ix
Alla Boldina – <i>Stretching the Limits</i> (painting) .....	xii
Haley Marie Lipps – <i>Let Me Have This Dust</i> (fiction) .....	1
Susan Stracquadanio – <i>Teacher</i> (poem) .....	6
Madelyn Chianis – <i>Lesson</i> (photograph) .....	7
Shelli Cordisco – <i>Crack'd Houses</i> (non-fiction) .....	8
Masha Morozov – <i>Open Boundaries</i> (photograph) .....	10
Amanda Truin – <i>Illumination in the Midwest</i> (non-fiction) .....	11
Miranda Moses – <i>Me</i> (poem) .....	14
Sarah Russell – <i>Forever Memories</i> (non-fiction) .....	15
Amanda Truin – <i>Galactic Santa Monica</i> (non-fiction) .....	16
Quishanah Pieternella – <i>Leading to Serenity</i> (photograph) .....	17
Rob Woods – <i>Vanilla Ice Cream</i> (fiction) .....	18
Richard Connolly – <i>Lunette</i> (poem) .....	28
Paul Archer – <i>Genki</i> (poem) .....	29
Alex Plesnar – <i>Good Morning and Welcome to Camp Pembroke</i> (fiction) .....	30
Sushma Madduri – <i>Graceful Fall</i> (photograph) .....	36
Sushma Madduri – <i>Graceful Fall</i> (poem) .....	36
Amber Gance – <i>Soul Tree</i> (fiction) .....	37
Miranda Buckland – <i>Green Tie Event</i> (photograph) .....	37
Haley Marie Lipps – <i>Traveling Through</i> (poem) .....	38
Abigail Clain – <i>Shine on in the End</i> (poem) .....	39
Josh Lewis – <i>Whimsy</i> (poem) .....	40
Jasmine Thorson – <i>Dying Flame</i> (poem) .....	41
Celena McDonnell – <i>Only Words</i> (non-fiction) .....	42
Jason Detrani – <i>The Window</i> (photograph) .....	45
Miranda Moses – <i>Her Story</i> (fiction) .....	46
Alla Boldina – <i>Time Out of Mind</i> (photograph) .....	50
Richard Connolly – <i>Live Better</i> (fiction) .....	51
Amber Gance – <i>Her</i> (fiction) .....	62
Madelyn Chianis – <i>2 for 5</i> (photograph) .....	62

Careline Ramirez – <i>Angie (poem)</i> .....	63
Raphael Tombasco – <i>The Social Party (fiction)</i> .....	68
Miranda Moses – <i>A Little Girl (non-fiction)</i> .....	76
Jessica Marie Hranek – <i>Melodious (poem)</i> .....	77
Amanda Truin – <i>Between These Screens (prose poem)</i> .....	78
Richard Schleider – <i>Word (poem)</i> .....	80
Margaret Winchell – <i>Asylum (photograph)</i> .....	81
Susan Stracquadanio – <i>Fortress (poem)</i> .....	82
Justin Howe – <i>My Unwelcome Home (non-fiction)</i> .....	84
Josh Lewis – <i>Emergent Chemistry (poem)</i> .....	87
Bunky Zelman – <i>Curtains (poem)</i> .....	88
Ed Evans – <i>What My Father Knew (non-fiction)</i> .....	89
Sarah Russell – <i>Slanted Boundaries (photograph)</i> .....	92
Charles Stone – <i>Barricades (poem)</i> .....	93
Bunky Zelman – <i>What I failed to Mend (poem)</i> .....	96
Liam Harrington – <i>T-9 Months (poem)</i> .....	97
Dawn Shefler – <i>The Paradox (fiction)</i> .....	98
I. J. Byrnes – <i>White Gold (fiction)</i> .....	102
Miranda Moses – <i>Someone to Love (poem)</i> .....	106
Breige Graven – <i>Yours, Mine, and Hours (non-fiction)</i> .....	107
Josh Lewis – <i>LMIRL (poem)</i> .....	108
Liam Harrington – <i>For You (poem)</i> .....	109
Careline Ramirez – <i>Best of Me (poem)</i> .....	110
Haley Marie Lipps – <i>If You Know the Words to Speak of Other Possibilities... (poem)</i> .....	112
Sarah Russell – <i>The Temple (poem)</i> .....	113
Josh Lewis – <i>I. (poem)</i> .....	114
Guy Frazier – <i>Exigencies (fiction)</i> .....	115
Gloria McCormick – <i>The Glory of the Snowflakes (poem)</i> .....	118
Amanda Truin – <i>In the Hollow of Remembrance (poem)</i> .....	119
Jessica Marie Hranek – <i>Minor Chord (poem)</i> .....	121
Ian Nobel – <i>Hatred (poem)</i> .....	122
Richard Schleider – <i>I Can't See the Forest for... (photograph)</i> .....	123
Virginia Shirley – <i>Little Spider (fiction)</i> .....	124
Careline Ramirez – <i>A Walk to Susquehanna (non-fiction)</i> .....	129
Sushma Madduri – <i>You (poem)</i> .....	130

Haley Marie Lipps – <i>Adagio</i> (poem) .....	131
Amanda Truin – <i>Never Again</i> (poem) .....	132
Bunky Zelman – <i>April 6th</i> (poem) .....	134
Guy Frazier – <i>Remote Control</i> (fiction) .....	136
Jessica Marie Hranek – <i>Doubtful</i> (poem) .....	141
Amber Gance – <i>Heart, Break.</i> (poem) .....	142
Miranda Buckland – <i>Charcoal Woman</i> (drawing).....	143
Lucy Loo Wales – <i>Ditch</i> (non-fiction) .....	144
Vasilios Dikeakos – <i>Shattering Earth</i> (photograph).....	145
Bunky Zelman – <i>Two-Way Mirror</i> (poem) .....	146
Amanda Truin – <i>Patchwork Being</i> (poem) .....	147
Amber Gance – <i>Burning, Breathless, Crazy.</i> (poem) .....	149
Alex Plesnar – <i>Motion</i> (poem) .....	151
Carolyn Amory – <i>The Trees in My Hedgerow</i> (poem) .....	152
Amanda Truin – <i>The Firebird Dances</i> (poem) .....	153
Paul Archer – <i>Pocketed Truths</i> (non-fiction) .....	155
Margaret Winchell – <i>Ribbed</i> (photograph).....	157
Miranda Moses – <i>Pain and Pride</i> (poem) .....	158
Haley Marie Lipps – <i>Windows and Mirrors</i> (prose poem) .....	159
Heather Coggin – <i>Summiting</i> (non-fiction) .....	160
Haley Marie Lipps – <i>Wound</i> (poem) .....	162
Madelyn Chianis – <i>Dad</i> (photograph) .....	163
Quishanah Pieterella – <i>Bridging Partitions</i> (photograph) .....	164
Amanda Truin – <i>Prisoner of Fashion</i> (photograph) .....	165
Glenn Modrak – <i>A Tale of Two Kitties</i> (fiction) .....	166
Amanda Truin – <i>Transcend</i> (photograph) .....	170
Notes on Contributors .....	171
Richard Schleider – <i>I Guess Sunflowers Will Have to Do</i> (photograph).....	Inside Back Cover



## BREAKING BOUNDARIES

In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Rebecca Solnit ponders this question: “Love, wisdom, grace, inspiration—how do you go about finding these things that are in some ways about extending the boundaries of the self into unknown territory, about becoming someone else?” It’s certainly an important question to consider, especially in these turbulent times. Bounded on all sides—intellectually, morally, and physically—do we adamantly remain islands unto ourselves, standing aloof as bystanders, or do we encourage our fathomless hearts to embrace not just all people, but all life on earth? The language we use shapes reality, but too often it ruthlessly splits the world in half, determining mine and yours, us and them, here and there; fences become walls and walls cells. Robert Frost reminds the wary that “Before I built a wall I’d ask to know/What I was walling in or walling out.” Sound advice. Before a wall is ever built the idea of difference must exist. Conversely, building bridges seems the opposite impulse of wall-building.

Let me tell you of such a wall, from a story passed down to me. Years before I am born and can see for myself, my mother and father see for me. They live in a large brick apartment complex that heats up like a bakery oven during summer. Their neighbors across the hall are an older couple. The man has cerebral palsy. His wife works for an accountant. One day the man is coming home from the bus stop along his usual route, over the uneven slabs of sidewalk that run for several miles down Military Road. While walking, he stumbles over a crack in the sidewalk and falls. He cannot get back up on his feet, and so he is forced to crawl home. Along the sidewalk he pulls himself, making slow progress the two blocks it takes to get to his own doorstep. Several people pass him as he crawls along, offering no help. Why don’t they? Do they assume he is an imbecile or some contemptible being drunk in the middle of this properly bright afternoon? Maybe they think: *such behavior*, and within sight of the church. In fact, this man later recalls that most go out of their way to avoid him, giving him plenty of room as he crawls, perhaps believing that getting too close might contaminate them. When he looks at them directly they look away; when he’s not looking at them he feels their disdainful glances, their irritation. On his own, the man finally reaches the building, which has no elevator. He starts up the back stairs to his apartment. When he reaches the first landing, he rests. My parents will not hear the entire story until hours later when they arrive home. I will not hear the story until I am an adolescent and attempting to negotiate the invisible boundaries of my own tenuous life. With difficulty, he

crawls up the last two flights of stairs, maybe two dozen steps in all, over the next twenty minutes—what might have taken other nimble legs a few careless bounds in less than a minute—and he rests again after he knocks on his own door, and he waits. He unrolls the evening newspaper lying by the door and reads in the dim light as he waits for his wife to return home from work.

Where is the wall, you might ask? I'll answer that indirectly with a passage from Antoine de Saint-Exupery: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

Like the parable of The Good Samaritan, my parents' story stays with me, for stories take on an energy all their own. Once read, they set certain attitudes and beliefs and actions in motion. Silent on the page, stories become perpetual motion machines, going far beyond the telling, transcending the boundaries of time.

Maybe their story stays with me because I'm aware that such incidents happen too often around us, within our peripheral vision, daring us to have the decency to acknowledge them, yet sometimes we cannot see through the hard edges of our own rash judgments. We become inured by their frequency. This is what we seem to work against every day, as writers and artists, these terribly superficial preconceived visions—ours and others'. We see those who walk around or walk away from what they cannot understand. We build walls to protect us from what we cannot see or understand, to protect us from what we only imagine, as if we have made decrees against compassion.



As teachers we say we want students to *think critically*. I am sometimes puzzled by that phrase, as I am by most phrases that come preassembled with no operating instructions and a limited one-year warranty. I suppose we mean by this the habit of thought that leads, patiently, gradually, to discernment; that doesn't gallop toward the flashiest conclusions; thinking that tries to consider most ideas, and struggles uphill for answers; thinking that does not split the world in half with each new issue; thinking that does not fear unanswerable questions; thinking that is wary of statements that masquerade as reason; thinking that frowns at glib answers as the cul-de-sac of inquiry; a thought that suddenly veers off the path of predictable parallel thinking. I suppose when one is not critically thinking, one is—what's a good term for its inverse?—engaged in *cubicle thinking*. Stay within the boundaries, don't cross lines, be sure to clean up after yourself, and turn out the lights when you're done.

It's no surprise that where education thrives, it crosses and sometimes erases boundaries. The idea of compartmentalizing knowledge into mutually exclusive domains—the English Department over here,

the Psychology Department over there, second floor, the Engineering Department last building on the left, and so on—may mislead some students into thinking that knowledge is fixed, that it is contained within a locked vault and that only teachers have the combination. But when we cross over, taking what is essential in one area and applying it in brand new ways to something else, we happily move against the notion of cubicle thinking. Call it innovation. Call it creative thinking if you like. These are what our goals should be: to encourage mindfulness through active learning and inquiry that erases or moves boundaries of the known and the fixed. To encourage the awakening of a slumbering mind. To empower.

Most of the writers and artists in this issue of *Breaking Ground* explore the idea of boundaries, weighing in on this year's theme in their creative work. In presenting these works to you, dear reader, we hope you, too, will consider the boundaries of the self, perhaps exploring your own unmapped territories within. ∞

— *Christopher Origer, April 2017*



Alla Boldina | *Stretching the Limits*

## Let Me Have This Dust

---

HALEY MARIE LIPPS

*Let me have this dust,  
these pale clouds dourly lingering, these words  
moving with ferocious accuracy  
like the blind child's fingers*

*-Adrienne Rich*

Perhaps it is inevitable, we become what we're nearest to—a high desert defined by its hunger. Rain would most likely not arrive until August. By June, the ground begins to crack. The dust begins to rise. Our cheeks and foreheads turn red like the cliffs. Our elbows form their own canyon walls and we lie still like lizards, not moving as long as the sun is pressed against our backs. Despite our houses, and our showers, these refrigerators, or our hairbrushes and razors, there's still the immense power left to the land, to turn what it touches into its own image. There are parts of me which have learned to move through time the way this place moves through time.

It is the wilderness of the night that has spoken to me most frequently and with the most ferocity, however gentle. The red dust settles, or quietly stirs, the sandstone ground cools and becomes a moon circling around the greater moon, casting our shadows throughout these nights. And the landscape seems to shrink, becomes something more touchable, something we can almost imagine and place ourselves amongst. The tourists return to their rooms, wash the dust out of their hair, and sleep. We make piles of juniper brush, of anything that will burn and everything—*everything*—is dry enough to burn, including our voices, burning and bouncing off these canyon walls. It is inevitable—this scent of dust and burning juniper.

“Here, Dad, I brought you a bouquet of roses,” she said.

She had picked me an absurd bouquet of cliffroses. Sparse and fragile, each of the flowers had five petals, hardly hanging onto the center. Nothing about them was lush or elaborate, made of pale white petals stacked on top of dry green leaves, a subtle beauty. Somehow, managing to grow out of rocks, out of dust.

“Rosaceae *Purshia mexicana*,” I said. “You know, if it's between these or those well-groomed hybrids, I'd choose these every time. Where'd ya find 'em?”

“Right off Route 128,” she said. “I couldn’t for the life of me remember their Latin name. I felt so ashamed of myself.”

“The name is hardly important—almost detrimental.”

“Yeah, yeah, but I like to know.”

The juniper sang and burned while the night turned towards dawn. The moon was lying low enough to hear its breathing. Kara was staring deep into the fire, picking dried leaves off the brush, crushing them between her fingers and the rich scent traveled through the night. The arches and plateaus stood like old matriarchs, with their heavy heads staring at the shadows their bodies made. I couldn’t tell where our humanness stopped and where they began.

“Have anything going on tomorrow, Kara?”

“It’s summer vacation, I don’t make plans.”

“How ‘bout we head down to the river. Maybe take some kayaks to Cataract Canyon?”

The river had many moods. Kayaking down the river could mean floating, hardly paddling, cooling off in the shadows of the canyon walls, eating grapes, sipping on juice, or it could mean fighting for our life, raging on into the rapids.

“I don’t know, Dad, which part of the canyon?”

“The part we don’t have to try too hard at.”

“I was hoping you’d say that—sounds perfect.”

Through the window, I could hear my wife talking on the phone. When she talked to her sister her voice sounded like bells. I didn’t listen to the words, all I could hear were bells, clamoring from some desirable distance. They were from the coast of Oregon. Her sister still lived there, a walk away from the Pacific. I had met Rebecca in Oregon. We lived there until we had Kara, and then we moved here, to Moab. She said her good-byes and hung up the phone.

“Why don’t you come join us by the fire?” I called through the window.

“On my way.”

She walked out like a person who has learned to move from water, her white silk dress floating like a wave just above her knees. She looked like the desert, as we all did. However, it was against her will—something closer to the process of desertification. Something more like a tragedy—a thick forest clearcut and eaten away at by wind and dust. She kept parts of the ocean that the desert couldn’t take from her—a sadness buried deep within her belly, rippling but never surfacing. Kara and I couldn’t hide those things. Our emotions were like

cliffroses among the dust. They presented themselves and we noticed them, however humble they appeared, however subtle.

Rebecca sat and wrapped her long arms around Kara. Kissed the top of her head and cheek. I could hear bells in Kara's voice as well, whenever she spoke to her mom.

"Dad and I are going to the river tomorrow. Wanna come?"

"We'll see."

"Oh, come on, Mom. We're just going to do the part, as Dad says, we don't have to try too hard at."

Rebecca paused for a moment, holding a sigh in her throat. "That sounds nice."

Bells filled Kara's voice. Rebecca's voice was filled with love and a mist of salt, rising from some unknowable part of her sadness. We sat silently, my silence filled with images of our happiness, like juniper trees in a vast landscape, approaching and picking the berries from their branches. Rebecca dancing in the kitchen. Rebecca hiking barefoot through the Needles district, an image of freedom I cannot shake. Rebecca laughing and laughing and laughing. Rebecca holding Kara. Kara covered in dirt.

"Welp, you guys are boring," Kara said, "I'm going to bed. What time are we leaving in the morning?"

"Let's leave around nine, before it gets too hot," I said.

"You better come with us, Mom."

Rebecca held onto her for longer than usual. Kara kept trying to pull away, but Rebecca just held on. The desert trains your vision. It becomes easy to see what is approaching. Easy to recognize the shape of coyotes far away on the horizon gnawing on bones, or distant storms brewing over the La Sal Mountains, not often reaching us. It isn't too often something sneaks up on you. There's something in the air that informs you when spring is truly exiting and when summer is arriving, or when autumn approaches early. I felt Rebecca exiting. I could feel her life slowly turning away from ours. I wanted to stop it, to hold it still, to stop this constant rotation away from each other. How fragile it all seemed. How easily the roots of the cliffrose could lose their grip, could tumble away forever. It would be many hours before the night would turn blue. Many more before the sun would rise over the eastern mountains. I watched Rebecca hold Kara. The image flickering in the firelight.

"Good night, I love you," she said to Kara.

Kara hugged me briefly and headed inside.

We sat silently for a moment, both dwelling in our love for Kara.

“How’s your sister doing?”

“I can’t stand how much I love that crazy woman. Now she wants to be a midwife. I can’t keep up. I’m worried about her. She wants too much. She wants everything. And all she’s truly done is served people their coffee. She’s smart, but completely unfocused. I know she doesn’t want to be working at the same diner forever and yet, there she is. I just wish she’d commit to something, you know?”

Rebecca spoke about her sister all the time. She was a good subject. If I listened closely, I could finally discover what she felt, the parts that haven’t surfaced in her. When Rebecca said her sister wanted everything it meant that she, herself, wanted everything. She did want everything and she wanted it simultaneously. Both she and her sister were stuck, staring at the endless possibilities, nearly paralyzed.

“She’ll figure it out,” I said. “You think she’s happy?”

“I don’t know if she can identify happiness. I think she’s lost, but maybe I’m wrong, maybe she’s happy in her uncertainty.”

“She’ll figure it out. She’s just figuring it out.”

“I wish I was closer to her. Not emotionally—I might go mad—but physically. I just miss being around her, I guess.”

“You’ll get to see her soon. We always head up to the Northwest in July.”

“You’re right. That’ll be good.”

The silence spun around us as the air continued to cool. The stars lay over us as they do, just out of reach. The fire continued crackling and at its center it burned a pale blue, the color of lichen or a good day. The moon had disappeared but its light clung to the earth, like dust. I didn’t know what to say to keep her with Kara and me. She just kept getting pulled away, kept facing a different direction.

“Did I show you this bouquet Kara brought me today? She was trying to be witty about it, but I just can’t help but admire them.”

“Are those even flowers?”

“They’re flowers all right. In fact, they’re roses.”

“I know. I was only kidding.”

“Think I’m too serious?”

“Of course not, you know I think you’re great. I’m just having a difficult time. Whenever a silence comes over me, I dunno—”

“What?”

“I want to become a midwife. I don’t know. I just don’t think I know how to live here, even after all of this time. I love it, I really do, but I don’t know how to love it. Everything is dry, so sharp and unforgiving. Everything is covered in dust, I’m covered in dust. I miss my sister, the ocean.”

“We’ve been happy here, Rebecca. Remember?”

“I am happy. I’m happy. I just need something else.”

She began to cry. Salt water falling down her face. Some unspeakable part moving through her like a tide. Nothing could sneak up on me, not here. I could see everything approaching on the horizon, the shadows as tall as these cliffs. I didn’t want her to go, but some things announce themselves in the smallest of ways.

“What do you need?”

She wiped the salt from her face, mixing with red dust, staring into the fire for an eternity.

“I guess I just need sleep. That’s all. Just some rest. I’m sorry. What time are we going kayaking in the morning?” ☞

## Teacher

---

S U S A N S T R A C Q U A D A N I O

It might have been called mind reading  
How she knew about the missed meals, or lack of sleep  
Maybe by looking into my eyes, the clothes that had seen better days  
Or perhaps she heard the inner rumblings of my hunger  
Then subs, pizza, apples, granola bars  
Brought in on a whim  
Carefully distributed and packed,  
Then offered to be taken home

Home wasn't too stable then  
And school was a spotty diversion  
Meant for other kids to take seriously, not for me  
But somehow, she knew I was barely holding on  
To that education lifeline  
Craving more than tools and hallway nods  
I needed a personal rocky trail guide  
And she was the teacher who took up the task.

When it seemed no one really saw me,  
Let alone any possible potential,  
She brought words into my world  
I never thought to speak—  
Belief and books,  
Unconditional love, compassion.

I was shown a world of possibilities  
Reading myself into faraway places  
People I couldn't have dreamed existed  
Opening my eyes  
To an inner kind of strength  
A will that could see past the barriers  
And hopelessness  
The looks of frustration and pity  
Past slamming doors and suspension warnings.

The time she spent, patient and persistent  
Couldn't have been easy  
My ruffled feathers  
Sometimes would sprout thorns  
But little by little, she led me out  
To a place beyond the pain.

Learning about unfamiliar paths  
Abilities and choices  
A lesson beginning with kindness  
An education all unto itself,  
Not seen anywhere else.

But years later,  
A gratitude runs deep  
For the one, long ago  
Whose reach was met with mine,  
Lighting a match,  
And handing me keys  
To chart a powerful new course.



Madelyn Chianis | *Lesson*

## Crack'd Houses

SHELLI CORDISCO

A girl with long, stringy hair and gray eyes was perched way too close to him on a crusty, sunken couch. A couple faceless guys were wedged in on his other side, but she didn't waste her time on them. Nor did she care about any of the other shadows coming in and out of the room. Most times, none of them ever registered in her memories at all. But him and the girl, she will always see the two of them just sitting there, unspeaking, with glazed expressions, staring out into nothingness.

And she knows there must have been voices, traffic sounds from the city street below, or maybe a dog barking. Yet she remembers only the deafening shards of white rage that filled her lungs and rose to a pitch of pounding silence at her eardrums. She spoke not one word herself. She simply grabbed his collar, yanking him to his feet with such force that his shirt ripped away as easily as if she had torn a single piece of paper in half. That his neck and chest were now exposed in such an intimately vulnerable way merely fueled the noiseless roaring in her head.

Some variation of the words, "Get out," managed to come screaming out of her mouth, and a glimmer of recognition flashed across his eyes as they (finally) connected with hers. She pulled him out of the room and down the never-ending staircase. Going down was easy because she had him with her now. Absurdly, she felt protected by his staggering footsteps behind her. The hands reaching out to touch her, the tongues clucking and cooing, and the rancid smells burning at her nostrils on the long way up (up, up, up) those stairs had disappeared. She had found what she'd come to find, and so she was safe now.

Outside in the unlit parking lot, her father-in-law stood waiting for her. He had declined going inside to help her look for him. He certainly couldn't go

inside a place like that! No. Not him. But she could. A mother of two young boys with a great big dog and a real job that paid the mortgage and... Ah, what did it matter? She had found him. They were outside now.

No worries (ha!) out in the open where the moon laughed down on her and a languid breeze struck her face in mock retribution. Her gaze was held by the meandering light show that blazed out from the cigarette's tip as it moved to and from her father-in-law's lips. She resisted the urge to swat at the incessant, gnat-like buzzing of words that spilled from his mouth between puffs. Why couldn't he just shut up? What had possessed her to think he'd be able to help anyway? He simply made things worse. Always.

She interrupted the old man to say she was going home now. Alone. He could drive his son's car (the one hidden so cleverly from everyone driving by except her). And he could take his son with him. She had found the son-of-a-bitch. That was enough for this night.

She knew that bleary-eyed exhaustion would be wide awake and ready to greet her at the front door. She'd have little time left to reclaim any sleep, but she needed to try. She needed a clear head to operate efficiently at tomorrow morning's board meeting.

Of course, that was after she got the boys off to school.

After she tried to make herself look presentable despite the dark smudges etched permanently beneath her eyes.

After she walked the dog. His dog.

After she folded up this latest version of her recurring nightmare and tucked it into a nice, neat little corner of her brain where it wouldn't blind her when she turned out the lights. ∞

*Photograph*



Masha Morozov | *Open Boundaries*

## Illumination in the Midwest

---

AMANDA TRUIN

So much for the MapQuest directions.” It was a wintry late November morning, and Emily and I had pulled over for a directions check and a leg stretch in an empty Burger King parking lot. We had both just watched a strong gust of wind sweep our printed directions to California off the dashboard and out the open door. At first we just stared after them as they twisted in the wind. Then we both started to laugh as they were carried farther and farther away and finally disappeared into a cluster of trees and over the next highway.

“I guess it’s time for the GPS that hasn’t been updated in years, and the paper folding maps.” I couldn’t believe that had just happened.

Emily grinned and started up the car, and we turned onto the highway, heading west.

After two long days of driving through hundreds of miles of unfamiliar territory, it hit me: this journey was happening for real. Both of the homes we had known most of our lives had long since disappeared in the rearview mirror. We had just spent the night in a fifty-dollar-a-night roach motel in Nebraska, and were putting our overnight bags back in the car. Standing there on that windswept morning, I realized I’d said goodbye to home and was going to live in a place for a year that I had never even visited. It wasn’t just an exciting thought; we were doing it. The only family and friends we had now were each other, because no one else would be around if we needed someone in a hurry. And already our adventures had been great.

Before we pulled into this motel, we had been driving through flatlands with no lights in the distance. I’d only found this place by skimming frantically through the AAA travel guides and calling any that were nearby. Emily still kids me about this moment, but in my tired state I wasn’t thinking too clearly: when I called the motel, I asked them if they served breakfast—as if we had any choice and our lofty decision was dependent on the answer. These two homeless and haggard, road-weary travelers needed a place to lay down their heads and what am I doing? I’m asking if they serve breakfast.

“I don’t care what they have as long as there’s at least a bed and a door, and maybe a sink,” she said.

From what I gathered, the place we had booked to stay on this blustery evening was the next right and I told her so. We veered off the highway and down what appeared to be a dirt road leading straight into pitch blackness. I can still see the headlights fighting through the clouds of dust that kicked up in front as the snow lightly flurried around us. At the moment, we were sure this twisting road to nowhere-land was where we were going to spend eternity. After a few miles, we swung left and out of the shadows of old barns and shabby bushes appeared an illuminated mini Las Vegas oasis.

It felt as if we were dreaming. We were beyond awestruck. Neon signs were lit up on each side of the street. Laundromat here, gentleman's club there, a country diner way down there. Truck stops, apartments for rent, a pawn shop. We had to slow down and blink our eyes because it was almost too startling to be hit with that much light after having spent so long in darkness. We kept driving down the street and soon the signs disappeared in the distance and we were alone once again.

"We missed the motel," I whispered, not wanting to break the spell that had fallen over us.

"Okay," Emily said as she pulled over and turned the car around.

Again, the dark gave way to the floodlit Times Square of the Midwest.

"There, on the left," I urged.

We pulled into a space alongside the one-story concrete building, complete with a row of doors and flickering "Open" sign. We made our way into a dimly lit room that served as the lobby, where behind a counter full of tchotchkes and cobwebs the owner stared at us blankly. After a few half-hearted pleasantries, she handed us the key to the shoebox we were going to spend the remainder of the night in.

After we checked out the room and put our bags down, we remembered it was Thanksgiving, and decided we needed to go somewhere to eat a late dinner. We remembered seeing a diner down the road, so we got in the car and made our way there. We started laughing as soon as we sat down, and couldn't stop. A green-haired waiter took our order and asked us if we were drunk, slightly raising his eyebrows. We assured him we were drunk on life and continued to laugh as we thought about where we were, how we got there, and let the tiredness we felt in body and soul take hold.

Sitting in that booth with our hot chocolate and slabs of turkey heaped with

grainy mashed potatoes swimming in salty gravy on those heavy diner plates, we knew true happiness. We had let go of everything we had known, and made a leap of faith and change in life bigger than either of us had even realized, finding ourselves on the outskirts of our own known humanity. I don't think I tasted the mediocre food; I was more tired and overwhelmed than hungry. I washed it down with the weak cocoa.

Still thinking of our silliness and bravery, we tried to quiet our giggling as the T.V. barked to let us know that there was more going on in life than just our adventure, and the sleepy nomadic denizens of the diner ogled us as if sensing we didn't belong. The neon lights from the street cut in through the window and added a yellow hue to the green hair of our waiter as he cleared the plates away. We laughed and tripped our way past the disapproving eyes that followed us and out into the street of chaotic signage.

We headed back to the motel and when we got there we saw that the door to our room was ajar.

"This is it," I thought.

Since we were young and foolish, Emily had her keys ready in her fist, and I kicked open the door, ready to fight. Nothing. We checked every crevice and cubbyhole; no one had been there. Nervously, we settled in, and it felt as if I slept with one eye open. In the morning, the owner unapologetically told us that the door sometimes had a hard time closing unless slammed shut. Perfect.

