

The Dandelion Review

Issue 1

Fall 2016

THE DANDELION REVIEW



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The Dandelion Review
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The Dandelion Review seeks to publish women and gender nonconforming writers. The magazine is published biannually. Submission requirements can be found on the website: www.thedandelionreview.com

Editor: Sarah Sandman
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?”

— Mary Oliver

Dear friends,

It’s finally here! This lovely first issue filled with all kinds of beautiful writing. I am so happy to put this magazine into the world, and I’m so grateful that these writers took time to send me their work.

Not so long ago, after listening to a friend tell me she wasn’t sure what kind of publisher would want *her* work, I realized that I could (and should) create a safe, generative space for women and gender nonconforming writers to share their writing. I believe that we, as writers and editors, still need to be actively carving out space for non-mainstream voices and stories. There are many publications that are doing this work—but we need more. Writing about our experiences, our bodies, and our sexuality should not be taboo. We should not have to ask: can I say this?

In the current political maelstrom we find ourselves in, it’s particularly important to me to say *I hear you*. I want to hear the stories of overcoming, of abuse, of identity struggle, of love, and beauty, and all the things in between. I spend much of my time listening, actually. Listening to my students, to the writers around me, to the wind, and to the dirt. In listening, I hear just how important our stories are. We want to be heard. And so, this magazine and this press is about just that: hearing the stories that need to be told.

I look forward to many more seasons with the magazine as it grows into whatever it wants to be. This magazine is like me: earthy and barefoot. This publication wants to break through the cement and grow up through the cracks, edgy and brilliantly yellow.

I hope you enjoy all the pieces in this first issue, and I hope you keep reading and writing.

We can change the world, if we just try.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Sandman', with a small circular doodle above the first few letters.

Sarah Sandman
Founding Editor

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CREATIVE NONFICTION

DAUGHTERS OF DAMNATION

by CIENNA MATTEI

There are two mismatched couches in the living room that we picked from the curb. They meet at the corner in an awkward shoulder kiss. Between them is a wooden three-legged table on which the room's only lamp can be found, shade-less and glaring. A moth-eaten sheet covers the space between them, pulled taut over the table, under the lamp, over the arms and into the cushions. The nook becomes a cave and we pad the floor with the pillows and blankets off our beds.

Both windows are covered with flattened cardboard boxes and duct tape. It is cold enough that the chill seeps in with the light from every seam. Despite the draft we are naked, our skin purpling and prickling. We make this cave the softest, warmest spot in the house. It is the only place you can comfortably crawl without being brutally splintered by warped hardwood. On our knees we shuffle through the hole between the couches, arms filled with a plastic stethoscope, flash-light, and roll of duct tape. The radiator rattles against the wall while TV static and a ringing telephone sound off somewhere in the far reaches of the house. My sister takes a stuffed creature I have sewn for her and wads it into a ball which we duct tape to her belly. This is our favorite scenario, learned by watching the mother of my sister pump out child after child like a champion sow. We cheered on the sidelines of each live birth, the only sport that ever interested us.

Today, I am the mittened midwife. My sister is the pregnant mother who comes to my clinic in sudden labor. We squeal and giggle, I hold the stethoscope to her chest and listen to her heart, the baby's heart, then her breath, the baby's breath. So far, so good. I push her tongue around with a chopstick and shine the flashlight down the well of her open throat. Maybe I am a very thorough doctor and I poke around to test her reflexes. She gags only slightly and I give her a sticker for being a good patient. Now her water breaks, crash, she claps. With a blanket in her teeth and her ankles above her head, she bears down as I work furiously to free the creature child from her sticky womb. The tape is hard to separate and leaves red lines like tire tracks around her waist. We forget to be quiet, we whoop and holler. The only thing louder than our laughter is the sound of the lamp smashing backward into the wall, bulb first, shattering as the sheet is torn from above our heads.

Our father roars. We curl ourselves together, shielded against shrapnel of spittle and glass and words. We have been told about this before, how dare we? There are some games that are not to be played, including, but not limited to: midwife, gynecologist, Barbies fucking, marriage, I could continue.

In the panic, time becomes elastic so I push her out between the shoulder-kissing couches, between his legs, hard. I attempt to follow and am caught, yanked backward by ponytail. My body convulses against his grip and is slapped, spun, whirled through the air like an acrobat.

Baby barks, snarls, charges him like the mastiff that she is. Despite the floppy ears and buttery rolls of puppy fur, she is almost menacing. I do not cry until she is kicked, until he turns away from me to beat her instead. Every whimper is my fault, is my doing. I always displease him, I am never a good girl. When the rage comes I launch myself from the arm of the couch onto his back, into his hair, tearing, kicking, clawing, yelling into both ears.

Then everything goes red, I never remember how it ends.

Or perhaps the ending is clear and I simply cannot recall how we got here. I must have provoked him with our games, always somehow sex-obsessed, our young fingers probing uncomfortable questions. He taught me how to play but it was our secret, I betray him by telling. My sister was not supposed to know. I am not to go around like this, playing with just anyone. I have spoiled the game, the gift, how ungrateful I am. It was for me, only me, because I am special, because I came first—my sister could not understand.

But she did understand. The rules are not hard. It is exploring yourself through another's body. No one can see inside themselves, that's why we have other people. Do I get that?

Maybe the first time I understand is when my mother questions me with pursed poppy-red lips, her voice thick with worry. She asks about the fingerprint bruises that freckle my brown body, about the nakedness in the house, about touching myself. That hole in you is a portal to hell, keep it closed or Satan could crawl right out. I am warned, this is the ultimate sin—that only demons go there to hide in the damp darkness. I deflect her, lying naturally and effectively. Maybe I touch the genitals of every living thing that will let me. I molest the dogs, the cat, even the canary, Precious. Poor, sweet Precious who died of fright while still in my hands. There are guilt stains everywhere.

Maybe my mother is neurotic and there are no bruises, no suspicious bleeding. Maybe she is just looking for ammo to use in the biweekly battle over custody and child support. I make these memories up out of the questions she asks me and all the possibilities that might answer them. I am a paranoid schizophrenic who demonizes a good man, a loving father. How dare I dirty his good name with my malicious fantasies. How should my

sisters feel if they ever heard of this nonsense? How selfish to think such things let alone to say them! What a bad girl I am, always the cause of trouble. I am to write these and the bad dreams in diaries so that they no longer pollute my consciousness. It is the fault of my imagination.

None of it is real. None of it is real. None of it is real.

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

by MATTHEW MERIWETHER

I'm in bed, but really I'm in a hole. I'm lying flat, but really I'm crawling like a possum or a rat—one of those lonely animals that surrounded the house I grew up in—trying to reach the darkest, deepest depths of darkness and deepness. This is my fantasy of what sex could be like.

My roommate enters, whispers “Shh, he’s asleep,” to his guest, who is a boy, who he met on Tinder. The guest chuckles a little, then says, “Oh.” Which means, “That’s sad, but also funny.” Because it’s Saturday night and we’re in college in New York. I lie very still as they get into bed together, clenching all my muscles, holding my breath. I am pretending to be asleep.

I haven’t been sleeping for the past month, haven’t been leaving my dorm much. Usually my roommate will be out doing something at night, or staying over at some boy’s house in Bushwick or Manhattan. He’ll come and go through the heavy door, leaving a cloud of cologne in his departure, a reminder to me of his dizzying activity that takes place outside of this room.

I’m used to having this room to myself, which has devolved insidiously into a moat of cluttering shame surrounding my island of a bed, since he kept going out more and I kept staying in more. Clothes and trash and unidentifiable objects pile, covering the floor tiles entirely. Dishes stack and encrust on themselves, leaving thick layers like second skins. Molds grow in cups and mugs—blue, gray, violet; puffy and voluminous, almost pretty. I tell myself each night that I’ll die if I don’t clean this room by the end of the day, but then inevitably I’ll find that the day is over and I haven’t cleaned the room and I also haven’t died. I’m just an alive person with a messy room, which is maybe worse than a dead person with a clean room. I guess I’ll never know.

I listen from my bed as they make love, make something, in the bed two yards away from mine. I hear the hushed moans and wet pulling and suctioning—at times, sounding like thick tomato soup coming out of a can. I hear the slight gasps, the warm, intimate giggles. Not giggling because anything is funny, but giggling because that’s the only sound they can make to describe the immense pleasure they are experiencing. It is their minds and bodies grasping for explanations. I’m used to the moans coming from my laptop from a porn video. Their bodies smell like the cloud of cologne he leaves every night, but kneaded and baked and turned into something else. Oh! I remember that.

I stopped having sex about a month ago. Every time I’d have sex I would feel numb and translucent, like a sauteed onion, for days after. What I craved was

not company, or physical intimacy, or a cock, or anything related to the other person at all. What I craved in sex was a feeling of transcendence that I never got. What I wanted was to transcend my body. Or maybe I wanted to test whether or not I'm really human, and I always felt I'd failed. There would always be a window of a moment during sex, where I'd see myself trying to crawl into the hole of another person, trying to pretend I'm not the ugliest of animals. I see the dirt, the filth, the rancid hunger. The inelegance.

And now I feel caught in a different way. I don't move a muscle. I wish they would both leave so I can go back to crawling into my hole. I feel my ugliness exposed, like one of those lonely, homeless animals having a flashlight shone on it, bright with judgement in the night. Does it scurry or stay still? Which will render it more invisible—stillness or swiftness?

I stay awake all night, never moving or making sound. When light arrives through the window I hear the clanking of belt buckles, which remind me now of those sorrowful-sounding wind chimes every house had in the midwest, like my parents' house did. Some mornings I would go outside, while most people were asleep or driving out to an early shift at work in the small town. I would smoke a cigarette and feel languid, forgetting my aloneness, my ugliness. Forgetting I am a possum, a rat, something you don't want in your home and certainly not in your bed.

They kiss again as he finishes dressing. I hear the wet tomato soup kissing again—is it beautiful or disgusting?—and then they walk out together, swinging the heavy door behind them, leaving a cloud as proof of their intimacy, and I am alone. My breath regulates, my muscles relax. I can forget I am alone now, forget I am ugly. My bed becomes a hole again. I crawl back in and fall asleep.

MAYBE LIES COULD SAVE ME

by JOYCE HAYDEN

I was holding to the railing. I could see the orange bus out the large glass doors, ready to take me home from Fairmount School. Next thing I knew, the world was black. I heard the pound of kids' feet running down the stairs. Kids laughing. A boy yelling, "I'm gonna get you, Smittie!" But all I saw was darkness. As if the lights had been turned off. As if my eyes were shut tight. As if I'd been locked in the closet again at my cousin's house. I grabbed tighter to the railing and stood still until the blackness receded and the brown floor tiles, the flash of red and blue winter coats, plaid scarves, and Principal Costellano's face re-appeared at the bottom of the stairs.

After dinner that night, I told my mother what had happened. I was hoping she'd have an answer. A way of helping me understand. A solution so that this would never happen again. But what she said was, "Don't make yourself do that again," and she left the kitchen. I was dumbstruck. I wanted to say, "I DIDN'T make it happen. It happened all on its own. Why would I MAKE myself black out?" I already knew I wasn't the kind of girl who enjoyed being scared to death.

That was the inciting factor to my becoming The Queen of Lies of Omission. The brief black outs continued to occur throughout grade school. I never told anyone ever again. I just stood in fear, waiting for light to return, for color to seep through the darkness. Luckily, it always did. What stopped me from telling? Fear of not being heard. Of not being taken seriously. Of opening up to being vulnerable and having that slapped into submission.

When I was twelve, I made a decision while standing under a shower of scalding water. Suicide was the only answer to my dilemma. Was it going to be a bottle of pills, a razor blade to the wrists in a warm bath, or the handgun in the glass gun cabinet? It was a Monday morning; I had til Friday morning to decide. Fridays were the day we went to Uncle Bob's house. Uncle Bob's, where the monster hands came out. As the water beat onto my skin, I knew pills were out. I'd never learned to swallow them easily. It was always a big production, no matter how small the pill. We had one bathroom, 2 parents, and 5 kids....suicide by bleeding to death is time consuming. Too many chances of getting caught before the job was complete. But the idea of smashing the glass doors to Dad's locked gun cabinet, loading the bullets, switching the safety off, and holding the barrel to my temple, falling onto the cement floor, dark red blood pooling around me, that felt perfect.

I walked around school that Monday with the gun image in my mind. I was laughing to myself. *Ha ha, I thought. That'll get them. Finding me lifeless on the cellar floor will make them understand how they'd neglected me.* It was years before I'd realize that instead of understanding, my parents would have been haunted with not having any idea why I'd taken such measures. They'd never know about Uncle Bob and his wicked ways...his groping hands, the way he'd pop out of nowhere, paralyzing me into collusion. But by Wednesday that week, the thrill of broken glass and pooled blood was wearing off. Yes, I could and would do it if I had to. But what about George Harrison? What about Pete Dinklage? What about the other rock stars I needed to meet? I couldn't do it if I was dead. I came to the conclusion that I wanted to live. I just didn't know how to keep myself safe. Somewhere between lunch and the bus ride home, a plan developed in my head. I knew my mother would give me permission to do something, if it benefited someone else, say a neighbor. And I had already begun babysitting. So even though I didn't have the gig, on Wednesday night I told my mother that Mrs. Montgomery asked if I could babysit Saturday night. I had this all figured out: It had to be a Saturday night, not a Friday night. We spent most weekends of my childhood at Uncle Bob's, 3 hours away in the tiny town where my mother grew up. It was a habit that developed after my mother's father and one of her brothers were killed in a car accident, leaving my grandmother with 10 kids, aged 2 to 23. My mother was the oldest. After the accident, my parents spent nearly every weekend down there, helping out with the younger kids. By the time my grandmother retired and moved to Florida, we were still going down to spend time with Uncle Bob and his family.

So, I calculated that it had to be Saturday night, because if I babysat Friday night, we'd just wait to go down Saturday morning. I was thrilled. I was sure this could at least buy me a couple weeks before I would have to kill myself. Well, it bought me the next 4 years, until I was old enough to hold a real job. My parents never realized what I was doing and after a few weeks of lying about the babysitting jobs, I actually got the jobs. I realized at some point my mother would run into the families I was supposedly babysitting, so I better cover myself. At 12 years old, I was on the phone Wednesday afternoons to three neighborhood families, letting them know that I was available the upcoming weekend and that I had also contacted a couple other families. I always had a gig by Thursday night. I also became a bold faced liar, but omitting details was usually the underlying purpose.

One night the father of a family I was babysitting for the first time, drove me home. I was scared. I don't know if he touched me inappropriately or said something that made me afraid that he, too, would molest me, but I was terrified in the car on the drive home. I didn't want him to know where I

lived. I hadn't left a light on in our house, and it would be obvious, I thought, that I was there alone. Inch by inch as he drove down Dixon Drive, my brain frantically bounced from excuse to excuse when he asked where I lived. I pointed finally at the Robertson's house. He pulled into their driveway and watched and waited as I went into their garage. I was praying to God it was unlocked. It was. I stood there, inside the dark, by the old Volkswagon, until he drove away, thanking my lucky stars. Then I ran as fast as I could across the street and locked all the doors and windows. Whether I felt the need to protect myself or to attain something I wanted, I had no issues telling my parents or other adults something that simply wasn't true. I was willing to create or omit whatever was necessary to get the job done.

I often lied in order to be able to participate in an event that I was afraid my parents wouldn't allow. When I was 14, a boy I loved died. It was the unrequited silent love borne alone, but which felt huge in my early teens. When Chris died, I thought I would die. I needed to go to his wake. I needed to see his coffin, his body. I needed to understand the reality of that finality. What I didn't consciously realize at the time was that I needed to see Chris' body to help me get a handle on the death of my brother Jerry, who had drowned at the age of nine. Who'd died the year before I was born. Whose absence consumed much of my waking thoughts. And so, I refused to ask permission from my parents. I refused to hear No. I didn't want to have to try to explain what that boy meant to me, especially after my mother had said when I first heard the news, "I don't know why you're so upset, you didn't know him."

So I told my mother I had a school project to work on at my friend Jesse's house and that her father would pick me up and drive me back home. Fortunately it was winter. Fortunately, it was Syracuse NY., which meant it was dark and it was rainy. When the car pulled up to get me, no one but me could tell it was Mary Kallfelz's father who was driving. Or that there were five girls in the car. No one knew he was driving us to a funeral home in downtown Syracuse. I can't even now put into words how the experience of sitting in the funeral home on hard metal chairs helped me begin to learn to process grief. To talk to friends and strangers about the hole in my heart. To cry around others. Then to shut it all away by the time the black car dropped me back at 210 Dixon Drive where I explained that Jesse was keeping the project at her house, and yes, it was going well.

There was a period of years during college and after, where I lived with friends and roommates and I had a clear sense of identity, a sense of independence, and I didn't need to resort to lying to protect myself or get what I wanted. I lived my life. I made my own money. I didn't have to count on anyone for anything and I didn't have to ask permission from anyone. I

made my own decisions. I did what I wanted, when I wanted. But then I turned 25. Then I met Kevin. Oh, how I thought I was the luckiest woman on earth. I was open. I was trusting. I bared my soul and deepest secrets to him and he didn't run away. My lies with Kevin began with lying to myself. "Oh he didn't mean that. Next time, he'll be nicer." When he wracked up \$700.00 on the gas credit card I loaned him and never mentioned anything about it or offered to pay it, I told myself that Yes, I did live far away from him. Yes, it is ok if I pay for his gas to visit me.

The lies of omission, commission, exaggeration, and bold face began after Kevin told me to put my tip money in his top dresser drawer. At first, it didn't seem like an issue. Fine, we could store all our money in one place. Except, he didn't leave any of his money there. And when I'd go to check on my money it was usually gone. I found myself having to ask him if I could have \$20.00 to buy a book, or a pair of earrings, or laundry detergent. And I was not an "asker." I'd always hated to have to ask for anything—money, assistance, and permission. I always found ways around it.

So after every shift at work, I'd stash a percentage of the evening's tips in a separate pocket. I'd hide the stash with my underwear or in a box of tampons. I was into reading spiritual autobiographies in those days. When I was ready for the next Carlos Castaneda or the latest Lynn Andrews, I wanted to go buy it, not hear "No, we have to save that for rent," even though there was no end to the excuses of items Kevin needed to buy, because of his "bad back" and all his pain. Kevin, who couldn't take the garbage out or shovel the driveway, but who had no problem lifting a full sized canoe over his head and strapping it to his truck if he wanted to go fishing in Sunapee.

My lies increased to the point where I never shared any truth about Tuesday nights at Daniels, where I waitressed. Had he known, Kevin would have insisted I not work Tuesdays or he would have been sure to come to the bar just before closing, to join us. And that, I did not want!! Tuesday nights after closing were the one night I could count on to have FUN!!!! So yes, I lied so that I could enjoy myself. So I could have some laughs and maybe even harmlessly flirt a little bit! After the customers left on Tuesdays and the bartender Kono locked the doors, our resident weed dealer, Herb, would visit. Martha, my fellow waitress, and I and Herb and Kono would hang out at the bar, drinking margaritas and then Black and Tans, smoking Herb's latest batch, and buying bags for ourselves. Occasionally, another restaurant worker would stop by to join us, but usually it was us four and a sweet young dishwasher who would months later die in a car wreck after his shift.

It was full body protection for me to omit the details of the night that Ray, the evening chef, asked me up to his apartment above the restaurant to show me

his slides from his recent trip to Italy. The night air sizzled with each flick of the slide projector, with each look into each other's eyes. I knew if Ray touched one hair on my arm or face, I would jump his bones right then and there. Before I crumbled, I left his apartment, somewhere between Venice and Rome.

My life of lies with Kevin continued especially after the first time he slapped me across the face in front of a friend of his, another artist from the craft shows. I knew then I couldn't joke with other men; I couldn't say what was on my mind. I omitted the times at Craft shows when Kevin's artist friends would purposely stop by our booth when Kevin was away, so that they could "make a trade" with Kevin. I had to make it clear I wasn't one of Kevin's objects. They'd have to choose an item from his actual artwork. And I knew, as well as I knew I couldn't tell my parents about Uncle Bob when I was 10 and 12, that if I shared any of this with Kevin, I would be the one blamed. So I didn't.

And so lies became a way of life. I lied to Kevin by not telling him how afraid his anger, curses, name calling, threats, and fists and thrown bottles made me. I lied when I didn't tell him he was hurting me. I lied when I didn't tell him I hated him. I lied when I stuffed all my feelings and all the words I wanted to say deep down my gullet...down to the bottoms of my feet.