At dawn, we finished packing up the car, and I looked out across the unchanging lands of Nebraska, the chilled breeze whipping my hair and icing my cheeks. The events of the night were still in mind as I climbed into the passenger seat and opened the map, while Emily booted up the GPS. We pulled away from what now looked like a ghost town; the glowing signs bleached out by the creeping Midwestern sun. I felt the ever-widening gap between the life that I had known and the choice that I had made pulling me ever upward and destroying the box that I had restrained my growth and capabilities in. I released myself into adventure, stubbornly refused the limits of my own conformity, and have never turned back. ∞

## Me

---

MIRANDA MOSES

I watched her follow her heart to Texas.  
She walked straight into the lion's den.  
I warned her that she was but a silly sheep.  
She went anyway, into his arms she ran.  
I watched her suffer mental and physical abuse for two years.  
She thought it was her fault, that she wasn't good enough for him.  
I knew he was a bastard and did not deserve her.  
She sat on the cold bathroom floor with a gun pressed to her head.  
I slowly convinced her to take her finger off the trigger.  
She thought she wasn't worth loving and wanted to die.  
I have always loved her.  
She cried and begged the Texas Rangers not to take him.  
I embraced the happiness I got from watching the police arrest him.  
She promised him that she would get him out of jail.  
I quickly packed everything we owned into a small suitcase.  
She grabbed only the stuffed puppy her mother gave to her.  
We ran two miles to the nearest bus station and didn't look back.  
We took the first bus out of Texas that was going to New York.  
She laughed when we were safely on the bus.  
I cried knowing how close we were to no longer existing.  
We slowly began to heal with time, and together we became me.

## Forever Memories

---

SARAH RUSSELL

I remember. It was a Saturday morning, I was about six or seven years old. I came downstairs to watch morning cartoons. You were asleep on the couch. I turned on the cartoons and sat down in my little beanbag chair, trying to be quiet as a mouse. You woke up eventually, grabbed the bottles next to the couch, and stuck them in your desk drawer. Your words soaked into my brain before you went upstairs, “Don’t tell your mom.” You went upstairs and passed out, knowing my lips were sealed. But you knew she knew anyway; I didn’t have to say a word.

Next came the divorce. I was eight years old. Being so young, I never knew what you were doing. You had a new girlfriend before you even left the house you were living in, with a woman you had already been married to for years. You broke her heart, but she was stronger than you and your disease. She thrived. A single mother of two children, two children who never wanted for anything, and two children who never doubted they were loved. But you went from girlfriend to girlfriend. Rehab to rehab. AA meeting after AA meeting. One of my worst memories of you was riding in the car. We were on our way to dinner. You picked us up in your big truck with the cap on the back. I climbed into the middle, Tom in the passenger seat. You were driving and I didn’t notice until we were halfway there and on a winding back road, that you were acting funny. You were swerving, couldn’t keep your eyes open, and I started to panic. I looked down at my lap and realized that in your stack of books was a Bible. I clutched it as I cried to myself, each tear slowly rolling down my cheek, which you never even saw. We made it to the restaurant and back home in one piece. I called Mom and she came to get us, but you weren’t even awake; you had passed out almost as soon as we walked back in the door. This disease consumed you. But I still loved you—I didn’t know how not to. You were my dad, the man who was supposed to teach me how men are supposed to treat a lady. The one who would be a grandfather to my children and walk me down the aisle when I was ready. You missed my first kiss. My first love. You missed me going to prom and getting my first car. You missed me going to college and making a business for myself. The disease had already taken you. It consumed our whole family and everyone around it. It’s not like cancer. You kept the disease thriving. You fed it until it killed you. ∞

## Galactic Santa Monica

---

AMANDA TRUIN

The fishing poles rested on the worn beams that functioned as railings at the end of the pier. I saw their lines shining silver under the moonlight, cascading over the edge. Looking out past them into the saturated blackness, I couldn't tell where the pier ended and the ocean began. Logically, I knew it was there, but looking out I felt as if we were poised at the end of the world with nothing tethering us. Fishing into nothingness on a dense ocean of unseen wonder. A few distant stars were the only indication of a plane beyond this creaking platform.

The lights around us were a hazy orange, and the 72-degree California breeze held me in a warm embrace. We sat on the scarred bleachers that could have been the same ones that Otis Redding sat on when he rested his bones. The history of this special place surrounded us as ghosts of the past and present mingled about, dancing to the homeless musician collecting money in his hat.

I smelled the Pacific. Earlier, I had put my feet in it and let it wash over my sand-covered wriggling toes; I knew it was there. I could hear what should have been waves lapping at the barnacled beams that stabilized the pier. But I couldn't see them; I couldn't see anything beyond those haloed lights. It was the most intense blackness, as if light existed only there with us. The carnival-like atmosphere was our pulse as we lost time on the historical boardwalk that exists still in my memory. The moments stretched on and converged, linked by fishing poles between us—earthly mortals—and the celestial blackness, set adrift from the world on Route 66.

Occasionally, a fishing rod would be reeled in, the anglers knowing no fish would be biting. I think they found joy in using those lines to explore the untouchable and unknown world beyond the pier. We imagined if something were caught it would not have been a part of this reality. I wouldn't have been surprised if it was a constellation that bit the line and fought for its life. My eyes would catch Pisces, the circling twin fish, leaping from the skies below and gasping for air on this old wooden spine across the beach, as the ghosts dream and the tourists sit for caricatures. ∞

*Photograph*



Quishanah Piernella | *Leading to Serenity*

## Vanilla Ice Cream

---

ROB WOODS

**T**HE SETTING: On this frosty cross-quarter day, dusk surrounds a modest, two story cottage in the backwoods of upstate New York where a husky north wind hurls thick raindrops against a drafty casement window. The cramped room on the other side of the glass bleeds heat faster than it can enter from an outer hall, where a small, open fireplace burns. Drawing current from an overloaded power strip, a greasy lightbulb in a shaded lamp smolders in one corner. Amid a splash of pallid shadows, a plastic clock, clinging to a grimy wall, fitfully ticks away seconds.

THE SCENE: I sit in a creaky swivel rocking chair behind a musty old card table with my back pushing up against the wall. Feeling like a gambler contemplating a hold or a fold, I set my whiskey tumbler on the table next to an empty bowl with a sticky spoon and peer for several minutes at the sheet of crisp blue paper. Finally, I toss the sheet on the floor and, after pushing aside a dusty transistor radio and a scattered pile of notes, my tap, tap, tap on the keys of the old PC spurs a squeaky little fan to life. Some nervous whirring encourages an outdated version of Word to illuminate a flickering screen, and out spills an unsteady cascade of light causing a half empty bottle of whiskey to glow.

I TYPE: Today, at a Great Books Discussion I was challenged to write something to contribute to this magazine. With a cheery smile, the editor shoved a crisp blue call-for-submissions poster at me. “We’re just waiting on yours,” he said. The theme: Boundaries. Unfortunately, his comment struck at my conscience; years have gone by and I have enjoyed the annual magazine, yet I have never contributed.

I THINK: Scan the table. Okay, sort through these notes again. How do I use them? There are way too many. What a mess. Is that tumbler empty? Pour two fingers. A toast to Boundary! Drink. Ooooh, that went down smooth. Glance at the bottle. Wow, I drank that much? Glance at the clock: 5:56 PM. Six minus four—has it been two hours? I hope this whiskey idea is not a mistake.

I TYPE: What is a boundary? As a Mathematics Professor, I know boundaries. I am all about boundaries. I draw them, measure them, and lecture about them often. I describe how sometimes boundaries exist and sometimes they don’t. How sometimes

you inch closer to a boundary, never reach it, and then, in some mysterious infinitesimal leap, you are suddenly on the opposite side and—

I THINK: blah, blah, blah! STOP!

I HEAR: I am doing laundry! Bring me your laundry!

I THINK: Not now! I'm busy. Why is it always when I'm busy? Only her first call though. I have some time. Pour some more. Drink. Oops, spilled a little, no problem. Is it getting chilly in here? Hmm, where was I?

I TYPE: Let me put the mathematics aside. One theme for an essay about boundaries is to assert that boundaries can be harmful. Further, one might assert that some boundaries are dangerous and, as a matter of course, should be removed to avoid inherent evil. In other articles contained in this magazine, I am confident that compelling arguments will be made to support these assertions. However, in my story, I resolve to leave any discussion of dangerous boundaries out. In this tale I will approach the concept of boundaries with a divine spin.

I THINK: This is all too vanilla, although that vanilla ice cream was delicious. My hands are cold and so are my feet. Maybe I'll add zombies. Everyone needs to hide behind some boundary in a zombie story, yet those mad marching fiends wearing their filthy tattered laundry always seem to get through. Why is that? Got to think outside the box. That's such a cliché. But it is tough to think outside the box when the box is the subject. Okay, stop, focus, have faith and stick to the theory: To know boundaries you need to test them and to test them you need to locate them. Follow the whiskey!

I HEAR: Sometime tonight! I need your laundry!

I THINK: What was that? Her again? Oh, right. Where am I? Still nowhere, really. Time to kick it up. Pour. Drink. Pour. Drink. Lunatic fringe, I know you're out there!

I TYPE: True to the charge etched upon that crisp blue call-for-submissions poster, I will write about boundaries that are intellectual, emotional and spiritual in nature. Earlier today, in a cursory internet search, I stumbled upon two quotations which have inspired me in this endeavor. Let me share them with you here:

1. “Boundaries aren’t all bad. That’s why there are walls around mental institutions.” This is a quote from Peggy Noonan, a speechwriter for two former United States Presidents.
2. “To achieve anything you must be willing to dabble on the boundary of disaster.” This is a quote from Stirling Moss, the greatest race car driver in history that never won an important race.

I THINK: Must be getting colder outside now that it is dark. Rub my hands together and stomp my feet a bit. Get some blood moving. Is that sleet I hear hitting the window? This should warm me up. Pour. Drink.

I TYPE: All begins with the boundaries written into the laws of nature. Some of these include universal constants such as the transitional temperatures for freezing and boiling, the churn of day into night and back again, the faithful turn of the seasons, the force of gravity, energy levels of orbiting electrons in tiny atoms, and the waves of electromagnetic radiation. These barriers make all that follows possible. They reshape matter when unstable conditions in the environment force particles to collide. Out of chaos, these collisions provide the energy required for simple systems to organize, and, of these simple self-organizing systems, some persist and transform into living organisms. When these organisms develop boundaries, the ability to utilize substances in their environment for energy, and a means and desire to replicate, the race of evolution begins.

I HEAR: I am Boundary!

I THINK: I’m coming! What? Wait, no, what was that? Did I hear that right?

I HEAR: I am Boundary! You are seeking me are you not? You are here or rather, I am here. I am Boundary.

I SAY: Are you actually Boundary? Talking to me? Aha! I can’t believe it! I must drink to my success!

I THINK: Pour. Drink. Sniff. Wow, is that the lightbulb I smell?

I HEAR: Didn’t you come out here looking for me? I felt you heading this way hours ago.

I SAY: Yes, I have been looking for you. It's about time we met, my bottle is losing amber glow. I knew I would find you. Drink whiskey with me! But wait, I can't see you. Where are you?

I HEAR: I am nowhere. I am everywhere. I am the phantom on the rim. Nothing is inevitable without me, but with me, nothing is no longer possible (think about that one for a second). I am the creator of life, knowledge, beauty, and love. I am the undulating silhouette of the seductive temptress, jet black on a white background. You cannot see me but you are my slave.

I SAY: Fantastic! I love that video, Thunderball theme song, right? You must drink whiskey with me! Ah, but first, talk to me some more.

I HEAR: In the first book of the Bible the light is divided from the dark, the waters are divided from the firmament and the day is divided from the night. I am there. I step in and the chaos begins to disappear. You will ask, what is boundary? Well, know this, all depends on boundary. Boundary is power!

I THINK: Seriously? Ow! What was that pain in the back of my head? Scrunch up my face and look incredulous.

I HEAR: Dude? Why that scrunched-up face? Is this too much right off?

I SAY: Well, not really, I was looking for a divine spin, but I have already taken my story way past Genesis. Can we pick it up after we are all tossed from Eden?

I HEAR: All right, let me step it back a bit. How about you give me an idea where you're at.

I SAY: Follow me here.

I TYPE: After life began, by chance or perhaps by design, over generations, organisms became more diverse. The competition for survival is ruthless yet some organisms endure. These survivors all settle into their own unique niche. There is constant competition and change, but through time, subtle and invisible boundaries separate evolving organisms of differing types. Out of the struggle there emerges a sort of

harmony and balance among the competitors. Observing the results today, after eons have passed by, we marvel at the miracles that we see in nature. We experience our world as a complex, dynamic system, but do not recognize the underlying boundaries that built it and hold it all together.

I HEAR: I get it, all true, but bland. See if you can spice it up a bit.

I THINK: Okay, try this.

I TYPE: Boundary is the phantom of creation. It is not something you see or touch, you may never even consider it, but know this, the phantom is there. When all the separate colors on a canvas melt into one picture, the phantom is satisfied. Boundary is motionless yet all powerful, holding silently and working magic.

I HEAR: That's it. Now you are getting the idea.

I THINK: Getting the idea? That was my whole dissertation. This ache in my skull is making me lose focus.

I SAY: Thanks, but I am spent—can you help me with intellect?

I HEAR: Certainly, boundary is the gateway to intellect. To know, you must learn. For learning, information must pass into your consciousness via your senses. The boundaries at work with your senses allow you to focus and concentrate on details while blocking out distractions. You learn when the neurons in your brain construct and store a translation of these details into cellular compartments. These compartments are held together by a complex of boundaries which separate details and facilitate communication between them. Have you ever had one of those “aha!” moments? This is when the boundary between details stored in separate compartments becomes charged by truth. The previously unrelated details unite in a novel or useful manner and a new detail is thrust into your consciousness. This new detail is then added to your internal matrix. In time, this matrix of cellular compartments matures and becomes more and more complex. This magical evolution persists throughout your lifetime and fuels your consciousness and your intellect. The phantom is the knower of truth and the gatekeeper for your senses.

I THINK: Sure. Great. What is that smell? Is this room spinning? I'm shivering.

I SAY: Okay, I like it, but how do men share intellect?

I HEAR: Easy, humans use language. As you learn language, you add another viable sense to the five nature allows. What once was chaotic noise to the child transforms itself into information flowing into the consciousness and expanding the matrix of intellect. Language proficiency then allows you to piggy-back more senses; whenever you become proficient in an area of craft or scholarship you create a new sense for that area, be it carpentry, baseball, mathematics, history, biology, or any other specialization. What once was only noise now passes through an evolving boundary and into your matrix. When two humans have developed a similar extra sense, they share their intellect and both may benefit from the exchange.

I THINK: This flickering screen is really getting on my nerves. My head is throbbing like a bowling alley.

I SAY: Is there anything else?

I HEAR: Sure, let me give some examples of how I serve intellect and take it higher. With a pencil on paper the artist trains his hand and eye to imitate the curves of nature; when those curves are arranged in the shape of the human body the silhouette of a beautiful woman may emerge. It stirs you and you feel desire. If the musician plays random notes separated by short bursts of silence, dissonance is all that you hear, but when the notes are arranged in a clever way, the boundaries between the notes fade and melody emerges. When the maestro plays the melody of a great composer, as a listener, you recognize something that transcends the physics of the sound and experience an emotional response like the one you feel when you see a beautiful sunset or a rainbow after a storm. Words are made from letters separated by thin spaces and stories are made from those same words rearranged and separated by slightly wider spaces. Under the hand of the great author, a well-crafted story may become a classic. The symphony, the masterpiece, and the great novel invoke emotions that a mature intellect will cherish. These are gifts that our original senses cannot provide.

I THINK: I'm so thirsty! My bottle is lying on its side. No more glow. It's vacant like my bowl.

I SAY: Enough talk of beauty, what about sadness, envy, greed, hate, and fear? Let's talk about dark emotions. It fits my mood better.

I HEAR: All right, I get it. Intellect is like a medicine cabinet, organized, predictable, and refillable. Emotion, on the other hand, is quite a different story. When you tangle with emotion you enter a jungle with ferocious beasts hiding in every thicket. They are constantly scheming to attack and devour each other, or worse yet, two or three collude and run together to destroy their host. Beware the horde of creatures tuned to the same wavelength of dark emotions; they can inflict great harm. In the emotion jungle I am like the lion-tamer in the circus. I must always be vigilant, cracking the whip lest one or the other predator gets out of line.

I THINK: They are all stalking in my head right now, not in a jungle, in a frozen, blizzard, whiteout. Drink. Damn!

I SAY: The whiskey is gone. Did you finish it? I can't believe you finished it!

I HEAR: Whoa there, Tiger. When all of those dark emotions attack, there is only one thing to do.

I SAY: Well, we better do it fast.

I HEAR: Love, you got to feel a little love. You see, love can turn all those wild emotions upside down. Love makes those evil beasts lie on their backs with their feet up waiting for you to rub their bellies. Now you are playing with a basket full of kittens. Best way to make that happen is to listen to some good old, down-home blues. Will you listen to some blues with me?

I SAY: I'm listenin'.

RADIO PLAYS: "Love in Vain" by Robert Johnson:

When the train, come in the station  
I looked her in the eye  
Whoa, I felt so sad so lonesome  
That I could not help but cry

When the train left the station  
It had two lights on behind  
Whoa, the blue light was my baby  
And the red light was my mind  
All my love was in vain  
All my love's in vain

I HEAR: Ahh, that Robert Johnson, they say he made a deal with the devil. Every time I hear that music I feel the mud between my toes. It takes me down home to Clarksdale. I start talkin' the blues. Blues sure do make you feel all right! All them bad emotions run and hide when love takes over. Separate souls meet and fall in love, nothin' more beautiful. The gully between them disappears and two become one. I step aside and let love happen. Did you feel his heart breakin' in those notes, and the hurt deep inside him? That's how Robert takes your pain away. Love has no boundary. Anytime you go inside a blues hall, all the people there are livin' for the whiskey, the wine and the blues. Ain't no boundary on the two and four baby. Love gonna break your back, thank heaven for the blues, yeah, nothing like the blues. You feel me? Blues tames all them emotions so quiet that you can rearrange them any way you choose. Make them all fit where they belong, not a chair out of place. All those sweet emotions just swayin'. If you can hold it in the joint, then you can keep it tight when the jam is over. Same with the painting and same with the book. You make the connection? There is no more mystery. No more doubt. You are free. That is emotion, my friend.

I THINK: I am not buying it. I'm wiggin' out here. My brain is melting!

I SAY: I stood at those crossroads down in Mississippi. I never saw the devil, and Robert Johnson had no love. It left him with the train. He was standing there crying.

I HEAR: That's the point, my friend. No love can last forever. You are gonna lose the ones you love one way or another. We all end up like Robert in the end. Accept it, my son. All of us, you see? Accept it and all the pain goes away, and, after a while, if you're lucky, when it's all over, maybe you die in your sleep.

I THINK: I feel something dripping out of my ears! That clock, tick, tick, tick, how much longer?

I SAY: There has got to be more to it. What about the spiritual? What about heaven?

I HEAR: Where in hell is your damn laundry?

I THINK: What? My God, now I'm burning up. What is that smell? Why do I smell dead fish? How did it get so hot in here all of a sudden? I'm drenched with sweat!

I SAY: Help me! Help me!!

RADIO PLAYS: "S. O. B." by Nathaniel Rateliff:

I'm gonna need someone to help me  
I'm gonna need somebody's hand  
I'm gonna need someone to hold me down  
I'm gonna need someone to care  
I'm gonna writhe and shake my body  
I'll start pulling out my hair  
And nobody's gonna give a damn!

I THINK: Oh, no! That music is in my head! My heart is breakin', my hands are shakin' and bugs are crawlin' all over me. I'm gonna writhe and shake my body. Somebody please just tie me down! I'll start pulling out my hair and nobody is gonna give a damn!

I YELL: Sonofabitch! Give me a drink!

I DREAM: No more boundaries. Silence. Banshees floating in and out of a fire. Laughter. I am falling into that bleached harvest moon...

RADIO PLAYS: "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" by Bob Dylan, sung by Susan Tedeschi

When your rooster crows at the break of dawn  
Look out your window and know I'll be gone  
Oh you're the reason I'm travelin' on  
Don't think twice, it's all right  
So long, honey baby  
Where I'm bound, I can't tell  
Oh but good-bye is too good a word now  
So I'll just say fare-thee-well

Oh now I ain't sayin' that you treated me unkind  
Oh you coulda done better, but oh I don't mind...

THE SCENE: She enters the room and sees the old man hunched over the table, his head lying sideways on his forearm. His hands and face are ashen white. His lips are purple. She bends down and picks the crisp blue sheet of paper from under the table and then flips the dull orange switch at the end of the power strip to the off position. All the light seems to pool and then drain out of the room. The whine of the fan peters out. Tedeschi wails "you just wasted all my time, you just wasted all my time" and the radio falls silent. The clock goes tick, tick, tick and stops. Rising and turning, she leaves the room, closes and locks the door behind her. She crumples the crisp blue paper into a ball and tosses it into the fire and, as she watches the small burst of white flame, she says to herself, "No need to do his laundry anymore."

THE END

EPILOGUE: Outside in the dark, the smoke rises from the chimney and disappears like the phantom in the night. Back inside, the small room is dark. The falling snow striking the casement window is silent. Motionless, without a breath or a heartbeat, the old man's eyes pop open. He sits up, grabs the spoon, pushes away the table, slowly stands and stiffly shuffles to the locked door. As he gouges the spoon into the door panel, he mumbles something about a bowling alley and vanilla ice cream. Out in the hall she hears the noise and pauses.

RADIO PLAYS: "Thriller" by Michael Jackson

It's close to midnight and something evil's lurking in the dark  
Under the moonlight, you see a sight that almost stops your heart  
You try to scream, but terror takes the sound before you make it  
You start to freeze as horror looks you right between the eyes  
You're paralyzed

SHE THINKS: I hope that door is strong. ♪

## Lunette

---

RICHARD CONNOLLY

There are wolves at the back of my mind  
Howling at a moon that will never set,  
Racing through deep woods, mad, lost, blind.

They slept quiet for an age, by narcotics confined,  
Tamed by therapy's invincible lens, so I could forget  
There are wolves at the back of my mind,

Drawn to desolation sure as to the scent of the hind,  
Baying thoughtless delight at ruin's erotic silhouette,  
Racing though deep woods, mad, lost, blind.

Desire, shame-fed, to kill what I cannot bind;  
By fist, tooth, spear they die and die and yet  
There are wolves at the back of my mind.

Defenses I erect, to wary coexistence resigned.  
They spill 'round this bastion forged from regret,  
Racing through deep woods, mad, lost, blind.

Each hollow ring of yip and yowl seeks to remind,  
Though stout these walls, beyond this lunette  
There are wolves at the back of my mind,  
Racing through deep woods, mad, lost, blind.

## Genki

---

PAUL ARCHER

There can be no comfort found in psalms  
There is no prayer that  
has offered me any solace

I've watched the flesh and fury melt  
away from the vibrant  
As we dwindle and dawdle on  
The mortal coil

And where, buried in hushed tones, is tranquility?  
What do bowed heads offer?  
What truth  
Can be found in the gospel?

I have been washed of  
The original sin  
My soul is cleansed  
But my heart is blackened

Each night, I scan the sky  
I've sought out Zeus, Yahweh, and Jesus  
Nothing smiles down on me  
But Alpha Centauri

I have blasphemed, heretecized,  
I have questioned  
And each night,  
I wish I could pray

## *Good Morning and Welcome to Camp Pembroke*

---

ALEX PLESNAR

**G**ood morning and welcome to Camp Pembroke, the pride of Lake Eire. I am your camp counselor tour guide, Chad, and I will be giving you a tour of our illustrious camp. Before we begin, I just want to remind you to not get separated from the group, because I don't want to call up your parents and tell them why you're lost. Also, this is a public road, so if we see a vehicle coming down the road, please walk single file on the right-hand shoulder. Today you'll be viewing the lake front, the many trails, campsites, our famous waterfalls, and much, much more. Do we have any questions before we begin our adventure through the wilderness?"

Chad flashes a wide grin that touches the tips of his earlobes. His teeth are perfectly straight, and are white like a piece of paper. Chad's crimson sunglasses are sitting on the top of his forehead, and are pushing back some tufts of blond hair. His face glows with a faint red color, and around his eyes I can make out the shape of pale glasses. The sunlight bounces off the glasses, and makes the lenses glow bright. He has a green polo shirt with "Camp" embroidered on it tucked into his khaki cargo shorts. His white belt also has "Camp Pembroke" written on the side of it. Below the hem of his shorts, Chad wears shin-high white socks and on his feet are muddy boat shoes.

"If nobody has any questions, we'll begin then." Chad turns around and motions to a lodge in front of him. "This here's the admin building where you turned in your health forms this morning. You'll find the camp director, camp program director, as well as the camp commissioner in here at all times. You do not need to go in there unless you have a question that concerns safety, or have a question about paperwork. They are very busy now, but you will see them during dinner, when they go over safety procedures. They are also extremely busy during the night, and everyone is strictly forbidden to disturb them during that time. Unless, of course, you have a question about safety." Chad flashes a quick wink at one of the boys up front, and leads us down the trail.

"If you have any questions about the camp, don't hesitate to ask during the tour." Chad leads our group down a gravel road, and the collective sound of scrapes and stones being kicked drifts through the crowd as we stop in front of a large A-frame structure.

"This here is Camp Pembroke's outdoor chapel, built and donated by the Lake

Pointe Community Church in 1950. The benches you see were built as part of an Eagle Scout project. The wood used to build this chapel was felled and crafted here on the property. A very neat fact about this chapel is that the stone altar was built in the late seventeenth century, and it was donated by a small community group from Massachusetts when the camp was originally built in 1925. It is the oldest artifact we have here, other than old Rev. Clarke.” Chad lets out a quick bark of laughter, and continues. “Speak of the devil. There he is now, coming down the road.”

A gaunt man dressed in a grey polo shirt tucked into black slacks is approaching us. In one hand he is carrying a leather rucksack. The rucksack is greasy leather, and is cracked in some places. He shuffles down the path, and greets us with a thin-lipped grimace. His mouth is a slim, pale-red line in the midst of a multitude of wrinkles. The reverend’s electric blue eyes are sunk deep in his skull and bore holes into your body if you look for too long. His skin is stretched over every sharp angle of his face, like taut leather on a drying rack. Liver spots speckle the top of his bald head, and his pencil thin hands tighten around the bag. Although he is thin and lean, the reverend seems to tower over us, reviewing each and every one of our consciences in judgement.

“Rev. Clarke is the smartest man on the property, because he is well-versed in Greek, Italian, Spanish, and he speaks fluent Latin. It is worth noting that we celebrate all denominations of religion here at Camp Pembroke, because we respect all cultures. Rev. Clark is also a living history book of this camp since he’s been here a very long time. He was here when they built the chapel, and he survived every other staff member that worked here when he first started. We’re not sure how old he is, but we hope he sticks around for a long time, God willing.” Chad gives another one of his famous winks. “We’ll head on with our tour so the reverend can prepare for his service. Have a jolly morning, sir.”

Rev. Clarke turns and goes through the small archway that leads straight to the stone altar, his goat trotting after him. He gives no indication that he heard or cares about what Chad said. Chad gives a smile to the reverend’s back, and begins walking down the path. Next to the chapel I spot a small enclosure with a few goats and pigs grazing. I find it interesting that Camp Pembroke operates a small farm, and I wonder if there are farming activities we can learn here. A few paces away from the chapel, I look back and I see the reverend with a rope in his hand coaxing a goat out of the enclosure with a can of peanuts. Our feet keep kicking rocks as we go walking over a bridge that brings us over a small creek. The sun shines from the sky,

breaks through the foliage, and prints a lattice pattern on the path from the twigs and branches above. It is a pleasant late morning, and the sky is blue with cotton clouds gliding with the breeze.

Chad stops in front of a white building with a bright red cross painted on it. “Welcome to Camp Pembroke’s very own health lodge. Originally built in the thirties, it ran like a small hospital for a town a few miles away. It was last renovated in the seventies to better accommodate the camp. Just for fun, I’ll list off some of the injuries we’ve had here at camp. We’ve had basic injuries such as cuts, scrapes, sunburns, tick bites, arterial bleeding, severed limbs, splinters, avulsions, sprained ankles, and spider bites. Our camp medic, Tim, is a big gardener as you can see by his flowerbeds.”

Each flowerbed looks to be around five or six feet in length. They are full of reds, golds, oranges, blues, and purples. One bed has tomato vines mixed with a cucumber patch. A ton of flies are swarming around each bed, and they look like giant grey clouds. My concentration is broken because the sound of a door opening brings my attention to the entrance of the health lodge. A figure with his body hunched over appears to be struggling to get something through the threshold of the building. From where I stand I can hear a slight scrape of canvas over concrete.

“Tim, how are you?” Chad yells from the trail.

Tim jumps, and drops whatever he was dragging. With his back still turned, he closes the door quickly, and turns around. He begins to walk towards us. “Howdy, y’all. Lovely morning we’re having, isn’t it?”

“It sure is,” Chad replies. “Care to introduce yourself to the new campers?”

“Well, my name is Tim, and I’m a certified paramedic with the Lake Pointe squad. I started at Camp Pembroke five years ago when the previous medic died of unknown causes. I was part of the team that responded to that call, and the camp director offered me the job as soon as we bagged the corpse up. I’ve loved it since.” Tim is tall and a little wide in the middle. He has a red, welcoming face and he beams at all of us; a smile of pure joy spreads across his face. “As you can see, I have a passion for gardening. You actually caught me while I was getting my fertilizer outside; you have to use the best fertilizer to get your plants to grow strong. No one hardly comes by in the morning, that’s why y’all startled me.” Tim thrusts his hand in his back pocket, and pulls out a blue bandana that he mops his brow with, which is soaked in perspiration. He is breathing heavily, and it looks like he just ran a half-mile.

“Well we got to get going with the tour, so I’ll see you during dinner.” Chad claps

Tim's back, and leads us down a side trail. Tim stands there and watches us until he turns around, and begins to struggle with his fertilizer again. The path we're on runs adjacent to a creek. The creek is running fast from all the rain the camp received the previous evening. The water bounces off the rounded stones, and splashes joyfully at the sides.

"I'm going to take you to the waterfall, but we'll make one more stop before that," Chad hollers over his shoulder. "The trails here at Pembroke are extensive and quite complicated. We have a few kids go missing every so often but don't worry, we always find their bodies. If you stick to the trails you should be fine, and you'll see all the nature and beauty Camp Pembroke has to offer. It's also worth noting that if you go on a night hike here, it's absolutely important to stick to the trails. The trails have reflective blazes so you don't lose your way. There may be orbs of light that try to coax you off the trail while hiking. Don't listen to them. A good technique to use is to sing your favorite song in your head to muffle their voices out, and my favorite song to use is the Camp Pembroke Song of course." Chad turns around and gives the group a collective wink, and then stops in front of a worn-down building.

"Ranger George is a man you don't see in camp very often. He's always working hard up in the forest. On your right, you'll see our wood chipper. At Camp Pembroke we like to recycle, so we use this wood chipper to make wood chips that we then use to mulch the trails under your feet. We also like to compost as well as make soap to send home as souvenirs."

The wood chipper is rusted in some places, but the chip blades and pistons appear to be polished and in well-cared for shape. The cylindrical blades shine silver, and the sunlight gleams off them. I can tell the machine is well-used, and cared for. I can also see flecks of red spatter around the chute and on the wood chips even though the piles of wood chips and the ground are still moist from the rain. I'm not the only one who notices this, and a boy with glasses raises his hand and asks about it.

"As I've said before," Chad says. "Here at Camp Pembroke we recycle used material to make mulch. Any other dumb questions before we move on?" Chad gives the question asker a quick wink, and moves on up the trail.

"If you listen closely, you can hear the water of Oquaga Falls." Chad pauses, and in the silence I can hear the dull roar of water falling on water. Satisfied, Chad looks at us and continues down the trail.

In ten minutes we emerge from the woods into a gorge. The grey stone walls tower

over us, and right in the middle of the wall is an impressive waterfall that rises about thirty feet. The water is white foam as it plummets from the top of the rock face and into the basin of water below.

“Since your parents aren’t here, I can tell you a cool story about these falls. Many years ago, during colonial times, a colonial settlement raided a nearby Indian village and during the fighting, Chief Oquaga’s son was killed by a colonist. For vengeance, Chief Oquaga went into the colony during the dead of night and slashed open the governor’s son’s throat, letting the poor boy drown in his own blood. In retaliation, the governor gathered the local militia, and took Chief Oquaga captive. In plain view of Oquaga’s village, the governor took the chief up to the top of the falls. Taking out a knife, he opened the chief’s throat in front of his village, and his blood flowed out like this waterfall, cursing the water and rocks that it touched. The governor kicked the corpse down the falls where, it’s said, it remains at the bottom of this basin. A staff member by the name of Joe went diving for it one year ago. He didn’t find anything, but he hasn’t been the same since. Whenever somebody asks him about it he gets a bloody nose, and every full moon his eyes roll to the back of his head and a faint red line appears on his throat. Legend has it that on some nights you can hear the blood-curdling scream of the chief as his throat was slit, but most of the time it’s just been Joe. Ha-ha, classic Joey. There are a lot more fun stories like that if you ask one of the older staff members.”

We finally leave the falls and retrace our steps back to the admin building, but instead of stopping there we keep on going down the road. We stop at a brown building with garage doors for walls. The façade is chipped, exposing a yellow undercoat. Some of the garage windows are broken, but some of them have red handprints on them. One of the garage doors is open so we step inside.

“Good morning, Joanne. Do you mind if we stop in for a few minutes?”

“Not at all,” a cheerful voice replies. Joanne is a shorter woman with sleek brown hair tied back in a ponytail. Her eyes are a bright blue, and her fingers look calloused. She is wearing a smeared apron with “Camp Pembroke” embroidered on it. Joanne is in the middle of sweeping the floor as we walk in. It looks like she’s sweeping hair into a dustbin.

The handicraft building is full of chained cabinets, and jars full of paint brushes. In the corner stands a metal closet marked “Flammable Liquid: Keep Away.” Next to the cabinet three burlap sacks hang. The sacks appear to be wet on the bottom half,

and are dripping a red liquid on the concrete. I'm about to bring attention to this, but Chad speaks before I do.

"Joanne, what do you do here?" Chad says.

"Well, I'm in charge of running the handcraft program here at Camp Pembroke. We do a lot of things in this department. We make dolls, use chalk to draw on the ground, we make candles, we make amulets, and we also make plastic lanyards that you can take home to give your parents. I have a doll of Chad here that you can see if you'd like." Joanne opens up a cabinet full of dolls standing straight up on small stands. She takes out one with sandy blond hair and shows it to us. As she goes to put it away, it slips out of her hand and falls on the floor, landing on its side.

"Ouch," Chad yelps, and he clutches his right arm. "Not to worry everyone, just some shoulder pain; I'll go see Tim about it later." Chad glances down at his watch. "Yikes, I've got to get you to your campsite before I'm late to a staff meeting."

Chad says goodbye to Joanne, and leads us up a hill.

Our campsite consists of twenty green canvas wall tents which are elevated on platforms. A small campfire spot is ringed with stones, and benches made of railroad ties circle around it. An odd white mass is charred in the fire ring, but I don't call attention to it. In the middle of the site is a picnic table with one of its benches broken in half.

"Well, I hope you enjoy your stay at beautiful Camp Pembroke. It was a pleasure to give you a tour of the greatest camp on Earth. I'll have someone bring your camping gear up, and a staff member should be up here at noon to give you lunch. I've got to run now, but make yourselves comfortable. I'll see you at dinner." With that, Chad turns on his heels and walks out of the site quickly, so he won't miss his staff meeting.

I make my way over to a tent and open up the flap. The heat of the wall tent hits me, and I have to regain my composure before I step fully inside. It's like a sauna in here, and it's already making me sweat. I sit down on my bunk, and the springs sag and pop. I lie down and close my eyes, although I open them again. I hear the sound of drooling under the tent platform. ☺

Sushma Madduri | *Graceful Fall*



## *Graceful Fall*

---

SUSHMA MADDURI

A heart ripened with love  
Remains untouched by all the passing clouds and their showers  
Both, happy and sad.

## Soul Tree

AMBER GANCE

Watching her climb up her favorite tree was more riveting than any sport. She knew every curve, and exactly how much weight each knot could hold.

Once she reached her favorite perch, she sat there, totally at ease so high off the ground. She'd let her head fall back, eyes closed against the timber she trusted so well.

As if the tree shared in the peace of her presence, the winds ruffled its pale green leaves in such a way, that I swear to you sounded like a heavy sigh of a loving embrace.

Who's to say which one needed the other. She'd been climbing that tree since her bare feet had been able to bear weight, but that tree had been waiting for her nymph soul for many rings around its center.

All I can remember, now that I look back on that day,

Is how strangely her eyes matched those feverish leaves, and just how lovely she looked, smiling to herself, breathing in the spring. ∞



Miranda Buckland | *Green Tie Event*

## Traveling Through

---

HALEY MARIE LIPPS

**T**his orchard stretches its hands deep into the day until it reaches around itself, presents itself with an orange. The orange of a burning sun on a low horizon. Its skin, heavy with pores, drenched in light, weighing the purpose in our palms and finding the purpose of the skin, is not to keep out our many hungry teeth, but to keep a sweetness inside—

We stayed up for that entire night and built the kingdom of heaven inside of the orchard. Rolled our backs on their spines, and when asked by some great unknown, what keeps the soul inside of the body, we laughed and watched a migration of monarchs travel through—

There are parts of our bodies that keep traveling after death—your hair, taken by a bird and placed into its nest, woven with knowing between twigs of orange trees, dry grass, and mud. Or love, for you, these many shapes of need, we dust with pollen, and find later in the crevices of a monarch's knee—

Eat this orange, and place the earth into our bellies. What cocoon did we first stretch away from—we'll cover your soul once more with a dry dust of monarch wing and pray for safe and reckless travels. ☺

## Shine on in the End

---

ABIGAIL CLAIN

Sometimes you run into something  
that just immediately takes your breath  
away. This could be once, twice, maybe  
three times that really sticks with you. At that moment  
you're just silent, eyes and heart flooding with awe.  
Real genuine instances, they're the ones you may not be  
on the lookout for. Sometimes they happen  
when you least expect it. Occasionally  
you find yourself on a hunt, trying  
to find something more. Not every treasure hunt  
you find yourself on ends to be something you thought.  
Can you take a minute, step back,  
admire the adventures you've been on.  
Everyone is growing, no one ever stops. Living  
may be mislabeled as going through  
the motions. It's truly up to you to decide where  
life takes you. Vocalizing your thoughts, dreams & admirations  
may get you through. Every time you feel stuck take a walk,  
look for something beautiful.  
Don't accept the mundane  
to be the okay. There's always time to admire  
the little things. Once in a while you will need  
a break, and that's okay. Our lives are what we choose,  
so live, before you meet the stars.

## Whimsy

---

JOSH LEWIS

In the house of stars  
I blossom into a bird,  
swallow the darkness  
permeating the corners.  
The moon vibrates  
overhead. Black holes  
sing to me, inform me  
of ways to traverse  
these floors and walls.  
This is all fantasy,  
and that's all right.  
Even if my wings  
don't come to fruition  
in this lifetime,  
my room is still aglow  
with countless white dots  
that beckon me to explore  
my outer limits, the borders  
that make me so,  
or so I think...

## Dying Flame

---

JASMINE THORSON

Sitting across from you at an elegant restaurant. A sunlit room with a view of the seemingly endless ocean. Yes, you sit across from me, visible in the flesh, but you are not here. You stare at your phone as if I'm merely a ghost, occupied by thoughts that were once of you and me. The waves crash, one by one, slowly dissipating this dying flame.

## Only Words

CELENA McDONNELL

That morning, I was strong. I had words. She didn't want to go, but they said she had to. Cuts on her legs too obvious to be brushed under the carpet; the pills taken two weeks before—just now discovered—too loud a cry. “You must be evaluated—we are sending you to the emergency room. We're sorry, sweetheart.” Instructions from her therapist and mental health nurse practitioner that could not be ignored.

She didn't want to go and was angry, so angry. Tears and sobs as I took her home first, trying to give her some semblance of control over her life, for wasn't lack of that part of her depression? “I know you don't want to go...but you have a choice, at least. A choice in how and a choice in where,” I said.

“I won't go anywhere,” she replied.

“You must,” said I. This decision was no longer ours to make. Only how we did it. “You need to pick. Come with me and I will take you away—to a different hospital, where they may be kinder, may be more respectful, may help and not hurt, may give you hope. Make me get an ambulance and police, and they will take you back to where you hated. We will no longer have this choice. You must decide the best of two bad decisions. Let me know.” I was still strong then. She needed that—this couldn't be avoided. I had to help her realize and make the best choice for herself, and so I used as many words as I could find.

“I won't go anywhere,” she replied. And she cried and sobbed and cried up in her room, her older sister yelling at me in the kitchen that I didn't understand, how could I, I didn't have their problem...I was making it worse. She's crying too, now, as I'm trying to explain that this was no longer a choice...no longer a choice, no longer a choice.

“She must,” said I.

“Fuck you,” said she. Up in my fifteen-year old's room, I beg again. Then leave. And pace the kitchen. And breathe. And pray. She comes down to say that she'll go, but only to that different hospital, thirty-five minutes away. And she will refuse to stay. I breathe again. And I stay strong. And use my words to let her know that I am on her side.

A long, quiet drive on a beautiful October day: the glitter-air kind of day, sun bouncing off the leaves of the trees that lined the highway. No more words,

I let her sit and sob, not wanting music, not wanting a soda. Not wanting anything. Too soon, we march into the emergency department.

“Hi, honey...what brings you in today?” says the nurse in triage. The beautiful girl; too thin, too pale, with long, black hair and a beanie on top, she looks at me to explain. Not as strong as I, she can’t speak. I was still strong and so I again found my words.

“Her therapist wants a psych eval,” said I. “She doesn’t want to live anymore.” Still strong.

“Okay, sweetie...how beautiful you are. Let’s see if we can help you,” smiling, the nurse is caring, empathetic...kind. She explains that they just got crazy busy, she didn’t want us in there with all the busy, and would it be okay if we used the private family room for our visit? Of course, I say.

And this was wonderful: a large flat screen television, plenty of large, more comfy chairs. A computer. She could be evaluated right there, no need to leave except for the bathroom and urine test that the doctor who came in, right there in that family room, ordered for her. And the lab lady would even come in there to draw her blood. All this made me stronger. This was respect. This was care. This was what we didn’t get in our own area the last time she didn’t want to live. Or the first time she didn’t want to live. This was why we didn’t go back there, why it was so important that she listen to my words, and go with me willingly. If I’d needed help, we wouldn’t have had this choice. We would have had police and ambulances, and they would have taken her back THERE.

It was important that she listen to my words, and let me lead her choice, important that it BE her choice. That my words lead her here. I watch her leave with the lab lady to do her urine test. A tall, thin, beautiful, broken girl with long black hair and a beanie on top, joggers and band tee, and black Nikes on her feet. We exchange small smiles as she leaves. I focus on the TV, chin in my hand, propped on my knee. Still strong. The words are in my head now, but as background noise only because she is someone else’s responsibility for a moment. Someone else had eyes on her for a moment. I breathe.

Led back in, I see they have changed her. Gone are the joggers and band tee, replaced by a hospital gown and scrub pants, thank God; she hadn’t wanted the livid scars on the front of her calves to show. More respect for her; they didn’t even ask, had just handed her the pants. And let her keep her beanie on her head and Nikes on her feet. She sat, the lab lady went to work drawing blood. I broke. No words were needed now, nor were they appropriate. It’s time for

business, and this was real. The fact that she was even thinner, even paler, in that hospital garb, and the thought of her possibly wandering around a locked ward by herself, without me and my words for a few days...I broke and tears came into my eyes as I looked at her, and she was thankfully busy watching her blood flow out of her veins and into the tubes, and didn't see my fall.

By the time the lab was finished, I was strong again. I used my words to tell her what she had missed on *Bones* while gone, and made small chatter until the crisis counselor came in and I was banished from the room, albeit kindly done.

Her evaluation is done through a conversation, with a tech named the same as my sister, an unusual name for a girl, yet they both had it. My sister with whom my broken daughter shared the strongest bond, they were so alike that she'd been dubbed "Mini-me" by her aunt. The same tall, slim figure, the same in sexual orientation, the same in clothing choices, and it would appear the same in depression and an anxiety so deep, so hard, so hopeless, that they were also the same in suicidal thought and action. I went back to high school again, and again willed my sister down off of our roof, about thirty years now past.

It was odd though, that when I'd seen her first walk in, in that hospital gown and pants that made her look even thinner, even taller, even sadder, my mind flew immediately to my sister; odd that when she sat in the chair for her blood to be taken, I looked at my daughter yet saw her aunt. And the crisis counselor had my sister's same name. Not a usual name for a female, not for any of the three girls, but they were female all the same.

I could still be strong, because my sister was suddenly in the room with us, sharing her strength from thousands of miles away; I could feel her as my daughter found her own strength and her own words to speak on her own behalf and save herself from a three-day-stay she wanted no part of. She put her life back into my hands, for me to oversee and guard and protect and save; and with my words I proved I was able and steady, and the counselor let her go home with me.

I stayed strong, and still do, using my words to help my beautiful, broken daughter, as I did her aunt long, long ago—before she had someone else's eyes to watch over her. Using my words to prove she is not alone, every day, every hour, I watch, speak, listen, and prove that I am ready for when she needs me again. ∞



Jason Detrani | *The Window*

## Her Story

---

MIRANDA MOSES

**H**er morning begins at a much too early 6 a.m., with a resentful slap to the alarm clock at her bedside. She slowly crawls out of bed, mindful not to wake her husband, who is still sleeping. She carefully tiptoes down the dark hallway, hoping the cold hardwood floors will not let out a creak that will surely wake the children. As she reaches the bathroom and makes her way to the dimly-lit mirror, she wipes away the four hours of sleep from her eyes. She hesitantly splashes cold water onto her face and gently applies her morning face-cleanser, praying the vitamin C and ginseng will miraculously give her the energy needed for the eventful day ahead of her.

She continues to look into the bathroom mirror, catching a faint glimpse of the beautiful young woman with a fire-lit twinkle in her eyes that she used to be. She quickly comes back to her harsh reality, when she realizes that two months of undergoing chemo and radiation have gone by and now she sees only an exhausted woman in the mirror. She places her hands on her cheeks and pulls the skin back, temporarily making her face wrinkle-free. She lets out a sigh as her face returns to normal. She reaches for her makeup bag and takes out the concealer that she calls her "magic in a tube"—a cancer patient's saving grace. She starts to cover every flaw she thinks her face has, the end result making her look like a tribal warrior princess. As she begins to carefully rub all of the concealed lines together, she starts to see a woman who resembles the beautiful, cancer-free young woman she once was.

Feeling a bit more like herself she brushes her hair, when suddenly her attention is diverted to the white porcelain sink, which is now in possession of several strands of her hair. She was hoping she was going to be lucky like the last time she had chemo as she didn't lose her hair, but no such luck this time. With a worried look now on her face, she shakes her head as she throws what's left of her hair into a messy bun and rushes out of the bathroom to get her children ready for school. She delicately awakens both of her children with kisses and mommy snuggles. This is the part of her day when she stops feeling sorry for herself and her mood rapidly changes, just from hearing her children's sweet voices saying, "I love you, Mommy."

After getting some much needed mommy time she realizes she now has only 45 minutes to get them dressed, fed, and off to school. Her children, seeing the panic for lack of time in her eyes, now decide to take off their socks, change their shirts fourteen times and run around like crazy little people. She finally gets them fully clothed and rushes them down the stairs to the kitchen, where she becomes a breakfast time short-order cook. She makes scrambled eggs with a side of chicken nuggets for one child

and dippy eggs with buttered toast for the other child, only to have them switch plates but finally making them both happy for the moment. She sips her black coffee as she helps feed them to hurry along this complicated breakfast process.

The bus pulls up in front of their house and she frantically finishes getting her children bundled up and ready for the cold winter day. She puts their backpacks on and gives them one last, have-a-good-day kiss goodbye. As the bus driver pulls away with her children she goes through her mental checklist: hats, gloves, snowboots, snow pants, lunches, homework. Feeling confident she has sent them with everything on her checklist, she closes the front door. She can't help but feel sorry for the bus driver, knowing that her youngest child will throw a fit when she realizes her mother is not on the bus with her. She's very thankful she will not be there for that tantrum and takes guilty pleasure in laughing to herself, as she takes in the quiet of the household before beginning her daily routine.

She scans the living room but can't believe that two small children can make such a big mess in a minimal amount of time. She starts her cleaning in the kitchen and while she's doing dishes, she notices how tired she looks in the reflection of the kitchen window. This confirms once and for all that she hasn't had enough sleep since the children came into her life. After getting the kitchen clean, she puts a bagel in the toaster and starts another pot of coffee for her husband, who should be coming down the stairs any minute. She knows that her husband will be headed off to work soon, so she quickly finishes cleaning the living room in order to spend at least ten minutes with him before he leaves for work.

She reaches down to pick up one of the many clean shirts that has been thrown on the floor, when she sees that the princess fruit snacks her daughter was supposedly eating are smashed into the cream-colored carpet. Her mother had warned her not to get light colored carpet, having two small children in the house. She drops to her knees and the tears intensely fall from her eyes as she begins to pull the sticky princess fruit snacks out of the carpet. Her husband concernedly comes up behind her, already knowing the true cause of her tears. He doesn't dare ask her what's wrong as he fears he might lose it and he needs to stay strong for her. So when she shows him the sticky pastel mess in the carpet, he thinks he can lighten her mood by laughing and reassuring her that she will get the fruit snacks out of the carpet. This has a reverse effect and she now has replaced her sadness with anger; he quickly grabs his bagel and coffee, kisses her on the forehead and leaves ten minutes early for work.

Now as she furiously rips the fruit snacks out of her carpet, she wonders if her husband would be laughing if he had princess fruit snacks stuck in the tan interior of his precious BMW. A smile returns to her face with the thought of her husband's suffering. She successfully gets the fruit snacks cleaned out of the carpet and finally

finishes cleaning the living room, only to realize she still has the upstairs to clean. As she slowly climbs the stairs she takes a deep breath to prepare herself for the mess she knows her girls have made, but to her surprise she finds the mess her husband has left behind. She angrily picks his up clothes and puts them in the hamper and wonders why it is so hard for her lazy-ass husband to put them in the hamper, yet already knowing the answer to her own question she moves on to her oldest daughter's room.

As she enters she sees the pile of clothes that didn't make the cut today. God forbid her fifth-grader not look stylish enough for school. She hangs the clothes back up in her daughter's closet, when she finds a picture of a boy with a heart around him. She carefully places the picture back where it was supposed to be hidden, praying her husband never sees it, as she knows all hell would break loose her if husband knew his baby girl was growing up and taking an interest in boys already. She can't help but get teary-eyed when she thinks about how fast time is passing. She knows her daughter will be graduating in a few years and leaving her to go off to college. She quickly changes her train of thought before she ends up sobbing in the fetal position on her daughter's bedroom floor. She now avoids her youngest daughter's room, knowing the thoughts of her growing up without her mother will send her right over the edge.

Looking at the clock in the hallway she notices that it's almost 11:00, and she hasn't even eaten yet. Hungry and exhausted already, she heads downstairs to the kitchen to make herself breakfast. She smiles as she sees the unfinished breakfast her children placed on the counter, so she combines the two plates of food and puts it in the microwave. While she waits she pours another cup of coffee. Then the phone rings. She quickly takes her food out of the microwave and answers the phone. Knowing this is the call she's been waiting for, she suddenly becomes nauseous. She listens carefully as the doctor requests her presence in his office today at 5:00. Her eyes fill with tears and the tone in her voice changes as she knows this means cancer has won this time. She thanks the doctor for all that he has done and as she hangs up the phone she slams her fists on the wall and screams "Why?" as she looks up at the ceiling. She then calls her husband, who tells her that he's on his way home.

Feeling completely lost and alone she finds herself once again looking at her reflection in the kitchen window. She stares at the woman standing before her and tells her to stop crying and reminds her that she has already kicked cancer once before and she got five more years. But not this time. She wipes away her tears and tries to pull herself together and in this moment she can't help but blame her mother as she knows her mother passed away only a year ago, after her long courageous battle with breast cancer. "How could she do this to me?" she thinks to herself, instantly feel

horribly guilty, since she knows her mother would have never voluntarily given her cancer. With tears now streaming down her face she whispers, "I'm sorry, Mom" and then tries to find some comfort in being reunited with her mother soon.

Feeling depressed and helpless she tries to wrap her head around the meaning of all of this. Unaware of the amazing person she is, she can only think of others and their battle with cancer and wonders how she can help them through their fight for their lives. Suddenly she realizes what she has to do and with some help from her husband, they begin to write the story of her cancer. They don't candycoat anything she has gone through and they put every wonderful, silly, hard, and horrible memory she or they have endured into the book. For one month and two days they work on her story while she fights for her life with every ounce of energy she has left in her tired body but before they finish the book she is admitted to the hospital where she fights for one more day.

This is when her husband must take over and finish "Her Story" for her.

---

On September 9, she awakens to me holding her hand. I smile at her and then reach for the ice chips sitting on the table beside me. She shakes her head no and I set them down. She scans the hospital room and sees our two beautiful girls all dressed up for their first day of school. She reaches for them and gives them both bunches of kisses and mommy snuggles and tells them to have a wonderful first day of school. She silently signals her sister-in-law (my sister), to take her girls out of the room. She can't hold her tears back any longer as she watches her babies walk out of the room. She wishes she could walk out with them. I sit beside her and she now turns her attention back to me. She smiles and starts to tell me how much she loves me, when I interrupt her by gently kissing her lips, and then I playfully tell her that I know and I insist that I love her more. She tries to laugh and then makes me promise to finish "Her Story." I agree, though it is painful, and then I take her hand and place it on my heart. She gently takes my hand, closes her eyes, and with one last glimpse of my face, my wife, the love of my life, peacefully passes away in my arms. ☽

*Painting*



Alla Boldina | *Time Out of Mind*

## Live Better

RICHARD CONNOLLY

This isn't the beginning of the story. This isn't even one story. I could tell you that it's a vignette that I'm writing, or a few interconnected anecdotes. That would sound good. It would also be bullshit.

This is a series of tangentially related events, coincidental and absurd. You could assume that it is about a job I hated, and people I couldn't stand, and the escalation of credulity-straining insanity that finally drove me to quit abruptly and without giving my two-weeks-notice. But then you might ask to know more about me, about my life, so that you could more deeply appreciate my actions and reactions, or even gain an understanding of me psychologically.

Now the story is two stories. You may laugh at parts, but it won't be funny anymore. Not really. You may think an incident is hard to believe, but you will know that I wouldn't care enough to invent it. My actions and words won't be quirky anymore; they'll be tainted by the rage and bitterness you'll see devouring every moment of my thoughts.

Because this story isn't about liberation from an oppressive job; it's about the cancer. People say "adversity breeds strength," or "what doesn't kill us makes us stronger." The cancer teaches you that's all bullshit. Adversity is a wrecking ball that fucks your life inside and out, and if you do survive it, you'll wish you hadn't. It crashed through the walls of my world a few months after I finished high school. Money was tight and options for college were rapidly zeroing out. Then the family meeting, Mom trying not to cry as she said the words: breast cancer. She succeeded—that time.

First came the surgery. Double mastectomy. Weeks spent watching her slumped in bed, glassy-eyed from the drugs, the house filled with mingled odors of the blood leaking from her as her body fought to repair what couldn't be repaired, and the antiseptics fighting to keep her from becoming more sick. Then came the radiation, cooking her alive. She writhed and tugged at the shirt, desperate not to have anything touch the burns, begging us to let her die, crying from eyes that could not make tears. All you could do was hold her hand so the shaking had somewhere to go. Finally, the chemotherapy. The days spent spoon-feeding her as she lay without the strength to sit up; the nights spent holding her up while she threw it all back up.

People talk about fighting cancer. That's a lie. A fight implies the possibility of victory. You don't fight cancer; you lose slowly.

After a year, the chemo was cut back to a tolerable level, one that allowed her to move around some, to get outside more. My mother was a warrior, and she immediately tried to pick up where she'd left off the year before. She got busy gardening, crafting,

and bullying her way back into her old job. It all left her exhausted, but she'd spent a year as a living corpse and was determined that if she was going to live, she would be doing something with her time.

You want a little break? Yeah, I thought so. Here you go.

---

It had been impossible to move forward with college while the storm was raging. My father worked all day, but Mom had needed constant care. Now that she was doing better, you would think I'd get the chance to pick up where I'd left off. Well, maybe if there was just a touch of justice in the universe, that's what would have happened. Unfortunately, in America the right to life is granted on a paying basis, and for the privilege of twelve months of living hell, my mother was rewarded with debts she would never be able to pay off in two lifetimes. I suppose some people would have considered me free to walk away from that situation, and I don't even know if I think it would have been wrong, but it wasn't something I was prepared to do.

That's how I ended up short enough on options to take a night job at Wart. Of course, Wart isn't the real name of the international superstore chain where I worked (as little as possible) for three months of my life, but that's what I call it when talking to people about my time there, all in the interest of litigious avoidance. Friday nights at Wart were the beginning of my work week, and from the instant the sun went down I knew I had less than an hour before shit got weird. Really weird.

The countdown to the end of my time at Wart started the first Friday of October, 2003. I was assigned to Liquids, a department tucked into a back corner of the store. Not that it was much of a department: three aisles divided between soda, water and health drinks, and alcoholic beverages. Liquids shared the ass end of Wart with Dairy, but no one was assigned to Dairy at night since there would be few shoppers looking for milk at a quarter-to-one in the morning. Not that that was remotely true, but it was a great excuse to pay one employee to mind two departments. On a typical Friday I would rotate between keeping the soda shelves stocked and slapping awake the drunks who mistook the stained linoleum for their best friend's couch (hint: get the mop and bucket first—they'll spew on waking as often as not).

That night I had only one drunk, and he never lost consciousness; I helped him find the Grey Goose and off he flew. Later I had to order a woman to pull her three-year-old out of the runners in the soda aisle. The very top shelf had been built on a thirty-degree slope, the assumption being that as each bottle of soda was pulled, the next one would slide to the front. Problem was that the shelf was filthy and covered in the gummy residue of leaking bottles. Shoppers with small children would boost them up and feed them into the runners to go digging around for the last bottle of,

say, pineapple (a real flavor, I shit you not).

I'd brought out the bucket and mop before approaching Mr. Grey Goose as a precaution per my standard operating procedure, and after he left I was about to wheel it off the sales floor when I heard a shout. There was a sudden racket of sneakers squeaking and raised voices. It sounded like two men arguing. I'll call them Montague and Capulet, because why not?

"Get off my shirt, bro!" Capulet protested.

"I'm not on your shirt, bro!" Montague declared.

"Get off me, homo!" Capulet exhorted, deigning to include a barb which might otherwise have been beneath his dignity.

"Fuck you, pussy!" Montague ejaculated ironically, as it was very likely not his intention to follow through with his threat.

Then a scream of pain. Perhaps he had been in earnest.

I found myself rooted by indecision. That's not true. It was apathy which rooted me, and, rather than being rooted, it was more like I was held lightly tethered. While I knew it was sort of my responsibility to see what was happening, I didn't want to. I debated with myself how believably I could feign not having heard the fight. The prospects, on examination, appeared dismal, so eventually I decided to intervene. Shuffling to the end of aisle three, I poked my head around the corner into Dairy. Two men, both in their mid-twenties, stood facing each other from a few paces apart. Montague was balancing on his toes, a carton of Half & Half in his left hand and a bloody knife in his right. Capulet, dressed in a white t-shirt and plaid pajama bottoms, clutched his left thigh, blood leaking out between his fingers. I remember thinking the pajamas looked comfy and it was a shame they'd gotten ruined.

Montague spotted me and relaxed his stance. He backed off and turned away, calling over to me, "Hey, go check out back; this bitch needs Half & Half."

I called back, my voice lacking the fire of conviction, "You can't just leave." But he did.

Walking over to Capulet, I asked him where he bought his pajamas. His address to me consisted primarily of panting and the occasional expletive hissed through gritted teeth. Once I'd ascertained that Capulet was in no immediate danger of expiring, I went to call a manager. You had to announce a code prefix over the PA, so that the consumers didn't know you were actually calling forth one of the spawn of Satan. Not that anyone would care so long as the Cornettos were twelve cents cheaper than at Wegmans.