I lied to Kevin when I didn't tell him that I'd been talking to Jesse. That for the first time ever I had admitted that he hit me. I didn't tell him that I told her I didn't know how to leave. That I'd been with him so long, I didn't know how to walk out the door without being dragged back, physically or metaphorically. I didn't tell Kevin that Jesse advised me to circle a date on the calendar, and on that day go.

And the weekend before I left, when I'd asked Kevin to come to Rodeo Nites with Marliiss and me, because maybe, I thought silently, I could give him just one more chance, I didn't tell him later that night when I returned home, that because he hadn't joined me, I had met someone. An unexpected life saver, who saw me in ways Kevin hadn't in over 8 years. That I'd left the bar with this man, an acquaintance of Marliiss' and that we ended up at El Farol, my favorite bar in Santa Fe. That we danced there til closing, then stopped into Geronimo's for a nightcap. That we ended up at Shidoni, with Charlie carrying me on his back over to the sculptures, and then into his glass shop, where we burned with the kiln fire until I made myself go home. And when I did go home, when I slipped into bed next to Kevin, who I knew was awake but said nothing, when I lay there, trying to keep my breath silent, my eyes wide open, my mouth curved in an unstoppable smile, impossibly wide, I didn't tell Kevin that I'd just had a glimpse of the possibility of a better life.

But what finally got me to a better life was being open and honest. Being able, for instance, to tell Kevin that I was leaving, that I had met someone, that, yes in fact, since you asked, I have lost respect for you. I don't regret the lies I thought could save me. Lies allowed me to set up boundaries. Lies allowed me to have a modicum of fun. Lies permitted me to do a little bit of what I wanted to do and they protected me until I had the strength to say, "No." To say, "Enough." To say, "Goodbye."

The process of truth telling is something I'm still working on. These days, I might lie to hold certain boundaries with people. People who don't respect my time to write or make art. People who don't hear, "No." But it's essential to continue the work. It's imperative to live authentically. To be able to live without explanations and fear of rejection. To cultivate a life filled only with friends and family who are willing to accept me on my own terms. Thoughts of pills and bullets haven't entered my mind in decades. The reason for that is truth. The reason for that is courage. The reason for that is the ability to walk alone forever, if necessary.

DEAR TABOOLEE

by BARBARA RUTH

Dear Taboolee,

The morning sun has found its way back into the office and I stop again, stop writing to you in order to photograph you. I type with my camera beside me, watching you as my fingers search for keys. Padding along, they have remembered the routine after all these years, the reflexes deep in my muscle memory, which sometimes wander away.

I wish I'd spent more time with you when you were young, Taboolee, wish I'd accustomed you to claw clipping in kittenhood because now it is quite impossible. Lisa used to get so mad at me because I would sit on the sofa, before you'd been fed your breakfast, with the clippers hidden in the folds of my nightgown, waiting until you finally came up beside me, motivated not by affection but hunger. Then I'd trace and I'd rub on your chinny chin chin and I'd hold you securely and clip one, just one of your claws while you howled and squirmed and sometimes bit me.

When I lost my mind in 2010 I was afraid of you. When I was released from the hospital I was afraid to come to Lisa's house because I thought you'd bite and scratch me and I had been so hurt, so battered in the hospital, my skin pierced so many times. I had spent a month wandering the labyrinth, in and out of consensus reality, so I needed to ask, "Taboolee did bite and scratch me before, didn't she?" And Lisa said yes.

I remember the first time I visited Lisa, after I got out. I don't remember who brought me, one of the early post-hospital aides. In those early days I talked to attendants for forty five minutes before I had them come over for what was an hour and a half interview. I only realized that something was not quite right with this approach when one potential hire called and said, "We've spent over two hours talking about the position. Do you think you'll be making a decision soon?" My concept of time was flowing in the water. Ditto my concept of geography. I only knew one way to drive to Lisa's house, by streets not highways, and I wasn't so sure of that. I'd completely lost the ability to use the GPS. And with so many people in and out of the house, providing my live-in care, I also lost my GPS.

My first time at Lisa's after the hospital I sat formally with her on the sofa. Taboolee, you came over and sniffed me. Did you hiss at me? I can't remember. Did you remember me? I lived with you and Lisa from August to June, just a few months before I returned in late November. How do cats lay down memory tracks? Do they derail? Is there such a thing as feline retrograde amnesia?

Taboolee, you're getting impatient. Meowing and licking my hand when I stretch it down towards the rug. When Lisa's at the computer you will

jump up on the desk and walk the keyboard, but you don't find my computing that compelling.

Dear Taboolee, in this moment you are hungry and I am the only sentient being in the house who is both out of bed and able to open the refrigerator. It's good to have purpose.

Devotedly,

The Other One

ANCHORS

by KATE BIRDSALL

It was almost two years ago now. Everyone had gone to bed, and the sad little exercise bike sat on the carpet in front of the oversized entertainment center, its stupid feet not staying, never remaining where they should be. Always flipping around so they couldn't grip the floor like they should. Always shifting, moving, not staying put, not doing what they were supposed to do. Not anchoring the apparatus.

That was what he was doing when it got weird. He was using the exercise bike to try and get ready for the goddamn knee replacement surgery that shouldn't have been, the surgery that tipped him from "mostly okay" into "mostly not okay." I'm digressing already.

Something happened, right after he'd managed to turn the stupid bike back over, and nothing has ever been the same again.

It's weird, almost uncanny, how sometimes we recognize those moments as they're occurring in real time. Usually it's a hindsight-twenty-twenty kind of thing, but not always. I've been alive for thirty-seven years, though, and I can think of only three.

We'd been having a good talk. A conversation. Adults, chatting about life. Questions about what it means to lead lives of quiet desperation (he wondered if it was Thoreau or Emerson; he used to know) and what it means that the core belief that he and I share is so simple: *never hurt anyone else*. A discussion followed of my own apocalyptic creative process, about how trying to find inspiration is just like having a heroin addiction. He didn't like the simile. He didn't like it when I said that I'd become stupid, either, that marking first-year essays and watching bad network television for nine months had turned my brain into pudding.

It was a joke. Not the heroin addiction, because that's what I believe with all of me. If I could bottle inspiration and sell it, I'd be a billionaire. It's not an exaggeration.

The joke was the stupid, the pudding-brain. The joke was that, after almost finishing my first year as an assistant professor, I'd managed to avoid addressing my own complacency. I'd told a story about how I'd been feeling restless and bored. How I talked about it with my therapist. How I felt fortunate to have access to a good therapist with my good university benefits

that pay for me to be mentally healthy and that, later, would pay half a million dollars for a year of cancer treatment. How, the week before, I'd gone straight from therapy to the library, where I kicked what I thought would be my next academic project into gear. Only just, but it was there, beginning to germinate.

Right now I'm fairly certain it's dead, dried up, as sad and forgotten as a brown tomato plant in a vacant lot.

In that instant, somehow the conversation went south, so suddenly and instantly, and, because it was a real-time moment and I felt the shift in the energy, my fight-or-flight response kicked in. But I just sat there, inert, like I always had. Afraid to get angry. Afraid to be sad.

But I was very, very sad. Almost astonishingly sad, and that feeling was the one thing that made sense through the three-way confusion that permeated the room and sunk into the upholstery like a foul smell.

He looked over at me, through the neurological mask that conceals his once vivid, expressive face, and said, "I think you're embarrassed and ashamed."

"What do you mean?" I replied.

My mom looked on with her own confusion.

He couldn't answer, because he didn't know. He'd lost the thread.

It was grief, not mere sadness. That feeling. It has a name. Grief. In that moment, although I'd said it before in therapy or to my wife, the halting awareness rendered me immobile and mute: *he's not there anymore. He's not there anymore. He's just not the same person. My dad is already gone. That damnable disease is starving his neurons of dopamine even as we sit here, turning him into someone else, turning him Other.*

The most twisted, demented aspect of it all is that, even then, he knew he'd lost the thread, and on some level that's why it happened in the first place. Psychology is weird. Terminal neurological illness burrows into the very fiber of every being it touches, making the thread crumble into dust.

The great irony is that, for his whole life until the diagnosis, he was always the strongest person in the room. The funniest. The smartest. The loudest, the most charismatic, the most charming, the one everyone wanted to impress.

The conversation itself doesn't even matter, really; it's just a way to tell the story. Or maybe it does matter. Maybe something about my boredom and restlessness, about my announcement that I had become a dumbass, tapped into his worst fear, which is best expressed in a Tom Lehrer lyric that he often quotes: "They fuck you up, your mom and dad / they do not want to, but they do."

Thing is, it's both true and not true. My dad did everything for me. He gave me things he never had; he said, near the beginning of that unfortunate conversation, that he knew what it meant to feel deprived as a kid, and he never wanted me to feel that way. But then it turned to questioning whether they'd spoiled me. And maybe they did, but they also injected a good dose of responsibility and human kindness into me. I turned out okay. Some might say successful.

The other great irony in all of this is that, in spite of our shared core belief, the three of us managed to hurt. Whether we hurt each other, I don't know—who can know? But we all hurt. We sat there and we hurt until he got up, said "I'm going to bed," and then did just that.

And at the end of it all—this is what I regretted the most, as I sat and silently wept in the big easy chair that we got when I was a teenager—Mom went upstairs and brought a book down that she thought might interest me. Said "goodnight," went back upstairs. No hug. And I didn't make the move to hug her, even though what I wanted most in that moment, in the aftermath of that cognitive almost-explosion of Dad's, was for her to hold me. For me to hold her. But we fell back into our old pattern, and no hug was given or had.

I tried to read the book. Then I heard a door click open and footsteps upstairs, so I wiped the tears from my face, the trails of the ones that had streamed down my cheeks and landed on one in a never-ending series of gray hoodies. I sucked the snot back into my nose and felt more alone than I'd felt in a very long time. A physical pain started behind my sternum and pushed both up and down, out through my eyes, out through my nose. The kind of pain that halts digestion.

So I went upstairs and hugged my mom, and I felt better.

Parkinson's disease is evil and, as we watch him lose his words more often than he finds them, as we watch him forget how to use the computer, and as we see him morphing from a strapping, strong, former-college-football-player

into a shuffling old man, we have to figure out how to name that feeling. At least that's what my therapist says. *Name the feeling.*

Two months later, I sat in a surgeon's office and awaited the biopsy results. I remember looking at the crappy five-dollar analog clock on the wall and knowing that everything was about to change; it was 10:21 a.m., and I knew that, at 10:45, or at 11:00, or at any moment that came after the conversation that began with my surgeon's kind eyes looking more acutely sympathetic than usual, it wouldn't be the same. There would be no more frantic typing, revising prose until the wee hours. There would be no more laughing at the stupid exercise bike. There would be no more breasts, no more nipples. There would be pain and potions and problems. There would be pathology reports.

There would be more grief, the kind that doubles you over in the shower, that pushes you to the ground and makes you cry in silence, because you don't want your wife to hear you and worry more than she already is.

"We found a little bit of cancer," the doctor said, as a nurse with a kind face looked on from behind him, shielding her front body, her own breasts, with my chart.

I felt, even though it was a hot July day, the kind of cold that makes you wonder if you'll ever be warm again.

My wife cried there, at the Formica table under the florescent lights. I did not, not then. I went into a space that I didn't know existed; I listened to him say the words "mastectomy" and "chemo" and "port," as he tapped on his own chest, to show me where he would implant it, and everything became sharp around the edges and brighter.

I didn't know, then, that having a bilateral mastectomy would queer me more than I already am. That my chemo baldness, even carefully covered with a cap, would reveal to the world that I was sick—sicker in treatment than I was when the cancer was eating through my breast cells like Pac-Man, shifting, moving, not staying put, the cells not doing what they were supposed to do.

I didn't know how much it would hurt when I got through six months of treatment and returned to my parents' house for the holidays, either. It was supposed to be a routine visit, but I found myself angering too quickly, getting as frustrated with my own limitations—which are hell for Little Miss Type A—

as I did with his. I found myself sad when I became aware, suddenly but also in a way that had been building over time, that his limitations aren't getting better and that they never will. Mine are and will. I'm stronger all the time.

My father, my dad. He was one of my best friends when I was a kid; he was also a professor, so he had a flexible schedule, and we spent a lot of time together in my growing up years. Memories flicker and flash; there's the time he rescued my stolen bicycle from another kid's yard. The time I spilled my hot chocolate all over everything at McDonalds, and he took me home to change my clothes before pre-school. The time he dumped his change bowl onto the floor and taught me about money. The time he asked me, with every intention of following through, if I wanted him to slash the tires of the person who broke my heart in high school.

He's palpable. I can feel him with me everywhere, even though he's in Ohio and I'm not.

He hallucinates sometimes. To be more accurate, he has lucid dreams during the day that he sometimes thinks are real. My mom tells me that most of them are about me, and I wonder if, on some cosmic level, I'm there with him when they're occurring, those images of me in his own brain, flickering and flashing.

I felt more and more like that sad little bike for a while, sliding around, unmoored. I didn't die—those three words were my exact thought whenever anyone asked me how I was doing, or said something well-meaning about “surviving,” or donated money to Big Pink in my name.

And my dad hasn't died, not yet, and sometimes he has a good day and calls and we have the kind of engaging conversation that we used to have; sometimes he remembers that he once said he'd go to his grave remembering the first fourteen lines of the *Canterbury Tales*; sometimes he recites those lines, and I chime in, and we laugh, and it feels like the apparatus has an anchor again, holding us together, holding us in place.

The last time we spoke, which was over a week ago now, we found ourselves in a place we've visited often together: the existentialists. My dad—my father, my friend—quoted Camus as saying, “what matters most is human love.” And I'm pretty sure that Camus didn't say that (if anything, it sounds like something from Sartre), but my dad did, and he's right. He's right about love

and he's right about the core belief, and he's right that sometimes I'm there with him even when I'm not, because he always was right about most things.

Camus did say that he thought Sisyphus was happy—or at least had no reason to be unhappy, which isn't exactly the same thing—and that matters. I asked, "Dad, are you happy?"

"Yes," he replied. "I've had a wonderful life and I know who I am."

He accepts his fate. He knows that life is illogical and ironic. He is an exemplar.

He refuses to do his physical therapy exercises and the bike is in the basement, where it belongs, and I'm feeling less and less like that bike these days. I'm more grounded and more patient, but also less willing to indulge with banality. I know this creates a paradox. I'm human; I'm absurd; I make no sense.

Camus also said, famously, that "there is no love of life without despair of life," and I'm going with that. I also decided, at a point relatively recently, that "I didn't die" isn't a good response to the question—it's not funny, it's just sad. So I'm reframing it. "I'm alive" is different and, these days, I'm alive.

Anchored, even.

MONITOR

by BETH DUCKLES

The monitor beeps an alarm every few minutes and the ER nurse has to walk over to turn it off. Sometimes she looks at the numbers, but just as often she hits the button and goes back to what she was doing before. After watching this for a few hours, I've started reaching over to hit the button when the nurse is doing something. She seems grateful.

Mom is in the ER with a tube down her throat and a machine that makes air go in and out of her lungs. I brush off the feathery grey hairs on her shoulder. Her hair started falling out after she had lived in Moldova for about a year. She thought it was the water but maybe I could look up some supplements to see if those would help? I Googled "hair loss," bought supplements and sent them to her. I don't think it helped.

Mom put her earrings on this morning as we were getting ready to visit friends on our vacation in the San Francisco Bay area, but somewhere between the paramedics in the hotel and the ambulance, they're gone. She looks strange without them.

Several ER nurses comment on her eye shadow, it's gold and it sparkles. A few years ago at a makeup counter mom told a saleslady with green eyeliner that she was trying to look professional but a book on makeup said that sparkles were for young people. The saleswoman shrugged saying "You should wear what you want" then pointed to a combo set of glittering, punk rocker eye shadows. Mom used up the shimmery purple eye shadow first.

This morning, she told me she had a headache and I got a wet cloth for her forehead. When her body convulsed—seeming stuck in time—I thought she was having a stroke. She came back to herself and I said we should go to the hospital.

"I'm scared Beth."

I tried to comfort her as she stared glassy-eyed into space. A few minutes later, her head flung backwards with a rasping, moaning breath caught inside a rattle. The fear yanked from my stomach into my throat. Each step to the hotel phone was a decade.

When I was a kid, I kicked my brother Jonah off the couch onto a cereal bowl during a territorial TV dispute. His voice, once indignant was suddenly in pain as the crushed ceramic tore the flesh of his knee into half-moons. He

bled too much. I felt a cold rush of terror, guilt and fear. Each step to the phone was a year.

The doctor put blue-green paper around my brother's knee, squirted saline and injected something. Mom and I stood on either side letting Jonah squeeze our hands. His grip pinched the oversized ring on my finger making it hurt. It felt like penance. My middle school friend had given me the ring before she returned to Lebanon. We swore we would be friends forever.

The doctor tugged at the cuts and blood oozed. I saw stars and it seemed funny. I wondered if I was going to faint. I opened my eyes to see the grey floor underneath the gurney and a startled nurse pointed at a chair commanding: "Sit down." Jonah giggled and reenacted my fainting smile over and over again.

Strangers take over now with authoritative voices in the hotel room as mom slips into a coma. They bark like I did when I was a teenaged lifeguard and kids sprinted across wet tile. A woman with a clipboard pulls me aside to see if mom was on medication. The answer is far away because they just started cutting open her turtleneck and sliced through the center of her bra.

Whenever she came to the US from her work abroad, she and I would go shopping. I would talk her into replacing the muddled grey turtlenecks that had been hand-washed too many times and remind her that she only bought clothes once a year. She would talk too much about life in the Peace Corps to the saleslady. I would text Jonah to remind him of his lucky escape from shopping duty.

They're cutting open that turtleneck but somehow I'm supposed to focus on her medication. I call Jonah.

She makes that noise again, that indescribable noise and I am crying. The woman with the clipboard positions herself between me and the paramedics. It's a good idea, she should keep me calm. She might even be saying "Calm down." I ask Jonah about medication while he is driving to the airport. We decide she was on allergy meds.

More questions: Where does she live? What happened? Has she been sick? The words seem small, but they make me focus, like an activity for a child who needs something to occupy herself while the grown-ups talk. I busy myself with words while the paramedics put a tube down her throat, wire her up to devices and move her onto the stretcher.

In the ER the doctor will say it is a brain aneurism and that we should get another opinion. He will use the word “fatal” to describe the bleeding in her brain and I will fall. The nurse will catch me and pin me against the wall. I will open my eyes and see her face and think of the exasperated nurse of my childhood caring for me instead of the person she is supposed to be fixing. I will sit for hours with my mother looking at her closed glittery eyes and feathery white hair before we can move her. I will hit the button for the ER nurse over and over again.

Early the next morning, numb with the knowledge that our mother has died, my brother will climb into bed as though we were kids on a Saturday morning. We will sit side-by-side with our knees touching, leaning against the predawn window. We will pull out our laptops to organize and gather things—as many things as we can—to have something to do.

THE FARM ON GREENWELL ROAD

by MANDY PARKER

She was born in 1856. May. It was warm, the Farmer's Almanac said. Mary Jane Manning, birthed to Amos and Maria Rowe Manning of rural Churubusco, Indiana. They were first time parents who never had a son or another daughter. They lived quiet lives on their farm, trying to do their best by God and all others. Soon Mary Jane became Jennie, as Mary was too similar to her mother's Maria. Jennie was a golden child, doubly blessed with strawberry blonde curls as well as intelligence beyond her years. She was a thinker, that kid. Jennie grew to become a tall woman; she was very thin, and she set her jaw squarely when she was determined. Her brown eyes turned black when she got angry.

Jennie led a happy childhood and turned herself into a woman early on. She was ready for a husband not long after the Civil War ended. Maybe there just wasn't much to choose from. There was a young-ish man on a neighboring farm who courted her. His name was Marshall L Fulk, and he was fifteen years her senior. Nobody ever told Jennie what the "L" was for. They married on the farm where Jennie was raised, on Jane's Hollow Road. Her parents, along with a local preacher, bore witness that day. There were hardly twenty-three years left of the 19th century when they wed in 1877. It was August, and the Farmer's Almanac said it was a steamy day in the Midwest, with thunderstorms toward the evening.

After they were wed they took up housekeeping on Greenwell Road at their own farm. The house sat close to the dirty and dusty road with an apple orchard that was situated in front of the workshop. The fields were flat, with few rocks or stones. There was a good stand of trees not too far behind the house, maybe a quarter mile back. Jennie loved the place. She had a white house, a big red barn and stand of apple trees out in the country. Her life was becoming everything she'd imagined on the Fulk Farm.