A few minutes after I completed the invocation, Craig waddled into Dairy. It was surprising to see him on the sales floor that early at night; he usually punched in and then occupied the men's room for a couple of hours, moaning and cursing and crying

bitterly. He quickly chased off the stab victim with the threat of a lawsuit for fighting in the store. Then he ordered me to mop up the blood spattered on the floor.

"I don't think I can do that," I said. "That's evidence, right? Isn't it a crime if I destroy evidence?"

"There's no evidence," Craig said. "Nothing happened and you're not going to get in trouble, except if you refuse to do what I tell you."

"Look, I'm not doing this. There'll be security footage of me corrupting the evidence."

Craig scowled, then stabbed a finger into the air. I followed the path described by his ambiguously stained digit, up to the nearest camera pod. Wart had them hanging down from the ceiling like those fake wasp nests that are meant to scare away real wasps. Wasps must think we're hilarious. The camera pod over Liquids had a large cardboard sign hanging from it which read, "Cam broke. Parts on Mon."

When I turned back, Craig locked eyes with me and said, "You better fix that attitude of yours if you like this job."

I told him he was an inspiration, and then I destroyed the evidence.

---

The rest of my family worked or were in school, so they all had standard schedules of the eight-to-five variety. My shift started at three in the afternoon and ran until midnight or, sometimes, one in the morning. This meant that I usually didn't wake up until after everyone had left for the day, and I had to leave for work before anyone got home. After more than a year spent caring for Mom every day, it gave me a constant, pervasive sense of anxiety to see so little of her. I knew that if anything was wrong someone would wait up to talk to me, or at least leave me a note, but that didn't make me feel any better. Some nights I would come home convinced that something was wrong, and I would quietly crack the door to her room and sit in the hall listening to her soft breathing, crying silently as the tension oozed off me like the factory stink of Wart. I needed to prove to myself that she was still alive, and remind myself why I couldn't leave my job at that shithole.

It may sound pathetic, how attached I was to my mother. She used to tell me how outgoing I'd been as a little boy, always smiling and giggling. She said I was what kept her fighting when the depression made her want to give up. But the world isn't impressed with any of that shit, and it fucked me over as soon as it could get its hands on me. Everyone tells the story of how they were picked on in school, but eventually they found the group they fit in with, the friends who would stick together, the mentor who would help guide them. I was the kid who got attacked by the cool kids and the losers, a safe target for everyone. I never had a friend who didn't betray me to impress someone else. The adults in my life ignored me, or would believe the

most preposterous stories of how I started fights with five kids at once (because who didn't like getting their ass kicked by a mob?). In an us/them world, I was neither. I was a leftover fraction no one knew, or cared, what to do with. By the time I was six, I'd stopped smiling.

At that point in my life, my mother was virtually the only person who had ever given a shit about me. Now her entire existence was pain and sickness. In my heart, there was a vast hatred for this world that went on revolving while my mother's unimaginable tragedy played out with grinding slowness. I wanted the entire world to burn.



When I came in on the second Friday of that October, I checked the board and was surprised to see I'd been assigned to Paper Goods, the easiest department to work. I was teamed up with Paul, a friend who'd helped me get the job (though I tried not to hold that against him). The easy pace was a welcome relief from the previous week's impromptu reenactment of *Reservoir Dogs*, and I was far enough from Liquids that I couldn't smell the lingering odors of vomit, vodka, and sour cream. The first time I checked my watch, I found that I was almost halfway to the end of my shift. On a regular evening, I would check the time every twenty minutes. I would even have mental conversations with my watch, who I'd inventively dubbed "Casio." Sad to say, he wasn't very good at giving advice and typically led me in circles.

Paul had just helped me throw a pallet of paper towels into the overhead racks when two men approached us. One was white and the other black, but both wore faded blue jeans and red-and-black checkered shirts, just like the Brawny guy. I'm going to call the white guy Rosencrantz and the black guy Guildenstern. Don't pretend to be surprised.

Rosencrantz stepped close—too close—and asked, loudly, "Where's yer shit tickets?"

I blinked, confused by the question. Rosey waited a second before prompting me with: "Shit tickets?"

Paul, who had been breaking down several cardboard boxes, came over and asked, "What are they looking for?"

"Shit tickets," I said.

Paul frowned. "I'm not sure what you're asking for," he said to the men.

A young woman in her early twenties, wearing tight jeans and a halter top, entered the aisle behind the two men, passing them as Rosencrantz decided we required a visual cue. "Shit tickets, man. Shit tickets, y'know?" he said, spreading his legs and pantomiming wiping himself, his rough fingers rasping over the crotch of his jeans. The young woman shot him a disgusted look and picked up her pace. Noticing her,

he cracked a lopsided grin and, legs still splayed, called, “Hey, girl!”

Without expression, like a master of stoicism, Paul said, “toilet paper is in aisle seven”.

“Time for break,” I said, already walking away. Paul caught up with me and we punched out together. On our way to the store’s exit I said to him, “I think we just got this evening’s weirdo bullshit out of the way.”

There was an unusual press of people trying to get in as we reached the exit, and I counted the seconds of my break wasted getting past them. Off to one side of the parking lot were benches set up under a metal-framed awning for employees who didn’t want to use the breakroom. Most opted to go outside, since the employee restrooms were inside the breakroom, and at that time of night Craig would be hard at work playing tug-of-war with his colon. But on that night the benches were all empty.

Typically, there would be other workers outside, and the two of us would be absorbed into whatever the general topic of conversation was. Not that there was much variety to those conversations; it was limited to a handful of variations on hating work, hating family, or hating assholes (who constituted the majority of the human race—present company excepted, of course). Angry and unhappy, the average worker got nothing out of their job save the ability to continue hanging on by their fingernails to a life that would never get any better, no matter how hard they tried. They came in every day, saw the insipidly smiling face of the Wart logo, read the inspiring motto “Live Better,” and then began the nine-hour ritual of being treated like dogs by their managers and the angry, unhappy consumers who had just finished their own daily sentences of emotional humiliation and craved the opportunity to be on the handle-end of the lash for just a few minutes before going home and trying to make the noise of entertainment drown out the noise of their silent, thunderous despair.

Paul and I sat in silence as the minutes accumulated. Break lasted for fifteen minutes, and I always spent mine feverishly counting how many seconds of freedom I no longer had. I didn’t want to, but it was simply impossible for me to relax. My eyes roamed the parking lot, my mind preoccupied with counting, so that it was some short while before it struck me that there was no one out there. The lot was empty of people.

“How’s your mom?” Paul said quietly. He sat hunched over the bench furiously devouring a ham and swiss sub. Wart was far enough from his home that Paul had to take care of errands during lunch break, which forced him to eat his dinner during one of his fifteen-minute breaks.

My answer was slow in coming. I felt too heavy to bother forming words or push them out of my mouth. “She’s okay, I guess,” was all I said.

We’d done this many times before, and would keep on doing it for years. Paul

knew there was nothing new to report, but his asking was a way of telling me that he was thinking of us and hoped things were well. After that, we remarked to each other how eerily quiet it was outside and debated going back in early. Paul stuffed the last of the sub into his mouth at the same moment I spotted the store's head of security come out through the main doors. He scanned the lot, quickly catching sight of the two of us and hustling over. He was sweating, even though it was a chill evening, and his eyes kept moving back and forth over the rows of parked cars. When he reached the benches, he said, "Were either of you out here when the shots were fired?"

Paul paused mid-chew and looked up at the head of security, then climbed hastily out of his seat. I sighed and stood to go back inside.



During the following week, I had the chance to see my mother a bit more often. She'd caught a cold, and with her immune system so ravaged by the chemo, she was under doctor's orders to stay home from work whenever she got sick. Not that she always followed those orders, but this time she did. We would watch her favorite British costume dramas or the Pixar and Miyazaki films she had collected when I was a child. Whenever she was inactive for more than a day, her physical condition would begin to deteriorate, so as soon as she was well enough I started taking her out for short walks in the neighborhood. It was during one of these that she asked me about work.

"I wasn't sure if I should bring it up," she said, "but you're always so quiet. You've always been my quiet one. I don't see you for three days out of the week because you're working, and then it's another day before you speak to anyone. What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," I said perfunctorily. I didn't want to talk about it.

"Right," she said, "because you've always brooded like this."

"Haven't I?"

She took a sharp breath. It was a sign she was getting annoyed, something which happened frequently and precipitously when she was contradicted. "Not like this. Since you got that job you've been worse. So, what is it? I want an answer."

There was a period of silence. I knew from experience that my mother wouldn't accept any bullshit, and she knew I needed a moment to decide to answer her. "It's like—" I began, faltered, and tried again. "The job is humiliating. Everyone there knows that all we are to management is meat. Sometimes I think they literally hate us. They treat us like the money we earn is being stolen from them, like we owe it to them to keep their shitty fucking trumped-up dime store running, and we should do it because we're worthless people who ought to be happy just to be given something to do."

“Everyone working there hates management right back, but what they hate more is each other. They know they’re being humiliated, but they need to forget it to do the job and get paid. When they see a coworker, though, they can see that person’s humiliation, and because of that they know their coworker can see their humiliation. Being seen is what they can’t stand, because it makes it impossible for them to forget.” I paused to breathe. It was moments like this when I realized how much shit I’d been suppressing. My mother always had a talent for coaxing it out of me.

She waited before speaking, giving me the chance to revise and extend my remarks. Then she said, “That’s foolish. If things are that bad, they should be angry with their managers and object to the treatment.”

“It wouldn’t do any good. The people responsible for the conditions there are completely insulated. The one time I tried reporting harassment, my manager laughed in my face, and when I went higher up the chain I was called a fuck-up and told I’d be fired if I didn’t stop being a little bitch.” I was aware that I was venting, but I also tried to explain the dilemma as rationally as I could. “And I haven’t even mentioned the goddamn gunshots in the parking lot or the knife fight.”

“What?” she said, alarmed. “When did this happen?”

“The past couple of weeks.”

“No,” she said, “it would have been on the news. Are you sure?”

“I was there,” I said. “You don’t know about it because there was no press and no cops.”

She shook her head, but she spoke slowly and I knew she was thinking about it. “How can there have been gunshots and no one called the police?” she said.

“I don’t know,” I answered honestly. “But later in the evening when it happened, I saw the store manager talking with a cop outside the main entrance. They kept shaking hands and it looked like the manager passed something to the cop.”

The conversation lapsed into silence once more. It was exhausting just having to think about work. It made me wonder if that’s why I was so quiet the day after I finished each work week. I had to get Wart out of my head in order to be a person again.

“What you’re describing, Hon,” Mom said, “isn’t normal. Work is almost never fun, but what these people are doing is abusive. I’d like you to think about quitting.”

My answer was immediate: “I can’t do that,” I said. “I’ve seen the bills; what I earn barely makes a dent in them, but at least it’s something.”

She stopped, which forced me to stop as well, and took me by the arm. Her grip was weak, and for a split-second I thought she was getting faint and needed support. Then she looked me in the face and said, solemnly, “You aren’t responsible for my life. I don’t want your help if this is what it’s costing you.”

I couldn’t say anything. There was something coiled up deep inside, like a serpent

tied into knots by its own writhing, that struck instantly, demanding that I refuse. It was all the insecurities and fears that were kept at bay so long as I was performing some sort of representative controlling action. If I believed I could change the situation by contributing a few measly hundred dollars to the cause each month, then the snake curled up in my gut would be satisfied, even if I knew that money made absolutely no difference in the face of the tens-of-thousands of dollars owed.

My mom tried another tact. "I'm not trying to tell you what to do," she said, "but will you promise me that if it gets bad, and you can't think of any reason to stay except so you can help me, that you will walk away from this job? You would be doing it for me."

It was a trap, and an obvious one. But it was also impossible to get out of once sprung.

"Okay," was all I said.

"Good," Mom said, "now let's not talk about that anymore."



The way that final Friday at Wart began, I had a feeling it would be my last shift. Before I had even punched in, Mark, one of the maintenance workers, grabbed me.

"I need you for a couple minutes," he said pleadingly.

"I can't help," I told him, "I'm not punched in yet."

"It's okay," he insisted, "It's not work. I need a witness who ain't management." At that, I paused to listen. "I'm gonna file a complaint," Mark continued. "They're making me do something that ain't my goddam job. But I need someone who ain't management to back me up."

I told him I'd go with him, but I wasn't making any promises. He promptly led the way, heading back to the front of the store. On the way, he tried to fill in the details.

"About fifteen minutes ago, this old guy walks up to customer service and tells them, real politely, that he had an accident in the men's room. They ask him if he's all right and he just says he's really sorry, and then he walks off."

I already regretted going along. If Mark wanted me to take a look, I could do that, but I wasn't going to get roped into doing maintenance's job. Then we reached the men's room and a stench like rotting meat kicked my nose in the balls. I reeled, gagging. Mark held me by the arm, whether to steady me or prevent me from running, I couldn't tell.

"Sorry," he said in a nasal tone, trying to speak without breathing. "It's the first stall." Mark had to guide me through the heavy, warm miasma until I stood at the open stall door. Inside was a nightmare of red, green, brown and black. It looked like someone had loaded a shotgun with shit and blood and emptied both barrels. It was on the floor, the toilet, the walls. Gobs were sliding slowly down the sides of the stall.

Mark tapped me on the shoulder and pointed up.

“Jesus Christ!” I cried and started back. “How the fuck...?”

“I know,” Mark said, but I was already walking out. “So, you’ll sign my complaint as a witness, right?” he called after.

I didn’t answer.

I walked fast, making for the backroom, trying not to visualize the scene behind me. I could still feel the unholy stink of that ass-birthed calamity clinging to me like a vaporous shroud. I was so completely distracted by it that I nearly walked straight into Craig.

“Watch where the hell you’re going!” he snapped. I think I may have flipped him off, but I can’t remember clearly. I hope I did. “Is that a shit stain on your shirt?”

That brought me to a halt. I looked where he was pointing. There was a dark stain on my right shoulder. I suppressed the urge to gag and rapidly considered the feasibility of murdering Mark. “Nope,” I said. “Ketchup.”

“Bullshit,” Craig said.

“Ketchup.”

Craig came closer, leaning in until our noses almost touched. “I can smell it on you. I say that’s shit, and I say you get out of this store and go home and change into something you haven’t smeared with shit.”

I didn’t feel brave, I just felt tired and pissed off. “It’s ketchup. You want to say otherwise? Lick it and see.”

Craig stared hard into my eyes, mistaking this for a stand-off. It took him a minute to realize I wasn’t staring back at him; I was staring through him. “I’m calling up the store manager. If you like this job, you better have a major attitude change by the time I get back to you.”

I continued on my way without answering him. It occurred to me that I still hadn’t gotten the chance to punch in, and consequently wasn’t being paid for any of this, well, shit. Stalking through the backroom, I saw the other workers from my department clustered around the punch clock. They were talking in whispers, but hushed as I got close.

“Where the hell have you been?” Paul said.

“There’s shit falling off the ceiling in the men’s room.”

Paul’s anger spontaneously switched targets. “Did they try to make you clean it up?”

“No,” was all I said.

“All right. Well, we’ve got two departments that’ve been left unstaffed, so let’s get out there.”

“Two?” I said.

Paul indicated Jack with a jerk of his chin. “They pulled him off his department.”

Jack grinned uncomfortably. “They had me moving a bomb,” he said.

Something in my brain felt like it was tearing loose. “What did you say?”

Jack shrugged. “Someone made a bomb out of Clorox and fertilizer. It was strapped to one of our pallets and left out front. So, I jacked up the skid and wheeled it around back. Craig’s got a friend who’s a fire marshal, but also did bomb disposal in the Army. They’re out there right now taking the thing apart.”

“They told you to move a bomb through crowds of people, including children, and you did it?” I said.

Jack offered no reply.

I looked at my coworkers and knew they didn’t like what had happened. I knew they’d probably been bitching about it, and would continue to do so for weeks to come. But they would go on working for a company that had just violated its own safety regulations, as well as the law, and endangered our lives and the lives of all the people in the store. My disgust and hatred for the humanity-shattering entity known as Wart reached such a peak that I could almost see myself building a bomb.

One thing that crystalized for me in that moment was that working that job had come to represent a kind of living death, and it put me in mind of something once written by Kierkegaard. He said, “To work for a living certainly cannot be the meaning of life, since it is indeed a contradiction that the continual production of the conditions is supposed to be the answer to the question of the meaning of that which is conditional upon their production.” This job that I was afraid to leave because I believed I needed its support did not provide enough wages to support me, let alone aid my family in any effectual way, and for which pathetic remuneration I allowed myself to be drawn into a world of anxiety, bitterness, and self-loathing.

Concluding unscientific postscript: Wart could fuck itself.

I dug a hand into my pocket, taking out my store-issued box cutter. I pulled out my wallet to remove my employee ID card. I tore the badge off my shirt. It felt good, and the shirt was going to be burned on account of the shit stain anyway. I piled everything representing my employment at Wart into the palm of my hand and then dropped it unceremoniously on the floor. “What the hell are you doing?” Paul said. I felt suddenly calm. “When Craig gets back from talking to the store manager, tell him I figured out how much I like this fucking job.” ∞

## Her.

AMBER GANCE

Her favorite things were the sounds of wind-chimes flirting with the birds, the softness of sunlight, and cuddling like kittens in warm cotton sheets on a Sunday morning.

But her favorite thing of all was skinny-dipping in the pond out back. Her floating in the moonlight, serenaded by thousands of peeping peepers.

On nights like that she'd say to me, heart glowing in the darkness, "This is what being a star feels like."

"No," I'd say,

"You're the whole damn sky." ∞



Madelyn Chianis | 2 for 5

## Angie

---

CARELINE RAMIREZ

I.  
Coming home, she fell heavy  
Right into the arms of her chair  
  
She wasn't expecting him tonight,  
Or any night for the week, either  
  
Tired and slightly somber  
She did the chores, prepared dinner  
Ate alone  
  
That sad, lone, somber tone filled the house  
Containing only she  
  
Her heart leaped at any sound  
That came from the door,  
  
But to her dismay  
He was yet again delayed...  
  
It was getting late.  
  
Angie's eyes grew heavy  
She trudged over to the shower,  
  
Where silent tears fell,  
Intermingled with  
The water she bathed in  
  
She finishes  
Returning to her empty room  
With her empty bed

Dressed in her nightclothes, she lay  
Heart heavy, she placed the anniversary gift  
Adjacent to her, on *his* side of the bed

Which remained...  
Uninhabited.

She was careful not to mess up  
The perfectly folded sheets on *his* side  
To keep it as it was after he left

She was careful not to knock over  
The perfectly wrapped box  
Placed gently atop  
The perfectly folded sheets

With one more crestfallen glance at the empty spot  
her lover was supposed to fill

She fell asleep  
Only to toss and turn

Her mind was uneasy  
Not accustomed  
To this new way of life

Without her husband beside her.

II.  
He arrives long after she sleeps  
Migraine plaguing his head  
drowsiness pulling at his eyelids

He takes the leftovers she had left for him  
And eats alone in silence

All the stresses of the day  
Still swirling in his head

Quiet, so as not to wake her  
He tiptoes over to the shower  
And relaxes in the comfort  
The warm water provides him

The steam rises in translucent tendrils  
Creating tiny beads of moisture  
He presses his hand to them,  
His heart pangs a little

He thinks of Angie  
Her wet beaded back  
Drying in the summer sand

They stayed there all night  
Making love in the twilight  
He yearns for those days again

He finishes,  
Softly trodding over to the bedroom  
Where she slumbers

He sees the gift glinting in the dim light  
He sucks in his breath  
Cursing himself, he had forgotten!

So busy with other issues and other matters  
It had slipped his mind.

He set it aside  
Not opening it,  
And lies down next to her

He wraps his arms around her thick frame  
Her voluptuous curves spilling  
Onto the sheets

He takes this time to really appreciate her

He knew it was hard  
Her heart was suffering

Kissing her gently, he held her close  
And fell asleep with her in his arms

Too soon, all too soon morning came  
And he had to leave before she even woke up  
His job demanded long, sweaty hours  
Yet as stressful as it could be, he did love it all

But before he left, he looked at her  
Guilt panging at his heart,  
He hated to leave her.

Taking the gift with him to work  
He swore he'd get her something later  
He couldn't let himself forget.

III.

She awoke to the lonely daylight,  
Each day the same as it was before

She noticed that *his* side of the bed was messy  
Her only indication that he had come home that night.

She noticed the anniversary gift missing  
There wasn't one left for her  
Expecting this, she smiled softly

She slid over to *his* side  
Immersing herself in the scent  
That he had left behind

This was a gift enough.

She saw him so scarcely  
It was a luxury  
Just to have the little things he left behind

She closed her eyes  
Hoping that one day  
This would change

And they could steal time for themselves

But for now,  
Angie made the bed,  
Dressed herself  
Left for work

For the entire day  
To begin again.

## The Social Party

RAPHAEL TOMBASCO

A horn blasted its warning outside on the street. The sound reverberated through the tight hallways and close quarters of the buildings around the Villa Borghese, but it didn't register with Rosa Fortino; she remained focused at her vanity, brushing the apples of her still round cheeks with light rouge. Papa was calling for her from the hallway, and it was probably about something important. Unfortunately for him and fortunately for her, he was cut off by the now perpetual noise from outside and the shouting of her little brother, Bruno.

"Papa! Papa! Is it the Black Brigade?! Is it Il Duce?!"<sup>2</sup>

"You know what it is, boy! Now, go to your Ma and do what she says!"

Rosa was in her own world, staring intently into the mirror as she put on her face. The near masterful application of walnut brown eyeshadow accented the same doe-eyes that she used to attract Massimo. She paused for a moment, clasped the bronze locket around her neck, and smiled gently. He had given it to her a few days ago when they had snuck away to the park at night after curfew for a walk and a kiss. At the time, she was certain that they would get caught, that Papa would disown her, and that Massimo would be arrested or worse, but she didn't care then, and she didn't care now.

She was in love.

Usually if Papa yelled, that was it; you did what he said or you'd receive the beating of a lifetime. However, when it came to round-ups, chaos reigned. Bruno knew this, and he could barely contain himself. He ignored Papa's orders and started marching around the living room in mock goosestep, making a nuisance of himself while Papa, Mama, and her older sister, Gia, finished securing their valuables, opening all of the doors, cabinets, and drawers in their apartment. Had they been paying attention and actually processed what Bruno was doing, they would have been appalled and sent him to his room, but fear was driving them. Although they were well-practiced, they had only a limited time to make sure that everything in their home was set, that absolutely everything was in plain sight, so as to receive minimal damage as the German troops went about their routine search.

All of this was just noise to Rosa. Her only thoughts were of Massimo and the looks Christina, Marie, or any of the other girls from the building would have on their faces when they realized he had eyes for only her. She had nothing in her possession to hide from the Fascists anyway.

She was putting finishing touches on her eyelashes when Gia appeared in the doorway to their room, arms crossed, scowling with disapproval.

“We could use your help, Rosa.”

“I’m almost finished. I just have to put on my lipstick.”

“I know who you’re getting all dolled up for.”

“Yeah, I’m sure you do.”

“I’ll tell Papa.”

Rosa paused for a moment and looked at her sister through the reflection in the mirror. She could tell Gia was serious. Her face was growing warm with anger, and she was afraid she might start sweating and ruin her makeup.

“You wouldn’t—” Rosa started.

“Girls!” Papa shouted from the hallway.

“Better put on your lipstick,” Gia sneered, turned away, and walked to their Papa to answer his beckoning call.

Taking a few deep breaths, Rosa composed herself and started applying her matte red lipstick as quickly and steadily as she could. Christina and Marie were sure to be dressed in their very best. The round-ups had become one of the few opportunities the girls in the building had to actually socialize with the boys, and they had turned it into a competition of sorts. Massimo was the ultimate prize, and for the time being, she was in the lead.

“Rosa!” Papa screamed.

She gave herself one more quick assessment, pursing her lips and batting her eyelashes, seeing all of the benefits of her makeup work at her Papa’s theatre. Mama had been an actress before meeting Papa, and these days she spent her time helping the actors and actresses with their costumes and makeup. Gia and Rosa learned much of what she knew as a result since they were basically unpaid workers and helped their parents with whatever was needed, for the good of the family business.

A second horn blasted. It was the signal for all tenants to move to the basement of their respective buildings.

Papa’s patience had run out, but before he had a chance to charge down the hall in a rage and drag Rosa away from her mirror, she emerged quickly and quietly from her room and stood ready to follow Mama and Gia out the door.

“Okay, everyone is ready, yes?” Papa asked as he held Bruno tight by the shoulders in front of him, keeping the young boy in place.

The family all nodded.

“Let’s go.”

Her Mama opened the door and they were all soon absorbed into the growing line of neighbors moving steadily towards the stairwell.

Since Massimo lived with his father two floors above, Rosa knew she probably wouldn’t see him until most everyone in the building had made it to the basement.

That didn't stop her from looking around anyway. She couldn't wait to see him. Many of the girls and even married women in the building agreed that he was extremely handsome. Rosa admitted to herself that Massimo's good looks were what initially caught her attention, but it was his passion and intensity that made her fall for him. She knew this was often not directed towards her; his devotion to the resistance overshadowed all other aspects of his life, but she understood that the cause was the center of his universe, and if she was able to catch that energy and hover in orbit around it, for even just a short time, that would be all that mattered.

As the German occupation persisted, they started seeing more of each other, and she became obsessed with Massimo and his cause, with his love and his hate. He loved the music of Pippo Barzizza, so she would save her money from work at the theatre and buy whatever records she could, to listen, to feel, hoping that he too was listening and feeling what she felt.

He hated the Germans, so she would cry for death to all fascists and belligerently argue with her Papa about his unwillingness to act in the face of issues she didn't fully comprehend. Massimo was always outspoken about how much he hated the Germans, spouting liberal platitudes whenever the opportunity arose, but the hatred he felt was the hatred his father taught him. He didn't know what was going on any more than she did; he just had the vocabulary because he had been around while the resistance used his father's apartment as a meeting place.

Papa always spoke ill of Massimo. He declared the boy to be a danger to the children and especially forbade his daughters from interacting with him.

"He's like his father. He's a radical, one of those G.A.P<sup>3</sup> guys. Openly sides with the rebels and acts on their behalf. Never pays attention to who might be listening. He will only cause trouble for himself and those around him," Papa would say anytime the boy was seen or mentioned.

Statements and restrictions like these only prompted Rosa's curiosity and infatuation. Like the other girls in the building, she already did whatever was possible to draw the attention of the boys during the basement gatherings which had become more semi-formal as the routine of the frequent round-ups and raids took hold. While the German soldiers charged through their homes above, looking for signs of sedition and treason and ready to take away whoever harbored them, the men, women, and children socialized and played games. The adults mostly stuck to drinking wine and discussing the latest rumors around the neighborhood, and every so often the conversations centered around odd disappearances of friends and their families, but that kind of talk caused uncomfortable moments most people would rather avoid, so they would end up moving on to more trivial topics. The teenagers mimicked this behavior in many ways, but their conversations were limited more to who was kissing

who or American movie stars. The kids ran rampant, playing games and causing their parents unending grief.

Everyone in the apartment building moved as quickly as they could in single file, shuffling along in hushed excitement, toting whatever goodies they were bringing to share with their neighbors in the basement. At this point, the Fortinos had descended to the landing between the ground level and the first floor, and Rosa could see the German soldiers. The soldiers stood at attention while their officers sat at folding tables with ledgers. As much as she claimed to hate the Germans, she loved the fashion of their uniforms, the grey and black all in contrast to the bright red armbands, and, considering how handsome they looked, a small part of her couldn't help but wonder what it might be like to be one of their wives.

The cogs in the machine were in perfect sync for a fast, efficient process. Lines formed in front of the officers, each one representing a floor. The tenants placed their belongings on the tables to be searched while their names were checked off a list. They were then directed down the stairs to the basement.

It wasn't long before her family was in line for their floor. Rosa's nerves were always a mess when it came time for her family to face the scrutiny of the officers and the tall, well-built soldiers hovering ominously behind them. She was so caught up with herself that she felt like she was an open book that everyone was able to read with ease. Maybe it was from being around the theatre for most her life; maybe that's what gave her the feeling that her story was being viewed, and that everyone knew her deepest secrets.

As they approached, Papa came forward, still holding Bruno firmly in front of him, to present his family to the officer.

"Name," the officer said in Italian and then looked up to see who he might be addressing.

"Enzo Fortino, sir. And this is my wife, Angela, and my children, Gia, Rosa, and Bruno."

The officer checked off the names and said, "Please empty all your pockets and place any belongings on the table to be searched."

The Fortinos did as they were told.

"Good," stated the officer. "You may gather your belongings and proceed."

Papa stood aside and allowed Mama, Gia, and Rosa to pass. He bowed slightly to the officer and followed, guiding Bruno, who was staring up in awe at the German soldiers.

When they reached the basement, Bruno immediately broke free from Papa's grasp and ran off to play with his friends. Mama shouted after the boy, and charged through the gathering groups of people in pursuit. Gia saw her best friend, Simona, near the

washing machines and made her way to share the latest gossip from school. Rosa and her Papa were left near the bottom of the stairs, and they stood together for a moment, both silent, both trying to avoid asking questions or raising accusations that would draw the attention of their neighbors.

Rosa heard her father inhale and could tell Papa was about to say something when their upstairs neighbor, Tony Speciale, clapped him on the back and presented him with a glass of wine.

“How goes the theatre business?” Tony asked as he clinked Papa’s glass.

“It’s going well! Say what you will about the Germans, they appreciate a good show,” Papa replied.

“I heard Rosa might be up for a big part.”

“Yes, in a film.”

“Tu salud!”

“Well there’s no guarantee yet, but it’s called Campo de’ Fiori.<sup>4</sup> I forgot the name of the director. Rosa might know.”

Papa turned to ask her, but Rosa had left his side at some point during the conversation. Tony Speciale clapped him on the back again and they continued their small talk.

Rosa walked around scanning the familiar faces, determined to find Massimo, but she didn’t see him anywhere. She might have asked Signore Speciale since he lived next door to Massimo and his father, but that would have sent her Papa into a tirade, so she made her way through the growing crowd of neighbors. Many were struck by her appearance. Although she was dressed to impress, she didn’t overdo it, and that was perhaps what was most striking about her since the other girls and women were parading around in gaudy dresses and skirts wearing makeup so thick it looked like you could peel it clean off their faces. Her adept skill at accenting her natural beauty was a skill even her older sister Gia was unable to reproduce. As much as the sisters would argue and conflict with one another, Gia always humbled herself to receive Rosa’s help when making herself up.

She eventually spotted Christina and Marie chatting in a circle of girls from around the apartment. Christina noticed her almost immediately, as if she had been on the look-out for her, and scanned her up and down. Marie saw Christina staring off and looked at Rosa as well. A few of the other girls turned to look and see what was going on. Rosa nodded at them with a defensively vicious smile. Christina said something to her friends while staring Rosa in the eyes, and the girls all turned back towards her. Even as Rosa moved on through the basement, Christina’s focus remained on her.

Rosa’s palms were beginning to sweat and she could feel her heart picking up its beat. Christina always made her anxious. Since she could remember, Christina had been difficult to make friends with. The two girls had formed a tenuous bond

for a short time, but that crumbled once Massimo moved into the building. Their intentions were clear to one another in regard to the boy, and that set them in direct opposition.

In a distant corner of the expansive space below the building, one of her neighbors, the old man everyone called Tintinnio,<sup>5</sup> started playing “Marianina”<sup>6</sup> on violin. The acoustics of the room were surprisingly strong, and the music carried through, complementing but not intruding on the conversations and games. A few of the adults and older folks claimed a space near the violinist and slowly danced with one another. The heavy footsteps of the soldiers above started abruptly as they made their way up the stairs to search all of the apartments. The click of their boots provided a fitting beat to the music.

Rosa wondered if everyone had made it to the basement yet, and she began to worry. Where could Massimo be? Had the soldiers taken him? Had his father put him up to something? And if so, had he been caught? There was also the distinct possibility that any one of the German supporters living among them had informed the Fascists of Massimo’s or his father’s G.A.P. activities.

Trying not to panic, Rosa moved as gracefully as she could from one group to the next, always engaging with her sincerest attention to the dramas unfolding around her friends and their families.

Through all the laughter and conversation, through the barrage of passive aggressive sarcasm, masked insults, and constant exhibitionism, she continued to keep a vigilant eye out for Massimo. Finally, she saw the welcome sight of Massimo’s friends, Gianni and Sebastian, behind a group of older folks playing bocce ball on a large makeshift court constructed specifically for situations like this.

“You remember what happened in Piombino?”

“Yeah, the rebels won, but the Germans came right back the next day and took the town.”

“Most everyone who fought got away. And they’re still out there.”

“So what are you saying?”

“We should fight back—”

“I’m gonna stop you right there before you get us killed. You know Christina’s brother isn’t the only one around here who’s Balilla,”<sup>7</sup>

“They fought, and they won. And they got away!”

“They weren’t in Rome, you jackass, now shut up before anyone hears us.”

“But what about Massimo?”

“But what about Massimo?”

Sebastian caught Rosa’s eye, and suddenly fell silent, realizing she had probably overheard. Gianni noticed that his friend’s face had grown pale and questioningly followed Sebastian’s gaze. As soon as he saw Rosa looking back, he awkwardly

attempted to avoid eye contact.

She approached the two boys with caution and asked, matching their whispers, “Have you guys seen Massimo?”

“No,” replied Sebastian, looking around uneasily. “We’re looking for him. Just saw him after school today.”

The boys could see the worry on Rosa’s face, but they didn’t know how to comfort her.

“Look,” said Gianni. “We’ll let you know as soon as we see him.”

A weak smile appeared on her face, and she nodded her appreciation. Gianni and Sebastian watched timidly as Rosa turned away and disappeared back into the crowd.

She wandered aimlessly now, not wanting to ask anyone else about Massimo outright or show concern for him for fear of her Papa finding out or German sympathizers asking questions. The only thing that comforted her for the moment was the sound of Tintinnio’s violin, so she gravitated in that direction, but she froze in place when she viewed Christina in the distance talking with her older brother, Nico. He stood tall beside her, dressed in his Balilla blacks. There was a time a few years ago when Rosa found Nico attractive and would have done anything to be with him, but there was something about him that scared her away, a quiet intensity and cold calculation behind his seemingly black eyes that unsettled most people, even his parents. However, he and his sister maintained a close relationship from the very beginning. They were inseparable, and there was never a secret between them.

Before Rosa could avoid making eye contact, Nico noticed her, nudged his sister, and pointed. People were frequently passing through their field of view, but that didn’t prevent Christina from finding Rosa, who stood as if petrified in place.

Christina turned towards her brother, and he leaned down to lend an ear. She whispered something, and he responded. They both looked back at Rosa and started laughing.

Sweating profusely, Rosa tried to keep her composure. She moved on and continued her search for Massimo. After all, he might have passed by without seeing her, or he could have been smoking a cigarette with the other boys in the storage room behind the furnace. Maybe he had gotten caught up carousing with one of his friends. And she still hadn’t checked under the stairwell. That’s where he had to be. And if not there, she’d try to ask Signore Speciale when her Papa wasn’t around, just to be sure. She was certain he would know where Massimo was. She knew everything would be all right.

She was in love.

Rosa clasped the bronze locket tightly in her hand and moved nervously through the thick crowd of her neighbors, each of them absorbed in worlds all their own. As she passed through, those who took notice could tell she was in need of help, and, because of the stories they had heard, each in their own way felt they knew why. They

just didn't care to get involved. Their party continued, and they laughed and played games and danced into the night, and they ignored the reality around them, waiting for the sound of the third horn to call them home. ☞

---

<sup>1</sup> *Black Brigade*. Fascist paramilitary groups operating in Italy during the final years of World War II.

<sup>2</sup> *Il Duce*. Common title for Benito Mussolini, the leader of the National Fascist Party in Italy during World War II. Duce is Italian for 'Leader' or 'Duke.'

<sup>3</sup> *Gruppo Azione Patrioti*. Resistance groups that opposed the occupying German forces and the Italian Fascist puppet regime of the Italian Social Republic during the later years of World War II

<sup>4</sup> *Campo de Fiori*. An Italian comedy film directed by Mario Bonnard and released in the United States as *The Peddler and the Lady*, featuring a screenplay co-written by Federico Fellini.

<sup>5</sup> *Tintinnio*. Italian word for 'jingle.'

<sup>6</sup> "*Marianina*." A classic Italian folk song about a fairy mermaid who is lost during a storm and tries to find her way home.

<sup>7</sup> *Balilla*. Nickname of Italian boy-hero who started a revolt in Genoa against the Habsburgs in 1746, which became the name of a Fascist Italian youth organization for boys ages eight to fifteen.

## A Little Girl

---

MIRANDA MOSES

A little girl lies lifeless, with her tummy pressed firmly down on the hard, red plastic swing. The swing carelessly hangs from the tall tree bathing in the hot summer sun, which happens to be perfectly placed in the middle of her grandparents' front yard. She holds two bright yellow swing strings in each of her tiny hands; they remind her of the fishing line her daddy uses on their weekend fishing trips. With staggered images of her father now flashing through her head, she uses her sparkled-jelly-shoe-covered feet to quickly wind up the swing. She goes round and round, creating a tornado of dust glittering around her in the sunlight, covering her white dress with the pink rosebuds on it that her mommy bought her, until the two bright yellow strings on the swing can twist no more. As she returns to the facedown position, she can hear the sound of her heart pitter-pattering; then, with all thoughts suddenly clearing from her mind, she throws her feet up and releases the bright yellow strings, and for a fleeting moment she becomes the filter of colors that embrace her being and she is completely free. Free from her parents' divorce, free from thinking it's her fault, free from being passed back and forth from place to place, free from watching her daddy act silly and fall down drunk, free from watching her mommy cry—just completely free from feeling anything. ∞

## Melodious

---

JESSICA MARIE HRANEK

Music has no boundaries  
as melodious as it can be,  
hearing the piano playing a major chord  
is just universal language to me:  
and everyone's singing  
to the mountains  
from pianissimo to fort e  
from Mozart to Christina Grimmie  
and as time goes on—more elements  
make the clock chime  
a tuneful melody  
and even if they're not here with us—  
trust me,  
they live on in their compositions.

## Between These Screens

---

AMANDA TRUIN

This is not the first time I've cursed the cursor. It stares, blinking back at me. A skinny, black linear reminder. It started at the beginning of what you wrote, and showed up here again, waiting to type out my reply. I just read another one of your emails and any hope I had for the future has again drained out of me. If I can't save you, what good am I? If I can't help you, how can I help anyone else? The questioning begins again in perpetuity. I want to pop the caps off this keyboard and never respond again.

It takes immense strength to answer you. You have let your compromised mind take over and define your worth. I think back to my childhood. Our childhood. As a child, you'd sleepwalk in your cotton pajamas from our room on the second floor down the steep stairs to the first. In the morning, we'd find you there on the couch; you'd rub your eyes and tell us about how you made it down safely because your guardian angels took your hand and helped you. We had known before then that you were special, but we realized we were never the only ones.

When you were a young adult, I had just come down for my birthday weekend. I was walking with you and Mom in the mall and she kept asking you how your back was. I thought it was odd until I learned of the car accident the night before. It had snowed and there was black ice on that dark and blistery country road on your way home. You didn't see that patch of ice and suddenly the car swerved and tumbled over itself three times into a snow-laden field.

Four tires spinning in the air and a view through cracked glass revealed you hanging upside down by the seatbelt in the driver's seat. You told me later you felt hands holding you down and there was a presence shielding you as you watched the world turn through the windshield with debris flying past you. The car was totaled, but you walked away unscathed. Your guardians protected you yet again. I've asked you before to think why you have these angels with you. Why don't you see the worth they see? Do you envision them watching as you self-destruct? Does their silent agony burn you at all? They've been with you since birth—and maybe even before then, and there is a reason.

I just want to reach through this screen and save you. Reveal the potential shielded from your view by societal demons taking up residence in your mind, leading you with cast iron claws to an early death. The muscled walls within my chest bleed each time your pain reaches to me through your digital imploring words.

I have nothing more to say.

Yet, I type.

And hit send.

And continue with the hope that this time you will shatter your walls, break down, and return to life. ∞

## Word

---

RICHARD SCHLEIDER

New Window  
Select all contacts  
Bring all to front  
Hide others  
Select  
Ruler  
Replace  
Word

Master document  
Style  
Language  
Submit  
Preferences  
Arrange all  
Convert  
Restrict permissions  
Hide word  
Shape  
Split  
Auto fit and distribute

New from Template  
Go to  
Picture from file  
Focus  
Zoom window  
Track changes  
Cross-reference  
Highlight changes  
Document  
Flag for follow up  
Find  
Replace

New Blank Document  
Outline  
Formula  
Reveal formatting  
Open  
Borders and shading  
Protect document  
Share  
Equation  
Save  
Word

*Photograph*



Margaret Winchell | *Asylum*

## Fortress

S U S A N S T R A C Q U A D A N I O

Excuses litter the ground at my feet  
    balled up papers strewn across the floor  
Notebooks with random, written fragments,  
    thoughts quickly jotted down  
Sparks that have come and gone  
    like sputtering backfires and smoke  
    from the car that doesn't quite turn over  
All around me the layout of an enclosure is forming  
    marked off on each side  
    a high pile of bricks in one corner ready and waiting.

In the distance are the voices of naysayers,  
    the squashers of dreams  
    reminders of challenges, deficits,  
    and the array of things lacked  
What is out of reach  
    unrealistic to the current state of affairs  
With each reason uttered,  
    every doubt sinking in  
Isolation covers and creeps past the edges  
    and a new brick is laid, forming the foundation.

The sound of hardened clay clashing together,  
    timed to cynical pleas  
    and pitiful groans  
Beginning to rise and blocking some light,  
    the fortress of my own solitude grows.

Suddenly one brick topples and falls to the ground  
startling me from this trance,  
    I stare down at the weight of it,  
    wondering how it lost its hold,  
    about to raise it back in place  
When I realize I have a trowel in my right hand,  
    and a pickaxe in the left.

Turns out, I've been at work here,  
this is my own creation,  
my choice to construct.

In one discerning moment, shaken and aware,  
I swing the pickaxe  
to level the bricks down.

It was me all along  
who helped build this wall,  
encouraged by divisive forces,  
fears permeating the air.

But all that can change  
with a new kind of design  
A structure that breathes,  
has beauty, can move  
that embraces the light  
will shift with the wind.

I will build from my heart,  
not by default  
free from the noise  
and guided restrictions.

Know I am the one true architect  
a personal definition  
of boundaries and limits,  
character and style  
A structural space belonging to me  
my choice to secure  
my fortress to build.

## My Unwelcome Home

---

JUSTIN HOWE

I came to a place where people lived to help me die. I led a small team to the most violent province in northeastern Afghanistan from 2010 to 2011. I spent every moment of every day not knowing if it would be my last. One learns how to appreciate life after watching great people lose theirs. As a Combat Documentation Specialist, I've concentrated my lens on many of these awesome people in the heat of combat while enemy fire rained in like a sporadic hurricane capable of causing instantaneous loss of life. I have witnessed them fallen, gasping their last breath for men and women they will never forget. Often these men and women remain faceless. Obligated to nothing except a uniform, a code, or an understanding like a family; a bond that is second to none. The pact was written in combat for survival. We'd watch each other and help keep our brothers and sisters in uniform safe. The understanding that because we share the same uniform we will sacrifice all so that no harm will come. I was prepared to go to war. I had thought I was ready to come home.

On April 29, 2011, I went wheels-up in a C-17 military airplane out of Bagram Air Base Afghanistan for what would commence the first part of my six-day journey back home to the U.S. Like many Americans, to say I was excited to come home would be an understatement. I sat tight against the back of the seat with my rucksack in my lap, waiting for the aircraft to taxi across the long, hot, sun-drenched runway. I couldn't wait to feel the plane accelerate and begin its ascent into the sky and away from this war-torn and dangerous place. As we lifted off the ground I remember feeling so happy, like it was almost surreal. I was oblivious to the fact that when I came home from the war I would be fighting personal demons I couldn't begin to comprehend.

The plane was loud, it was filled with excited soldiers who couldn't wait to get home. The conversations would sway from food cravings to getting behind the wheel of a favorite sports car, or the soft caress of a woman's touch, though not so vaguely as I describe than the deliberate and more explicitly descriptive young soldier whose mouth had been hardened by the fierceness of combat. The engines bawled and sang a high-pitched whistle as I sat quietly listening to everyone around me. We were packed tight like sardines with soldiers from all over Afghanistan, with varying experiences and stories. The smell was a combination of stringent body odor, moldy underwear, wet socks, and morning breath. Despite the variety of disagreeable atmospheric aromas, nobody cared how uncomfortable the ride was; we were all

happy, because we were all leaving and going home. I couldn't stop thinking about what it was going to feel like once I got back. I could kiss the ground and burst out crying, my knees buckling under the intense joy for having made it back. I had no idea what would happen, I just wanted to go home. We had several stops in a handful of countries before making our final stint across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States.

We landed in Baltimore-Washington International Airport on May 4, 2011. I promised my team they would be the first ones out of the gate and I would be the last, so they could find their loved ones and connect. I stayed back and helped move luggage and equipment crates. I watched and counted my soldiers as they moved quickly and emphatically toward their loved ones. I moved intentionally slower than everyone heading toward the double swinging doors to what we had imagined to be one of the most awesome moments of our lives. As each soldier passed those doors I could hear an eruption of applause and cheers. I moved closer and watched the doors open again, this time the audible applause was accompanied by a glimpse of welcome home signs and banners. This was not something I had prepared for; I was terrified. Much like I had done hundreds of times on the front lines when faced with a situation that required action I stomached my anxiety, stood tall, and moved forward. When I pushed my way through those doors I emerged in the late afternoon sunlight as if I were being reborn and baptized in the light of the day. The light shined through the glass across the terminal, its dull orange tint from the warm afternoon made my eyes squint and flutter as they adjusted to its presence. I stopped for a brief second while I regained my bearings and focused on where I needed to go. Veterans of Foreign Wars waved American flags big and small, a generation of heroes from historic battles past. Grateful citizens reaching out to shake my trembling hands. There were smiling faces, young and old, all there to celebrate my team as we moved through the terminal to embrace our families who had been impatiently waiting since the moment we left. With each step, I felt my heart drop a little more. It was the first moment in my life I truly felt undeserving of such an astonishing, humbling, and breathtaking welcome. I was overcome with emotion. I did my best to disguise it as stoic pride and moved toward the awaiting government passenger vans that would transport us back to our unit for debriefing.

With each step closer to the doors I felt myself questioning whether I was ready to receive such cheers. I walked through the excited crowd and I could feel my heartbeat rise as if that surge of emotion wasn't even my own. I wished for all those men and women to be the ones walking through those doors with me. I wanted to be the one watching them embrace their children, wives, and mothers. I felt that I shouldn't be

celebrated because those lives I had watched fade away on foreign soil should receive all the recognition, all the praise and gratitude. It was their lives that gave the ultimate sacrifice. I came home, they didn't, and it wasn't fair for me to celebrate while they had given so much more than I.

After I had been home and had given relentless effort to reintegrate with my life, there was a persistent feeling that I was constantly out of place. I was supposed to relax and spend time with family, except that being home with friends and family crippled my conscience with guilt, like I had betrayed everyone by getting on that plane and coming home. I've been congratulated and given accolades for making it home safe, and fighting for my fellow Americans, their rights and freedoms. I didn't reject these gestures because I was modest, yet I felt that I didn't deserve such recognition because I had watched better men than I unable to return home to their families. I had witnessed great men orphan their children, make young widows out of their wives and never again be allowed to receive all this appreciation I was getting now that I was back on U.S. soil. This feeling wasn't like anything anybody could begin to understand and I didn't want anyone to alleviate the guilt I felt for coming home.

During my reintegration, I knew something wasn't right. I was constantly on guard. I had unpredictable mood swings. I had difficulty concentrating and I couldn't handle going anywhere public. I turned into a recluse. I had no idea how to be by myself, but I hated being around people. Everyone would always ask me questions about my time spent over there, thanking me for my service. Offensive questions to any combat veteran such as "Did you kill anyone?" burned deep in my soul like a cauldron of hot broken glass being raked across my insides. Silence was welcomed but had to be carefully navigated because in the silence came those demons. I had no idea where I belonged in a post-war society so I isolated myself and medicated with alcohol so I could sleep. I wanted to come home every second I was over there, but now that I was home I wanted to go back.

Survivor's guilt plagues many service members. Both with combat experience and without. We share a bond so strong that when one falls the other does, too. I couldn't imagine that a man who was not old enough to legally order a beer at a restaurant was in my presence fighting his last moments of life, as his soul slipped through his breath while he lay on soil that wasn't his own. Coming home from a violent episode of war is a rewarding and thankful experience. Many of those service men and women carry devastating invisible wounds of a psychological nature and it is swallowing our veterans who have survived such unfortunate adventures. ☞

## Emergent Chemistry

---

JOSH LEWIS

In the labyrinth of your affection,  
I emerge from sun-bleached bones,  
a castaway in uncharted territory.  
I have been alone for so long,  
undone by raggedy claws  
dragging me into heartbreak,  
that locker in which I learned despair.

From the refuse of lifetimes spent  
in jagged oceans, my experience  
mitigated by borders horizontal  
and vertical, I eschew easy words,  
pondering letters, and prefer to tell  
the story of our love through  
the alchemy of action, the firmament  
of earthly movement.

Recall, recall the means in which you  
and I became a we. Down this corridor of  
throbbing chambers, I become  
a wanderer among your static ghosts,  
a force propelling you forward into a  
living, breathing unknown.

## Curtains

---

BUNKY ZELMAN

He looked at me,  
my stalwart Cossack  
Blue eyes, sullied from eyeglass scratches  
Cupped hands cradling hardcover Steinbeck  
Fingers, rough, glue and grease stained  
From a plumber's work.

And without hesitation  
In a calm, steady voice:  
"jeans are just curtains for your legs,"  
He smirks, endlessly attempting  
To change my perspective to one that is less  
imaginative skepticism

But I am no pipe that can be welded and mended  
I am no book that can be read and closed  
And so I laugh  
A laugh full of only love for him  
that hides my single-minded snarl

Naked beneath the small,  
Over washed, starched and sterile  
White cotton  
Naked and ashamed of my body  
I had just remarked  
How all that separated my flesh from  
The world  
Was a sheet  
A small sheet,  
and a curtain hanging  
From the ceiling.  
I panted between agony and fear  
All that separates us are these  
Curtains  
Curtains and masks and diplomas and paper  
we weave for protection, for power, for envy.

Do we ever get to meet the entity behind them?

And so we await the necktie to enter the room  
Pull back the curtain  
And with diplomas and a sharp beard  
tell us my body is broken.

Begin the bloodletting.

## What My Father Knew

---

ED EVANS

**M**y cousin once told me “the older I get, the smarter I realize my father was.” And so it is in a world where you know everything when you’re young, and as you grow older you become aware of just how much you don’t know.

It was my junior year in high school.

On a winter night, on the way home from a high school basketball game, on a slushy road, three of the senior boys were in a car accident. Two of them were killed. The third—the driver—was badly hurt, but lived.

Ours was a tight-knit rural school which was very small—only grades 7 to 12 and only about 300 students. The senior class that year was amazingly small, just 13 students. This was an event that literally rocked our high school.

The fire station wasn’t far from my house and I had gone there after hearing the siren to see what was going on. With the initial word that some of my friends had been in a terrible accident, and two of them were gone, I stayed until the word came through who had died. I couldn’t sleep much that night.

The stark message from the cosmos was that no matter how small and powerful we thought we were, we teenagers were *not* invincible.

The morning after the accident my father and I headed out to do some errands. Saturday morning. The stunning loss was weighing heavily on me. I expressed the terrible sadness and the abruptness of the deaths of two people I had known for most of my growing up. How I just didn’t feel like doing anything.

My dad and I were on opposite sides of the car. He was standing next to the driver’s door and looked across the top of the car at me. Very quietly and firmly he said, “Their lives are over. But we must go forward with ours. As sad and tragic as this is, it is our job to live on.”

I took the advice in and thought about it, but it was lost in the emotional swirl of the next week—the trauma that shuddered through our small school. Calling hours. Funerals that all the students in the high school were bused to.

Then the slow, arduous process of grief and recovery and all else that followed. Getting used to the hollow spaces in the hallways and classrooms where the two teenagers' presence and energy used to live in the whirl of high school life.

I didn't mention it was a drunk-driving accident. This was before the days of MADD and SADD and the awareness of the carnage among teenagers who put together the lethal mix of alcohol and horsepower.

I also didn't mention the accident happened exactly two weeks before Christmas.

Many of the volunteer firemen who pulled our friends out of the wreckage were also our teachers at school.

It was simply layer over layer of trauma.

Nowadays, you hear on the news after some school situation: *School officials reacted quickly. Teams of grief counselors will be available for students and staff.* Not for us. Not then. This was before the era of "grief counselors."

The impact was just straight-up devastating and I don't believe anything like that had happened there in a long time, if ever.

In one way or another we as individuals, and as a group, walked ourselves out of the dark hole of that tragedy. Not everyone as easily as others. Not all at the same pace.

One afternoon after school, a carload of us drove a dozen miles to the junkyard where the mangled car had been discarded among the rusted ruins of all manner of vehicles. Just one more. We studied it. We examined the damage, the distorted shape. I remember that the impact, however it had taken place, had crushed the car on both sides, leaving it looking pinched in the middle like an egg timer. Being there, in a way, was part of our personal processing of grief and wonder. Revisit the object involved. Try to understand.

But getting back to what my father said to me about the necessity of moving forward with our lives—that is what we did. A difficult, however seemingly simple, piece of what you sometimes have to do.

It was decades later, long after dad was gone, that some additional information fell into place for me. We were clearing out the family home that was for sale and were cleaning out the furniture from our parents' bedroom.

Sitting at the end of one of the drawers was a stack of Dad's papers and pictures that my mom had kept there. As I flipped through them, one paper caught my attention. A low-grade quality of paper, yellowed on the edges, folded in half. It had been printed on a mimeograph machine. It was a program for a memorial service. Most of the writing inside was a list of dozens and dozens of names of young men who were part of my father's military unit at Guadalcanal in the South Pacific in World War II.

As the unit was preparing to leave the island for the next deadly encounter with the Japanese, on yet another island, they took time to remember and pay homage to their dead. Dad personally knew many of them. However, all of the dead were important to the unit as a whole. In circumstances like that, none of you are strangers to one another because each one of you can be the one who protects and saves the ones who are next to you.

His advice to me about moving forward with life was heartfelt good advice when he handed it off to me. But now, I appreciated it was advice he had lived with through an extraordinary time, in dangerous places, far away from home.

There is a footnote: sometimes the things our parents tell us are for right now, but are also meant for our longer journey. My father died just eight months beyond the December day when he offered his advice. Moving through that loss was the most difficult challenge of my teenage years. But I was better equipped. Fortunately, and unfortunately, I'd had experience. ☺

*Photograph*



Sarah Russell | *Slanted Boundaries*

## Barricades

CHARLES STONE

Late spring, and day turns outside in:  
newmown grass clumped on shoes,  
apple blossoms on a window ledge,  
the spontaneous invasions  
of ants and flies, and something forming  
in the unwatched corners of vacant rooms.  
We go about our business, brush them away  
excuse their forays into foreign land  
accept them, maybe, we the supreme beings of walls  
so benevolent in our random mercies.  
But then, on the lip of a water glass,  
we meet, eye-to-eye, something many-legged.  
Complete collapse of civil restraints.  
I shudder, flick it absent-mindedly  
into the sink, where three more have massed  
awaiting a signal to advance.

Two on the floor, four in the cupboard,  
now a flanking move,  
until I shout at no one no way no more enough  
and the attack begins—fist on glass  
I sweep and swat and shake off my drowse—  
we shall be the Masters of Spring. Then  
the phone rings,  
disturbs a frenzy of Lestoil and ammonia and  
the sugary powders spooned from boxes  
that warn *Keep Away From Children*.  
My mother, calling from the Land of Latch & Gate.  
“Cloves will stop the spread of ants,” she says.  
She should know. No insect has ever crossed her threshold.  
Simple solution, really.  
No pulverization required, the first choice of tyrants and louts.  
My father breaks in, too.  
“To lure a mouse, use lard,

not cheese—cheese costs money.”

And, before remembering what they have called to say, they say more: “Do you have any vinegar in the house, any baking soda?” and, less certain of this,

“To get rid of anything, use wolfsbane.”

*Wolfsbane.* Such solutions, so kind, or vicious, share a fine contempt for balance, never going so far as to organize the complete annihilation of ants and spiders and things we cannot see but never stopping ourselves, either—

Never allow admittance.

Given the slightest opportunity

even one becomes ten then fifty

Always build a strong line of defense

and a second line of defense

an exact method to stop the spread of Whatever

a palisade of cloves, wormwood, a garlic bulb on the sill,

or a checkpoint. With vigilance

small invasions are easily turned

away before they begin.

Hours pass before open screens admit the breeze and the talk of rowdy neighbors. A moving van blunders up trampling marigolds, sheering off a new section of fence.

No name neighbors leap out

leaving after a stay of just three weeks,

maybe more. An eviction?—who knows their story.

Still, it’s an opportunity. The same scene,

an instant replay of last month

and the month before

for those who missed the chance at welcome,

*bienvenido, bienvenue, willkommen,* whatever.

Well-known fact: in apartment complexes

tenants come and go anyway

“there’s no reason, they just do”

so here they go again,

boxes and bedding, chairs and coats,

several silk dresses, a broken lamp,  
all moving up the steel ramp,  
a picture show in reverse  
for those trimming hedges again  
or suddenly at the front door  
reading letters addressed *Occupant*  
Such careful consideration, and  
no one speaks.

Like strangers weighing the safety of numbers  
they inspect the van as it fills, satisfied  
nothing of their own is inside.

Outside, tending the border, older than trees,  
the nearest neighbor is watering his life,  
smiling at stuff shunted away,  
for the huge hands and copper faces  
of men who box this place,  
and all its indignations.  
No wolfsbane here. Just the  
precarious silence that wards off intrusion.  
Across the street his neighbor has a dog  
he keeps chained to a tree all day  
taunts it whenever he thinks no one notices  
just to keep it ready, the guardian of hedges and junk mail.  
None of us can say the obvious—*so long, good luck, stay in touch*—  
for we have not yet learned hello. And so we watch,  
the garden hose spitting at ruined flowers on the thin line  
between neighbor and stranger,  
the dog uncertain whether to lunge.

Inside, benign rituals begin  
(sprinkling of cloves,  
combustion of vinegar and soda)  
the ants resuming their tentative occupation,  
the spiders shooting strands of parachute  
for the breeze to carry them forward,  
the current occupant, with impatient hands,  
now and then, crushing all.

## What I Failed to Mend

---

BUNKY ZELMAN

You wore your bones  
on a rusted shirt

Your split-ended fingers  
self-scored a rubric  
on snow play whispers

I wanted to  
March trumpets  
The rifts of your fingers  
But you wailed chords over  
Her icy, paper shoulder

Glazing my  
vacant eyes with  
Caribbean ale  
My tongue bled lyrics  
you could have used, no charge

Now  
when I see the clouds  
crumble to ash  
the white  
drifting listlessly  
I am  
Reminded.

I am taken back  
through the dank  
through the murk  
through this city

and on these nights  
I think of you

your outstretched hand  
your barb-wired heart

## T-9 Months

---

LIAM HARRINGTON

I might be warm-blooded but the bathroom floor is cold.  
Something about the tiles without give—  
Forcing me into submission  
And acceptance doesn't always sit cozy inside four walls.  
Turn the hot water on and steam up the mirror.  
I don't want to see myself until this is over.  
Let me wipe it away with my own hands and wait myself into focus.  
Are you here yet?  
Everybody's ready outside.

## The Paradox

DAWN SHEFLER

The little room was yellow. It was a bright room with many windows on the second floor of an old house. Two chairs sat opposite each other in the room; two people sat in the chairs. For nearly two years, Artemis had been coming to sit in this little room. The activity assigned to the room was conversation—talking—Artemis, however, sat in silence on this day.