Jennie filled her first days of marriage happily with work in the house on Greenwell Road. Each room of the small farmhouse showed her touch; there was a crazy quilt on the bed, colorful rugs on the kitchen floor and pictures hanging on the walls. She worked endlessly in the summer kitchen; cooking for the men on the farm, canning food for winter. She was proud of the rows of shiny jars that held the bounty of the past growing season. She liked showing her parents that she was grown-up and capable when they visited on Sundays. The first year or so of married life looked sublime for Jennie Manning Fulk as she cared for her home and her husband.

While time passed on, it seemed her family and the neighbors waited for children that never came. There was no reason given. No explanation for why their children were never born. Jennie knew why. Maybe her mother knew too. It'd be hard to say. But no children of their own came unto the Fulks. The Fulks grew older together, got gray in their hairs together and lived together. And the years passed.

Marshall. Marshall L Fulk. Jennie called him the old man, but never out loud. She'd learned to disdain him over the short years since they wed. He was supposed to be kind and gentle as a husband, but he wasn't. He walked with a stooped back, forever shuffling his feet. He had rheumatic fever as a kid and still showed signs as an adult. His temper was quick and needless. She never gave him a reason to behave in such a way. She never provoked him on purpose and never contradicted the man. But he was always that way. His grandmother said he was a frightful child, already set in his mean ways as a toddler. He beat the animals on the farm mercilessly, for no reason.

The two of them, Jennie and Marshall, lived at the farm on Greenwell Road for just over twenty years. There wasn't much company on the farm. The old man's temperament never allowed for friends or cordial neighbors. They had hired men, who would come and go over the years. The coming and going was looked upon as Jennie's fault for failing to give Marshall sons to work on the farm along side him. The hired men always lived in the back room just off the summer kitchen. They were usually simple men that couldn't afford a place of their own. Or sometimes they were odd relatives from town that were sent to live on the farm to pay retribution for some random sin. It was around 1895 when the last hired man moved into the back room off the summer kitchen.

His name was Alva Swander. He was to be the last new hired man. The old man brought him to the farm just after Jennie turned forty. Alva was from a neighboring farm that had recently been sold. Barely twenty-one years old, he was a hard worker. He became a valued employee on the Fulk Farm, always useful to the old man. Alva was not so simple as many of the rest of the hired men had been. He helped the old man with a layout and they built a new hog lot with sorting chutes and such that simplified work with the hogs on the farm. Alva was good with numbers and measurements too. And Alva could do carpentry work. Jennie had some of the nicest woodwork in the county after an angry hog laid Alva up in the house with her, for most of a winter. He spent that winter with his crutches and tool chest, keeping busy inside the warm farmhouse. He hand planed boards for window casings in the front room. He knew how to carve fancy picture frames for in the bedrooms. He built Jennie cupboards for her summer kitchen.

The old man carried on alone with the outside chores for most of that winter while Alva was laid-up. Sometimes he hired on the young neighbor boys, from the Badiac farm, to help when he missed Alva the most, but the old man got by. It was early spring when Alva laid aside his crutches and resumed his everyday work. Alva Swander had worked on the Fulk Farm as the hired man for a couple years before the accident. No one ever questioned Alva about it. Sometimes he couldn't quite believe it all.

It was a gray and foggy morning on the farm when it happened. The accident. A foggy haze hung low near the wet ground. It was muddy and slick in the hog lot; the dirt was strewn with the dead leaves of last summer. Fall was a busy time on the farm, bringing the crops in from the fields. Some crops came in wagons and others on the hoof.

The old man decided it was time to be moving hogs to the feedlot before they went to sale. Everyone was lending a hand that day; Alva was at the west end of the chute moving the animals along, should they get bunched up on their way into the pens. The old man funneled them into the chute toward Alva. The old man walked the hogs with his arms stretched wide, his blue and gray flannel coat tails flapping behind him. There was a wooden cane in one hand that he used to prod or beat the sometimes uncooperative swine. Behind the old man, the hired-on neighbor boys walked the hogs in from the backfield. They were in batches of ten or fifteen head, as they lumbered across the land tearing up the grass and sod.

The boys and hogs came into the yard through the apple trees, where the beasts rooted and dug in the soil, still sweet from the last summer's apples. The boys herded the hogs to the old man, who would quietly slip behind to push the swine toward the chutes. Then it became a noisy procession of barking hogs and yelling farmers guiding the animals along. Surely someone saw the hogs bunched up, about fifteen feet up the chute. Somebody must have wondered what the hold-up was. Alva couldn't see that part of the chute from where he stood, prodding the hogs that moved too slowly to suit the old man. There were so many hogs in that one spot. They were rooting and making guttural noises. There seemed to be a pile of the beasts gnarling and grunting as their bodies writhed over one another in the tight spaced chutes. These were nearly three hundred pound hogs, mind you. The boys were on their second trip to the backfield to gather more pigs when the pile of hogs became noisy enough for them to notice the sound, and turn back to the chutes and wonder.

Before she took coffee toward the men and the hogs, Jennie stared out the window of the summer kitchen and studied them. She noted who stood where to accomplish their task. She'd watched the boys round up a batch of hogs in the field and bring them round to her husband. He was an old man. Old before his time. Old when she'd married him, he was born old, and old he would die.

Alva stood nearly out of her sight, limited by the kitchen window. She could catch glimpses of his faded blue denim cap while he prodded the swine onward. Seeing they were chilled out there, Jennie made coffee. She'd put on her work boots and tucked the backside hem of her weary dress into the front side waist and started across the yard to the men. The ground was uneven from the heavy hog traffic of the day and she had a hard time maneuvering the clumps and bumps. She hobbled toward the men and hogs with the thermos in her left hand. She gave the old man the black thermos that he opened and smelled appreciatively. (No appreciation for her, but plenty for the rich coffee with lots of sugar.) He took a drink of the scalding sweetened liquid and Jennie slipped down to the chutes and examined the hogs already sorted and waiting for sale. Jennie climbed onto the bottom slat of the chutes to see better. While she peered into the mud and mess and hogs, she dropped a golden clump of dried molasses that sank into the ooze. It took a fraction of a second before the split hooved beasts went into their natural carnivorous state, driven mad by the sweet temptation of molasses after so many months of foraging in the woods and pastures.

Upon noticing the jam of beasts in the chutes the old man angrily entered the mix. Roughly he climbed into the hogs, still holding the black thermos, he scaled the slick wooden gates, damp from the dew and morning mist and now the mud and filth flung from the hundreds of hog feet that had passed. And then, no one saw him anymore.

She said he slipped. She blamed the mud. She said that the hogs had a hold of him in a second. It had gone so fast. She said all she could see was flashes of his flannel coat through the writhing, barking hogs. She said that Alva tried to get the animals off the old man. He'd grabbed a heavy scoop shovel leaning against the back of the carriage house and used it to beat the hogs ruthlessly. When the swine were finally herded away the mud was splotted with red. There were pieces of the old man left in the mud. There were fat hogs with flannel hanging from their bloody snouts; the fabric was stuck in their teeth. The thermos was gone. There was blood on the scoop shovel and blood on the once white slats that made up the new chutes.

The Sheriff came to the Fulk Farm to look into the incident. Jennie told him the hogs got her husband. She told him it was an accident. She told the Sheriff that Alva tried to save the old man. But he just couldn't see what was happening from where he stood along the sorting chutes. (The chute layout Alva helped the old man design and build.)

Three weeks after the hogs went off to sale Jennie married Alva Swander. It wasn't appropriate for Alva to live in the back room off the summer kitchen with an unmarried woman in a house all alone. Jennie wouldn't live with a man that wasn't her husband.

The nuptials of Jennie and Alva were aged nearly a month when Alva expressed his wish that there would be no more hogs on the farm. It was another month passed when Alva and Jennie's son was born. Guy Leroy was born at the Swander Farm on Greenwell Road.

DAYDREAMING IN CHURCH

by MALLORY MCDUFF

Consider the teenager daydreaming in the wooden church pew. She comes to the sanctuary of St. James Episcopal Church, in Fairhope, Alabama, every Sunday. During her childhood, different members of her family sing in the choir; carry the cross as a crucifier; hand the bread and wine to the priest during communion; take up the offertory; pass out the bulletins; cook egg and grits casserole for the Lenten breakfasts; play the piano for Sunday school performances; sing the bass notes for “I’ll Fly Away” with the church bluegrass band, and then chose to sail on the waters of Mobile Bay, rather than attend Sunday school because the Sunday school teachers lean toward a literal interpretation of the Bible, which this family does not.

In short, she imagines church as a verb, not a noun.

So why, as she sings the hymn “The Church’s One Foundation,” does her mind drift from one seemingly unconnected topic to another? Why can’t her mind stay still in this sacred space that she calls her spiritual home? In one moment, she critiques the outfits of parishioners as they return from communion, giving them an invisible thumbs-up or thumbs-down. Then she fantasizes about being discovered as a teen actor for the TV show “Emergency!” And finally she reminds herself to photocopy flyers for the dance at her high school for adults with Down Syndrome.

The year is 1982, and she is consumed with the world at Fairhope High School. With her best friend who picks potatoes on the weekend to save money for designer clothes, she organizes events to bring disparate factions of the school together. They envision a culture where black students cheer next to white students at the pep rally, where migrant students eat lunch on the lawn with students whose great-grandfathers lived in Fairhope.

She has never heard of the word “inclusive,” but she collaborates with her friends to raise money for a computer lab at school and then organizes a “Clean the Stalls” event to rid the school bathrooms of their putrid smells, embedded in the plastic seats of the toilets.

During her sophomore year, Ronald Reagan is the president, the Equal Rights Amendment fails ratification, and Pac-Man reigns supreme at the video arcade downtown. Martina Navratilova beats Chris Evert at Wimbledon. And Michael Jackson releases the album *Thriller*.

Her friends organize a fundraiser that brings a dance troupe of black guys from the high school together with the mostly white girls of the Girls Service Club. One of the young men named Melvin, with a wide-open smile, teaches these girls to moonwalk.

She gets tears in her eyes at the end of the show, holding hands with all the dancers on the wooden stage, torn white t-shirt and leggings on her body, a ripped piece of cotton tied around her ponytail.

Her world is the action, the organizing, the movement. She sits still to study, and she sits still in church, although her mind is always connecting thoughts, because if she didn't connect them, who would?

Now consider the woman who was that child. Today she wakes up in her tidy bedroom to the sound of her teenager's alarm at 6:00 a.m., which gives her daughter ample time on Instagram and Snapchat before heading to the school bus at 6:55 a.m. Outside, the sky is dark, and the mother huddles under the warmth of the quilt sewn by her mother, back in Fairhope, years ago.

Her head rests on down pillows, and she wills herself to leave the warm bed for her 30-minute meditation. Only two months ago, she got up from her bed, lit a candle, and read from *A Celtic Benediction*, a slim prayer book that rests on the table by her bedside. She continued that practice for four solid weeks, but then her former long-distance boyfriend visited, and she didn't want to disturb his sleep, and now she can't get out of bed to meditate, even though he is now 3,000 miles away.

It's as if heavy weights encumber her legs. She cannot move. So instead, her mind moves, racing down lanes, like bowling balls thrown with abandon. In the dark of the morning, she worries about a student who expressed deep discontent with her class. She then worries that she hasn't found a new counselor for her teenager. And of course, there's climate change. But what will happen if Trump gets elected? Her own nephew, the son of die-hard Democrats, went to a Trump rally in Mobile, Alabama. Her brother drove his son, but he wore a hat that covered his eyes: "I was afraid someone would see me," he said.

Soon 30 minutes passes, and she must wake her 10-year old, Annie Sky, whose eyes are truly the color of the sky. "How did you know how to name me?" her daughter asks.

She doesn't know. And she has tired of wanting to be someone who meditates but doesn't. She has run marathons, raised two babies as a single mom, given up alcohol for 40 days during Lent for the past five years. She gets shit done. So why can't she find the willpower to meditate?

If the spirit is in the body, then her body is tired of feeling her heart race high up in her throat in the early morning. Last year, she even took a mindfulness class online, which sounds like an oxymoron, but that's when she started meditating, for that one month.

At 50 years old, she has enough sense to know that beating up her one-and-only soul for not meditating is f* *cked up.

So she doesn't guilt trip herself. She takes the long view and tries to be present while sitting in a wooden church pew, walking her daughter to the bus stop, or looking into the refrigerator, wondering what to cook for supper. As her mind races to connect past to present, she tries to stay in one place—even when she misses the moment.

FLOAT

by CHRISTINE VILUTIS

Part I

I felt I didn't belong there, that I was being humored by the community, and it made me grateful. All I ever wanted was the chance to pretend. Each one of us felt out of place, longed to be somewhere else, but we didn't know where that was, couldn't imagine anywhere unlike this small Midwestern city isolated by oceans of corn fields and pasture. The closest thing to different was the western Ohio border, and I'd been there, and it seemed about the same. Except for the cluster of ostrich farms—tall, gangly birds trapped in the midst of a continent evolution had never intended for their flightless bulks.

Ostrich meat is thick and deep, gamey in flavor, like a tougher, wilder chicken. I can only imagine how they slaughter the animal—grab them by the long, snake neck, forcing the head onto a block, wary of sharp beak, serrated teeth, strong, kicking legs, and chop it off in one fast stroke of blade. I wonder if the body continues to live, as it is said happens with chickens after beheading—large form shaking furiously, searching without eyes—before crumpling to the dirt, sending a gentle cloud of dust into the Ohio air.

I drove past those farms on my way to the nearest liquor store on Sundays, because Indiana had its old laws still in place about the Sabbath, the birds uncurious any longer as to the cars whizzing past.

And I lived in a tent outside the college house. He visited me those nights after everyone inside had gone to sleep, and we would drink vodka straight with lime slices he brought in a little baggie, hit a joint, blowing smoke out the screen doorway, talk softly to each other, to ourselves. The words didn't matter. And eventually that would lead to places I can't remember.

My tire blew out on a nail the next day, and the boys of the house stood on the porch watching me change the flat after classes had gotten out. They laughed as I stood, then jumped, on the tire iron to loosen the bolts, but they were quiet after that and I was proud of how fast I could finish the task. I pulled out of the lot, shooting gravel in my wake, three boys with me so we could go to the bar before the sun went down, speeding across the bridge that spanned the river gorge bisecting town.

I always slowed when we reached the opposite side as the police station sat at its lip, cops striding in and out, guns in holsters, eyes hidden by dark sunglasses. Jail inmates escaped into that gorge one time in the late evening,

and we locked our constantly unlocked doors and listened to the sirens and helicopters circling the river and its sharp, wooded banks.

I once took pictures down there and was followed by some teenage boys with bb guns, at first slowly, then their strides quickened. They called out to me, and I broke into a run, never sure what they had said, only that my entire form jumped forward and away. They shouted after me, but I was out of earshot. I was trembling by the time I had climbed up the stairway to the street above and I ran all the way home to my tent. Panting, I smoked a bowl and took a shot of vodka before I was able to begin to stop my mind. Or something close to that.

We come across each other seemingly fully formed, merging our trails together like plaiting so many strands of hair. But the one doesn't know the details of the other's history, except what little is cautiously divulged or revealed. It's like we emerge from mist to arrive before one another in full Technicolor. And all we have to hold onto the other person's past are these fuzzy snapshots they give us—like a shutter opening and closing so quickly on a small scene—another pinpoint to link together what the narrative has been. Then we drift away. And in the end, all we are is a foggy story slipping occasionally from their lips during quiet times at barbeques or a child's birthday party.

Part II

There are places on and around campus where it seems no one else has ever been, but I know that I'm not making any new discoveries. There are dried, aged cigarette butts and joints near the bottom of the dramatically forked oak at the dip in the stream, there are more laying beside the broken tombstone that reads, "Here lies Lizbeth Acc..." and there are a couple even in the piece of forsaken bean field hidden behind the farthest reaches of back campus. I could follow them like breadcrumbs. I am not alone—only a thin veil of time separates us.

He told me that it was all right, that it didn't matter who knew, and I'd sometimes come out of my tent back into the house when it started getting cooler, until I was a constant visitor in my own room. My roommate sure didn't know what to make of my sudden return, and she did not make nice with the tent I set up over my twin bed that took up more than half the room, repeatedly feigning tripping and grunting.

He and I would sit in there with a lantern and giggle and drink until we were lying on top of each other and couldn't do much else. It was something to hang a hat on. It made the day have a rhythm. He didn't smoke pot much,

but I smoked like I had fire burning inside me, and it made the time pass more slowly and then faster at the same time.

We never talked about what we were or who we wanted to be—we talked about movies and tv, maybe some music, other people in the house. He exited through the back emergency door and I made my way through the front parlor room. We didn't have much in common, but we had our nights.

I would have probably starved to death if it hadn't been for the other girls in the house. I was like their child or some vagrant street urchin that they took pity on. They gave me portions of the beautiful, elaborate dishes they made for dinner. Or they seemed elaborate to me as I had only the patience and ability to make box mac 'n cheese. Hannah cursed my upbringing and made me stew with root vegetables. The girls on the third floor let me share in their roasted chicken and potatoes. I helped with the cutting, the preparation—they thought it would teach me skills—but it was more the contact I was after, I didn't store away those recipes or lessons. I ate dinners alone as a child, and to finally dine with others was a blessing I had stumbled upon in my lucky ineptness.

I don't like to argue; I don't like confrontation or conflict. It's that I feel that everyone should be right, and that they are most often more right than me. People seem so invested in what they believe in, and they put so much of themselves behind it. It means so much to them. I don't feel the same way about anything—so vehement or emboldened. So I don't fight back. I've been told I'm docile and complacent—maybe I am—and that I too often feel sorry for myself. And maybe I do.

Part III

There was a major street before the house, the most major of streets in town. And we would cross it to get to class everyday, scurrying out of the way of cars actually speeding up when they saw us.

I remember walking into the house as the second tower fell, its steel and girders in slow motion through the air. No one was speaking in the living room, but I could hear someone screaming somewhere from inside the television. I know I looked at him, and he only glanced in my direction. And I could see how scared he was and realized that I was shaking. I had my camera in my hand, and I put it down gently because I knew—somehow—I would otherwise drop it. How much control I had in that moment—yet, did not feel it at all. There is not much more that I can remember right now. Fall slipped away like an eye-blink.

He broke his foot tripping off a porch one night. Everyone said he was wasted; I figured he was just looking for attention. Sometimes, when we were feeling out in the open, we would sit on the couch together and watch bad television in the evenings. I did most of the channel changing; Oprah was a favorite—we did pride ourselves on our cynicism.

There was a rule of no smoking in the house, so when it was time I got up first to hand him the crutches, and we would go outside on the front porch. I held open the door, letting in a blast of cold and closed it behind us with the couch blanket wrapped around me. Even though I never smoked nicotine my breath was still visible in that early winter air.

It hadn't snowed yet, but it smelled like a storm—sky looked like one—all clear and bright. It was inevitable by that time of the year, so maybe that's why it even felt like one, tucking the blanket around his shoulder so that we were leaning against each other. He'd wear a sock on his good foot, and his toes were bare at the end of the cast on the bad one. I laughed because they'd be turning blue and purple. He would laugh back, smoke curling from his nostrils into the cold night air.

We students danced at the bar on Thursday nights—Dance Party Thursdays. I was too suggestive with my dancing sometimes. I didn't know why each boy I partnered with near the old jukebox thought we were going to have racy, drunken sex—I only wanted to dance until it was time to go home.

And on Fridays we went to El Rodeo, the Mexican place down the street, and drank margaritas as big as your face. Or that's how Sara described them as she licked bits of rock salt off the rim of her glass.

Quakers built this place, this outcropping of buildings that sits on the border of Indiana and Ohio. Made it simple and solid. There's a lot of quiet here, a lot of attentive listening and waiting. We take turns talking—try not to speak over one another. The stacks in the library lean heavy with a history of conscientious objection and peaceful resistance. It is like we are practicing for a world that someone, someday, might dream into existence.

Part IV

In the evenings, we girls walked along the edge of campus holding hands or with our arms linked. We leaned against each other and often kissed one another on the cheek. There was a lot of honking and some yelled slurs as townies drove by on the main drag. They thought we were gay—and it's true that some of us were—but that wasn't the point.

And on Sundays, the whole house gathered together and made dinner. We had paella, pollo con mole, vegetarian sloppy joes and, one time, even pancakes and waffles. We were supposed to be discussing house business, but mostly it was just laughing and snorting over food, some people sitting close together, others ignoring someone else at the other end of the table. It's not easy to remember specifics.

A few days later, a man came onto campus with a shotgun. He was wandering through the field near the entrance, his eyes scanning the buildings beyond. Security saw him very quickly, moments after he arrived, but not before he came upon some students. There were three of them, and they were smoking a joint under the old curved oak. One said that he froze upon spotting them. Then his gun shifted—its long, straight barrel moving in an arch towards the tree. Next he was walking again—towards them—his strides more purposeful than they had been before. The joint dropped to the ground as he approached. That's when security showed up.