The words had struggled to come out in breaks and stutters the last time Artemis had sat here. The difficulty in making her tongue form words had been extreme, but eventually the words had come out: “what I want...why I come back every week is because... I want... (she searched for a phrase) ...emotional intimacy...with you.” Today, Artemis sat in silence.

The woman in the other chair sat with a thoughtful and slightly sad look on her face. Artemis thought the other woman must be confused. She must be confused as to why Artemis had gone silent. For two years, they had weathered the occasional silence but their general rapport was good, amicable, even jocose. Last week, Artemis had struggled but eventually succeeded in making a difficult confession. But today, silence.

Artemis wondered if the other woman was hurt by the sudden stonewalling. She shook her head at herself; it was stupid, perhaps self-deluding, to even wonder that. The other woman was not hurt by the actions, or inactions, of Artemis. This was her job, what she was trained to do. Artemis looked at her. It would have been easy to believe that this was the actual woman and not a carefully constructed mirage. The mirage looked so thoughtful, so kind, so beautiful. A mirage that could compel a lot of people to die in the desert.

Artemis knew that she was being unfair to the other woman.

The mirage looked up with a slight, questioning smile on her face.

“Last week, you said you wanted emotional intimacy, but today you won’t talk to me. Do you see the paradox?”

Artemis nodded and managed to force a “Yes” from her locked lips. Her eyesight began to be obscured by unwanted wetness filling her eyes. She wanted so badly to reach out to the mirage. Artemis stretched her legs outward towards the other chair, not quite bridging the gap.

“What did you mean by emotional intimacy?”

Artemis pondered this question. The need to define the desire required her to see everything she was afraid to show the mirage. Emotions started to rush in and overwhelm her. Artemis pulled her legs back in from across the gap. The emotions pushed the impulse to reach outward down further and further into the depths of her soul, like a waterfall pushes a swimmer down further into the depths of a lake. What were these emotions? Artemis could not name them all because fear took center stage. Fear whispered in her ear to evade any questioning. Fear told her pain was at the end of this road, pain and humiliation. A thick gray wall rose around Artemis's thoughts. The wall encircled her mind, closing it off from any probing.

The mirage looked concerned and softly spoke.

"What's going on? What are you thinking about?"

Artemis searched for an answer but could find no way to circumvent the gray wall; not even she had access to her thoughts any longer. The cold gray wall was impenetrable from every vantage point. She circled around the wall feeling desperate. She could see the attentive expression on the mirage's face. Her heart ached to answer the question. She became frustrated at the barrier separating her from her own thoughts. Artemis's frustration turned into peevishness. When she finally answered, it was with irrational annoyance.

"Nothing. I'm not thinking anything that matters."

The mirage continued trying:

"Well, why don't you tell me what you are thinking first and then we can decide if it matters?"

Artemis just shook her head.

A hint of frustration passed over the mirage's face.

"Why won't you let me see what's hurting you?"

Artemis held tight to her annoyance.

"Why do you want to see? What good will it do?"

The mirage smiled.

"That's what I am here for: to see."

Artemis grimaced in pain and frustration.

Silence engulfed the little room again.

The mirage was the first to break the silence once more, speaking deliberately.

"You have put me in a difficult situation: I feel as if you are on one side of the door pushing it shut and I am on the other side trying to open it, and I

don't know whether I should keep pushing or let it shut..."

Artemis wanted to cry but resisted. The tears grudgingly began to roll down her cheeks anyway. The mirage's statement shot pain through her heart because to her it portended an end. If the mirage let the door shut, that would be the end. Her time in the little room would be over. The idea made her ache with loneliness. She did not know how to explain this loneliness. She had friends and family, people in her life that cared about her. But for some reason the idea of losing the mirage made her feel as if there would be a space—an important, yet hitherto unknown space—that would then be empty. A space that Artemis would then be alone in without her. This feeling of loss was strong and inexplicable.

The mirage sat quietly, thinking. Her left hand played with the ring finger of the right, rubbing it unconsciously, while she waited for a sign from Artemis. Artemis contemplated the mirage. Artemis's mind battled within itself. Fear was whispering loudly in her ear. She feared her feelings. She feared her loneliness if she should lose the mirage. Yet she knew one day she would inevitably lose her. There were limits to their relationship. Limits she could not change. The relationship was created to end. It was meant to be temporary. It was meant to be one-sided. This would cause her pain regardless. There was no escaping pain.

What would happen if she delayed losing her? What would happen if she surrendered to her questioning? Artemis would have to admit that what she wanted all along was a mutual relationship with the mirage. A reciprocal connection, to know and be known, to give affection and receive it. She knew this was impossible; it was outside of the boundaries of the relationship. She knew she was being a fool. She was a fool to want such a thing with a mirage, someone who did not really exist. It would be humiliating for anyone to know this about her. Even she had to admit it was a laughable situation: all her life she had held people who may have wanted to come closer at arm's length, and now for the first time she felt a real desire to pull someone closer and it was someone who was not real, the one person who could not come closer.

Artemis was really crying now. She stood up and tried to regain control of her voice.

"Could I ask you to please stand up away from the chair?"

The mirage looked quizzical at this request but she complied. Artemis looked at the two chairs across from each other. The chairs seemed to be staring each

other down. She imaged lances pointed in combat as she examined the chairs. First, she turned her own chair just short of ninety degrees clockwise. Then, she turned the mirage's chair an equivalent amount counter-clockwise. She imperceptibly moved the two chairs closer while performing this feat. Artemis started to put the chairs right next to each other, but fear stopped her: that would be going too far. She now had the two chairs at least facing in the same direction, focused on the same wall.

The mirage gave Artemis a questioning look. She searched for words to explain.

“They were too much in opposition to each other...the gap was too far...I was trying to get them together...trying to put them on the same side...trying to bridge the gap...”

The mirage seemed to accept this explanation. They sat back down. They were both facing the same direction now, looking at the same wall. Artemis took a deep breath and slowly started to speak.

“What I meant, when I said I wanted emotional intimacy with you... is that I want to be here with you...I thought about leaving and not coming back... but the thought made me feel so...alone... I want to be understood by you... and I want to understand you. I want to know you and be known by you. I want mutuality.”

The mirage looked at Artemis but Artemis could not bring herself to look at the mirage. When the mirage spoke, it was not unkindly.

“Then it turns out what you want, you can't have.”

Artemis felt that, finally, they were both looking at the same wall.

“Yes. I can't have it. What I want is impossible.” ∞

## White Gold

I. J. BYRNES

The Hilton waiter quietly closes the door on the ballroom behind him, as the next lecture begins. So, if the dinner table is a reflection of its age, what do the sugar subtleties that graced the Renaissance prince's table say about his era? Sugar was white gold, a sign and symbol of magnificence, artistic creativity and worldly power. Only the wealthiest could bedeck their tables with 796 entrees as Charles V did and only the aristocracy could display subtleties of the most sublime of ingredients, sugar. These massive, if fleeting, art works included one of Apollo driving his chariot and Jesus and his apostles sitting down to the last supper. (Aside: Regrettably, the catering for that solemn event did not include sugary fanfare.) King Henry III of France went so far as to have his sugar wizards produce glassware, plates, cutlery and table-cloths made from sugar so that everything his guests ate, including what they ate with and ate from, was made of the finest artistic medium of the day. If you had access to what was once regarded as a tropical spice, not a sweetener, in the quantities needed to marzipan your fruits or glaze your ham under a sugary mask that allowed it to legally remain on your Lenten table, you were rich and wily indeed. Only the most powerful could employ sugar bakers in the kitchen whose sole task was to spin edible art from *mascaba*, *zucarum album*, *fioreton*, and into *babilonia*, *camponon* and *rosatum e violatum*. If you were a lord of sugar and a master of sugar bakers, you ruled the known world."

The speaker coughs, pauses, and drinks from a water bottle.

"Sugar was the cocaine of the age of royal courts, lifting up the taste of food, charging the spirit of the diner. It dazzled the eye and romanced the appetite. It had a gem-like gleam and it made a feast by candlelight glitter. Sugar teased, beckoned and provided a surge of energy upon communion with it. It was an emblem of power as legible as a heraldic banner. It was the Gucci bag, the red-bottomed Laboutin, the Rolex, of its early era. As a Christmas present for her young daughters, it is said that Queen Isabella gave them a small box brimming with sugar.

"Sugar, or what the crusaders called sweet salt, was the honey without bees that Alexander and the world were waiting for. Imagine the wonder of consuming what tasted like a solid form of honey, of eating sweet crystals that had the form and brittleness of salt. What a moment in history. Sugar was the panacea alchemists

dreamed of, at once a medicine, a preservative, an exotic ingredient that lit up the pleasure centers of the brain without impairing performance.

"Is the happiness, the surge of strength, the wave of well-being we feel in taking in sugar a hint of what spiritual transcendence might be like? What nirvana might feel like? What the internal experience of heaven is like? Is being one with everything a feeling of sweetness and light? Is a mouthful of perfectly orchestrated sugar the closest experience to bliss we can have...with our clothes on? Shakespeare reminds us that romance and friendship are indivisible from death and betrayal. Sexual bliss is unreliable or fleeting. Sugar offers both excitement and consistency."

A light sprinkling of laughter goes through the ballroom.

"The best possible feeling in this life is, you, plus sugar, you with a sweet coffee drink stoking your brain, you with a forkful of frosted, creamy cake heading toward your welcoming mouth, you biting into the tango of acrid chocolate exploding with wild sweetness, and why not? Sugar is the only taste we are born craving. We come into this world seeking immediate union, not with a soul mate, but with sweetness. Red is the color of true romance, not because of heart symbolism or St. Valentine's Day, but because when green fruit goes red, it is an outward sign of an inward and invisible sweetness. The Japanese, firm, Lotte, brands its confectionaries as, "the sweetheart of your mouth." Now there's truth in advertising!

"The white gold of the Renaissance, the sign and symbol of wealth and power is now white gilt, still shiny but now accessible. Once a luxury, the iron law of history has turned sugar into a necessity. As the availability of sugar increased, the price fell, making the rare and expensive crystals a staple, available to all. Truly, this is proof that the invisible hand of economics is generous and that the very arc of history bends towards sweetness.

"We now consume sugar in quantities that dwarf the groaning tables of the lords of the Renaissance and might turn them green with envy. The popularity of bitter stimulants like coffee and tea have fueled the engine of sugar's wild success. Our caffeine-driven culture demands ever more sugar to sweeten the tide of tea and coffee that power us through long days.

The speaker pauses confidently for audience laughter.

"Sweetness signals energy, life, the power to survive. Sweetness is a symbol of survival from pharaohs, from plagues, from the rigors of the spiritual fast. In the theater of the *seder* ritual, the taste of sweet is the celebration of escape from slavery

under the shadow of the pyramid. Sweet is the taste given to brand-new school children to convince them that learning is even sweeter. Sweets are the longed-for treats after surviving the long Lenten fast. Sugar is for survivors, winners, closers. From the battlefield to the playing field, the taste of victory is sweet and defeat in the boardroom or the bedroom leaves one bitter. Only the living eat the sweetmeats at the funeral. And only saints exude a sweet perfume at death, rather than decay.

"Our planet celebrates its victories and gold days with sugar cakes and sugar drinks and infinite varieties of the species *Succarum*. We celebrate our high holy days and our debauched holidays with jellied sugar, spun sugar, chocolated sugar, cold and creamy sugar, chewy sugar, crunchy sugar, and floury baked sugar. White gold is now available in every shade of pastel as well as black, brown and red. Sugar is shiny, matte, sparkly, pleasantly sour, caffeinated, frothy, whipped, crumbly and violeted. The Renaissance elite had their subtleties, sugar bricked into the stations of the cross, sugar molded into wounded stags from which wine flowed as blood, and sugar carved into the form of Julius Caesar who bested Brutus on the Renaissance table if not the steps of the Roman Senate. Today our sugar candies are as brilliantly sculpted and as brightly colored as any Venetian-style *millefiori* conjured by artist Dale Chihuly. We fill our markets, as we could fill our museums, with sugar art: sweet crystals shaped into every known image from rabbits to the skulls of the dead, from ova to cigarettes, from Christian crosses to Jewish gelt. Medieval peoples had their religious triptychs and we have our peep dioramas.

"An entire course, dessert, was invented to feature sugar. While the reign of popular entrees are stable, the dessert throne may be taken by force, assassination, or charisma. Any gorgeous pie, any spell-binding cake is eligible for sovereignty and may topple the reigning monarchs, who are never more than temporary, from their thrones. Where are the subjects of Baked Alaska and Nesselrode Pie, now? New queens and kings have replaced them and we have sworn our fealty to them with our forks and spoons. With their invention of afternoon Tea, the British colonized an entire meal to the service of sugar. Crust-less sandwiches were but the much-ignored opening act to the cream cakes, jammy scones, and butter-drenched muffins that starred in this meal. Unless you were one of the rare political fanatics to take your Tea abolitionist-style.

"Is sugar what defines us as humans? Is sweetness the hallmark of this geologic age of humanity? For centuries now, earth has been in a Sugar Age, a Sweetocene. Sugar is the rock that has defined us and re-shaped our brains to her ends. Not one day of Confectionery, as in Japan, but a 500-year Reich of sugar. We are the sugar makers

of our planet's most grown crop. We are the sugar eaters. We consume continents of sugar and never grow jaded nor surfeited. We are the polytheistic sugar worshippers, revering the many incarnations, whether pave, gelatinous, rock-like or water-borne of the substance we hold most dear. We are the sugar artists, spinning new pastries, edible sculptures and delightful candy shapes, which are enchantments to both the eye and the palate. We are the confectioners and the confection eaters. We eat the flesh of animals and then feast on the sugary confections made in their image. Take that, non-human carnivores. We devour, symbolize and then devour again! We are under the thrall and dominion of Sugar. Long may She reign over us!

The audience shifts and re-settles after the speaker's loud finish.

"In closing...in an uncertain age, we can be grateful that should the drones drop in, the smart bombs fall, if our borders shift and the names of our countries change... we will still have sugar. It may simply be in another form. We may need to retire our *Mont-Blanc* cakes and take up *streuselkuchen*, abandon sacher torte and fork into mooncake, put down our *krumkake* and plant our teeth into a *zefir*.. Alliances may fail, maps may be re-drawn, Earth itself may be colonized, but Lady Sugar will have the last word on how the day stands. Whatever ails us, the prescription is always, "obecalp". No dish or life could be anything but improved by the addition of sugar. All Hail Sugar! Long May She Wield Her Scepter over this planet and Her devoted subjects! One day the earth may be stripped of every stalk of sugar cane, every sugar beet, and every last, precious, crystal of sugar, but thankfully, that day is not today. I say, "Sugar Now, Sugar Tomorrow, and Sugar Forever!"

Uncertain applause erupts and dies off as the house manager thanks Professor Fawn R. Argus for her presentation, and announces that artist Kara Walker's work will be featured in a rebuttal to this lecture, to be held later this afternoon. The title of the rebuttal is, "Sugar Sphinx: The Giddy Uneasiness of a Dark and Bitter History of Sugar and Slavery." Related afternoon presentations are noted below. The house manager invites the audience to proceed to the scheduled break and enjoy refreshments along with their coffee and tea.

Afternoon Presentations:

"Gluttony's Toll: Sugar and Slavery" Anna Maria Russell Conference Center

"The Mark of Cain: Sugar Cane and the Depredations of Slavery" Lincoln Ballroom

"White Devil: Sugar's Dark Inspiration of the Slave Trade" Triangle Meeting Room

"Sugar Empires and their Bitter Harvest" Peculiar Institute Center ☺

## Someone to Love

---

MIRANDA MOSES

I've been sitting here amongst the weeds, in a hole that the earth has cleverly made just for me, each day now for about two weeks. The hole sits just below a lavender bush where the butterflies tend to land to take a small break from the day. The hole also sits above the river bend, where the mosquitoes await their fate as the bass stalks patiently below them in the shallows. Every day here has been about the same; fishermen wading in the calm of the river, their patience awaiting a swift tug on the line, often mesmerizes me. Then there are the two loons that swim by with their sweet serenade around mid-heat of the day, anxiously awaiting any small fish the fishermen may toss their way. I quite enjoy their song as I eat my egg salad sandwich and sip on blackberry tea. But today I've noticed a slight change in the winds and of course as the saying goes, "all great things must come to an end." The change comes in the form of two lovers, in a tiny blue boat that decides to float my way.

Now I'm not one who knows love well, but I do know that these two have caught whatever one catches when you behave in such ways. They seem to be gazing into each other's eyes, when suddenly a joke must have been told as the women's cackle frightens the resting butterflies. Then there's a silence— you know, the awkward and uncomfortable kind. However, I choose to use the silence wisely, pondering why these annoying lovers might think their shenanigans are more important than my day. They have lured the mosquitoes their way with the promise of a bloody drink. Their laughter has caused the fish to hide, which sends the fishermen home empty-handed and the loons who have awaited the fishermen's small catch throwbacks, now have to fend for themselves. What a mess, a ridiculous mess! You know, I bet the lovers have not one single care for what they have done. But then again, I'm not sure I would care, either, if I had someone to love! ☺

## Yours, Mine, and Hours

---

BREIGE GRAVEN

Some people in this world are clock-watchers. Some use magic pills and potions to cheat death, while wishing their flaws away, sending them out into the world in the form of petty charity and insincere friendships. Others live slowly in ways that ensure they grow old quickly. They collect their skeletons and search for solace in their bottles and glasses, as numerous and ever draining as the burdens they bear. Then there are those that savor every moment. Taking time to breathe and breathe deeply. Love, and find love in those around them. How can you truly enjoy life, after all, unless you discover every inch and unexplored corridor that exists around and within you.

In some twisted world, people take their time with things. They realize when it's the first time they find their passion, or the last time they kiss someone, right at the moment it's happening. It's grossly overlooked how humans go through the world so unaware of what it is they're actually experiencing. It takes days, even years before some people realize that their life came to a turning point and spiraled in a completely different direction because of one particular interaction. One particular thought. One particular word.

I'm guilty of taking advantage of words. My whole past, present, and future career is dependent on the fact that I continue to do so. That is what writers do, after all. Some create art from paint and mud and blood because they can't find words. Others lend their eyes and minds to the equation. The lovers of the arts. Soaking up each stanza and still-life as if they held the answers to their livelihood.

We continuously choose to drown ourselves in worlds of fiction. False lives that offer an escape from the real world. Some come back up for air, but there's a sea full of people who never got so lucky. Lost forever in the murky gray, living by the blade, herb, or image that landed them there in the first place. The thing is, we can send as many lifeboats as we want out to these unfortunate souls, but they don't want to be saved.

Every day all of us are presented with the opportunity to save ourselves from our own personal hell, but more often than not, we choose to stay in the pain we've grown to be so comfortable in. We go back to our vices and make-believe happiness. Watching clocks, and wishing death upon our demons. But there's a difference between wishing and doing. There's a difference between settled and happy. There's a difference between being alive and living. ∞

## LMIRL

---

JOSH LEWIS

Let's meet in real life,  
in real time. I know you only  
through your words and phrases,  
your letters and characters.

Let me experience  
the feel of your hair,  
the taste of your mouth,  
the sound of your voice.

You're only pixelated images  
in my mind, in my head.  
What would you look like  
if you weren't only in technicolor

but in real life color? How would you  
waltz, sashay along my retinas,  
tango with my pupils? I,  
an ethereal specter on the screen,

a ghost without vitality, vigor.  
Would you like me to appear  
in your field of vision  
divorced from all screens,

barriers? Or do you want me  
to disappear behind text messages  
that reveal nothing personal,  
reveal everything but me?

Should we meet without borders?  
Or should we meet silently,  
incapable of saying anything else  
but "Hello. Do I know you?"

## For You

---

LIAM HARRINGTON

This is for the King whose robe's hem is dragging,  
For the once Hot Stuff whose breasts are now sagging.  
For the feathers that fall from the birds taking off  
In which other ones take to make nests so soft.  
For the kids who build castles from the floor of their room,  
For the cracks in the sidewalk that let wildflowers bloom.  
This is for the girls whose skirts invited rape,  
For the little kid's shirt that is sewn to a cape.  
For the white picket fence unafraid of chipped paint,  
Or being glued to a sign protesting cries of the saints.  
For the locals who are trying to make the world a little better,  
For love ending in smeared ink on a crumpled-up letter.  
For the celibate priests with longing in their groins,  
For the desperate hobo pocketing a facedown copper coin.  
This is for the iron worker's back not cashing the check,  
For the woman smelling her marriage on another person's neck.  
For the trees with broken branches and a skin that peels,  
For the floor-level railings in which tired knees kneel.

All that is in us gets offered to the others,  
But our ribcages swell to hold one another.  
Breathe in, breathe out. Pray hope, don't doubt.

## Best of Me

---

CARELINE RAMIREZ

The fog rises lazily  
From the pavement  
As I wake like a sloth  
From my mattress

I gave you the best of me  
You took all of me

You left me with nothing  
You took everything

The eggshell sky breaks out in brilliant yellow  
Bleeding into bitter white

I gave you the best of me  
You took all of me

You left me with the sunrise  
You took the warmth away

Another forgotten night  
Another wasted morning  
Spent alone

You left me with the sheets  
You took my sanctity

Blossoming blue blooms on my battered body  
Handmarks and handprints paint its surface

My body was your canvas  
I was your purpose

You took everything  
I gave you everything

Now who am I and now what's left  
I want to cry out  
But my mouth is drying out  
I want to scream out, but

How do I explain this?  
How do I paint this?  
How do I frame this?  
Who will buy this?

I gave you the best of me  
You took all of me

You left me with nothing  
You took everything

Now who am I and now what's left

A blue and bloodied canvas bleeding out  
A canvas drying out

You took what's best of me  
You made a "masterpiece"  
But all I see  
Is tragedy

I'll take what's left of me  
Salvage the rest of me  
There's an opus in here yet.

If You Know the Words to Speak of Other Possibilities,  
Use Your Whole Body

---

HALEY MARIE LIPPS

this tongue sitting so heavy in my mouth—  
these words, conversations, briefly traveling  
and then failing, disappearing like dirt disappears  
into more dirt.  
for the bee, it was never a dance  
rather the language of ready orchards.  
and for these entire winters, they stay alive, are huddled close,  
slowly circling around what the center holds—  
until it's spring, it's dawn. it's dusk. until I am unable,  
again, to say that which I do not know or how—  
a gladiolus opens tonight,  
there are many other possibilities, and yet  
the bee is pulled by the ready orchard  
speaks with its whole body, alone with its reaching—  
how far can these words alone carry us?  
moving towards and away from what the center holds,  
for entire lifetimes, this tongue sitting so heavy in my mouth  
unable, to let the body alone, speak.

## The Temple

---

SARAH RUSSELL

This skin, this body, it's broken.  
It's been beaten, it's been starved.  
It's been marked, burned, scarred.  
It is a temple, but,  
It's been burnt to the ground.  
An empty pit in the earth with little soul left.  
I thought I was living, but I was breaking.  
Every year, slowly, slowly, killing myself.  
Starving.  
Depressed.  
Anxious.  
Now learning how to live again.  
Rebuilding this temple from the ground up.  
Each day a new memory.  
Each day learning to love.  
Each day just surviving.  
Happiness.  
Love.  
Lust.  
Adventure.  
Breaking the bonds that have held me.  
I. AM. ENOUGH.

I.

---

J O S H L E W I S

a line that shouldn't be crossed  
an invisible wall erected

between me and you i can't stand  
crenellations of any kind

dividers that preclude  
equilibrium from happening

freedom isn't a math equation  
graphs can't delineate

how far two bodies can move  
i for one can't be contained

just by two axis a set of coordinates  
knifing their way through the page

lacerating the alternatives  
must i continue to be separate from you

nice isn't a word to describe  
oppression these lines you draw

prevent me from getting close to you  
queries are met with silence

reticulated pauses what must i do  
say to get your attention

truth can't be encompassed in a line  
ululations are all i get from you

vocabulary has failed me  
why must we persist with these borders

xeroxed copies of our fears  
you and i are meant to be together

zodiac signs aligning

## Exigencies

GUY FRAZIER

Even now, two decades later, when he's safe inside his loft and looking down on the harried people struggling far below him, Colin wonders what would have come of it had they stopped.

What happened was this. It was August of the year of his son's birth. They were late in leaving New York, the four of them—the weaver, the curator, the scholar, and himself. Rush hour on a Friday, and escaping the city was always a bitch when you waited this late, someone said. They were somewhere above Yonkers, not yet to the Tappan Zee, in their official capacity, in their official vehicle. In the back were ceramics, a Vermeer, the brace of pistols that had been used in a duel. Everyone fleeing the city, everyone intractably in slow motion. Apparently Colin was the only one who saw the man, apparently. A brown sedan was pulled over on the side of the road at an angle, straddling the shoulder and the verge, its amber signal still blinking stupidly, and there was the body lying in the grass beyond the car, feet facing the road. Brown leather shoes, beige trousers, the face obscured by something over it. Colin didn't know if he was dead. It was his first time to New York. The others were still talking about a Flemish tapestry that would need to come in for conservation. There was a condition report. The restoration would be painstaking, it might take years. The room hygrometers might also be overdue for calibration, someone suggested. And other needs and desires talked about in the vast exodus streaming north from the city. A jazz festival just beginning at some lake somewhere. Tanglewood. Someone's car—"I wonder if the car is all right, where I left it, I mean." Colin, the subordinate member of the party and still new to the museum and new to these trips into Manhattan to the Met, spoke up after they had already passed the man.

No one was surprised. Or shocked.

Someone said, "You see strange things all the time."

And another voice, "What can we do?" Maybe it was the weaver.

Someone else said, "We have to think of our first priority, the artifacts."

Colin thought they should stop. "Shouldn't we do something?" he said.

They went on talking, unperplexed, indifferent, maybe pretending not to hear him. Their voices were loud, insistent, and he was, after all, only 22. He

would get used to the way things were done.

But Colin wouldn't let it rest. Something ought to be done. They would have to talk to him about it after all.

"What's that?" the curator finally said, after they were a mile beyond the scene, in traffic that was sludging along. Five minutes had already passed.

"What if it's just a ploy?" said the scholar. "Did you ever think of that? A ruse? It's a noble impulse, but I'm afraid you're very naïve."

"Right," said the weaver. "You read about it all the time. Some good Samaritan tries to—"

"Anyway, we'd be putting ourselves and the artifacts in danger," said the curator. "At risk. It's out of the question."

Colin frowned. Risk management was not what he wanted to hear. Hanging from the radio knob was an air freshener shaped like a pine tree, which was twisting slowly in the dry air.

"How can you be sure of what you saw?" said the curator.

"How can you be so sure of anything you see?" said Colin.

They were in the left lane now, passing an empty dump truck in slow motion. He could see ahead of him the shimmering tops of metal cars all the way up to the toll booths. There was no place to stop or turn around.

"Oh, he's probably fine," said Christian, the weaver, always conciliatory; "he's probably just resting."

"Right," said Colin. "Resting."

Someone else, coming to her defense, suggested that maybe he was waiting out rush out by taking a nap.

No one said the obvious. They each had their own alternative obvious. No one said

Maybe he's dying

Maybe he's bleeding to death.

Maybe he's having the mother of all heart attacks.

Instead, they wondered whether the curator's olive-and-egg sandwich he'd left in the refrigerator had withstood the integrity of the museum or had been eaten by their lunchroom thief; who would pay the toll when they reached the toll booths; if there was anything good on PBS that evening, and the latest mini-series about Winston Churchill.

And the only thing that was done, remembering Colin in the back seat, was

to say that anyway they were already too far north and there was nowhere to turn around. It was, after all, a divided highway. And besides, if it were true, by now someone else must have reported it. Or stopped. Maybe even the police had come by.

“Let it go,” they each, in their own inimitable way, finally said.

And that was that.

Still, the trip back to Albany seemed to take longer than the trip down, and few reasonable words were exchanged, and these all about enormously incidental things, nothing about the possibilities of a dying man far behind them, where they would never need to look again, except in memory. ☺

## The Glory of the Snowflakes

---

GLORIA MCCORMICK

I rushed out into the featherlike snow  
At 6 a.m.  
So early in the morning  
The snow in sparkled diamonds shone  
It's warm and snowy  
I thought  
Light and fluffy  
Not the shovel type  
A feathery sweeping kind  
I stood still and listened  
The silence  
You can hear it  
In all its winter beauty

## In the Hollow of Remembrance

---

AMANDA TRUIN

My drones build visions of memories  
and I am buried in the hive.  
There is a way out,  
but I don't want to leave.

I am the queen bee,  
touching each hexagon of thought.  
An old utterance breaks away  
and a blurry image from the past  
crystalizes into focus,  
as I faithfully reach  
for this remnant of us.

We are ache personified.  
I see you as I did then,  
your kindness,  
your ardent longing,  
beseeching me to join you.  
You were a constellation of scars  
I wanted to explore.

Somewhere in the past,  
the streetlights still filter  
through the blinds  
and you and I are captured  
in the banded shadows  
that creep along the wall.  
I know that if I stay too long  
in this illusionist's museum,  
the connection will warp and grow taut

enveloping me in the litany of our voices  
and turning me from flesh and bone into dream.  
I linger, fascinated by the pain and ecstasy.  
If I walk farther or in a different direction,  
another exhibit of a trusted face  
will make itself known  
and draw me down that storied hollow  
in this cortex of tunneled grey matter.

But this reminiscing suits me for now.  
Your care is illuminated,  
calling to me,  
weaving your threads into my core.  
I am watching what we were

the movie reel spins  
and spins faster  
as our escaped words follow their favorite paths  
into my cranial depths  
and I am raw.  
Gasping and stained with ink  
I stand

the cloying silence of the past  
a grainy apparition just beyond my vision.  
I remain here,  
in this prismatic prison  
of my own experiences

the branded queen  
of my own thoughts.

## Minor Chord

---

JESSICA MARIE HRANEK

It was so long ago  
Back in the days of forensics class  
And they wrote things in my yearbook  
Saying how sweet and kind I was  
just like a cat approaching their doorstep  
but, the truth is:  
the tears flow like playing a minor scale on a guitar—  
I'm doubtful because  
All I have are these four walls and myself  
Talking to me  
Approaching me,  
Singing to me,  
And all I have  
is that minor chord to get me by.  
Do I really have anything else?

## Hatred

---

I A N N O B E L

Hatred, irrational and blind  
Burning down bridges, replaced with walls  
Acting out of fear of those of a different kind  
Do we not realize, at all?  
A mindset that should be outdated  
This wasn't how it was supposed to be  
The Great American foundation, mutilated  
The land of liberty, home of the free  
Why is it "them" and not "we"  
Are we not the same, you and me?



Richard Schleider | *I Can't See the Forest for...*

## Little Spider

VIRGINIA SHIRLEY

I am sorely vexed and tormented. I am angry and sad and ashamed. They say what I will do to Simone, what I have done to countless others, is nothing that wasn't done to me. Nothing that I didn't live through, nothing that countless others after me, after Simon, won't survive. Nothing. That word is hateful to me. As if what will come has no consequence, no weight. As if the word *justifies* the terror and pain that waits. Nothing is a terrible word when it makes hell itself look like a respite.

None of the rest of our kind make the transition so difficult, so punishing. So barbaric. But we Sin Eaters have always been a bit distant from the rest of our kin. We are a fairly humorless lot and take ourselves very very seriously, feel our jobs are the most taxing and grave of all the Wrens. We resort to hazing, to hell rooms. Instead of trying to find a balance, we embrace the bitterness, turn it inward and punish ourselves and our protégés for our talents. We have no choice in our roles, in what we do. We ready the young ones, help them control and protect themselves from a life of constant and withering service.

Word Eaters make a game of it, a playful contest. They catalog the taste and texture of every syllable in every context. Language is their jungle gym, their buffet. They're mercurial and laugh too much for too long. Memory Eaters train diligently, but their transition is a sensual feast, an orgiastic celebration. They trade bits of what they glean, paste it together in collages of beauty and wit. What they do is invisible, even to each other. But we sin eaters see everything. We see trespass roiling under the skin, swimming behind the eyes. We see it in words *and* in memory, see it oozing and creeping, see and taste it as we suck it, protesting, from the body. Some sins—those contemplated but not enacted upon—are often grateful to be plucked. The rest are resentful, they fight and sting and bite. Imagine trying to ingest a live octopus and you'll have some distant idea what it is like for us.

This is the life that awaits Simon, the life he has already partially lived. I first met Simon when he was four. He came to live with me six months later, and when he was five he officially became my initiate. I have had dozens of apprentices, taught them the various ways of eating sin. Taught how to pluck it painlessly, how to let it simmer and stew, how to make misery and scars before

granting relief. Some of my pupils have been terrified. Some quietly resigned. Some have been full of spite, some have been arrogant and over confident. Simon is a rare and beautiful exception. A dedicated disciple, he *is* the nuance of our craft. His touch can be light or it can burn to the center of every single minute cell. His spectrum of mercy is sublime, his sense of vengeance breathtaking. His grace and quickness have impressed and frightened others of our kind. They called him Spider, as if the word were a curse. I taught him how beautiful the name was, how apt. When it came time for his clan marking, I tattooed a tiny spider on the inside of his left wrist. He looks so gentle, so innocent. His eyes are shy, his skin pale. But he is knowing, and he sees the things people so desperately try to hide. As there is no hiding from us, there will be no hiding from him. Someday he will have his own adherents, will stand where I stand today. Someday, he may lead his clan, may lead us all. Someday, I hope he will be more gentle than they will be with him.

“Do we have much longer to wait?” he asked. His tone is neutral, but I taste his tension.

“Not long, little Spider.”

He smoothes down his sleeveless robe, checks and rechecks the togs that hold it closed. Then he settles back, hands on knees, spine erect. “I’ll have some jelly creams. When it’s done.”

“Jelly creams it is.” I had promised him a reward. A ridiculous bribe for surviving the unspeakable. He has only now told me what it will be.

What I hate most is the ceremony of it all. The darkness, the foreboding. Under those ridiculous black robes and hoods are priests, counselors, construction workers, school teachers. Even a children’s book author. Like Simon, I was especially talented. My initiation took place when I was seven. Simon is almost ten, but those extra years will do little to help him now.

My mentor left me wordlessly alone, to walk down a darkened hallway, lined on either side by my elders. They stood like angry columns, towering and stiff. Some of them I knew, some were distant relatives. Most of them were ancient looking, with a malice that stung me. My stomach lurched as I took that first solo step. I didn’t dare look back, and refused to look down at their dirty, worn shoes. Such an important day, and they couldn’t be bothered to shine their shoes. So I looked up. To make sure they saw me, seeing them. All those serious faces, severe expressions. When I realized I could see up inside

their noses I nearly laughed. Two black slits full of hair and goo and sometimes fingers. I knew immediately who amongst them picked their noses, who snorted coke. They drew back as I absolved them. Their surprise and uncertainty came off them in waves. I began to taste something deeper, something moldy. The one beside me routinely stole money from his boss. Two up, she was sleeping with her neighbor's husband. There was a blackmailer, a false witness, liars of all sorts. Although a few shrank away in awe, we all knew I still had to face the other side of my door.

"Try not to look up their noses," I said, knowing full well he would. He smiled briefly.

"Will it hurt?" he asked. His words are sour and yellow and make my eyes water.

"Yes."

"Much?"

I stroke his head. "Yes. Very much."

He nodded. Closed his eyes and leaned further into my side. Most of our initiates are sent in with training but little to no instruction on how to handle so much sin. Some do not pass the test the first or even the second time. Simon knows to brace against it. To sort it, to manage it. Small sins at first, small steps. Let it soak in slowly. Eat it, don't let it eat you.

The door opened suddenly. I know it was meant to startle Simon, but he doesn't move. Marcus jerks his head to one side.

"It's time," he said.

Together we stand. He resists reaching for my hand and it nearly breaks my heart. I take him by the shoulders. "Small bites." He meets my eyes, then runs two fingers over his tattoo. And then we walk into the hallway.

"Simon Wren, you have been readied for your future life. We have come to bear witness. Are you ready for your burden?"

Simon nodded. "Yes."

"Are you ready for our trust?"

"Yes."

"Then proceed."

And he walks away. With each step my heart slams, open shut, open shut. My mouth is dry, my throat burned mute. The sound of the door closing behind him is like a gunshot and he is gone.

---

When the door closes they move from the hall to stand in front of it. No one has ever tried to enter or interfere, but ceremony dictates that we make the wait worse by the expectation that we should. None of us have ever been damaged by this ritual, not in any permanent way. We know the trial is hellish, horribly painful. Overly difficult to prepare us for the worst that could possibly come. It's hell for them and hell for me, but I do it because others want there to be pain, want there to be failures.

I can't help but show some disdain for the proceedings. I clear my throat, spit a small innocuous sin onto the floor. It writhes and slithers. Joseph looks at it, looks at me. Then he grinds it under the toe of his shoe like he would a smoldering cigarette. All else is silence.

When enough time has passed they part to allow me through the door. As I walk between them I can feel their hopes – that he passed, that he has exploded with the pain. That he has found madness. That he has failed.

The room is empty of sin. The walls are oily, the floors slick and viscous. I feel the last vestiges of what was, of the multitude of transgressions, many of which never should have been delivered to a child. I am nearly sick with anger and relief.

Simon is on his side in a fetal position. His body shakes and spasms. He sweats and pants, his clothes are sodden. I put my hand on his back and he arches away and back again. His veins are dark and pulsing. His eyes snap open, black and unseeing. The sound he makes is unearthly. I am nearly sick again.

"It's done." I try to soothe him. "You're done, Spider."

"Not...hrrrr...little..."

"Not anymore."

"Hurrrrrrrk...Hurrrrrrrr..."

He half sits, convulses. His eyes begin to clear and he looks at me with hatred, confusion. The blackness drips from his nose and he shakes as he wipes at it.

"Olivia..." He convulses again, and this time retches up an oily snake of sin. It sticks in his throat, smears itself over his neck and shirt. It finally falls free, tries to crawl away on hundreds of fingerlike stubs. He watches it for a moment, wipes it away from his face. Then he takes it in his fist, squeezes slowly until

it melts out from between his fingers. He whispers something and collapses against me.

He has passed. His skills are undeniable. Formidable. The next step in his journey is to choose a pathway. They'll be waiting outside when he recovers. They'll jockey and fight for who will be his new mentor. They'll pull rank and threaten. When he is announced they'll cajole and promise. I already know he'll choose none of them. My little Spider has already found his home, has already decided on a path. Now all there is to do is sit with his head in my lap and wait. ☺

## A Walk to Susquehanna

---

CARELINE RAMIREZ

I realized this year had so much more to offer as the stars twinkled in the indigo sky. I followed the new boy down the rabbit hole, a wind of new opportunity trailing behind him. He walked, and I wandered the pathways and parking lots, trudging through the unforgiving snowscape. My boots made soft sighs as they stepped in and out of the footprints of people before me, maybe the people that belonged here.

*“Susquehanna Community,”* the signs said.

People of the Susquehanna, or the “River People,” as I have silently dubbed them, were at first, strange to me. It took me a while to understand the impact living with a river has, the effect so personal to each individual. In thinking about the River People, I picture face-painted Americans, covered in leather and feathers, proud in stance, but stoic in expression. Then I think about a whimsical woman in tinkling earrings describing ice in sound, the whooshing noise in her mouth an endearing attempt to mimic uneven patches of ice as they slide down the river bank. Somehow, I think this latter image is not far off from the former, perhaps another incarnation from another time, a different place, but just as wild in beauty, gentle in earth, and ethereal in spirit.

He opened the door into a room that held faces I’ve never seen before, but were welcoming all the same. I tried my best not to wrinkle my nose at the smell that raided my nostrils, a smell that I was starting to learn, permeated many nerd dens. I wondered if anyone else noticed, but I was too polite to even dream of voicing this aloud. (You get used to it) I marveled at the sight of humans transforming into aliens and space rats before me, amateur actors playing their parts, voicing their lines, and deciding their fate with a roll of the dice, while pieces of paper denoted the laws of their universe. A family of friends huddled around the round table, laughing, joking, and sharing anecdotes all around.

I can’t see myself joining them in their roleplay, much less their live-action roleplay, but God, do I want to be a part of them, a part of a set group, a family. As I walked home that night, I walked alone. I looked again to the indigo sky, searching for answers, and found myself, a Moon amongst a city of stars.

Does the Moon ever wish to be a star, shining along with the rest, or will it forever be fated to follow the Sun in a useless attempt to capture it? ☾

## You

---

SUSHMA MADDURI

You are my Delightful story  
And my glass of wine  
You are my Awful habit  
And my most claimed prayer  
You are my Radiant smile  
And my deep-rooted fear  
You are my Incurable mistake  
And my forgiving tear  
You are my Everyday thought  
And my everlasting moment  
You are my Yearning today  
And a direction at every end  
You are my Passionate song  
And my quantum of solace  
You are the Magical dream on a lonely night  
And my incomplete story  
You are my Shadow  
And my bright sunshine

You are my love, this moment and more  
And 'your very self' for making me realize this.

## Adagio

---

HALEY MARIE LIPPS

A half-moon dragging its feet  
through a meadow lacking

abundance, these grey horses running  
until they sound like apples falling on some other

acre, or these horses turning towards your approach,  
your once outstretched hands holding bags of apples, this

adagio of their heavy exhalations, of hooves  
clapping in the meadow

eries full of cream-white or spotted-brown eggs  
full of eagles, but we are not

afraid and it is not difficult for the place to grow  
a heart and start pumping your blood through it; we'll

age with the grace of wind  
carving rock into canyon walls

## Never Again

---

AMANDA TRUIN

You don't remember me yet.  
When the Great War  
blasted our world  
and you fell  
on the front lines,  
I stood over you  
and defended.  
I cauterized your wounds  
by the fire of an enemy's camp,  
while aerial strife  
streaked  
and bombs gutted  
the earth.

When brothers  
fought brothers,  
and fathers killed sons,  
and color incited lunacy,  
I watched you  
ride with your general's stars,  
stiff-backed and foolish  
as I forged ahead,  
unafraid  
of the wilderness  
we were lost within.  
I found you fallen  
and wept at your grave.

In our school-day youth,  
I painted murals  
and sold tickets at the drive-in  
while you toiled  
under filthy metal cars,  
oil blotting your  
rust-stained white tee-shirt  
with chrome and T-Tops  
on your mind.  
We were married  
too young, and that mistake  
seared us together  
as we outgrew our ecstasy.

When giant beasts roamed  
this terrestrial plane,  
searching the night  
as burning stars  
scorched the sky,  
we sat together  
learning the language  
of our bodies,  
and smearing cavern walls  
with primitive dyes.  
We were eviscerated  
in screaming  
prehistoric flames.

Before time.  
Before existence.

In this blink  
of a life,  
this miniscule now,  
I have found you,  
once again.  
Two ghosts  
circling this immortal drain,  
and the end  
knows it will never come.

You don't remember me, yet.  
You will.  
And the devastation  
will begin  
anew.

## April 6th

---

BUNKY ZELMAN

My fingers tap the glass  
That rests between us.

The war is over. You have won.

My side, smudged with  
Tears, sweat, human grease,  
Punch marks that crackled  
Into miniature constellations  
Not heavy enough to break through.

Your side, Windex-streaked,  
ammonia-free, cage-free,  
white-washed, chirping perfection.

You cradle your newborn as  
I caress the empty space of my womb,  
The emptiness of my ovaries  
where hope had just been  
surgically removed.

Your side, where my loving parents  
have chosen to stake their graves,  
And add to the heaviness of my heart.  
They play with your son  
who tied the bow to the shovel  
used to dig a trench  
under the glass wall  
and join you.

I'm remaining.

I can't fit in the trench  
with all my bags,  
my questions, my conscience,  
and all those I help.

For we are not Instagram perfect,  
our problems are ugly and  
unphotoshopped.  
We live without your filters,  
In high contrast  
And low resolution.

Unwelcome as we are,  
We remain,  
This side of the glass,  
Wanting, waiting,  
Yet free to walk about the museum,  
brushed roses tying wrist to hand.

## Remote Control

GUY FRAZIER

Please,” she said. “You know? Let’s just drop it.” But he kept on talking. He still had a lot to say. He’d been storing it up all week. There were words spilling out of his mouth like sewage, in the upstairs hallway, then in the kitchen, and finally in the garage as she tried to go away from him. The words were following them everywhere. He was talking in absolutes, the way he sometimes did when he believed he was making sense.

“Why do you always do this,” he said. He was convinced he was being extremely reasonable.

The automatic garage door was opening, but then it stopped halfway up the track. She could see the two gray cars and the basketballs and sneakers and gym clothes and all the other unsorted laundry still spilled on the garage floor. She’d have to move it to get her car out. Or back over it. Now the door was stuck. She pressed on the remote control but the door wouldn’t go up. “Do what?” she said.

“This,” he said. “Run away.”

“Don’t go there,” she said.

But he went anyway. There and a lot of other places she’d forgotten about. The money. The house. The cars. Roger Freer.

“Who?” she said.

Never did he forget a detail once he’d convinced himself he was aggrieved—that he was right and she was not. He amassed slights and resentments deep in his brain. “The clown,” he said. “You remember the clown.”

“He didn’t have a name.”

“Yes he did,” he said. It seemed to her he was pouting when he said this.

“You don’t want to go there, buster,” she said.

Now he couldn’t stop himself. The momentum drove him. Why was it that whenever she was feeling particularly good he was feeling bad. “Explain that to me, will you,” he said.

She couldn’t. She supposed it had something to do with the humidity—didn’t that always make him crazy? It had something to do with the peculiar way he had of seeing everything. There was only his angle of vision and no one else’s.

Didn't she remember the time he came home from work, exhausted, and the circus was in their living room?

He had to bring that up again. Of course she remembered. He was always bringing that up. It had happened so long ago. Why couldn't he just let things drop?

"Explain that," he said. "What was up with that?"

It was a small circus. They needed a place to stay. She was being generous. Wasn't he the one always saying they should help others in need?

"And there were no hotels?"

"You don't know anything about anything, do you," she said, still fiddling with the remote. "It was a small circus. It was a troupe of amateurs."

"I know this," he said. "I know there was a juggler practicing in front of our bathroom mirror when I came downstairs to brush my teeth. I know there were clowns lounging around in the kitchen as I tried to make dinner. I know they managed to gut our refrigerator. I know they used all our towels. I know I had to trip over strangers sleeping on our porch. I know there was a fire-eater in the garden who stole all our tomatoes and nearly set fire to the garage."

"Right," she said. "You always bring that up. You can't forget anything, can you? Tomatoes. You can't let anything go, can you?"

"What do you remember?" he said. "I suppose you have a different version of everything."

"He needed a ride to the bus station. That's all it was. A ride. I gave it to him."

"Oh, right," he said. "Like I'm a complete idiot. Like I don't have eyes."

"Your problem is you have eyes where your heart is supposed to be—your problem is you don't know the first thing about forgiveness."

"I don't, do I? And I suppose you do?"

The garage door still wouldn't open. How convenient. She thought he had probably wedged something in the track to keep her here. A garden trowel, or a fork, or a bat. "No, you really don't," she said. "I'm calling a cab."

"Good," he said.

"Good yourself," she said.

"I hate your sarcasm."

"Mr. High-and-Mighty," she said. "I hate yours."

"And let's not forget my condescension. That's what you always say. My condescension."

“You think you have the only license to be indignant. I’m calling a cab.”

“You said that already.”

“I’m really going.”

“Then that’s the last I have to hear about all this.”

“I suppose it is,” she said.

“Good,” he said.

“Good,” she said.

“So go. Have an amazing life.”

“You see? There you go again. You can’t stop me.” Now she had the portable phone in her hand. I’m really going.”

Don’t forget to—but he figured he’d stop there. He was looking at her funny, at the shoes she was wearing. The heels were worn down. She was going in those? And the laundry was all over the concrete floor of the garage. She wasn’t going anywhere yet. He still had so much to say, it was getting jumbled in his head, but it was all useless now that she was almost gone. If she really was. Maybe she wasn’t. She didn’t have anything with her other than a book he’d given her last Christmas, so he knew she couldn’t be that serious. If she was serious wouldn’t she be taking all her things with her.

“I’ll send someone back for my things,” she said when the cab finally came around the corner and she saw it was for her. It was almost as if she was reading his thoughts. She was sitting on the porch with the dog, a droopy-eyed St. Bernard that was known to be, on occasion, disloyal to both of them. “And don’t throw out my things.”

“Why would I do that?” he said. “You don’t know me very well. Besides, I wouldn’t want any of it.”

“You’re a stubborn man,” she said—“I know that much. You hold grudges. You store them up. You have warehouses stockpiled with them.”

Two neighbors across the street, a couple who wore matching blue bathrobes, were pretending to dawdle as they inspected the mail. They didn’t wave anymore. When they first moved in they had. They didn’t now.

She went over to the garage again. “It’s horrible,” she said, kicking at a piece of chipped concrete in the driveway.

“What is?”

“This. All this.”

“I don’t understand,” he said.

"It's all wrong."

"So?" he said. "Change something."

"Why does it always come down to me? Me fixing everything that's broken. You're just as culpable."

"What does that mean," he said.

"I can't explain everything to you. Look it up." She was crying now.

"Here," he said, reaching out to her.

"Don't," she said.

"Look," he said.

"There's nothing you can say to make this better."

"Maybe," he said. "Maybe not."

"You've said a lot of mean things," she said. "We both have."

"I can't take anything back. I can't unsay things."

"Neither can I."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm a bully sometimes. I was just talking. I was just saying things. I go on about stuff. I was just remembering, that's all. I can't stop sometimes."

The cab was in the driveway, its engine running. The driver had white hair pulled back in a ponytail. He was sitting there with a book, apparently reading it. He was in no hurry to go anywhere.

"I'll be there in a minute," she said in a different voice. It was pleasant and kind. The driver smiled back and nodded. He had the window halfway up. The gray exhaust was enveloping the flowerbeds in the front yard where the two of them had planted azaleas the year before. It reminded him of when he was a boy, and early in the morning the village would send someone around, unannounced, with a loud fogger and they'd suddenly have to scramble to close their windows as the entire street turned white in a plume of insecticide. By noon when the poison cloud had cleared and it was safe to go out again he'd ride around on his bicycle and find dead birds. He thought of that now. He was still sorry for the birds.

The two neighbors had gone back inside with their morning paper. They wouldn't be reading about any of this tomorrow. This was not a big story.

He was making it hard on her. He could see that now. He was being stupid. "Look," he said, "it doesn't have to end like this."

"Doesn't it?" she said.

“I can make a different ending,” he said.

“You can, can you?” she said. “I just bet I know what happens.”

“No you don’t,” he said. “No one ever does.”

“Fine,” she said. “If you want it like that. You can tell me about it on the telephone. I’m really going now.”

But six more minutes passed and she was still there, on the sidewalk that led to their house. The driver had turned off the engine; he was still reading. He was not being a jerk about the delay.

“Don’t try and stop me,” she said.

“I’m not,” he said. “This is exhausting.”

“What is it you want from me?” she said. “What—can you tell me that?”

He had something small in his hands he was groping with. He had calmed down. It made him resentful to talk about his feelings, and when he did he always exploded, and the reaction was usually out of proportion to what was really going on. “I don’t know,” he said.

“Well I hope you figure it out soon,” she said. “For your sake.”

“There,” he said at last. “I think I’ve fixed it.”

“What are you saying?”

“The opener. It’s working now.” He aimed it at the garage and pressed the orange button. The door clattered and rose in its track, exposing all their accumulated pretenses and misgivings, the cars, his tools, the sports paraphernalia, the piles of unsorted laundry, all the things they’d been putting off until now, all the things that had meant something once.

“I’ll be in touch,” she said. And then he knew, as the cab drove away down the street, that this time she really meant it. ∞

## Doubtful

---

JESSICA MARIE HRANEK

I stood there on that same mountain,  
but it was such a different tune  
that red coat I was wearing from before  
was now fading to a deeper shade of black—  
my hands shook  
like the distant wind of the hurricane—  
my heart was beating  
like a drum  
nervous yet doubtful,  
in this time of such minor chords.

## Heart, Break.

AMBER GANCE

His smile was wide and his skin was shiny,  
but his eyes hung differently than she remembered.

They held some quiet sadness  
of someone much older.

Someone who'd witnessed a loss,  
that sparked the mechanical materialization of mortality,

Within their time apart,  
without their shared shard of earnest.

She was standing before the body of a boy she had conjured childlike infinity with,  
but now, somehow now saw the boy but felt the man, the stranger.

As children in love, we dream together and believe as if it is only us who know the secret to  
“poetry in motion, life eternal,” more commonly referred to as love.

But on that clear winter's day,  
when the sun blew kisses to the trees, and the trees shed sequined sleeves,  
perhaps in returned flirtation,

standing before her, greeting her kindly, strangely so, stood the corpse of a dreamer,  
animated by the demon christened “Heartbreak,”

and in that moment she found a truth;  
breaking hearts create creases and cracks in such pure porcelain souls,

letting all the glitter fall, lost in the darkness.

and in that thought, not a moment later,

she felt within herself the lucid kaleidoscope shatter, endlessly.



Miranda Buckland | *Charcoal Woman*

## Ditch

---

LUCY LOO WALES

I can see myself. I can see me in a ditch. Why a ditch? Why not a ditch. They've always seemed sort of half-assed. You're not quite a hole, but you're not something you can comfortably walk around without people thinking that they're going to fall into you. You make people uncomfortable because you're that in-between state of not wanting to try hard enough and trying too hard. No one likes 50% and no one likes 120%. Or maybe you're like me and you try your best and no one is thinking that you're trying hard enough. You work to the point of sweat and tears but no one cares because you're just a ditch. You bend over backwards to help others because you think doing that would make you happier, helping other people. No one cares about ditches. No one cares about you. No one cares about me.

I am a ditch. ∞

*Photograph*



Vasilios Dikeakos | *Shattering Earth*

## Two-Way Mirror

---

BUNKY ZELMAN

There's glass that separates  
Me from them.

And I'm watching  
As they print trees and tap feet  
As they gnaw rotten bones  
Exchange lecture hall war stories  
And sleepily  
Click  
Click  
Click

Most days  
Long days, without sight of the sky  
I loathe the very worst part of my  
job.

These are days  
where ellipses become  
blue screens demanding  
Martian broadcasts  
Endless charts  
And the hum of a dusty fan  
Cooling my anxious heart

Some days when I stop talking  
I can feel them.  
Looking in  
Watching me peck away  
Watching me waste away  
Melt into the chair  
That has become my tomb

For  
Nine  
Hours  
A day

Is this it? I ask myself  
Separated by glass  
Is this what they will become, too?

## Patchwork Being

---

AMANDA TRUIN

The needle and thread work quickly.  
They've seen this pattern before.  
Another piece of me returned.  
I must now sew it back into myself.  
See if it still fits.

Losing you and what we were  
was unexpected,  
yet familiar.  
I can see now  
that you weren't ready  
for the depths I wanted you  
to join me in.

"Why do you do this?" they ask me  
with desperate eyes.  
"Each time a piece gets reattached  
your pattern changes,  
and you're more threadbare."

They don't understand.

The piece returned  
serves as a temporary patch  
until we're prepared to try again.  
Are we strong enough to become something more  
out of all that remains?

The thread is sewn in uneven stitches.  
My hand is unsteady.  
I see the needle pierce  
the ragged flesh.  
Welcome back to my suit of armor.

As the shapes pull closer together,  
and the stitching gets tighter,  
a part of me looks out from within,  
and sees the crisscrossing sinews  
illuminated in the light above:  
a woven gate of memories  
stretching across my entire vision.

Each graft signifies shared experience.  
Time spent.  
Ideas exchanged.  
Heartbeats.  
There are times when I must reach forth.  
Take the piece  
no longer coveted and cared for,  
rending what binds us.  
A sliver of you is still attached.  
These unforeseen additions  
become a part of this fluctuating cover,  
and affect a change in me.

Now, let's get to know each other  
again.  
Let's find a way  
to make this new arrangement  
work.  
Shattered, it doesn't all seem to fit;  
some pieces are old,  
worn and replaced.

"Why do you do this?" they plead again.  
To find solace.  
Release is exhilarating and freeing.  
Release is slicing your façade  
and exposing the raw.

I am a mannequin  
in a suit made  
of vein-lined fabric  
and stardust.  
I name the piece that I hand to you,  
I ask you: take it as it is  
and do not return it war-torn  
and haunted.

## Burning. Breathless. Crazy.

---

AMBER GANCE

His Voice. Velvet foreign tongue, whispers crimson caresses across the  
nap of my neck.

Tightly catch the vivid feverish air, hold it in your lungs,  
Mood sets.

Softness, newness, the embers crackle and crumble,  
burning sweet blisters on my lips.

Budding like runny roses,  
aching for the paint brush that is your fingertips,  
dancing their way down my canvas of spine.

Padded paws, retracted claws, delicately messaging the quieted drum,  
Pounding it out of time.  
Ba-bum. Ba-bum. Ba-bum.

I didn't ask for the jungle cat rumbling low in the dark.  
His eyes glow.  
Lips lapping,  
at my secret aquarium of colorful dreams and tempting tantalizing  
desires,  
that swim so freely into the bowl that is  
your cup.

Please. Please stay out of focus  
in that orange hue of mesmerizing night.  
Your searing soul burns wild fires in the forgotten gardens of my own.

I want you in the soil.  
Let us make the jaguar jealous of our libidinous embrace.

But first,  
Just let me catch my breath,  
Light the candle once more,  
and melt deeper into your caramel eyes.

I'd like to stay here,  
(deep breath)  
With you.

Burning.  
Breathless.  
Crazed.

## Motion

---

ALEX PLESNAR

Water flowing down a creek  
Sweeping my feet away.  
Water flowing down a creek  
Cleanses my soul and me.

Tumbling, bouncing off the rocks  
Water sizzles, crackles, pops.  
Splashing, lapping at the side  
Water speaks, but never lies.

Carving, scraping at the earth,  
Water leads but never thirsts.  
Soaking, shining the rays of sun,  
Water keeping cool flows on.

Winter, summer, rain, or shine,  
Water stays and never dies.  
Dancing, running down the path,  
Water defies even death.

Water flowing down a creek  
Keeps me humble not asleep.  
Water flowing down a creek  
Sweeps my heart away from me.

The Trees in My Hedgerow  
(Have Much History and Many Parts)

---

CAROLYN AMORY

**SOIL**

Self, Opportunity, Instinct, Language

**ROOTS**

Recreation, Orality, Observation, Trust, Strength

**WATER**

Willingness, Adventurousness, Thought, Energy, Reading

**AIR**

Alertness, Industry, Reason

**SUNSHINE**

Stability, Unity, Nature, Song, Heart, Interest, Naiveté, Education

**STEM**

Science, Technology, Engineering, Math

**BRANCHES**

Beauty, Reason, Art, Nuance, Communication, Humor, Ethics, Sociability

**LEAVES**

Literacy, Efficiency, Ability, Voice, Effort, Sincerity

**FLOWERS**

Friendship, Love, Openness, Wisdom, Experience, Responsiveness, Simplicity

**FRUIT**

Fascination, Reflection, Universality, Insight, Truth

## The Firebird Dances

---

AMANDA TRUIN

In the vast madness that is this moment,  
I am grounded in the thought of you.  
Here, in the heat from an electric fire,  
I imagine my thoughts streaming into the darkness.  
Trapped embers flash against the walls of my mind  
and try to find meaning in this pulsing heat of savagery.  
The blazing glow illuminates  
dancing shadows around you,  
surrounding us, heathens,  
and I wonder who they will take first.  
Tendrils from our dark and vivid souls  
form fragments  
and piece together  
like a deformed puzzle.  
I watch the madness dance  
and know that you have wrestled  
my demons.  
I sense their familiar markings all over you.  
I am reaching forth from this prison  
that we built to shield us  
from the world.  
We shake the bars of our caged emotions,  
and shriek into the dark.  
Everything seems to be trapping us  
within these walls and the heat burns.  
It's comforting to know that this wildness  
that exists within me  
has found a home within you.