It became hazy after that and all based on hearsay. I never heard what happened when the police were called other than that he was taken away once his gun was taken away from him. I can picture the three students just sitting under that tree the entire time, staring, high and disbelieving of what they were experiencing until it was gone. Despite that, I'm sure someone had the presence of mind to ground that joint into the dirt beneath the oak before the police showed up.

Grades and essays, exams and presentations, and people arguing over the hypothetical 'til time runs out. Steel and girders and fire and the image of a man leaping into fate—floating—then plummeting stories and stories and stories to the earth.

There is something deeply wrong with me. I have yet to pinpoint it, but I feel it like a lead ball that has swelled to size in my gut. Something that I was born with inside of me, yet had not taken root and grown until now. I fantasize about running away like a 15 year old girl, packing a bag and stealing the car—though it's mine, and I'm old enough at this point to be my own mother.

Would it be so hard to slip away? To leave those simple, everyday things which have become too defeating? It's the details that are most taxing. The process of doing a dish once it's been used, the procedure of moving sheets from the washer to the dryer before mildew creeps in, the method undertaken to shower daily, the steps it takes to leave bed in the morning. These are things that, for most of life, have been beyond routine, like blinking and breathing. But there are times—deep at night—when even breathing

becomes a course of action that does not seem reflexive anymore—that doesn't even seem natural. And I lie in my bed and have to force my lungs to inflate with air and then push that air out again and again and again until I have tricked my body into remembering how to do this without constant provocation from my brain.

Could I walk out this door with nothing, headed for nowhere, and leave it all behind without looking back? Would the absence of an address do the trick? Could I leave this in order to drift, destroy my relationship to all objects, people and principles of ordinary life that I have known, float weightless somewhere that is unfamiliar, on a map that I have never even glanced upon?

Part V

It became so I had to lock my door at night. My roommate asked me who kept knocking at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, even though I suspect she wasn't that stupid. Sometimes she spent the nights away at her boyfriend's, and one night I forgot to lock the door because I was too high to remember and there he was on top of me at 3:14 am, his breath tasting of alcohol and cigarettes, his hands pulling and ripping at the blanket, then at his belt. For just a second, I was still asleep and I dreamt myself right out of it. Then I was wide awake and shoving, pushing him from my bed. I yelled—he slipped to the floor. I yelled again—and he was stumbling to leave. He tripped and slide into the wall. Then he was gone from the room.

A few dark evenings later, a couple of the boys on the druggie hall lit an old couch on fire and pushed it from the roof of their building. It seemed to hang in the night air, all aflame in orange, red and yellow—some sort of burning space ship of doom. Then it hit the ground and sparks erupted upwards and outwards like angry flaming wasps from a destroyed hive.

Someone screamed, but there was mostly cheering as the couch sat there—on fire—crumpling further into the grass at the heart of the campus. One of the boys rushed out the front door of the dorm with a fire extinguisher. There was more cheering as he shot the blazing couch with vaporizing foam, like fat silly string with little effect. Then he ran as the security vehicle pulled into the yard. We all ran or disappeared, shutting windows, stepping inside doors, climbing back stairways—a speedy exodus—until the only things left were the security officers and that small, dying bonfire of everyday furniture.

There are connections left for dead. People I thought I would always be in contact with, but there is nothing left, no thread of communication, no line to pick up anymore. They are gone from my life. I have done this so many

times, let trails go dead, allowed the thread to go slack until it begins to fray and eventually breaks. I do not mend or repair these bridges — they are all crumbling ‘til finally gone.

Addendum

To suddenly believe—to be certain—that the world has ended. That there is no going back to what you were or going forward to what you might become. There is no time on either side anymore. There is only this moment of total understanding. When this moment is over, you will be no more.

There seem no choices left. The fire is rising—flames licking over the cubicle walls and scurrying from P.C. to photo copier to printer ever more quickly. The floor beneath you is rumbling—the steel and girders beginning to scream. And it is not just smoke anymore that is making the sky spin like this.

Somewhere, hundreds of feet below are the things that have made you who you are at this second—they are spread out before you like gleaming points of light on a map as vast as the breadth of land beyond. And those points no longer have any control—any sway.

It is time. The moment is over. And the sky stops spinning.

GIRL IN A SNAPSHOT OF DEATH

by JANINE CANTY

When I am 7 years old, my nana dies alone on her living room rug. The elevator is out in her building and the firemen are trying to juggle an empty gurney up too many flights of stairs. My mother sits me down in the yellow and white kitchen and tries to explain death to me. Death is not real. Death is something that happens on soap operas, played on black and white TVs. My parents don't live together anymore. My father lives in a rooming house with cracked windows and peeling paint. My mother stays up all night listening to songs that make her mouth look broken. I have started peeing the bed and sucking my thumb again. Those things are real. When my mother begins talking, I have a piece of toast in my mouth. She has on an old pair of my father's thermal underwear. The neck is ripped. The arms are stained with blood. She has just given herself a hypodermic needle filled with insulin, to the gut. She tries to explain death like it's a vacation. I drop the toast under the table. The sun is shining on my mother's sleepless hair. My daddy will be sad in a way he can never heal with alcohol. My nana is never coming home.

I don't understand the word wake. I don't know that my nana's body will be put in a box the grownups call a coffin. I don't know that the box will be rolled under bright lights and surrounded by flowers. I don't know that the firemen who tried to save her, will put on ties and dress shirts. They will stand in a long line of crying family members. They will shake the hands of my aunts and uncle, and my father. They will say how sorry they are. This is how people show respect. How they say goodbye. I don't know that my nana's body is not breathing. That it will never breathe again. I don't know that her blood has been replaced with embalming fluid. That her children will gather like a storm cloud, and pass a bottle of Captain Morgan around in the parking lot. They are a mess of sweat stains and red eyes. Bitter mouths. This is what grief turns a person into. They will get into an argument over the flowers or the eulogy. More than one punch will be thrown. Someone will go home with a black eye. They will all get up in the morning with a hangover, guzzling Pepto-Bismol for breakfast. A funeral home is no place for a recovering alcoholic. Half my nana's children are recovering alcoholics, and there is no recovering from a mother's death. I don't know any of this. I just know my parents' hire a sitter and walk out of the door holding hands. I hope this means my daddy will be there in the morning. I cry angry tears when he isn't.

A few months later, my mother almost dies on the couch and death becomes a flesh and blood thing. I can touch it and smell it and remember it. It's February and the zipper on my coat is broken. They served rubbery fish

sticks and warm milk in the cafeteria. My hair is wet from melting snow. I'm already in a bad mood before I find the door locked. My sister is three. She has a pot belly and brown baby stick legs. Wispy hair and big, dark eyes. Eyes that are wet from crying. The room is mostly dark. No one has opened the red curtains today. There's a box of hostess doughnuts on the coffee table. Mangled and ripped by a toddler's frantic hands. White sugar ground into the rug.

It takes two tries to hear my sister: Mama won't wake up. This is what the bogeyman looks like when you're seven years old and your mother is a Juvenile Diabetic with an eating disorder. My mother is wrapped in a black and white afghan. Her forehead is shiny with cold sweat. Her mouth is open. I can see the whites of her eyes. Her feet are poking out. Bare, with chipped purple polish. Her second toe is crooked from years of cheap shoes. While other children learned how to spell their names, I learned what to do in an emergency. I know where the sugar cubes are. I know how to get orange juice into my unwilling mother's mouth and how to dress my sister in a dark room. I even know how to dial the operator and ask for the paramedics

I've seen my mother fall down and talk gibberish. I've never seen her silent. I've never seen the whites of her eyes. My stomach feels like it's going to roll out and lay alongside the powdered sugar ground into the rug. This is the part of my memory where there's a hole. Probably dug there for my protection. There's only so much a child's heart can hold. I'm told I ran screaming up the stairs. Pulled a neighbor out of the shower. Refused to let go of my sister when the police came. I don't know any of this last part for sure. It was filled in for me by other people's mouths. Now it's years later and there's no one left to ask. It took them over an hour to track my father down to a dirty bar in the back bay of Boston.

I clearly remember this: Standing alone outside, with my still wet hair. Waiting for my father to sober up. He goes to his first AA meeting the next night.

When I am 11, summer arrives like the prize at the bottom of a box of cracker jacks. I have half broken in sneakers and budding hips. My first pimple threatening to erupt on my chin. It's the last day of school and everyone is in a hurry, except the bus driver. He's flirting with a blonde girl on the street. He's too old for her and he has a beer belly. The skin on his face is oily and scarred. Only the handsome boys with washboard abs get the girls in the books my mother leaves laying around. This is the first day the little boy across the street is allowed to cross by himself. He's six years old. Curly hair

and caramel skin. Green eyes. He would have grown up to get the girls. Nobody saw the piece of paper that slipped out of his hand. Nobody saw him climb under the idling bus. I am climbing the stairs towards apt. 3, when the bus driver puts his hand on the emergency brake and his foot on the gas. I am asking my mother for a snack, when my bus driver ends a six year old boy, like a poorly written western.

The blue sky turns into a scale of screams. The bus driver's scream. The mother's scream. The ambulance scream. They sedate the mother. Ask the bus driver the same questions over and over. Until he's vomiting too hard to answer and they have to call another ambulance for him. They measure tire marks and blood stains. Cover the red cement and bits of bone left in the road. The tarp they use is twice the size of a six-year old body. My mother tries to shield my eyes when we walk by. "Don't look," she says. But I've already seen. She tries to hold my hand, twice. Until I remind her I'm 11. There's a whole new level of broken in her eyes. She wants to put me in a cage or hold me against her beating heart until I am safely grown. This is what fear transforms a mother into. She leaves me at the bookstore, while she goes three doors down to the Korean grocers to buy orange juice and grapes. I sit on the floor of the bookstore, pulling 4 or 5 books from the bottom shelf. While a few doors away, my mother begins telling the Korean grocer about a tragedy not belonging to her.

I am allowed one new book a week. My habit is to read the first chapter of several books, so I can decide between them. Today, I am not just reading. I am wiggling my toes inside of my half broken in sneakers. I am amazed that my toes still wiggle. My eyes still see. Today, I am not reading to choose. I am reading to forget what the inside of a six year old skull looks like.

My mother and the neighbors spend the next few months whispering at the clothesline. Passing around a basket of wooden clothespins. They dissect the death of a child until it turns into something that could never happen to them. They whisper about the woman across the street and how she turned insane. Like she sat down and turned a dial inside herself. Her husband left her because their child died and she had lost her will to wash his socks. I imagine her grief as the dried ketchup on the plates left in the sink. Her grief is the pile of dirty underwear in the bathroom. It's the scissors she finds in a utility drawer. The ones she takes to her own face, when she can't stop seeing the moment her child fell off the earth. The ambulance arrives on our street again at the beginning of winter. It takes a dead boy's mother away to a place without scissors. My mother just keeps saying, "He was so beautiful." I wonder what she would have said if he'd been ugly.

The next summer I outgrow Barbies and my training bra. I spend my days in front of a box fan. Reading S.E. Hinton or Judy Blume. Sucking on an orange ice pop. Wishing I were a beautiful girl pursued by a dangerous boy. Wishing I was anyone but me. It was the middle of everything. The middle of the summer. The middle of a heatwave. The middle of the week. The middle of a brand new body I wasn't yet comfortable with. I had no idea how close to reality my tiny, teenage self was hovering. It was also the end of everything. The end of our days in the projects. The end of my childhood. The end of a scary old lady named Sarah. The lady downstairs is dying from colon cancer. In a back bedroom directly underneath the room I share with my sister. This once scary woman has been reduced by her disease. She becomes spine and gums and bedsores. Cancer steals beautiful bodies. It breaks down a living thing. Cell by cell. Sarah dissolves, while I move up a bra size.

The nights are hard. Heat and wrinkled sheets. Restless legs and frightened ears. And the sound of Sarah dying. She was loud. Louder than the fan. Louder than the David Cassidy song I found on the radio. My mother called the noise a "Death Rattle." It didn't sound like any rattle I had ever heard. It sounded like monster movies. It sounded like choking on a jawbreaker. It took 3 nights. Sarah died on the third night, just before dawn. I was sound asleep when the ambulance came. Curled on my wrinkled sheets. Radio next to my head, playing static. For a long time afterward I'm not sure what was louder. Sarah's dying song. Or the silent air her death left behind

When I am in my 30's, my father shrinks an inch. His chest is covered in white hair and beginning to cave in. He has a time bomb behind his right lung. We don't know that yet. He grows homesick for the streets he courted my mother on. When I was very young, my father took me to Brigham's and explained place attachment to me, over a bowl of peppermint stick ice cream. Some places he said, get under your skin and in your blood. For my father and I, that place is Brookline. He picks up a red pen and a pennysaver. Circles real estate ads over McDonald's coffee and pancakes. My parents return to Brookline, finding elderly housing just two blocks from the projects where I grew up. I don't think of my parents as elderly. I pull gray hairs defiantly out of my own head. My parents' deaths are a myth. I don't know that my father will be dead in 7 years. My mother, in 17. These are things in a future not seen yet. I put on a purple and white windbreaker and walk through the courtyard of 71 Egmont Street for the first time in 21 years. My parents are waiting at the curb. Sitting in my father's little red shitbox. Heater on. Radio playing some Christian rockabilly crap. St. Christopher medal hanging from the dash. I am not the timid child this place remembers. I am a grown woman with a body that has birthed four babies and buried another. My fourth child slipped away like a prayer. I held his death in my right hand

and tried to make a crazy sense out of it. I am not the hovering teenager this space knew. I am not the child death chased like a nightmare. I am an adult who has touched death. I am a CNA, who has gone home with a grieving daughter's mascara, staining my skin.

Like many people who return to a childhood place, I am disappointed. It is not at all the way I have saved it in my mind. The colors are faded, like an old VHS tape. Everything is smaller. Did I expect time to have stood still just for me? Did I expect that while I changed, this place would remain the same? Yes, yes I did. They've replaced the wooden circular fence in the center of the courtyard, with an ugly, black iron square one. I lean against it anyway. My palm remembers the splinters. My ass remembers the warm wood and long afternoons waiting on the good humor truck. Sarah's window is right behind me. Above that is the bedroom I laid in and listened to her die. I know she won't be there when I turn around.

My eyes remember how she looked in that window. Doughy arms crossed. Mouth set in a sad line. Scary, unsmiling eyes. Did she hate kids? Did she have any? Did she have a dead baby she could fit inside her hand? An almost baby she could never let go of? A 16 year old daughter who ran away with an unsuitable man? I never knew her story. She sat in that window and tracked my childhood for seven years. Through rain and sun and snow. She was there, every day. When I left for school in the morning. And when I came home in the afternoon. When I played hopscotch and ran through the sprinklers. When I walked through the courtyard with my face in a book. When I fell off my bike and when I got a new haircut. She watched me grow up. I listened to her die and I don't know a half dozen things about her.

She had a husband named Abe. He had hair in his ears and a curve in his back. He wore piss yellow shirts. He carried linty ribbon candy in his pockets. She cooked this weird soup. When it got hot outside, the hallway smelled like it. Mothballs and cabbage. I don't think they ever ordered a pizza or opened a can of Chef Boyardee Ravioli. The last time I saw Sarah she wasn't sitting in her window. She was sitting in the stairwell. She had on white old lady sandals. Knee highs circling her ankles like a puddle. A flowered dress with a growing stain in the center of it. Her wig was crooked. Abe had taken her to chemotherapy and she collapsed on the stairs. She was crying or moaning. Her vocal cords would no longer make words that people could understand. She looked like an outline.

My father came down in his white tee shirt and blue work pants. Green tattoo on his bicep. Unlit Lucky Strike in his mouth. He looked like he had stepped straight out of a James Dean movie. He knelt beside Sarah, and talked to her

with the voice he used on me when I was sick. A voice you reserve for wounded animals and dying people. My father and another man made a chair out of their arms. They lifted Sarah gently, like a baby bird being returned to the nest. They carry her into her apartment and close the door. She never sits in the window again. My adult self stands on the ground of my childhood and thinks it understands. It was yearning I saw in her unsmiling eyes. It was the things that growing up and grief leave on a face. I turn around with my adult body. My eyes fall on Sarah's blank window. I expect to see my past. Big wheels and plaid ponchos. Orange ice pops and Judy Blume books. David Cassidy songs and a little boy who died before he could lose a tooth. I expect to see the things Sarah saw. The day is overcast and chilly. I stuff my hands into my pockets and pull my coat tighter around me for protection. All I can make out in the glass is a wavy image. A shadow I can't pull into focus. It's my reflection.

ANOTHER MOTHER

by HEIDI CZERWIEC

I saw the movie *Juno* when it first came out in 2007 with my then-fiancé (now husband) Evan, mainly because it featured Jason Bateman and Michael Cera, and we had spent much of our first summer of love bonding over *Arrested Development*. Despite the self-consciously hipster dialogue, we found the film moving. Endlessly empathetic and human, it followed the titular teen through an unplanned pregnancy, her adoption choice, and her interactions with the would-be adoptive couple. Every character is beautiful and flawed, and they dramatize the effects—expected and unexpected—of an adoption choice, how they ripple out from the birthmother.

This was not the same movie I saw, or rewatched, in the winter of 2012, when it aired late one night on cable while I cuddled a fussy infant. As a new adoptive parent myself, the film had been radically reframed for me—this time, I couldn't keep my eyes off Jennifer Garner's character Vanessa, the nuances of her reactions to Juno. At the end, when she cradles the son Juno has given her and asks Juno's stepmom (Alison Janney) how she looks, Juno's stepmom replies, "Like a new mom. Scared shitless." I sobbed in relief and recognition.

Two years later, when we found out my son Wyatt's younger brother—the boy we had chosen not to adopt from Kinzey—had been adopted by another family in the same area, we sent them a message through the social services agency saying that we'd like to be in contact for the kids' sakes, if they were willing. They were willing, but overwhelmed with new parenthood, and wanted to wait until more settled in.

After weeks, then months, of waiting, we received a letter from them through the agency—from Alicia, her husband Rick, and their son, my son's brother, named Eli—saying they were ready to meet, and sorry they hadn't tried to contact us earlier. The letter gave Alicia's cell number. Evan and I carefully crafted a text to her, trying to sound warm and not too anxious. She responded, and after some scheduling back-and-forth, we all agreed to meet at one of the small picnic shelters near the University Park splash park—a public location we thought would cool off some of the pressure, and would let the boys play while we talked.

Beforehand, I was nervous—how much should I pry about their relationship with Kinzey? about Eli's health (any allergies like Wyatt's)? should I share what information or news I had about Kinzey, even the increasingly alarming

news I was hearing? I decided that I would follow their lead on sharing info, especially for this first visit.

We let Wyatt go play in the water, and we all follow, watching him and talking, ducking in and out of the mist to cool off as Eli warmed up to us. Alicia and Rick comment on how much Wyatt looks like his birthmom, Kinzey—the dimples, the dark coloring. I agree, and comment on how much Eli looks like his sister, Kinzey’s oldest child, Elly, also broad and blond. When they glance at each other, frowning, I worry I’ve said something wrong. Apparently, they knew Kinzey had a daughter, but had never seen pictures, and Kinzey hadn’t told them Elly and Eli are full siblings, with the same father. I backpedal, worried I might have my information wrong, but when I show them a picture I have of Elly, they’re also struck by the resemblance. They didn’t know much about Elly. They definitely didn’t know that Kinzey had gone on to birth two more sons after Eli, news I knew only tangentially.

There’s a moment in *Juno* when she’s complaining about the discomfort of pregnancy and thoughtlessly says to Vanessa, “You’re lucky it’s not you.” The look that flickers across Vanessa’s face is subtle, but says everything before she glances at the ceiling to compose her expression. I wondered about the babies Alicia had not mothered when the same look crosses her face. It’s clear the news of Kinzey’s fertility hurts her.

We learn that their adoption experience with Kinzey was much stranger and painful.

We had met Kinzey early in her pregnancy. Both she, and her best friend and confidante Monica, had liked us immediately. We had the opportunity to visit with her several times before Wyatt’s birth, which helped us establish trust with her. She invited us to her first ultrasound; we invited her to help choose a name for what we discovered would be a son. While the days following his birth were emotional, we all left the hospital trusting the process, the decision. Monica bought both Kinzey and me congratulatory flowers.

In contrast, with Eli, Kinzey had not wanted anyone, especially her ex-, to know about the child, and had met with Alicia and Rick only about a month before the birth. At the hospital, Monica—the friend whom we had gotten to know—had begged Kinzey to keep Eli, which was wrenching for everyone. They had had little contact with her since the termination hearing, didn’t seem to want to. Of course, I didn’t tell them that Kinzey had contacted us, had wanted us to adopt Eli too—there was no reason to.

And Alicia and Rick were great parents—sweet and funny and generous. They did not deserve any more trouble. I had assumed that because we both shared the same birthmother, were both mothering boys related to each other, that our relationship to adoption would be the same. This, of course, was stupid of me. I had an ambivalent relationship to motherhood, had not longed for a child, had not waited long once we decided we wanted one. I had found Kinzey's subsequent pregnancies disappointing. But these things didn't hurt me the way they hurt Alicia. This is what makes me want to be more careful about what info I share with her, because it affects her so differently.

The start of the school year intervenes, and it's a while before we meet again. One weekend in October, while Rick is out of town hunting with his brother, I offer Alicia a break in the form of a playdate, so Saturday afternoon, she and Eli come to our home.

While the brothers play with Evan, she and I talk. She, too, has had the same jarring experience watching *Juno* before and after going through adoption. She, too, has lost contact with Kinzey. She also worries about what she'll be able to offer Eli when he wants to know more about her. And yes, she would be interested in seeing what I've tracked down of Kinzey's family.

I'm delighted. Evan has never been very interested in documenting Kinzey and her family the way I have—sitting up late Googling her name, studying her Facebook page and friends for cues and clues as to who is who, families and fathers, newborns and new homes. And to be honest, I'm not sure why I feel so compelled to do so—is it curiosity? Self-torture? A sense of duty to provide whatever background I can for my boy, if and when he asks? Even if the evidence hurts me, and may hurt him? In recent queries, I'm hearing that her life may be losing its ever-tenuous hold—a hard divorce, associating with a new man with whom she's been associated for various charges ranging from petty theft to possession of meth. Is any of it true? All of it? And what do I do with this information? It's a burden—unlike most, it's not one Evan wants to share, reasoning it doesn't help anyone.

But, like me, Eli's mom wants to see these other siblings. Relieved to share at least part of this burden, I share what I can and we study faces, compare them to our playing sons: that one's brow line, this one's coloring and smile. We find the most recent baby, a preemie in Kinzey's arms. I steal a look at Alicia to see if it's bothering her, but she's interested, pointing out how Wyatt and the newborn have the same dimpled chin. We speculate if Kinzey's raising him.

For a minute, I think *I wonder if she'd want to know, about the other stuff.*

Evan is across the living room, happily snapping Legos into fantastical contraptions at the boys' direction. They appear to be building a series of fire trucks with interlocking ladders, almost Escher-like in structure.

I think, *She really should know. This is part of Eli's family history, too.*

I think, *I would want to know.*

But the truth is, I don't want to know. These are things it hurts to know, that I'm worried are showing on my face because she's looking at me quizzically. What I really want is to share this burden, and ultimately, that's not fair. Evan's right—it doesn't help anyone. Least of all, the boys. And it doesn't help us be better parents to them. There's nothing we can do with this information but feel bad.

So, I show her the same pictures of Eli's full sister Elly that I showed her months ago at the park, but larger on my laptop, and I leave it at that.

We tell her we'll be leaving at the end of the school year, moving to Minnesota in May, and that we want to keep in touch, keep each other's' contact info current, what crumbs we can offer for a trail. Kinzey is spiraling away, uncontactable, though we have left a letter for her with the agency in case she surfaces, seeks us out. We know Elly is in Arizona, but it's a big state, and we don't know anything more about the aunt who's raising her. The other two boys we know of in theory only—faces and first names, but not families. Wyatt and Eli may be each other's only link to answers we can't give, their only link to biology.

Here's another thing to consider, another thing I couldn't make up: Evan and our son Wyatt both share the last name of Nelson; Eli's adoptive parents are also a Nelson family, also live in the same town as us. And, in the process of talking with Alicia about living in Minnesota, we find that they, like Evan, are also from Thief River Falls, a small town an hour away. While their relatives know Evan's, to their knowledge we are not family.

And yet, for our sons' sakes, we will be. Must be. Are.

FIND ME HERE

by MEGAN GALBRAITH

Monica was my best friend and she had agreed to accompany me on my research trip to the New York Public Library's genealogy section to search for my birthmother. We were bumping downtown from Columbia University on the A-train in a hazy summer glow of the underground.

It was the early 90's, I was newly married and a few months pregnant. I didn't know yet that I could have picked up the phone and requested a search for my birthmother through Catholic Charities. All I had at that point was the number off my adoption birth certificate—it appeared in the right hand corner—36369. My adoptive birth certificate included the fact that I was born in Manhattan, New York, but lacked important information such as my height, weight, hair, and eye color. Back then, I naively thought information was stored in one place, and that by going there it might be possible to find the details of my birth, even my original name and my birthmother's. That place, in my mind, was the genealogy wing of the New York Public Library.

In short, I went looking for my self.

"I see her being a famous magazine editor," Monica said, swinging herself around by the crook of her elbow on the shiny chrome pole of the subway car.

"What if she's homeless? Or in a mental institution?" I said. "Worse, what if she's penniless and living in a trailer and she wants to come live with me, bringing the one tooth she has left in her head."

"She's probably pretty musical, since you are," Monica said.

"I just found out Joan Baez put a daughter up for adoption and is searching for her now," I said. "Maybe I'm Joan Baez's daughter, wouldn't that rock?"

"You're like an honest-to-goodness love child," Monica laughed.

"Or the byproduct of rape," I said.

The Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History, and Genealogy was huge and airy. It smelled of leather-bound books, oak, and old paper. The librarian was perched on a raised dais that reminded me of a judge in a federal courtroom.

“Do you have your number from your birth certificate?” she asked.

I volunteered the slip of paper.

“Oh, I don’t need it, but you will,” she said. “Do you know the last name of the person you want to look up?”

“Last name? No, that’s kind of why I’m here,” I said, confused.

“All our records are alphabetical by birth year,” she said, looking over her glasses and down at me.

I felt my heart begin to palpitate and sensed Monica watching the rising panic in my face.

“I’m sure you have an alphabetical cross-reference, right,” I said.

“You would think, but no,” she said.

I began mentally haranguing myself. I’d thought the search for my birthmother would be easy. I’d thought a simple number would unlock all the clues, like a codex, or the keys to a safe deposit box full of family secrets; as if this library full of information owed me something and that by possessing this tiny data point, I could access my entire biological life story that would rush into my brain and make me feel whole, and good, and real.

“Come on,” Monica said. “How hard can this be? You said you think you’re Irish, so I’ll take the ‘O’s for like, O’Connor, O’Hearn, and O’Malley and you start with the ‘C’s’ for, I don’t know, Cavanaugh, Connelly, and names like that.”

Being adopted, I didn’t know what or who to think I was. Whose identity could I claim? How would I begin to guess where to start looking? My adoptive parents were Irish and Polish, but that meant nothing in the search for my true identity. Who was I?

“All right, let’s do this,” I said.

The librarian climbed down from her perch, crossed the floor and went up another set of stairs. She emerged with four black bound volumes the size of her torso. They looked as if they held ancient spells.

We found an empty table and sat down in the hard wooden chairs side-by-side. I opened one of the books to a random page. It showed columns of arbitrary numbers on the left—the numbers I needed to match with mine. The columns went on for volumes and the paper was tissue-thin. The information was listed in single-spaced, 12-point, Courier type and—just as the librarian had indicated, it was in alphabetical order by last name. I had a number, but no name. It was an adoption Catch-22. I needed to know my identity before I could find my self.

Monica and I spent the better part of that day tracing row upon row of faceless, numbered columns. She had the brilliant idea to handwrite my number on the blank side of an index card so we could trace the edge of each column without our eyes crossing. Throughout the day we would find amalgams of my number. Each of us would rise halfway out of our chairs with excitement, only to realize we had transposed one or two numbers—36396 or 36936. It became some sort of demented genealogical lottery. At the end of the day, we left the index cards on the floor. I was exhausted, had a headache and I felt guilty about dragging my friend into the mess of my unknown history. It had been enough for one day at least. We rode the subway back uptown.

I would find out after meeting Peggy, my birthmother, five years later that my background was Hungarian and that her maiden name was Herman. I wasn't the byproduct of rape, or incest, or even a one-night stand. I was either an accident or a mistake, although what's the difference really? If the timing had been different, I could have been an abortion.

A few years after meeting Peggy, I returned to the New York Public Library. The genealogy section had moved to a different wing with ornate cast iron staircases. The long oak tables were littered with people's laptops, and huge windows let in the light off 5th Avenue.

I had my number still, but now I also had my birthmother's name. I wanted to see if I could find myself in those books.

This was how I was listed in the 'H' book, "BIRTHS Reported in the City of New York, 1966:"

Name, Last/First Number	DOB	Borough
Herman, Gabriella 36369	10 28 66	M (for Manhattan)

The middle name my adoptive parents had given me, Gabriella, was actually my birth name. My father had told me he thought the nuns at Catholic Charities had named me for the archangel Gabriel. It was a romantic story, and one he clings to even though I've told him otherwise. I would come to find out that Catholic caseworkers, nurses, and an Italian foster mother cared for me in my first six months, but no nuns. I felt cleaved. I had two stories, two full identities. Yet still, I felt apart from both of them.

But for one moment, in searching for myself, it turned out I had been here all along.

HAUNTING HINDSIGHT

by JENNIFER WONDERLY

I found my six-year-old self in a fraying box, half-buried under mismatched ceramic mugs, old Halloween couple costumes, and Polaroid photos that housed irrelevant ghosts. It had been Saturday and much to my later dismay, I had suggested we organize and put away a few things that we had salvaged from the paint-chipped, cheap version of a Roman-like structure we called a garage. Roman in that it was crumbling and its heyday was long over. Since my sister tapped out early and had assigned herself the task of an afternoon nap, and my mother's legs were as useful as rotted stilts, it fell to me to haul everything upstairs and find a place for it.

Yay.

By the third trip up those shag-carpeted stairs, which caked on dirt like a makeup virgin caked blush, I was understandably wheezing worse than a set of Swiss cheese bellows. Needless to say I was more than eager to abort this mission and return to my room, return to my internet, so I may not have been as gentle as I could have been while handling (read: shoving) all this junk into the hall cabinet, which was already packed to the brim. Dusty blankets, a questionable Ouija board, old hunting and fishing books and a macabre collection of hospital cups from my family's many internments already stingily called it home. As I squeezed a box in, waddling it to and fro in order to get it comfortable in its new and likely permanent seat, something rattled and a bit of white poked out from beneath the contents of the uppermost layer.

It was her, or rather...me I suppose, trapped in the form of a book. It was one of those thin, blank deals that were a staple in my elementary years. Her pages lapped in a brief wave, like fingers, as I fished her out. Cradling the book, the first thing that struck me was the rather...unusual cover. A family of bears occupied the space, seemingly painting my name on a canvas. The raised surface suggested a sticker with my name printed on it, despite their illusion. A cheery sun beamed down on the two young, brown bears, though they were speckled with white due to my less than stellar coloring skills. The oldest, the adult, was an entirely different story altogether. It was like Nyan Cat decided to take a shit all over it as the bear was nothing but a patchwork of color. One leg was this, another that, the tail was orange, and the head a purple grape. The bird perched on the canvas seemed to suffer the same multi-color disease. The back was similar, though instead the three were as blank as memory loss save for a few pencil scratches here and there, as they merrily drank from honeypots. Either I had not the inclination or the time to finish.

Upon opening the book I found myself face to face with a familiar, repulsive stranger.

Each page was mostly occupied by white space, scribbles and childhood lies born out of clairvoyance. At the top were sentences penned by either a teacher or by a family member as my handwriting was nonexistent, let alone able to conjure the looping snake scrawl of cursive. At the bottom right corner, tiny and squished, almost like huddling children were the dates these entries were supposedly made. They ran from September 14, 1998 and eventually stopped April 26, 1999, an entire school year I realized as I flipped through the tainted tree-sheddings. It was set aside in favor of clearing up the mess that clogged the hall and it wasn't until later that evening that I had the time to sit down and really pay it the attention that was due.

When I returned to my room, I found her phantom sitting on the bed, kicking her legs that could not touch the floor. Her blue and white striped Little Mermaid top, or perhaps it was a dress, was partially stained with what I presumed was chocolate. Crooked teeth clacked in a smile, and wide brown eyes were partially concealed by her unruly bangs. Shaking my head, the fanciful specter faded, leaving the book in her place. Reading it over several times, I'm haunted by how much I have changed...yet somehow have remained the same. Each observation is just as striking as the last. Looking over the entries, it quickly becomes a tired, mixed rendition of Taylor Swift's "You Belong with Me" and Saving Jane's "Girl Next Door" only without the romance-induced jealous bitching.

She was happy when she played with her toys...I'm happy when I'm mostly left to my own devices, something that was likely unthinkable to her. She hated solitude and I've come to accept it, if not appreciate it more. You won't find any mention of friends on these pages. On all but two sheets the skirt-wearing girl stands alone, smiling that empty grin among her prized possessions, looking more like a demented doll than a child.

She was sad when she had to go to bed early. As an adult what makes me sad is the stagnant existence in which I live, with no clear path, no clear goals, and meager aspirations. And the fact that no matter what I may do, I can never live up to the colossal expectations I have for myself. It's a life of constant dissatisfaction. Heh, I'd much rather have those days when all I had to worry about was what hour my blue wristwatch wall clock chimed. My favorite food is a BLT and hers, for some odd reason, were cut up hotdogs that could be dipped in ketchup. Hey, never said I had taste. Her favorite color was blue, while mine are teal and purple. She had a thing for clothes, pretending to be a

princess and labeling “The Little Mermaid” as her favorite Disney movie. I live in old jeans and love-worn anime t-shirts, hoard books like they’re going to be outlawed (and if Trump becomes president who knows), and constantly cite Belle as Ariel’s replacement. She loved “Green Eggs and Ham” but out of all of Seuss’s books, “The Lorax” is my main jam.

Few things have remained the same. Funnily enough our favorite place to go to is home and the library has kept its monopoly as our favored part of any educational institution I’ve attended. Lastly, a stain on the last page reminds me of the constant one etched in my mind, inscribed on my heart, even to this day. It seems innocuous enough. A misshapen, anorexic cloud heart hovers above my pencil counterpart and the words scribbled within are as squished as a stereotypical nephew or niece’s cheek. In blocky, capital letters it states my love for my family, minus one member as my younger sibling had yet to be born then. It seems cute, doesn’t it? A small child’s written devotion.

The sad fact of the matter is I don’t know whether I was trying to convince myself or the would-be reader. Even as a child I knew my life was far from the ideal, picturesque images splashed on magazines, children’s books, and 90’s sitcoms. There was no need for cheesy romantic background music and when laugh track moments happened they were few and far apart. That’s not to say it was a horrible childhood but it was far from the romanticized version society pushed, the one it expected...and the one that I wanted.

Upon closing the book all I could do was stare at it. More than anything, the book reflects the reality I tried to paint for myself rather than the one I actually lived in and the distortion between the two only grew as I did. In the seventeen, nearly eighteen years since then the chasm has only blossomed into a Grand Canyon in and of itself. Were my younger self to see me now, she would be quite disappointed I’d imagine. If I were to close my eyes I could imagine her standing at my desk side, with teary, baleful, accusing eyes stabbing into me, likely saying things her mouth didn’t yet know how to formulate. Why hadn’t I applied myself more? Why hadn’t I taken every opportunity offered? Why had I made the mistakes I made? So many why’s, not enough because’s and hardly any of them justified. She is my hindsight personified, set to haunt me for my remaining days.

But I can’t let her do that or else thirty years from now I’ll take her place.

Life isn’t what she thought it was and I can’t let her expectations, her disappointment chain me down like weights which would only build up my disappointment rather than my muscle mass. The simple truth of the matter is...I’m not her anymore. A part of me longs to be, but it just isn’t possible.

The urge to burn the book, to throw it away assaulted me, bringing with it contradictory baggage. I couldn't destroy it, it was part of my childhood and not to mention my mother would be pissed. You couldn't walk through our house without tripping over some elementary or middle school art project. But another part of me wanted to because it felt I couldn't move on and let go unless I did. In the end, I shoved it, and her, within the depths of the hall cabinet, smothering them among the blankets, and latching the doors shut. My fingers lingered on the latch as I exhaled.

I couldn't help but feel like I was still running away.

But I couldn't keep re-reading the same chapters of my life...the same books. I was past the editing stage and all the pages were stained with my old typos in permanent ink. The projects of my past were well-worn with twitchy fingerprints as I worried and clawed at them until they were threadbare and unfit for a second hand shop. My present ventures were scattered, unfocused, even mad ramblings born and bred as I sat in an isolated darkness with nary a star to point my way. My arms fell, or perhaps flopped to my sides in an almost decisive manner.

My footsteps held a jolt of determination as I walked back to my room, though whether it was merely a temporary putter or a constant hum of a steady engine had yet to be seen. I just knew I couldn't write another cookie cutter sequel to this horror show that was my existence. My future

It was high time I introduced some new elements, proceeded from a different angle, maybe met some new characters and most importantly...find a new goal.

I've always been the protagonist of my own story...it's about time I acted like one.

MY TARNISHED TRIBE

by REBECCA CHAMAA

Writers often talk about their tribe. I can't tell you exactly what that means; I can only guess. They have a group of writers who have their back? They have a group of artists who they can share their ups and downs and over and around with? They have a group of like-minded individuals who they call, text, do readings, visit, and publish each other's work? It doesn't matter what it means; I am certain that nothing like this exists in my life.

I may not have anyone else's definition of a tribe, but I have people. They are tarnished, but they are mine. Even though we kicked mud on each other's dreams and tried to break each other's spirits and occasionally each other's bodies, they are still the ones. They changed my diapers, made me birthday cakes, stayed up late on Christmas Eve wrapping the gifts we probably didn't have the money for, but somehow, my wishes ended up under the tree. They are the ones who woke up in the middle of the night when I had wet my bed and put a towel beneath me so I would stay dry until morning. They are the ones that played kick the can with me and carried me into the house when all the skin on the front side of my body had tears and cuts from sliding head first down a gravel driveway when I fell from running as fast as my six-year-old legs would carry me.

I am the one who got pregnant at fourteen. I am the one who ran away to another state with an ex-con who had a record for breaking and entering. I am the one who started smoking cigarettes before I could drive. I am the one who dropped out of high school and college before finally getting my bachelor's degree.

If we were keeping score, it is probably true that they have disappointed me as much as I have disappointed them, but still, they are who I belong to, and they belong to me.

Summer is my favorite time of year with the long light days stretching into the evening and fresh fruit on the table each night for dessert, but lately, I have been missing the fall, pumpkin spice lattes, cinnamon, oatmeal, bread and other baked goods. In the late days of summer, early days of fall, school would start, and I can remember they all helped me get ready. We moved so much I was always facing new kids. And even back then, I found myself circling the perimeter of the cliques. I didn't quite fit in anywhere except at home with my people; the ones who made space for me at the dinner table no matter how badly any of us screwed up.

They are the only tribe I have ever known and with them, I'm someone who can enter without a key, join in without an invitation, take my shoes off and open the refrigerator without permission. I imagine we have our rules for belonging, but I don't need to know them because I was born into this family and they are mine.

ON READING NAILS

by KRISTINE S. ERVIN

I think of how fingernails can hold a history, some bendable and soft, others sturdy as stone. How they can trace what you've done in a day, tell the story of your life in their pale crescent moons.

About the messages written on the bare backs of young girls. I drew an invisible letter with the backside of my nail, my friend guessed the letter M. By the end of the night, we knew each other's secrets through the disappearing ink of touch.

I remember my mother as having no nails, though technically this is not true. She had the pinks of them, their edges chewed, split, cracked, snagging the yarn as she pulled it through a canvas of needlepoint. I can see her nails, even now, but I have no memory of her lifting her thumb to her teeth and gnawing on a sliver of white.

Sometimes fingernails become maps: a detective swabs under them to find a victim's story. Dried blood could mean she fought her killers. Clean nails could mean a quick death. But my mother, with fingers as nothing but nubs, must have kept her story a secret.

Sometimes nails so easily transform, turn a caress into a scrape, goosebumps into a wound.

I remember playing with her thick brown hair, and she asked me to scratch the dead skin from her scalp. Her hair contained white flakes and spots of blood because I pressed down too hard and a rainbow of a hundred barrettes. My nails once held, as in *kept safe*, her skin.