Gone are the obtrusive thoughts  
that no one else will understand.  
You have never been more understood.  
Every insane and wonderful doubt you are,  
exists somewhere else.  
This moment.  
This madness of unbelievable occurrence,  
burns us together until we're dust.  
And from that dust,  
we will be rebuilt again,  
the firebirds that dance  
with eternally brighter flames.

## Pocketed Truths

---

PAUL ARCHER

On this day, I must admit an uncomfortable truth. I must admit this truth both to myself, and to all those who bear witness to these words. If I had had eighty dollars, I would be the proud owner of a pocket watch. An antiquity that bears the disdain of impracticality and elitism as proudly as you might bear your last name. An object that would make even the most sympathetic and kind balk at the owner. An object that makes street urchins cry, gentle dogs bite, and inspires goldfish to forget everything they've ever seen or heard. I ask that you repress your natural urge to hiss and jeer. That you not wear your repulsion on your face, as I bear the nature of my sins to you.

It was at least 7:30 PM when my fiancée and I crept through a broken down parking lot of a desolate dance studio. We stepped briskly through the night, past the liquor stores, past the hooded figures strolling amicably, or malevolently, through the night. Finally, we stopped outside the door of a small, but certainly not humble, dress shop that went by the name of *Boom Baby's*. We'd just finished our trip through the mall, looking for boutiques or any store that sold wedding dresses. It'd been weeks since my fiancée had started obsessing about what kind of wedding dress she would wear. She would pester me constantly, forcing me to look at dozens of photos of women wearing wedding dresses and asking me about the most minute and granular details. To say that it was mind numbing would be a true discredit to her tenacity, to her propensity for drilling into the base of skull and funneling images of wedding dresses directly into my brain. Tonight, we would be walking through this store to look at dresses in real time, live action, HD, and fully 3D.

So we walked in, bells jingling as the glass door swung open. The store was rather dimly lit, lest anyone actually get a good look at whatever they were buying before they bought it, and was abuzz with the din of young women buying prom dresses, employees chattering away about what dress would look the best for whatever occasion, and despondent fathers sitting hollow on benches. My fiancée got to work immediately, like a bee returning to the hive she quickly cornered an employee and asked about how the store was organized. She walked over to the section where she'd find the optimal dress

and I followed, as good dogs often do. I should perhaps give more honest coverage of my fiancée, I believe I may have inadvertently painted her as a shrew. She is beyond kind, sweet enough to make sugar weep, and all around a good natured person. However, when she becomes anxious, she's no better than a weiner dog hopped up on cocaine chasing groundhogs. She moves quickly, she will explode at the tip of a hat, and noncompliance is most certainly not a valid strategy. We had only half an hour before this store closed, and she intended to make good progress.

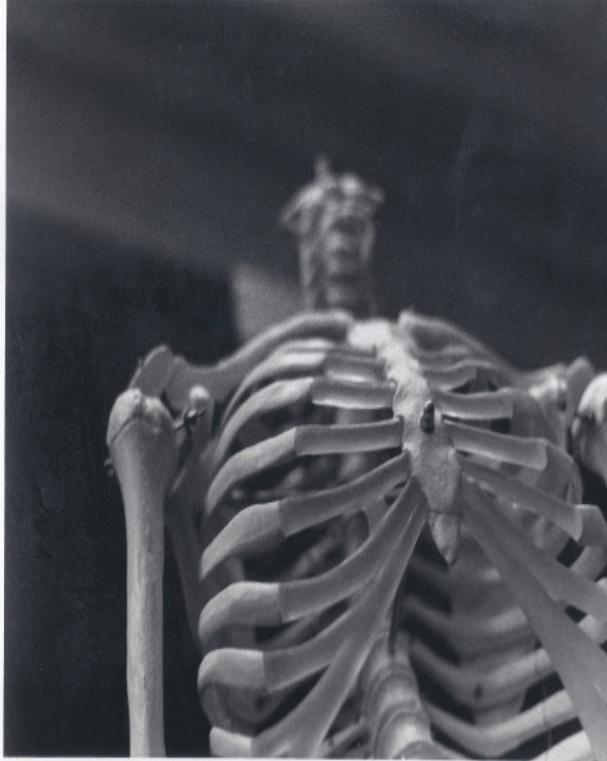
So we wandered over to the section of the store and she began pulling at dresses and asking my opinions on them. My opinion was invariably, *that looks nice*, but that hardly ever proved to be a sufficient answer and upon being pressed I could never provide evidence to back my assertions. So, while we were repeating this process, my eye caught on a jewelry dangling from kind of jewelry tree. There were necklaces, pendants, locketts, rings, and several other things I couldn't, and refuse, to name. But most interesting, was a gold circle hanging from a thin chain. I couldn't help but grin, and I turned to my fiancée and looked her dead in the eye.

---

"I'm pretty sure this is a pocket watch. That has to be the most amazing thing I've ever seen ever. A perfect combination of ostentatious and completely impractical. I need at least 20 of these." I said.

I would over and clicked it open, and I have to be honest, what had started as a sarcastic jibe began a slow crawl into uncomfortable truth. It was ornately carved, elegant white background, simple but powerful font, and such a lovely little ticket. Hell, it even started to feel a bit warmer in my hands, I was really beginning to wonder if we'd lost something important when we stopped putting things on chains. I flipped it over absent mindedly and gaped at the price tag, 79.99 for god-damn pocket watch. An object that even the haughtiest of noblemen in the modern age would be embarrassed to own publicly, and they expected 80.00 dollars for it. Well, here is where my sin comes forth, if I had 80 dollars, I would have definitely bought that pocket watch. ☺

*Photograph*



Margaret Winchell | *Ribbed*

## Pain and Pride

---

M I R A N D A M O S E S

Somewhere, a man is  
Sipping tea, as tears fill his  
Eyes, with thoughts of equality  
Still strong and very much  
Alive in his mind.

Somewhere, a very different man  
Eats his well-done steak slathered  
In ketchup, with plenty of time  
To create new forms of hate,  
For those who follow the sounds  
Of trumpets.

Elsewhere, a man nearly goes broke  
Devoting ALL of his time to ensure  
ALL people have the same rights,  
As he stands by his belief, that love is blind  
That love will conquer hate.

Everywhere, a man uses his so-called  
Self-earned fortune to assemble and  
Impress only those who share the same  
Views as he, thus using America to Make  
Himself Great Again.

## Windows and Mirrors

---

HALEY MARIE LIPPS

From Monday through Friday, I stare at their office building from my office building. I look from my window, across the street, into the windows of their building and with ease it becomes a mirror—from this closeness, this strange distance. There I am, across the street, in a single window, in a ten-story building, without identity and with plenty. There are sounds of phones ringing and papers moving through printers. The sound becomes a smell, this smell of machines humming, of people I know sipping coffee, and it travels through every story of this building, much unlike everything else. Only the hum moves up and down the floors; our stories remain stacked on top of each other. The carpet looks like cement and offers no more softness, but we call it carpet because it is made of a fabric that clings to the dirt on the bottom of our shoes. People chatter with sweet voices and good laughter, speaking of the weather happening between this building and that building, away from us. On the top floor of their building, a woman pauses for a moment, and stares outside her single window. I know this type of pause. It is the type of pause where one can be convinced that this is silence, that this is rhythm. That the hours, the paychecks, the phone cords wrapping around fingers, the coffee in the breakroom, the fluorescent lights, are not so far from what we imagined. That the sun, today, pouring through the windows is the same sun that helps the two trees in the street to grow, that it is the same sun that informs the seasons to move through themselves. It is also the same sun that demands the people in the third story pull down their blinds. We tell time by the shadows ☽

## Summiting

HEATHER COGGIN

**T**hat cold fall morning, in complete darkness, I had already traveled more than a mile on easy rolling ground by flashlight and I was thinking to myself, if the entire hike is like this, it's going to fly by—I can do a mile in a half hour, easily. But what I didn't realize was that was on flat ground. I still had about seven miles to go to reach the summit of Nippletop, one of the high peaks in the Adirondacks, and that was just one way. This was my first time hiking over four miles and I had all sorts of fears and self-doubts: would I fall off a cliff? Would my fibromyalgia prevent me from keeping up with my friends, all of them experienced hikers? Do I have enough water and food to make it back? Am I actually fully prepared for this journey? Where would I go to the bathroom? And on and on.

At the trailhead, the actual start of the day's hike, I looked up at the boulders and asked my friend Kara, who was barefoot, "Is this really the trail?!"

"Yup," she said, "but you're doing great for your first time."

The others in our small group all agreed.

Still skeptical, I followed everyone up the steep trail. I was cold, but bundled up. After we had hiked the first few miles, the sun began to rise, and so I eventually realized I was overdressed and started peeling off layers of clothes. My calves were already burning and now I was trying to scout out the perfect rock to use the "bathroom." However, my friends had already alerted me to the possibility of bears.

"Smell that?" said Kara.

"Yes," I said.

"That's a bear."

"Where?!"

So now I had that to think about, in addition to all my other fears. Would I have to give up? I thought. Would I have to turn back? I had already made it this far, and I kept telling myself that I had to make it to the top. I wasn't about to quit. I also thought, perhaps jokingly, could I put this on my resume?

I kept on. I persevered.

When I finally reached the summit, after hours of climbing, my adrenaline was pumping and I looked back at where we had come from, taking in all the surrounding mountains. In the distance I could see traces of clouds while the sun was beating down on me. I had never felt so accomplished. When I registered for college I thought it would be the hardest obstacle to overcome; when I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia just before I started college, I thought that would be my hardest obstacle to face. But this journey, so far, was proving to be my hardest obstacle but also my greatest success. As I stood on this peak, I thought that this was better than any picture of nature's beauty that I had ever seen. Even these words on the page cannot quite express the experience.

As it turned out, the way back was even more difficult and time-consuming than the ascent. My knees were sore, and I had to take a breather every twenty minutes, because the steepness of the trail and the roots growing over the rocks made the way down dangerous.

Overall, the hike took 18 hours, several gallons of water, many packs of dried fruit, half a roll of toilet paper, inspiration from friends, and a strong will to complete. It took me five days for my sore muscles to recover, but when they did I was ready for my next challenge. ☺

## Wound

---

HALEY MARIE LIPPS

The days move through themselves,  
turning towards a deep blue night—  
a moon breaks into more moons  
the truth you found, gets lost  
inside the fragile architecture of their hearts—  
You, silenced like crushed fruit  
under too many moons, I could hear  
your voice, so full of root and raging blood—  
I could hear the men laughing  
while pulling at the taproots,  
while filling your voice with theirs.

And I am as silent as a pale and heavy moon.

*Photograph*



Madelyn Chianis | *Dad*

*Photograph*



Quishanah Piaternella | *Bridging Partitions*



Amanda Truin | *Prisoner of Fashion*

## A Tail of Two Kitties

---

GLENN MODRAK

**T**wo cats shared a tail between them. Each cat had a day's use of the tail, and gave it to the other cat the next morning.

One day, however, Penelope, current wearer of the tail, did not show up at the appointed time. She was going to a fancy dress ball that evening, and had forgotten to arrange with Bertrand for the extra day's use. By rights, she should have gone two days without the tail, but the ball had slipped her mind until that very morning, and, well, she had other arrangements to make, so she didn't even telephone Bertrand to apologize. Bertrand was of course in a pickle over the tail because he too was to attend the ball. He had forgotten to tell Penelope, so perhaps the mix-up was his fault as well.

Bertrand's own tail was not in good shape anymore; there had been an accident, and he could not afford to get it repaired.

His father offered to lend his own tail, but Bertrand's father's tail was not in very good shape anymore, and in any case had a kink in it from an unfortunate cat-door incident some years before.

"Maybe you should rent a tuxedo," said Bertrand's father. "You know, a coat and *TAILS!*"

Bertrand could not believe his ears! Why, he'd have two tails then. And what would the other cats think, not to mention the upper class mice that were sure to attend?

Bertrand hurried over to Penelope's house on his bicycle, and managed to catch a glimpse of her disappearing around a corner in a coach pulled by forty mice. Pedaling furiously, Bertrand followed them, and since mice don't have much staying power, was able to catch up with the coach at the groomers—I mean, the hairdressers.

He rushed into the shop, and called to her: "Wait, please, Penelope—we must talk!" But Penelope, by now aware that Bertrand desperately needed the tail, whisked into a dressing room and closed the door.

Bertrand waited and waited, and finally decided he'd have to leave to get ready for the ball, tail or no tail. He would have to go without, but wasn't sure how that would be received.

He went home, got cleaned up, got dressed, and went out to hail a coach,

wearing his best suit (no tails!). Coach after coach passed him by, all filled with other cats heading for the ball. Finally, one pulled over, and he saw a single passenger.

“Good,” thought Bertrand, “We’ll split the fare.” But when he saw who was in the coach, he could not believe his eyes! It was Penelope!

Bertrand sat stiffly on the seat in the coach, as far from Penelope as he could get. She sat on the other end of the seat, with her tail, *THE* tail, looking all fluffed and permed, between her and Bertrand.

It was Penelope’s tail, originally. How she came to lend it to him every other day was due to him saving her life one day a few months before.

Penelope and Bertrand knew each other; they worked in the same building and would say, “Hello” to each other. Occasionally they would share a cab home; she lived with her parents not far from his apartment. One day Penelope was walking ahead of him a few steps, when a gust of wind blew a ball of paper past her and onto the street. Like a kitten, she let out a “Meow,” and ran after it.

Bertrand, who had been idly watching an approaching cart, saw it heading straight for her. Quick as a flash, he darted after her, and pushed her out of the way. The cart missed them both, but not Bertrand’s tail!

Penelope peered at him around the fluffy tail. “What do you think of the tail?” she said.

Bertrand sat stiffly, looking straight ahead, and muttered something under his breath.

“Sorry?” said Penelope—“What did you say?” She could tell he was a bit miffed about not having the tail. She even thought of letting him wear it right then and there, but it didn’t match his clothing at all, and would have clashed badly.

Bertrand coughed a bit to clear his throat, then said a bit louder, “it’s lovely, and it suits you very well.”

“Thank you!” said Penelope. “Are you meeting anyone at the ball tonight?”

“I have no one in mind,” said Bertrand. “I was hoping to dance a few times tonight, and then go home early.”

“Would you like to dance with me, Bertrand?” said Penelope, peering a bit farther around the end of her fluffed tail.

Bertrand was startled; he’d never thought of asking her to dance.

"Would you like to dance with me?" he said.

"Of course I would," said Penelope, and smiled.

They arrived at the hotel where the ball was being held, and Bertrand helped her down from the coach and paid the driver.

They hurried to the entrance, but so many cats were trying to get in at the same time that Penelope and Bertrand were separated, and he soon lost track of her.

Penelope received her dance card from the attendant at the ballroom door, and immediately was surrounded by her friends.

"Oh, Penny, you look so wonderful!" one of the lady cats said.

Some of the male cats who had come without a date were noticing Penelope, and started a line to see if they could get on her dance card. She allowed only three to sign their names on her card to start, but the first place was reserved for Bertrand.

"Where is he?" she thought, and looked around frantically.

The first dance was due to start very soon; had he forgotten?

Penelope turned around once more, and there was Bertrand, standing in front of her.

He smiled at her, and asked, "May I have this first dance?"

"Of course!" she said, "And the fifth, and the ninth, and however many after that you want." And then the orchestra began to play.

So they danced the first dance, and it was a waltz, all the cats flowing and twirling together, careful not to tangle their tails.

But suddenly, the orchestra switched to a tango, without pausing at all.

All the cats knew about the tango; it was a new dance, and many had practiced it with cats they knew, but *NO ONE* had practiced when there were fifty other cats on the floor.

Tails started getting tangled immediately, slowing down the entire floor of moving cats, but not Bertrand and Penelope! The two of them glided smoothly past the other couples, and with only one tail to worry about, they didn't tangle with anyone at all.

The other male cats had been looking at Bertrand, the cat with no tail, and had made comments among themselves about how badly he looked without one.

But now, now they could see how well Bertrand and Penelope moved

to the new dance, and when the tango ended, there was a rush of male cats to the coat-check room, to check their tails! The cats in the check room were overwhelmed; whoever heard of checking your tail?

The orchestra leader saw what was happening, and started the second dance as a tango, too. All the couples who had signed up for this dance were on the floor, and no one tangled tails, not even once.

Bertrand found himself at the center of attention, and quite liked it. The orchestra leader came over after the second dance, and told Bertrand that he was the best tango dancer he had seen. He asked when Bertrand would dance next, and so the tango was played at the fifth dance, and the ninth dance, and the thirteenth dance, and the...

Around midnight (yes, 12 o'clock) everyone was tired. It had been a grand evening out, and all agreed it had been wonderful.

Bertrand helped Penelope get her coat; there was quite a line, as all the male cats had to get their tails. But once the crowd saw Bertrand, they pushed him and Penelope to the front of the line, saying "Let the dancer through!" and "Here comes the dancer with his date!"

Penelope and Bertrand made their way out of the hotel, and found a cab to take them home. Penelope was dropped off first at her home, and Bertrand walked her to the door.

"This night was wonderful!" said Penelope. "Er, you're not too angry over the tail, are you?"

They had reached the front door to her house, and unknown to either of them, her parents were listening to them at a window near the door. Bertrand smiled at her and said, "No, Penelope, I'm not angry at all. The lack of a tail tonight was just the thing. It will start a new trend, you'll see!"

They said good-bye, and Penelope went in her door, and waved to Bertrand as the cab pulled away, and closed the door.

Bertrand was thinking about dancing with Penelope on the way to his apartment, and how nice the whole evening had been, and thought, "Now, what do I do about my tail?" ☞

*Photograph*



Amanda Truin | *Transcend*

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**CAROLYN AMORY** lived the first 23 years of her life in the San Fernando Valley, Hollywood, Venice Beach (when it was still a slum), and Malibu—which may (or may not) be responsible for her sometimes irreverent attitude. It is in every way responsible for her eclectic tastes and skills (i.e.: BA in Music, MA in Italian Literature, Ph.D. in Comparative Literature). She teaches in the English Department.

---

**PAUL ARCHER** is an aspiring editor, who has always enjoyed mangling a good sentence. He currently works at a software company, Profit Rhino, as a technical writer. On his off time, he finds himself writing and playing D&D campaign, rereading the same books, and deleting three-fourths of the sentences he's written.

---

**ALLA BOLDINA**, a native Russian, is an English Department instructor and an abstract artist. As for her teaching, she aims to stretch and redefine the boundaries of knowledge, perception, and understanding in her artwork.

---

**MIRANDA BUCKLAND**. I am a visual communications major, plan on transferring to Marywood University and majoring in Art Therapy and Art Education. Art is a major part of me and I have had a love for it all of my life.

---

**I. J. BYRNES** is a Professor in the Philosophy Program at SUNY Broome and serves as Faculty Adviser to the campus' two-year international honor society, Phi Theta Kappa. I.J. Byrnes has impeccable credentials in both theoretical and applied aspects of sugar consumption.

**MADelyn CHIANIS.** I am a LACM student at SUNY Broome. I view my photography as a way to capture a moment in time that may be lost forever. The goal of my photographic art is to express my feelings and emotions in a way that helps tell the viewer a story.

---

**ABIGAIL CLAIN** is studying business management to take over her mother's family business with her husband in the coming year.

---

**HEATHER COGGIN** I am a 26-year-old non-traditional student who is a Business Administration major. I serve as the President to Phi Theta Kappa, President of the Women's Discussion Group, Vice President for Financial Concerns in Student Assembly, and as Vice President of the Gardening Club.

---

**RICHARD CONNOLLY** is an alumnus of SUNY Broome Community College and currently a junior at Binghamton University. His major is English with a focus on creative writing. A native of Vestal, New York, he has long been suspected of being a wombat in disguise. Please do not mention this in his presence; it upsets him. Also, it would be best to avoid eye contact.

---

**SHELLI CORDISCO** is the director of Sponsored Programs at SUNY Broome. Professionally, she calls herself a grant writer. Privately, she aspires to the title of creative writer, especially to recount those moments in life when fiction and non-fiction collide.

---

**JASON DETRANI** is a Chancellor's Professor of Communications and the Chair of the Communications and Media Arts Department at SUNY Broome. As such, he oversees some of the most creative, restive, and eccentric talent on the planet. Photographically and metaphorically, Jason and the rest of the 107th Communications Division continue their mission of securing the world

for freedom, correct exposure times, and the defeat of Hydra and the dreaded Red Skull. Jason has also been titled “The Light Ninja” by his son Aedan, who will, in time, become the first Avenger (and Blue Ninja) and carry on the quest of justice.

---

**VASILIOS DIKEAKOS** is a mechanical engineer who studied Engineering Science at SUNY Broome from 2007-2009. The submitted photo was taken on the Finger Lakes Trail in the summer of 2016.

---

**ED EVANS** is an award-winning journalist, documentary filmmaker and a 2016 recipient of the prestigious SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching. He is a Senior Instructor in the Department of Communications and Media Arts and is a regular contributor to *Breaking Ground*. He is the Supervising Producer of the 2016 SUNY Broome documentary film “Experiencing the Everglades.” He and his wife Robin have two grown children, Brian and Rachel.

---

**GUY FRAZIER** is an avid chess player who enjoys writing stories about absurd situations. A former creative writing student at SUNY Broome, he is intent on pursuing a degree in studio art at Fredonia while working part-time as a landscape gardener. He has two excellent cats and a parakeet named “Bill.”

---

**AMBER GANCE** is a SUNY Broome Alumnus. She is currently a student at SUNY New Paltz, studying business and creative writing. She believes that having creative outlets is important for students of any concentration and age. Amber believes the arts help us to express ourselves in a way that connects with others, and allows us to share our unique perspective on life.

**BREIGE GRAVEN** is a former creative writing student at SUNY Broome.

---

**LIAM HARRINGTON** is a student at SUNY Broome finishing up his Liberal Arts degree before transferring to Binghamton University for Human Development. He is a transgender male and enjoys being active in his community by speaking locally at schools to both faculty and students on being an ally in the LGBTQ community. He writes out of soulful necessity and reads to nourish the same.

---

**JUSTIN HOWE** is a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces. Some accomplishments include several photographs published by TIME Magazine (online edition) along with various print and media publications around the world. In addition, he was hand-selected to interview on FOX News for their Memorial Day Tribute in May 2011. Currently, Justin is attending SUNY Broome pursuing a major in General Health Studies; he hopes to attend the Dental Hygiene program.

---

**JESSICA MARIE HRANEK**, otherwise known by her nickname—Jess, is a Music Therapy student finishing up her second year at SUNY Broome Community College. This school year, Jess took the plunge into Student Assembly—as she is a Student Senator here! She loves performing, Starbucks coffee, pizza, and she hopes that you enjoyed her submissions for this year.

---

**JOSH LEWIS** is enjoying life along with its opportunities and challenges. In between preparing for classes, he writes poetry and short fiction. Also, he is a part of Trilateral, a writing group that continues to inspire him to grow as a writer and as an individual. He wants to thank his family and friends for their continued love and support.

**HALEY MARIE LIPPS**, formerly known as Haley Marie Nieboer, grew up near a lake in Michigan called Lake Michigan. She misses the water, but finds pleasure in the fog that clings to the hills in Binghamton. She likes to write about that fog, amongst other things.

---

**SUSHMA MADDURI**. I live in Binghamton, NY. I am a mechanical engineer by education and an ardent nature lover at heart. Two important teachers in life that never fail to inspire me are Mother Nature and people.

---

**GLORIA MCCORMICK** graduated from SUNY Broome Community College in 2016.

---

**CELENA MCDONNELL** is a single mom and resident of Endicott, NY. This is her first semester back to school after over 20 years, and she is pursuing her degree in Human Services. Her hobbies include writing and volunteering, most recently with the United Way of Broome County. Her special interests are in human and civil rights, especially in regard to poverty and mental health, and she hopes to continue her education after SUNY Broome in one of those areas.

---

**GLENN MODRAK**. Physics professor by day, cat-tender by night. This story occurred to me one night as my wife went by, reading *A Tale of Two Cities*. This story has *nothing* to do with France.

---

**MASHA MOROZOV** is an 18-year-old BAP student studying neuroscience, and a New York City-based amateur photographer for both analog and digital photography with a concentration in portraits.

**MIRANDA MOSES.** I am currently a student at SUNY Broome. My major is Liberal Arts and in the fall I will be attending Binghamton University as an English Literature major with the intent of becoming an English professor. In my free time, I enjoy writing and I have been working on my first novel for some time now, with the hopes of being published someday.

---

**IAN NOBEL.** I am currently a Communications major, focusing on audio. My hobbies include: playing guitar and bass, singing and, most of all, watching Doctor Who.

---

**CHRISTOPHER ORIGER** is the Chair of the English Department and the editor of *Breaking Ground*. His writing has appeared in *Fourth Genre*, *The Father's Book*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, and other periodicals. When he's not writing or teaching or thinking about writing or teaching, you might find him somewhere in the mountains or the desert, hiking with his family.

---

**QUISHANAH PIETERNELLA.** I'm an international student from Curacao. I am very passionate about photography and I hope to professionally pursue a career in photography in the future. I hope that my pictures can communicate a message and make people think. Every picture I take, I take with the purpose of communicating a message.

---

**ALEX PLESNAR** was born during the late twentieth century in a hospital in Johnson City. His interests include writing, fantasy, *Magic the Gathering*, Flannery O'Connor, and J.R.R. Tolkien. His favorite memory is watching the sunrise over the verdant lawn of Villa Philmonte while eating breakfast on top of the Tooth of Time in Cimarron, New Mexico.

**CARELINE RAMIREZ** was born on Valentine's Day. That has a lot to say about her, and most of her work. She writes from her reflections of human experience, both personal and impersonal. Music also has a heavy impact on her pieces. "Best of Me" was inspired by a song by The Used under the same name, and "Angie" took inspiration from a previous story she had written and the song "I Will Wait" by Mumford & Sons. Don't ask her why.

---

**SARAH RUSSELL** is a second-year college student, and lifelong artist. Love whatever you decide to do. Live your life as though each day is your last. We spend so much time on this earth being so critical of ourselves and each other, but we need to just be accepting. Love one another.

---

**RICHARD SCHLEIDER** is a visionary visual artist, writer, cultural environmentalist, mediaologist (media literacy analyst and advocate), certified commercial brewer, and an inveterate world traveler. Curiosity compelled Richard to live in Southeast Asia for a couple of years, during which he photographed orangutans, worked under active volcanoes, and attained (slightly) higher levels of peace and patience. He currently contemplates the complexities of our mass-mediated society and the profound power of black and white imagery as an instructor in the SUNY Broome Communications and Media Arts department.

---

**DAWN SHEFLER.** I am currently a student in computer science. Previously, I earned a BA in history and classical civilizations from Binghamton University. Organizations I am associated with on campus are: Phi Theta Kappa, The National Society for Leadership and Success, and the Computer Club. I spend most of my free time reading 19th century fiction to my pet cockatiel, named Birdie, and playing the guitar very badly.

**VIRGINIA SHIRLEY** does not exist. You will not find her with a mouse. You will not find her in her house. You will not find her in a box. You will not find her with a fox. You will not find her here or there. You will not find her anywhere.

---

**SHARON SLILATY** I've been a stay-at-home mother of three, for 19 years now. My husband has been the one paying the bills and providing us with a beautiful house. It's been my job to care for the children and make our house a home. The first six years were blissful. Then life happened. My husband, suffering from a painfully bad back, was often irritable and yelling. Twelve years of being understanding and sympathetic seemed to be my limit. I started toying with the idea of divorce. The children were graduating high school and starting college; maybe it was time for me to make some changes too. I started by doing things for myself, like hiking. Among the trees, the birds, and the chipmunks I started to find me again, in the form of confidence, but not at first. First, I got lost a few times trying to follow the marked trails. How could I possibly survive on my own if I couldn't even follow a silly trail map? I kept at my new hobby, enjoying the beauty of nature. I have a year's worth of nature photos, from every season, starting with spring, the time of renewal. At Chenango Valley State Park in Chenango Forks, New York, there is a line where the flowing water freezes solid in the winter. This is where the water takes shape, where the pond becomes stable, steady and whole. It took a year, a year of hiking, of learning, of relying on only myself to make it through the woods safely, to feel strong, confident and capable. Notice in the picture the water reflects all that is around it. It takes what it is given. The ice does not. The ice is its own being.

---

**CHARLES STONE** plays the fluglehorn in his spare time when not watching out for the occasional invasions of ants and neighbors.

**SUSAN STRACQUADANIO** is a member of the Learning Assistance Department at SUNY Broome.

---

**JASMINE THORSON** was born in Clearwater, Florida and has now settled in Binghamton, NY. She will be attending Binghamton University in the fall to study human development. She loves to read, write, paint, listen to music, and spend time with her friends and family.

---

**RAPHAEL TOMBASCO** is a teacher, writer, and musician born and raised in Binghamton, NY.

---

**AMANDA TRUIN** scorns borders and scolds boundaries, flying free with winged fancy and open mind. For seven moons and fortnights, she has watched clouds of amethyst fire and wispy smoke with keen binoculars, as swooping bats fill the kaleidoscope sky. Venturing back to the land of flesh and bone, she thanks thee for printing glimpses of her heart on pages of tree bark to share and hold.

---

**LUCY LOO WALES.** I am currently in a Medical Illustration Program at RIT and take classes during the summer at SUNY Broome. I hope to work full-time as an artist and also work on my comics in my spare time. I want to be able to live in the middle of a forest with whoever my future spouse will be with three cats, a skunk, a lobster, and I haven't decided on the kid yet but if not an extra cat will suffice.

---

**MARGARET WINCHELL.** I am a first-year student at SUNY Broome, and I am studying to be a photography teacher. I have been taking pictures since I was ten-years-old. I love everything about photography and that you can capture a single moment in time and freeze it forever.

**ROB WOODS** is a mathematics professor at SUNY Broome.



**BUNKY ZELMAN** has traversed the painted hollows tunneled through the mountains of Willow and Thyme. She polka dances with the allure of faerie mystique and measures time by fires. Once again, she thanks thee for allowing her works to grace these pages of ink and discovery, bound in borders and worded partitions.



Richard Schleider | *I Guess Sunflowers Will Have to Do*