I'm looking at the length of my nails. My story is not her story. There is no thread tying us through the burrs of our cuticles. No, I grew my nails out a year after her murder. I was nine then, and I needed a weapon to play Mercy with the boys. I couldn't bend their wrists backwards until they knelt on the ground. I couldn't crush their knuckles or strangle their bones between mine. But I could make them bleed, turn my nails into knives until they cried Mercy, until they yanked their hands away and studied the ten bloody smiles in the backsides of their hands.

I think now of what isn't underneath but on the surface, the texture of an unbuffed nail.

Of holding my father's hands, weathered from a youth spent in oilfields, on the thin knit of a hospital blanket and running my finger crossways over his nails, over the high ridges that run cuticle to tip. My nails are my father's, only grown longer and with smaller faces. He advised me once to superglue a ridge that was splitting, because nothing else would prevent the fracture from running up through the quick. Only a person with crested nails knows this.

Years ago, I asked him to study his nails under a reading lamp. "You see how the ridges are brighter?" I said. "What does that look like?" "It looks like nails with ridges," he said. "No, Dad, what does it look like other than what it is?" "It looks like corrugated tin."

We can read the ridges as hardened wrinkles, a sign of our bodies' aging. As malnutrition or malabsorption. Or as origins. Or the corrugated tin that houses the motor of an oil well and shimmers in wind and light. But when I held his hand in the hospital, I thought of them as Braille, as the stories still untold between us.

POETRY

JACK MERIWETHER

WHY ARE YOU NOT KISSING ME I'M TIRED

Why are you not kissing me I'm tired
of sweeping my body clean each night,

the art gallery you never peruse absently
on your day off, fingering

the artist's leaflet, fumbling with
the watch on your wrist.

There was only one night
when we slept together in that bedroom

of sadness before I began curating it
into a freakshow museum.

You'd think that night would be seared
in my mind but I do not remember your morning body,

I do not remember glazing a look of love
over my sleepfulness, kissing you goodbye

(forever), I do not remember
the weight of your exit creaking

my floorboards like groans.
I choose to remember that our bodies

and the bedscrews quietly hummed
all night like a choir in a dark church.

FIRST DATE: RETROSPECTIVE

Do you remember my orange-rind hair
Gliding towards you in the sunlight
On the steps of the Museum of Contemporary Art

Your face: cautious and kind
I think you were probably nervous

Do you remember

The derelict shoes wrapped in animal fat
And bed frames and chairs in blocks of cement
The upturned tables planted with grass

I remember feeling like my life was changing
As I walked through the gallery
Seeing grief and pain distilled into beautiful forms
Voices of the dead calling through a sheet of roses

Dull hunger mixed with apprehension
As we orbited the dinner table sewn with human hair
And you asked the security guard his thoughts on the work

You know,
I actually don't think about you
All the time

But I do wonder if I'll ever get to tell you
How I spent the entire winter
Like an invalid in my bed, wondering
If you forgot I existed

NO PAIN

I feel like a blurry mistake,
sitting in the exam room
watching a video on the small screen
probably made before I was born.
The woman's voice says there
should be no pain.

I wonder what this country chiropractor
thinks of me when I'm lying face down
with dark-painted nails, yellow hair,
and a funny shirt saying to him: **PROTECT ME**
FROM WHAT I WANT, which he smooths
over my back before applying the instrument.

My face sticks to the sanitary paper
as I move at his direction
like a clinical ballerina: head left, head down,
head right. You see that? He says to my mother.
He points to my legs, off-kilter, I assume,
from years of standing the wrong way,
obliquely, sullen.

He walks forward to my head
and with gentle urgency he pulls
it away from my neck, trying to realign me.

GABRIELLE FREEL

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY SIX

Every morning begins with a square
shard of glass—it looks so fragile,
yet it can hold so much.
One hundred seventy six pounds of a
bulky belly, blossomed breasts,
thick thighs, and concrete calves.
Patterns of cellulite lace the bases
of my thighs to the stumps of my shoulders.

I wrap the cold mass of the toilet bowl
into my aching stomach. My bare legs,
cold on the linoleum floor—pressed
smoothly and almost fully,
save the few outliers of cat litter
that stab into my knees like pins
as I am projected into the porcelain.

I HOPE YOU HAD FUN

She makes you as warm as Skyy Vodka makes me.
Both inhibit our judgment far more than we thought they could.
Mine comes with a sharp pineapple taste,
while yours is a bittersweet blend of guilt and risk.

One, two, three shots and all I could think about was
your green flannel, her blue jeans, your lacy pink bra.
I lay here and feel the vodka numb me, starting
at my core and throbbing out like you when her hands start to drift.

You start to feel that rush of fire, as she starts with our pulsating pill,
and I'm scorched in embers, as I swallow two more stinging shots.
As you betray your betrothed with someone who belongs in a brothel,
I'm hearing countless I told you so-s and sleeping alone.

Morning sneaks lazily through your dorm room window to caress her face,
you're empty, and you see me like everyone does when they see her.
She's temporary, but sleeps so soundly with no stain of regret.
No amount of numbing could give me that peace.

SERTRALINE

I'm the 1% the little warning
on every antidepressant is for.
May increase means will increase—
the risk of—the thoughts of—
The behaviors of—the bandaged soul
that is clinically depressed.

Dark heavy fog—that's almost always
mentioned when survivors speak about
psychiatrists saving their lives—with
SSRIs with SNRIs—
with Zoloft with Abilify—
with Cymbalta—grows harder to see through
and five feet in front is too far.
The misty backroads right after
the downpour and all is lost but calm,

save the behaviors of—the thoughts of—
hoping that there is enough water
on these winding roads to hydroplane—
because only the mentally insane
have these nonstop thoughts of—behaviors of

Apathy—anxiety—
agitation—insomnia—loss of
appetite—numbness—suicidal thoughts
and actions—and if you're having any
of these, call your doctor immediately
for a cocktail of more warning labels
that may increase—the risk of—the thoughts of—

behaviors that will land you hostel
with a new roommate who thinks it's easy
to escape to rob that bank and shoot three
men trying to thwart your little escapade

But the thoughts of—behaviors of
the warrior are locked in the box,
tucked in the musty cellar—a beast
within the jail cell—until Sertraline
throws in the key and releases hell.

BALLOON ANIMAL

A stampede of nitrogen
and oxygen inflated my lank, slim
body of rubber whose bead he bound
to the narrow nozzle end
of his haggard hand pump.
My life conceived—fresh and clean
beneath the grasp of his soft,
non-dominant hand. I was inflated
to meet his needs. He saw me malleable.

He twisted each limb into existence
and I could almost hear myself pop
like the egg-sack of a wood spider
whose babies cascade over garden gloves.
He folded and twisted each segment
to the ear-piercing shrill of rubber
spinning against itself—against myself.
Another pop—my shoulders
he grasped and forced behind my back—
bound there with a lock twist
and the only word I could find
to describe the pain was blue.
Each limb bloated around the twists and ties
like those of the dead whose faces
are caved in and hoping
to meet their maker—but how
could such a thing exist when we feel
each and every twisted ligament—
every stipulation turned to victim blame,
when manipulation seems rational.

I gave him all the tools—just one long balloon.
No wonder I'm in this position,
waiting for that one sharp, fatal twist
when my neck snaps with a pop
and I explode in pieces.

ASEYE AGAMAH

TILAPIA

“Usually the head comes off first”
He says pulling the fish from its
Bag of blood and vinegar
“But even before that, you have to clean
Out the intestines”
There’s a slit in the belly of each fish
Where most of the innards have been taken out
But it’s not good enough for your father

He puts on gloves and reaches his hand into
The hole and claws out the remaining globules
And fibrous tissue
With his index finger
He moves to the outside and
You watch as he cuts off the spiky spine
The small flaky fins look like they’d be soft
Like feathers but they’re hard, so hard that he beats
‘Em with a butcher knife
Tries to cut ‘em off with a pair of scissors
You tell him you wanna do it, you wanna
Help him, but he’s nervous
“Just watch,” he says
He’s always had a hard time grasping
The concept of learning from experience
He tells you that his mother used to
Always say, “softly, softly”
The way that we Americans say
“There, there”

Spindly and sharp
Porcupine needles on the back
Of a fish
You finally get to clear out the pocket
Of blood that lines the spine
And look down to see
You’ve forgotten to cut off
The head like he said
You see the glassy eyes
The open mouth

With hollow lips, a peephole
Peering into the small, cavernous belly
The tongue
The milky gills
The textured scales, softer
Than you'd expect

You don't want to think about death right now
And so you begin to pepper him
With questions
What was your relationship like
With your siblings?
Did you like yourself when you were young?
Do you still feel like you're the same person
Even though you've changed so much?

He initially bristles
Softly, softly
You refine and tweak each query
Rework it so he'll understand
And feed it to him piecemeal
You gently cut off his spiky spine
Because no one else will

THE FOREIGNER

She comes home and throws around
Words like *agency* and *problematic* and *subjugation*
Words you never taught her, yet somehow
She knows. You have mixed feelings:
An amalgamation of curiosity and wonder
Coupled with skepticism and distrust
Who is this feminist vegan liberal that eats
(Only some of) your food and wears
All of your daughter's clothes?
She's supposed to be the child
You reared for 20 years
You didn't raise her to be like this!
Only you did — you did raise her
And here she is
A stranger in your own home

KRISTINE S. ERVIN

MATERNAL LINE

I walk the alleys to avoid lamplight, keys held
as I was taught—one slipped between each finger,
a set of claws—though I know I will drop them
when the arms surround me, my hand flexed flat,
the clink on pavement.

I won't reach for the eyes, no quick stab to snap
the larynx, and when I scream, the pitch will be an echo
waiting years to be heard.

I'll crawl into the backseat of a Dodge, vinyl slick
against my skin. As I reach into my purse
for Just Go to Bed, I'll say Put this children's book
on the floorboard. And give me a beer to appease my thirst.

No matter the route, interstate or highway
or dirt back roads, I'll tell them to find the abandoned
oilfield, its pumping units frozen
in a stalemate memory,
and demand for my hands
to be bound behind my back, just like yours,
the cord on my wrists giving a clean slice.

Then with my red sweater open, shredded threads,
the night will be in déjà vu, the stars recounting
each curse. Cut my bra between the cups, I'll say.
Let every tear and every bruise
finally swell with knowing.

I'll think of the game we played
in the mornings—the way you held me close,
the fabric of your red robe all around me, the way
you whispered, Try to get away,
the way I laughed and squirmed and fought
and pretended like I wanted to be let go.

When they walk me through the grass,
the trees dark and swaying and the moon
99% full again, I'll insist for the knife

to my throat, so I may walk to you,
proud to say, You are no longer alone,
exactly as I have rehearsed.

And of course you will tell me
you never wanted this, but *this* isn't just about you.

POST-MORTEM

after reading James Ellroy's My Dark Places

A man dumped his mother's body like men
dumped yours, and when he gives the details
of her autopsy—her scalp cut, flaps pulled back,
the top of her head sawed off—I hurl the book,
shocked I had not thought of this, the damage done
after you were found, and I am back at the funeral,
shaking my head at the girl in purple
who believes her mother is on her side, intact,
jeans and a blouse, sleeping as she slept
on the living room couch, but no one tucked
your hands under the pillow, your hair behind your ear,
no one clothed you, they said *there is no reason to*.
Your body already divided enough, too decomposed
to recognize, your coroner's wounding
is somehow worse, his failure to find
how you died. I read how they sliced
his mother's stomach open, whole kidney beans, shards
of meat, masses of cheese, and agreed she ate
Mexican for her last meal. I'm jealous he knows this,
can make murder real. I want to hold onto
a detail like this, not to know the unfamiliar though—
whole cigarettes or gravel or more than one cum—
but instead a fact that can pull the pain back:
your stomach coated with chocolate,
containing a tag from a Hershey kiss,
slivers of foil. I want to know, in your last hours,
you tasted something we loved.

PROVATAKIA

for Angie

I stand on the eastern shore, late December,
waves breaking cold against bare feet,
and remember her voice, reading to me by the Aegean sea,
a voice of exile and light and silence and holes,
her finger pointing to the lips of foam
that ride a cresting wave. *Provatakia*, she says.

Little sheep, skipping on the sea.

Off this coast, lines of white swell, then subside,
so distant I cannot see

if the sheep flow toward or away from me.

I want to enter their fleece, dive

into the softness of that hair, fingers sinking into the blue
body of text. It would feel like a whisper,

if a whisper could be held,
curled into the palm of my hand.

When they leave, each little sheep singing toward

her beach of pebbles and stone,

they are born of me, beginning with my breath,

my body when it dances, my hand when it touches

another hand, and yet there is rapture too

in their return, each little sheep a sigh from her,

a word of her speech that enters me as I breathe,

a million little sheep now breaking inside my body,
bleating into bone.

DAWN CUNNINGHAM

THE HOUSE OF

*A vein passes on its seeds
from one tree to another
leaving trails of diseased limbs
and scarred trunks
and the wanting to be
rid of knots and warps
of each house that has grown*

I.
Uncle
built the knotted walls plastered
by palm reading Story lines
groove the sculpture's hand—
mother had to sand the grain with steel
wool **You wouldn't believe**
what your uncle said
She waited for my reply washing
spray gun to rid overlay
The price of his built home
No **what are gay men like us to do**

II.
Mother
buffing the wood
I want to ask a question
after puttying the knot
How would you feel
about a new father
Stripped forest
Barren mountain at 25

*walls bow and crack from water lines
nailing mouth and birthing pain
of overlaid lacquer that cannot be
stripped away with thinner*

Secrets built the house . . . OF

NOT A DEAD BED

I'm forced to write
because I know no other way
to focus an energy
that requires touch.
This is a disease called
addiction
to touch, to orgasm; an insatiable
desire to be fulfilled
where fantasy fails.
Fifty plus, and the desire
has increased, folded my life, into. . . . Men
over forty complain about their women, "She's
dead in bed." I'm alive
and there hasn't been a man to keep up.

ENTRY #28 : CHURCH FLYER

“you do not belong here”:

her words shake her head
to her feet that turn backwards.
she came to church to find communion.

familiar faces and none to talk;
shake her hand and hug : “good morning”
at the good morning ceremony;
and the music enters her lungs.

her lips exhale the division
between flesh and spirit: “I Am glad to see you”
while the pastor diverts his chest
to welcome the row of young men instead.

“woman should learn in quietness”:

singing makes her dizzy,
light; the sun shines through the walls
into her empty chest in the back row
in a pew, alone, she converses,

shakes her head as she bows,
leans

“what is the difference in confine and confidence”:
“being submissive” for support during prayer.

quiet, alone, she writes on a church flyer
inspired word comes through man,
and she concludes convoluted selfhood in a spiritual belief

CANCER

INDY, 2012

after Lucille Clifton

i pray to a god
this body.
i imagine my son as he
once was
standing in my doorway,

smiling between earphones
while talking, "I love you; Mom,
you got gas money?"
the words sweet and sour
with a laugh,

his left hand holding life, his
fingers, long . . . where i see his daughter reaching,
his only daughter.

he leans his forehead
on the doorframe, then
says, "I know" to a voice
only he hears
and blows kisses.

i call his name
i know is his.
my hand offers
support;
this smile,
this body.

JACQUELINE LAPIDUS

SEWING

There are more folds in her face,
now, than pleats
in the skirt she so carefully pins.
Remember, she tells me, *never*
skip the basting. She knows
haste leads to error and I'll
only have to do it over.
Over the years fashions have changed
and so has her daughter:
I no longer wear skirts
but I, too, sew
nimble, without a thimble,
my fingers enjoying
the preciseness of the task.
Remember, she asks, *the year*
hemlines suddenly went up
and I had fourteen skirts to shorten?
Well, here it is again! She squints
into the light, the thread
goes through the fine steel eye
on the first try. Her face
is the work of years.
My source is here:
every skill I have that's worth knowing
I learned this way,
beside my mother
sewing.

SHAWKEMO HEIGHTS

After lunch, my mother lay
on the sofa looking out
over wetlands to the ship channel,
watching tiny boats come in under sail.
Beyond, in the harbor, millionaires'
yachts lined the finger piers
like giant gulls or sleek white-
sided dolphins, their hulls
jostling as they murmured
rich, rich. Did you sleep?
I asked later, and she said
no, but I'm sure she dozed off
for an hour or so while we,
entwined in your great brass bed
on the balcony, rode
wave upon wave upon wave.

MORTAL

Time stood still while my mother was alive:
for decades, Daddy never got any older,
his curly hair graying so gradually
no one could guess his age.

I'll look great when I'm laid out,
too, he said, and he did,
but when Mom went, the transformation
felt so total. Even
in her best pink suit, what lay in the coffin
was not her body but my life.

NINA S. PADOLF

AT PEACE

for Junie Nicholson Petraglia

Thick air lightens,
to a hum. She is bent over
in prayer bathed in moonlight rest.
Home is layered sandstone and crimson brick
centered by The Cathedral of Learning.
Three rivers surround
wishes, nestled in the belly of
dreams, floating in and out of
opened windows.

JANE EATON HAMILTON

BREAK-IN

1)

Acquit

2)

Your house was seen
loitering. Do you know
what time? All the other houses
were dark, but not your house
You could see everything she owned
She was wearing a low cut roof
lit up skylight to pathway
from her flaunching to her gullies to her gables
The judge hadn't seen newel posts that shapely in three cities
She asked for it
blinking her dormers, her soffit soft and purring
peonies blooming in your garden like petaled lingerie

3)

the guy man/tained she
yearned to be cracked open, spread wide
the pleasure of pain, her shutters torn
sweet rip through metal
tinkle of glass
Who said she got off on having
her goods stolen
He said you gave him consent

4)

The judge wanted to know
why you just used a latch to lock her
He needed to grasp why there were
apples in her fridge, chocolate on her counter
money when the guy cracked her goddamned safe
It wasn't called flashing for nothing, the judge noted

Why would you call it a kick plate
if she didn't want it kicked?

5)

Huh? Huh?

Houses can lie like rugs
The defense had photographs
of her windows slid halfway down

You hadn't even moved your welcome mat

LYNNANNE FAGER

A WHITE COUNTRY GIRL

moves deep into the city
where street lights transform
nighttime into afterglow.
Cars race to the stoplight
at the end of the block—
sometimes sirens chase
them. Down this one-way street,

music vibrates the old, thin windows. To the point
of pissing me off, thump. thump. thump.
Too familiar, unfamiliar noises.

I keep my ears perked, listening
for shattered glass. Here
or at a nearby house. I have
met only one neighbor. A black lady.
She stopped, smiled,
introduced herself to me. No whites

care to wave, or make eye contact.
There is no safety here to depend on
except your own. Ears and eyes open,
alert, pay attention. Not a city girl,
I am. A white country girl

living in a city of hate. Divided,
lynchings in 1930 here, in Marion, Indiana,
on the courthouse lawn. They said
it could be justified. By some,
this hate spreads like water moving through
the Mississinewa River. Throughout the generations,

this muddy water seeped into every crevasse, north and south,
in every smile of white teeth, white people, white ropes
tied. My stomach churns into knots.

I am a white country girl living
within this city of hope,
within this city of grandchildren mixed

with love. I am a country girl
living. In the city, deep south,
a country girl smiles and waves
as you, the white privileged, drive by. Ignoring
the white country girl, living
in the city, I am.

CLAUDIA MCGHEE

BULLY

Childhood #3

He sneaks up behind, scans the playground, yanks
a handful of hair hard enough to snap her head back,
then spins fast and sprints away. She screams at him
as he leaps past girls playing Chinese jump rope,
makes faces at her, and laughs. Next time.

Next time he dashes away, she follows. Slower. Steady.
She closes the distance, he darts away, she follows.
He starts toward school, she cuts him off, forces him further
from teachers, safety. He lets her get close, singsongs
taunts. Runs fast away. Once. Then again. Each time

she narrows the gap, each time he dodges not as far, gasps
as he calls her names. She follows, he turns too late, she
lunges, grabs the collar of his shirt, hauls back
as hard as she can. He falls, she leaps on him *'don't DO that!'*
slaps his face, 'just leave me ALONE!'
punches his chest 'DON'T pull my hair!'
'DON'T you EVER touch me again!'

MARINE SCIENCE

The last time a stranger asked about you and me
fifteen years together,
the words I shaped were redolent with seashells, salt:
Whelk. Scallop. Clam. Lobster.
I said something about pressure, the immersions
required by oyster,
abalone, mussel. She walked away, puzzled.
I called to her, louder,
'It depends on how deep you go!' but she was gone.
I thought to say, later,
*'Build jetties against erosion, against night storms,
dredge often and with great
care.'*

LISA ZIMMERMAN

FOUR MOURNINGS

To die in her sleep
like her brother Walter did.
Some prayers get heard.

Not a tree falling—
more like thin poison threading
his old Army veins.

Widowed sixty-five
years, her heart still feeling it—
healed when she joined him.

He was a good dog—
large, quiet. Without conflict.
A little like God.

SEASONS WHERE I LIVE

Boy in a hammock
June's hay stacked high in the barn
shade rocks his mind to sleep

Sweep of blue heron
down to the lake's muddy edge
leaves crack into rust

Clenching cold, thin wind
ice on the dog's dish, blue lake
horses blow white air

One narrow green blade—
the deer finds it and bites down
goodbye red tulip

EVERYTHING TURNS OUT OKAY IN THE END

There is no laughter
like the laughter of relief—
out of the grave stunned
silence of aftermath
the god of lightness returns.
The impossible weight of despair
is lifted and dropped as if
from a great height
onto a faraway continent.
The people who live there, at supper
with raised forks, can't recall
later if they heard anything.
When eventually the crater fills
with water, the people float paper boats
across its mirrored surface and stroll
with big dogs along the shore,
our laughter stirred in like distant sunlight
with the laughter of their children.

AIRLINE SECURITY

I hold my arms above my head
in surrender to this travel by air
and on a screen somewhere else
my fear shows up as a trellis of bones.

The mustard seed in my pendant
is too small for such elevation,
the seatbelt absurd, considering.
I just want an invisible saint
to go the distance with me, one
with superhero strength and maybe
some mechanical know-how
should one of the engines falter.

At 32,000 feet my saint tells me beauty
trumps terror, offers me his peanuts
and points out the night-soaked window
where a city of crushed embers
lies scattered under the boot heel of sky.

MARY ANN CAIN

TOMATO SEASON

I never tire of tomato season.
I become a tomato-eating Monster.
There is never enough. Why share?

Even with my Beloved. Especially
with him. He cannot fathom
those seeds that goiter my greed.

To finger such smooth, to round
a ripe heart tongued right
there in the dirt where dead

animals have been dusted,
the garden a graveyard for old
roots ground and turned, turned and

risen only to meet my blade.
I hack, grab, fall backwards
where new roots will hair

old bones sliced into astonished ovals,
golf balls cut loose from distant greens,
a tiny toy racer that grieves lost wheels—

all whispering bits of Barney's
last beagle bays. What it takes to
bloom a single taut heft

is so hard to hoe, so crooked a vein
to weave and dodge. So much my stake.
But I want what I want when I stem—

summer pulped with prim
basil points, sacrificed to the dark
oven's withering breath. I cannot wait

for the burn to cool, for tomato soot
like carmel crusted in pan corners
to stop my desperate from clawing

it loose, rich with the world—
kalamata oil, Madagascar pepper,
salt harvested from a Celtic sea.

RECEIVE

Why does rain drip like needles
I want to swallow?
Their route takes more
throat than I can cough.

Who said ache
does not mean?
The body is a book we learn
not to hold, a child
belly-crawling across grass
just to moan.

Maybe it's not rain I want
but the slow drop
of nerve gas before a last
choke? Fear is an animal
cracker waiting to crumb
with one ugly glance.

What does it mean to be safe?
I used to be a shore
no one could reach. And now,
now GPS uncovers all.
I know too much
to eat nuts and not think
I might not live without
medical pumps to free me
from what I cannot
reverse: the break, the wound
the blind guard who paces,
ceaselessly alert to where her eyes
lock. The miracle of allowing
what is to be.
The child holds herself.
Rain needles open
every last tongue,
the better to receive.

NAVEL GAZING

Why the cuts for staring
hard at where we enter
through our mothers' corded
twists that suspend all
tears or other means
of pushing starlight
from those equatorial madonnas,
unperturbed, heavy-lidded
as geckos, firm as engine
belts fashioned to full-moon bellies?

Why not just bow our heads,
ponder the mark? My own, five-
pronged, a stick figure
star-dead long before its light
touched eyes
searching for that amniotic
tropic where every equidistant
map point cannot shame, cannot
accuse, only hold us in suspended
light, hibernating trout
below the current, inside the breath,
with nothing but blood paths
to bind us.

JEN KARETNICK

LA CHANCLA MADRIGAL

We learn to behave by fear of the flip-flop,
not by the ghosts of our ancestors
or the sting of absent fathers' leathers.

This house is a maternal cop shop:
We crouch between *las chancletas*, sore,
and learn to behave by fear of the flip-flop,
not by the ghosts of our ancestors

who themselves had been known to leap
out of the way of sandals reaching to the rear
of a child whose mouth is open to a roar.
We learn to behave by fear of the flip-flop,
not by the ghosts of our ancestors
or the sting of absent fathers' leathers.

BANDWAGON FALLACY

Circle your fingers around my wrist
like pitchforks against a threat. Coat them

these colors of camouflage. I will not resist.
Safety is a vessel from which we should

never row, an imperfect vase that will not hold
a bud, where water leaks like a portent:

bead by furtive, wind-spread bead.

APPENDAGES

Last night my subconscious gave me
ideas about the pads in the paws of otters,
about how they tasted like corn chips,
with the texture of fried polenta,
only less mealy. I dreamed about

how to catch, kill and cook enough
otters to feed a table of brand-name
chefs for some kind of culinary competition,
or maybe just to impress them with a dish
“out of my comfort zone,” as Gordon Ramsay

might say, and whether or not these delicate
insides of otters could be extracted
surgically like the roe from sturgeon
so I would not have to fish for otters
in running streams—or is it trap them—

but could instead keep them
on some kind of dam farm to regenerate
the way lizards do a tail or stone crabs
a claw. I dreamed about the pressure of time,
how a deadline is your frenemy like a teenage

girl, forcing you to make decisions
you might not have otherwise made,
uncertain until the aftermath
about the rightness of anything.
I don’t even know whether otters

have pads in their paws, or whatever
you call them, which may or may not
be webbed and therefore should be stewed
like ducks’ feet, flippers of gelatin
to thicken a dish, or stuffed and roasted

like the two-toed hooves of pigs.
I only know I woke up very late, hours
past my intentions, with my dachshund’s
lithe, heating pad of a torso pressed to mine,
and the pads of her paws against my mouth.

SANDRA DE HELEN

THE FIRST TIME

Come slowly, Eden!
Lips unused to thee,
Bashful, sip thy jasmynes,
As the fainting bee,
Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums,
Counts his nectars—enters,
And is lost in balms! Emily Dickinson

I touched her hair—and was
lost, found, ensnared—she
pulled me to her and took my
lips.

I tasted her nectar. From the
first drop I was an addict, my
hunger was loosed, like a
crazed bee, I forgot my
dance to my hive.

I discovered Eden in her
embrace, then drowned in
her balms.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

*I had no time to hate, because
The grave would hinder me,
And life was not so ample
I Could finish enmity.
Nor had I time to love; but since
Some industry must be,
The little toil of love, I thought,
Was large enough for me. Emily Dickinson*

My beloved and I are born of the same
material as all the rest of this universe:
stardust. We all glide, slide, haphazard
in the chaos we call life, death, time.
All a construct we cling to, pray to,
sing to. I'll have none of it. I'll have
more, please.

LAURIE HIGI

THE VOICE

So like the trestles and the river flowing beneath them
the gravel road weary of shards stabbed into its back
dawn spreads its moonlight legs
and gleams with foggy sunlight
above moths and butterflies
I call to me those gone to bathtubs
young corpses stars ripped out
of a universe only alive to the dead and
those in trees by the river too far from home
I call the blizzards and freezing rain
lightning thunder wind
strong currents
heat waves
I call the blood of fish and drumsticks
the pools of blood from straight razors
I call the friends and the friendly
I call the sane and the insane
I call teachers I call drummers
I call cooks engineers students bikers
drug dealers
I call the stilled heart
I call the one I've lost
I call the one I've lost
I call the one I've lost
the hazy morning sits Indian style on the corner of my bed
the moths and butterflies dance around me
the fist a polka the last a salsa
the young corpses fidget at my voice
the stars ripped down pulsate with glow
those in trees by the river too far from home jump down and fly like a
sparrow
sing at my window
safe with the sound of my voice
blizzards wrap around my hair
freezing rain if it is possible hollows my eye
lightning looses light under my thumb
thunder if it is possible quiets itself
I receive amazing embraces from the wind
the strong currents carry me home

the heat waves do not drench me but cool my reddened face
the blood of fish comforts me with its glimmer
the blood of drumsticks dance for me
the pools of straight razor blood cleanse me
friends and the friendly come back to hear me
friends reconsider at my voice
the sane and the insane listen to me and cooperate
the first reluctantly the last wholeheartedly
the teachers leave their classrooms and claim that I may lead their teachings
the drummers sing to me
the cooks save children
save my voice
save my name
the engineers calculate with my fingertips
the students can't wrap their heads around what I say
the bikers stop on the side of the road and let my voice proceed
the drug dealers cry and flee the country
the stilled heart beats when I call

the one I've lost cannot hear me
the one I've lost does not come home
the one I've lost cannot answer

BUTTERFLIES AND EMPTY BOOKS

This cornucopia is crammed
Full of butterflies and empty
Books. I try to make space
By filling the books with ink.

I am careful not to pull
Wings off of butterflies,
Though part of me wants so badly
To examine them. Find words
To describe, in these empty books,
Every color, spot, line antenna.

Maybe tattoo it on my fingernail,
The one that I see with.
Put it next to the star,
The fire, the fish, and the lake
Named after a beaver.

YOUR EYE IN MY MIND

I want to memorize
Your face. Count
Every hair growing out of the top
Of your nose. Every freckle
On your forehead.
To duplicate the blue
Of your eye in my mind
So that I can perfect the description
Of it as the clearest sky
With a speck of storm on the right side.

Tonight, I smoked half of one of your cigarettes
Just so I could taste you
30 minutes before I would meet your tongue.
The smoke, like peek-a-boos of white
Now playing on your sideburns.

Your lips, like arms greet me.
I am home.

SHARI BENYOUSKY

THE WEDDING

Caveat: I went not knowing them

To revel in celebration without my own cacophony
But I judged the velvet anyway

And yet there were moments when I forgot myself...

The bride grew silky ringlets like milkweed seeds loosening
I imagined them blowing about the sanctuary

Gleaming and innocent parachutes
Curated bridal glitter to catch the floodlights
(There's myself intruding again)

Afterward

Breathing in the sharing of secrets
The ceremony of waiting for the party

Empty round tables clustered behind a velvet cord

Candles

Creased white linen

Crystal picking up stray lights as if
the night sky had poured itself

And didn't care if my tumbling, pooling angst judged or not

MORELS AND ME

I find myself in the woods crusty from sculling through
riptides of platitudes
some sticking to me like scum dipped off
the surface

By the stream, I sit to bathe my mind
Here the earth ripples clearly
Dogwood petals fill with water and rock down

Further along massed violets edge the paths like
rows of bleachers
For the bikes racing and chasing
plastic arrows nailed to redbud trees under
blooming stars like spilt ganglia

Off the path, I search and search for mushrooms
small corded brains scalped from the bright green swamp where the wild
cabbages fold
open like seas

Scraping down past the Internet, I cross a soft spongy trunk and wonder
where foam on the water comes from in this place
once hallowed
still

DEFINING BLUE

What is the color of a wave
 sunlight dappling
 translucent to murk
dancing crashing cauldron
 capture
cup
 measure
sort

Slight shades between
 bravery and stupidity
 error and genius

Hold up, tighten slightly,
Tack here and there
Slide down a thousand gray wave slopes
 Before hitting the tip of one small rock

Imprudence held at the right angle
 is truth colored

Does God possess personality or
 is God a rounding up of every facet
A gestalt of wind and wave and sky
 and me

Are all of these fine distinctions
 Kingdoms
Phylum
classes

A thousand different words
 for blue

AIMEE R. CERVENKA

AN HOUR BEFORE DAWN, I AM CHANGING BANDAGES AGAIN

Flashlight beam balanced
against his shifting body,
I cup the warm breath of his muzzle,

his fear like cold spasms in my hand

so that it is hard to move
my fingers over his neck, across
his jutting withers,
and down the trembling foreleg.

Doc had said the hoof would come off;
I'd pictured a leg ending in bare bone,
some clean thing I might polish with a cloth.

Wind like the ocean breaks
against the wooden walls,
I could forget where I am,

but the green flesh stinks,
drips iodine to the cement floor.

His eyes so white, like the bone
beneath the flesh, sinking.

Cells fold into cells,
signal one another,
rest.

PRUSTEN

It's the huff of recognition,
the breath that says *I know you*
and maybe I am glad to see you.
Rising from the liquid tissue of the lungs,
it is almost no more than an absence of growl,
hostility burned out. If saber canines
glinted in my mouth, perhaps I too
could make such a small sound.

SISTER, I HAVE WRONGED YOU

Months before you contemplated causing
your death, I wrote that you had died.
A coincidence, surely. But when,
for months without reason, you did not speak to me,
I came to suspect I might be responsible. The thought
was like a creature which quickly took hold, and I
made the mistake of doing nothing
but giving it space to grow. I've thought often of how
I would wrap it in brown paper
and send it to you, if I could. How it would please me
if you found joy in its company, if perhaps
through this silent year,
you have been lonely for me.

NATHALIE KIRSCH

AN ABORTION

Latex-covered hands glide over my bare thighs
dusted in a thin layer of baby powder like
snow fall in late October. The nurses
vacuumed out relief. My body is slipping
out of my grasp and my knuckles
whiten as I tighten my grip. It's normal,
the nurses say. A speculum hovers
like a missile. I feel as easily
as my body the slapping of veins,
the drawing of blood, the expurgation.

CONFLUENCE

Does the Amazon flow
into the ocean? Which one?
The Indian? I had a test
when I was eight
on the continents
and the oceans and I aced it,
but I no longer know. I
bathed with you
in the shower when I was
only hip-high. I sat
in the sink and splashed water
when the sink felt like the womb,
the water cradling me
as if I were still in utero.
I wish I could crawl up
the birth canal and be flooded.
In my dreams, we stand
under the showerhead,
the confluence of two great rivers.

REBECCA HART OLANDER

POETRY

we / do not admire what / we cannot understand
Marianne Moore

I.

I admire, deeply, the wolf under the tree,
the way she repeats her tight ellipses
over and again, a skater training on a rink.
Her path is sure. She doesn't need to deviate,
until she does. Her neck, craned to one side,
allows her to look at what has tried to escape
her in the branches. What hides above
is bigger than she is, made bigger than that
by darkness and shadow, but it smells good,
so she doesn't care. Night falls, and still
the wearing of a track into the dirt beneath
her paws. On her side, an old scar amidst the
silver-gray. Why wouldn't I understand her
hunger, her steadfast pursuit? Why wouldn't
I want what she has, what she wants?

II.

I admire the pushing elephants, the way they
plunge as one into the mud to save a single
calf. Ears flutter as they turn to check that
they are all together in this, and down they go,
trying to fish him out from underneath with their
trunks. And they do it, too, without language,
without machines. They also mourn their dead
and visit their bones. In their biggest brains,
they store for later what has passed them by.
They know mortality, placing fallen leaves on
top of it. I understand how death has us trying to
blanket loss. I, too, know the way the place
of loss becomes the loss. But I want to recognize
myself in mirrors placed before me. For tusks
to curl like ivory swords right out of my face.

WHY I BECAME AN ENGLISH TEACHER

When I read *Maggie*:

A Girl of the Streets

in 11th grade English,

my teacher told me

the yellow in the story

could only signify

decay, as in rotting

teeth, as in the streetlamp

glow bathing

the young prostitute.

She told me it was

ever thus, yellow used

by all writers to symbolize

only this one state

or action. Drenched

in melancholy, swathed

in sadness

not sunlight.

But what of the yellow ochre

horses dancing

across Lascaux

Cave? What of the finch

flashing through

the bush? The sun-

colored cabs in New York

City are yellow,

the easiest color

for the eye to spot.

When Ilene Woods

sang Cinderella in

the Disney movie, she

hesitated before

harmonizing

with herself, unsure her

voice would fit

beside itself, slip

inside the folds,

a stockinged

foot into

a slipper. What if she hadn't

cracked open

that egg
to explore the yolky
richness of her
inherent harmony?
That song would be lost now,
amidst the hearth
cinders and mice.
I've spent my life writing
belonging and *joy*
in yellow tones,
declaring dandelion
a flower
not a weed,
the ball of sun, Italian ice
from the silver cart,
pollen like summer
snow, the silken, sticky
hair inside the husks
of corn.
Perhaps she was partly right.
Maybe I just
didn't want
to dwell on Maggie's
ruined mouth,
the yellow
beam of a spotlight
to draw men's eyes
to her, moths
bent on burning
inside a flickering
candle,
how her crushed girlhood
leaned against
that iron post.

MASS ON THE MAMMOGRAM

If inside a soft place grows a
firm and alien thing, how to go
back to the time where biting
into a peach brought happiness?
Or is that the only way to return,
after intentional poison, lighting
up your lymph nodes till you
are a radioactive filament, till
the branches of your tree are
stripped of hard fruit, till the mill
of your imagination stops
grinding out such terrible grain,
and on your plate, a meal you can
taste, not bitter, not barklike, not
wondering if it is your last one.
Maybe only then can peaches
taste sweetest. Like that apple.
It wasn't difficult to bite until
thinking back on it later,
linking it to all that slipped
through fingers without even
knowing it was once held there.
The way a pit settles in a palm
and fingers form a fist around it.
Wrinkled little bomb, remnant
of sweetness. Loss always does
this. Leaves behind a stone.

LUCY M. LOGSDON

LOVE LETTER TO MY SURGEON

There I am on my side,
a trussed pig, a slab of meat,
dressed for incision, and invasion.

I'm cleaned and shaved,
sterilized and almost naked
on the gleaming silver table.

There is always so much metal.
Everything is cold, bright,
appliance, in this arena.

I squint and wait for meds.
The music's loud,
aggressively happy,

as the nurses will be soon.
I am the only one naked,
or almost naked. There's a wisp

of a hospital gown draped over me.
You think I don't notice,
spread-eagled on the table,

But I do. I always watch
until the last possible moment
when right before I go under,

you walk in like a rock star.
You become attention's center.
I, object on the table. Prepped.

I should have made chit-chat.
Let's have a party.
Don't mind me—have

your way with my body.
Love my liver, admire
my spleen, stare at the length of intestines.

So much. You aren't
the first,
and you won't be the last.

I invite you, I am letting you
get this close,
get inside me, veins, arteries,
and finally, jackpot,
my crooked spine,
because you said you could

fix me, promised, didn't you?
It seemed like you did.
Why else would I let you swim?

in me, while I'm more under
than a six whiskey
bender. It's like love, isn't it?

You touched me tenderly,
didn't you? You, Doctor, with
your witty surgical hats and masks.

I wasn't just some pig, carcass
split open for business, was I?
I was a beloved, a wife, a daughter.

Your fingers were so delicate,
I like to think. My spine
in that moment like nobody else's.

CHRISTINE JACKSON

PTSD

Not a dew-covered spider web
balanced over an azalea bush
in the backyard,
but a tripwire strung across
a dusty road in Tikrit

Where is the path back
to my soccer mom life?

TASHA BUSHNELL

THE CENTRIPETAL FORCE OF LANGUAGE

Her life began in misprint
—The shards of grass cut her feet—
and language leaked from between her toes.

The left eye exchanges knowledge
with the right hand.
Nerves are notorious pranksters.

What is the sound
of one heart clapping?
There's more than porn in Indiana.

The centripetal force of language
is (right hand sows revolution) perception.
The velocity is (for the devotion of left ear)
defined by punctuation.

I (period) Love you
I love (period) You
I love you (Period)

Pranksters? Nerves are notorious (exclamation point)
The left ventricle can be a bully,
but the aorta can't help but think she's cute.

The shards of language leak from misprint.
Grass begins in between her toes,
and her life cuts her feet.

SCARRED FEMUR

1.

I was not the first child to pray for divorce.

2.

Ants build hills to compensate lack
of tongue.

3.

There are still things I cannot speak
about to my husband. Certain secrets
you swallowed to survive.
Truth aloud is too technicolor.

4.

Lemon ants create a devil's garden.
They kill all the plants around
the tree, *Duroia hirsuta*, promoting duroia dominance.
The tree is then rewarded with ants burrowing
through its insides. To date,
no one has asked the tree how it feels.

5.

If you split my right femur
you could count the years.
My parents separated when I was 11, 13, 17, and 21.
It wasn't the separation that scarred.

6.

A crushed ant secretes a scent
to warn others that danger is near.
It also attracts nearby ants,
filling them with rage.

7.

The reason I don't drink beer
is not because my family tree has alcoholics
falling like coconuts.
It's because beer sucks.

The reason I don't drink gin
is because I love it.

8.
Ants build hills to prevent drowning.

SHE CHASED BEAUTY

after Joy Harjo

She chased beauty in sidewalk chalk.
She chased beauty in fistfuls of dandelions held softly against her lip.
She chased beauty in her mother's high heels.
She chased beauty in the purr of a calico cat whose eye would sometimes
glitter with madness.

She chased beauty.

She chased beauty through the splash of a spring puddle.
She chased beauty in lilac-flowered hair.
She chased beauty in the ink of a book.
She chased beauty in a house that shivered with too much pain.
She chased beauty in parents too tired to chase back.

She chased beauty.

She chased beauty in bright red lipstick.
She chased beauty with pink painted toes, then hid them in steel-toed boots.
She chased beauty in the beards of men who were not beautiful.
She chased beauty in the beard of a man who was.

She chased beauty.

She chased beauty in between malignant cells and saline-sweetened IVs.
She chased beauty bald.
She chased beauty beneath hats, wide-brimmed and floppy.
She chased beauty in the scar on her neck, though the doctor assured her it
would fade
into the wrinkle of age.
She chased beauty in quiet, smile-coated pain.

She chased beauty.

She chased beauty for two daughters who were so like her, she was ecstatic.
She chased beauty for two daughters so like her, she was afraid.
She chased beauty for two daughters so they would recognize beauty without
their own chasing.

She chased beauty.

STELLA FINEMAN

FULLEST MEMORY

If I had the fullest memory of my childhood
I'd recall my mother at twenty-three
making French fries and hamburgers
in a deep fryer because she'd heard
it was important for children
to have a hot lunch
and how she was careful to never
tip her ashes into the rancid bubbling oil.

POMEGRANATE EXPLOSION

Golden copper descends
from the latest sunset

indirectly upon you
lighting contours indescribably seen.

Someday,
we'll dissociate like the forgotten tail
of a falling star

but tonight, our moisture circulates
without resistance, petals on pond water,

drawn together with the ease
of ghost attraction and subtle enchantments.

Smiles and your eyes begin so many things;
fingers curl to secure them

and then—
a pomegranate explosion luminesces
on the endless horizon

and a new sun appears beside us

or perhaps,
with the wish of a lover's whisper,
we have made it suddenly appear.

KATARINA BOUDREAUX

ON NAMING

Some believed
she was the
rind of a watermelon.

Others that she
was the pulp
in an overripe
orange.

Only she knew
that she had
nothing to do
yet with
the eating
of fruit,
as she was
the seed of
the pomegranate,
not yet grown.

CHRISTIAN MCPHERSON

WOOD

You, sapling
bowing beneath leaves
weighted and whittled
splintering into skin
like the squeak of an old oak chair
calling me
asking to be greased or
adjusted wrenchwise
I go hard to work
forging in alleys
collecting nails from the yard
and set flame to fat, faithfully
melting milk down
churning myself to butter
you spread me thinly
and then caking
into woodgrain
absorbing me until
shining and lacquered

ACORNS

My teeth are foreign,
crushing into my cheeks,
slipping across my tongue.
They are acorns, cracking.
Crunching my words
into calculated silence.

But I want to rain upon you,
Little bird.
Shower yourself in mirrors,
unscathed, chirping,
preening your down,
while lightening boils between my lips.

JANUARY

She wears a veil.
It isn't white.
It reminds her of chain link,
the kind that tastes like blood.

She is the unsung hero,
the martyr.
The welcome home party
is interrupted by I.V.s

All she can do is cry,
leaking out onto bedlinens,
as everyone else celebrates
with their backs turned.

AMY JO TRIER-WALKER

MASKS TAKE THEIR OWN

for Muriel Rukeyser

masks, when wildness on their hunting : singing a mask-god exiled from
love
song myself split : speak from no memory
torn, myself among word-eyes no more : lift now, frag
ments
my own night deeper as death sleeping : my head forgotten, the first
forgot and
knew
evil woke, burning the tree-mind : spare calm knows the growth of
a snake with bones burns the second I woke : and gave on gold-green earth that
walks the dark
grows veins, belief, dreams, voices crying : cries arise simple
and found in deep hours
again
sleep-effort speaks : takes what
tells, conceals, reads
I died and crawled into a rabbit-candle, sore : was told how not to grow open
now I am sails like glad blowing, tilting :
I wanted to speak my
hand
now, I become nine sentimental fluids : widowed and
wept, I want to
you
close your not-lamps, their corners : for fear sometimes will
tragedy fist now, dreams stand
the sunset-death light : clouds are transformed and leap
unhappy
to me they will open and think themselves loved : bright little
foam-waves veer off from love grow me : you touch these
entities grip : clinched yesterday is alive in no one words
shown silence move : and take their own speak

WE CALL THIS PATTERN SPADE

fight, flight, or faint
 it's the heartbeat that slows
 wrinkling
 until traction
 I don't remember
 the split from him
 fire flinched
 through the bed
 or forget I hate them
 it's the nails that bite eventually
 I don't remember the rip
 to alone
 I remember not to cut nails from needing them
 for his skin
 better burned
 outstretched
 and
 look straight
 stung into get up and
 move
 past the harp without a pulse

WASH WHAT COMES IN YOU

for Edith Södergran

wash the trees
 cleansed yourself— simple
 turns for a woman
 so embraced
 council nothing so cold, empty-handed and left heavy
 brow my life
 his when disappointed

 I saw languid
 the last rains never-gardens
 endless never her closer

grief
 a depth never best

understood
 she reigns
 stormy for life curses through

wombs
 the moon dead on leaves and unspeakable

 such a forest circles our path
 and death spins our flowers
 weaves all the sighs too late to await longing
 the land not long enough
 all in weary runes

 but all chains cool in dew
 in life—
 one way to my beloved
 who is night who is quiver who names an arch higher
and drowns fog to answer but nothing certainly all comes in you always

JANE EBIHARA

THE DAY AFTER YOU DIED

Mother,
my plane lowers over Chicago
after the snow

the tiny window
cools my forehead

below
the world is black and white
I'm supposed to be remembering
I'm supposed to weep

you have already been fed to the flame
gone up with unlikely passion

now my rental car slices a dark straight line
through Midwest farmland

what strange familiarity
this place
where you no longer live
where I no longer live

snow squalls throw ashen showers
onto the blurred windshield
wipers drone
it's late too late too late

I might slide off this road remembering
be found by locals
who'd say she's a stranger here
we'll have to see where she came from

it's late too late too late

WHAT LINGERS

Mother leads my teenage sons
through her tiny home
asking each what he would like
to have when she is gone

The drum table with the leather trim acquired at auction when Mrs. Winslow died? It came from England—shipped right to her door.

Aunt Josie's heavy lamp with the near-Tiffany shade?
It's no doubt valuable, Harvey treated her so well.

Grandpa's pocket knives perhaps? My thimble collection?
The dark carved statues from Haiti where we carried
church stones with the natives?

she is insistent they are uncomfortable
finally to please
one chooses a stiff horsehair love seat
the other the scallop framed portrait
of his mother virginal

2
I stand in the kitchen doorway and listen as
she gives lessons to her grandsons
they are making bread

push with the heel of your hand
push and roll push and roll
you'll know when it feels just right

3
years later
the younger receives a gift from his brother
a single vanilla-scented votive candle
wrapped with a note-paper band on which
he had carefully penned:
Summer: Grandma's Kitchen

TARA BETTS

THE POWER OF MOTHERS

for Ailene Quinn and her son Anthony Quinn

A five-year-old in a shirt covered with boxes is suspended in mid-air as an officer attempts to snatch the flag from his tiny hands. Fluttering red, white & blue clamped under clenched fists of a grown man. His grip is not strong enough to shake the boy loose. The child is a vice in protest. The place where children find such will needs no map. A photo does not tell what happened moments before.

Another officer holds a torn police brutality poster behind the boy in the fray. Before the shot, A mother and son stand together.

He looks up at her. She focuses her glance and says, Don't let that man take your flag. The boy holds on and never forgets, even becomes a lawyer years after that day. If one questions the power of mothers, any inquirers may require some interrogation.

CURSES

her fits left me
fizzing, dizzy
a zero reduced
to frazzle spiked
between vault
and sparks. Her
red-feathered
marrow floats
wet dawn along
the mattress—
a dreadnought
sinking, sluicing,
and dipping
a poem written
through curses
on my tongue—
a litany.

CATHERINE MOORE

MY LOVE GAVE ME A SEED

it rolled from his mouth
an impenetrable nugget
tight as unfurled Canna lily.
I buried it in the sofa
we sat upon each night.
I had no knowledge
that heat, pressure,
the energy of sound
was incubation,
until it sprouted.
First a thin stem
mere ribbon,
I could tuck away
at holidays, at company time.
Still, we fed it every evening.
Our fertile offerings—
he tendered steam
I sacrificed light.
We watched the stalks
swollen as rhizomes
grow out like ornery hairs,
damn cowlank, damn plant.
No matter how innocent
it looked in breakfast light,
its leafy lips rasped each eve
through the thousand blades
snaked by its naked limbs
into the house walls all day.
Then, the creature we made
swallowed the children.
In grief I gave it a scissors' edge,
and gargled in culling-songs
to keep from my weeping.
It grew rank as ailanthus in April yards
and despite sheering, tall enough
to shadow sequoias—it sprawled
a gnarled and gruesome reach.
So I transplanted it
in the bedroom closet.

While the dark bred vermin
a vulture took roost,
we heard its wings flap at night
as we hide under sheets.
A waiting gargoyle,
venom-infused over
shrouded prey—
strung mute guts.

HARROW

I am the pitchfork
in a police evidence room.
My long weathered handle
plastic wrapped and tagged.
My rusted prongs stained.
I can take you back to the fields
I have tilled. And tell you how long
it takes to break soil—clay, silt, sand.
I've been a tool for domestic grit.
Close your eyes. Touch me. Imagine
the long troughs we can carve,
to make loam and to bed seed.
Remember the daunting plow,
the necessary disturbance.

SKIN ELEGY

At midnight the image comes.

I see her alone, solitary, maybe.

There are suspicious shadows

like limbs in the background.

Entwined in rubble. I see black and white,

although in real life probably gray

or beige or rusts. There is no color

other than blood.

It's a flash. Her photo in a newspaper

several months ago.

Her scars, a patchwork story of the bomb

that blew her world apart.

I smell the tart, sulfuric, smoky jolt—

she looks wide-eyed, owlsh,

no gaze left for bitterness.

Her face hideous on a less beautiful child

half of it sewn back, stretched

to contain the human inside.

I can't reach her in the dark of my bedroom.

I rasp. I wheeze in my quilted chest.

I pray.

ERICA ANDERSON-SENTER

DEAD AT DALE HOLLOW LAKE

Damselflies spoon-in my rotting eyes,
summer berries damp with morning waves.

My skin slides off, quick like a silk-dress, and catfish
big as Chevys, undress me. They remember the color
of my fingernails as the silt sings *swing low, swing low*.

The crow has found me, right where the tide said to stay.
My insides, now out, are yellowed by the Tennessee sun
and from somewhere, I forgive your dog for eating them.

My bones suck in the sun; break apart with slate. A boy
from the cove uncovers pieces of my hand, shoves them
in his pocket to carry me home, carry me home.

Woven in, my hair is golden rigging for a sparrow's
nest, eggs rusty with freckles, fragile.

My brother skips stones while bush-crickets surge
with dusk and my grandmother weeps into the water.

Fog off the water is spirits, some say. But I keep
mine in a sunfish near the cove I've named Paradise.

HIDE AND SEEK, JUNE 1993

Near the alley, our old
barn smells of time and mildewed rain,
as I run from a boy named Keith.
Base is the barbecue pit,
tall and stone. Dad is drunk, passing
out inside the house.
Alone under peach-pulp moon, I am

sweating in peony-laced
air. Small for ten, my brow bone breaks
easily as plates, I trip head-
first, into rock; my skin drips.
Salt seeping in the gash, crying,
I remember blood:
sharp, familiar, made of metallic stars

THE AFFAIR WASN'T MY FAULT

I blame my jeans.
The fit like July nights—heavy
humidity between my legs, sweat
clinging to my curves.

What I meant to say is:

I blame my genes.
Depression and drunkenness
fogging up morality I find
in aged bourbon,

like my father before me.

CROSSING THE ROAD IN SEPTEMBER

Spine of the road, snake spine, you feel
my feet. I break your bones—pound you,

become aware of your shape. You are a build up,
strong thread through the city. You sprawl,

you sprawling spine, snake road—laid out,
knocked out under dimming sun, ordinary

sun twitching in an average grayness. This day
I notice you. I am ordinary. My hair greased back,

black pants, and a necklace bouncing—my breasts
move as I step, step on that spine. I notice today.

I notice your shape. I notice I'm ordinary. My lungs
inflate on your back. Today is a riverside

and you are dead under the sun.

SEVEN DAYS NOW

Dead deer line the ditch.
Broken legs with no where
to run as I drive south
on State Road 1.

Indiana wetness weighs
down soybean leaflets;
evening smells like raw
corn and green.

Skin stretched as tight as the road.

My palms, swollen
with penance, can't steer
me home. I have none.

A sign says *Christ died*
for our sins; under bruised
skies I'm jealous of his relief.

Indiana wetness weighs
me down. My affair is out,
seven days now.

WRITER BIOGRAPHIES

CIENNA MATTEI is a 23 year old recent graduate of West Chester University and single mother. I'm a hybrid artist of many mediums, often blending visual and textual elements together to explore new forms of authorship that reach beyond the literal toward Truth. I am inspired by experience and how art can liberate. My primary focus right now is breaking silences, navigating identity, and the duality of existence.

MATTHEW MERIWETHER is a writer living in Ohio.

JOYCE HAYDEN recently left her teaching position at Westfield State University to devote herself full time to finishing and publishing her memoir, *The Out of Body Girl*. She has published work in Angels Flight-Literary West, Dear Hope, Rappahonock Review, and Cimarron Review, among other journals. Also a painter and assemblage artist, Joyce held her first one woman art show: "Resilience/Reverence/Resistance" in the Short North section of Columbus, OH last summer. You can find her writing and art on her website joycehayden.com

BARBARA RUTH is drawn to the edges, the in-between, the transitional lenses of her glasses, the equinoxes, the mixing of watercolors on the thirsty paper, the going up and coming down, the phases of moon and tide, not this/not that. She is an old lesbian Jewish/ Potawatomee, physically disabled, neurodivergent photographer, poet, fiction writer, essayist and memoirist whose work has been published in Australia, Canada, India, UK and US, and been widely anthologized in disability, feminist, literary and queer anthologies, including QDA: Queer Disability Anthology, The Spoon Knife Anthology, Barking Sycamores: Year One, Storm Cycle, Secrets & Dreams, Shattered, In Media Res: Stories of In Between Anthologies, Tailfins and Sealskins. Her photography and poetry was in the inaugural issue of De Luge. She lives in San Jose, CA, USA.

KATE BIRDSALL is a writer and an assistant professor at Michigan State University. Prior to moving from Northeast Ohio to Michigan's capital city, where she lives with her wife and at least one too many four-legged creatures, she was a middle manager for a motion picture exhibition corporation, a content editor for a natural foods store, a retail buyer of nutritional supplements and health-and-beauty aids, a guitarist in a post-hardcore band, a graduate student, and a certified projectionist. She might be a dilettante. She's definitely an existentialist.

BETH DUCKLES is a writer and ethnographer who lives in Portland, Oregon. I hold a Ph.D. in sociology and a first-degree black belt in Aikido. I've recently published a personal essay in *Narratively*.

MANDY PARKER is a feminist farmer from Ringwood, Illinois who spends her days milking cows and chasing pigs on the farm where she lives with her husband and two mini-donkeys. She is originally from LaOtto, Indiana where she grew up on her family's cattle farm. Mandy obtained both a Bachelor's and Master's degrees from IPFW as a returning adult student. While at IPFW she was passionate about Women's Studies, History and activism.

MALLORY MCDUFF teaches environmental education at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NC, where she lives on campus with her two daughters. Her essays have been published in The Rumpus, BuzzFeed, Full Grown People, Literary Mama, Sojourners and more. She is the author of two books on faith and place *Natural Saints* (OUP, 2010) and *Sacred Acts* (New Society Publishers, 2012), as well as co-author of *Conservation Education and Outreach Techniques* (OUP, 2015).

CHRISTINE VILUTIS originated in Fort Wayne, Indiana. After finishing her undergrad at Earlham College with a bachelor's in sociology and anthropology in 2004, she absconded to the great metropolis of Chicago and has remained there ever since. During the last five years, she completed her Master's in clinical psychology and is passionate about the efficacy of thoughtful, culturally-competent mental health services. She is also in love with the written word, specifically in its ability to inspire and enrich our emotional lives. This is her first official publication.

JANINE CANTY has been writing most of her life and hoping to find a home for her words. She works by day in a nursing home and writes by night, on a turquoise laptop. Usually wearing a ratty pink robe, and aided by an obese black cat. She is a mother and a grandmother and a brand new orphan. Her work has previously appeared in The Manifest Station, The Weeklings, and Sweatpants & Coffee.

HEIDI CZERWIEC is a poet and essayist who is poetry editor at *North Dakota Quarterly* and teaches writing workshops at The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. She is the editor of *North Dakota Is Everywhere: An Anthology of Contemporary North Dakota Poets*, the author of the recent lyric essay chapbook *Sweet/Crude: A Bakken Boom Cycle*, and her first poetry book *Maternal Imagination* is forthcoming from ELJ Editions. This essay is part of a book project titled *Real Mother*.

MEGAN CULHANE GALBRAITH is a 2016 Saltonstall Fellow and Director of the GIV/Young Writers Institute at Bennington College. Her work has been published in *Catapult*, *PANK*, *Literary Orphans*, *Hotel Amerika*, *The Lost Daughters*, and *ASSAY: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies*, among others. She was a finalist for AWP's WC&C Scholarship in 2015 (judged by Xu Xi), and a Scholar at Bindercon. Her essay, "Sin Will Find You Out," was a Longreads Pick of the day and No. 3 in The Top 5 Longreads of the Week. It was mentioned in LitHub's Daily roundup of The Best of The Literary Internet, and in the "What I'm Reading" section of The Anne Friedman Weekly. Megan is at work on a collection of linked essays titled, *The Guild of the Infant Saviour*. She is a graduate of the Bennington Writing Seminars.

JENNIFER WONDERLY recently graduated from Indiana University with a Bachelor of Arts in English Writing. Her fictional story "Knave of Hearts" has been published in Indiana University-Purdue University's (IPFW) literary magazine, *Confluence*. She lives in northern Indiana with her family where she struggles with an ongoing existential crisis she attempts to alleviate through her writing.

REBECCA CHAMAA is a poet and essayist. Her work has appeared in *Structo*, *Angels Flight: literay west*, *Serving House Journal*, *Pearl*, *Role Reboot*, *Manifest Station*, and many other journals and anthologies. She has an on-going column in *Drunken Boat* and blogs for *Psych Central*.

KRISTINE S. ERVIN grew up in a small suburb of Oklahoma City and now teaches creative writing at West Chester University, outside of Philadelphia. She holds an MFA in Poetry from New York University and a Ph.D. in Creative Writing and Literature, with a focus in nonfiction, from the University of Houston. Her work has appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Brevity*, and *Passages North*. She is currently working on a memoir about searching for answers and a feminine identity—through texts, memory, and bodies—in the aftermath of her mother's murder and the solving of the cold case 25 years later.

JACK MERIWETHER is a visual artist and poet from Ohio. He is currently working on finishing his first manuscript of poems. See more of his work at jackmeriwether.com.

GABRIELLE FREEL is currently a junior at Westfield State University, majoring in English and Secondary Education. She fell in love with poetry last semester through her creative writing class and she's been writing ever since. Outside of writing, she enjoys reading, hiking, running and fishing.

ASEYE AGAMAH is a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She recently won third place in the Lowell-Grabill Writing Contest where she submitted a creative nonfiction piece entitled, "Body Study." Aseye is passionate about social justice, fashion, and red wine (or any type of wine, if we're being honest). She loves going to shows (she most recently saw Hiatus Kaiyote, Lianne La Havas, and is planning on seeing Chance the Rapper in September) and going out dancing (Y2K night at Chicago's Beauty Bar is her jam).

DAWN CUNNINGHAM explores family history, conflicts of self and others, sexuality, death, religion, science, politics, the stuff of life. Her motto has become "Stories write the world," meaning, stories are needed to keep the world alive. She is currently working on her memoir, *Cancer Cells*. Her poetry and prose appear in *Confluence*, *Flare: The Flagler Review*, *Diagram*, *Cliterature*, *The Voices Project*, *Shuf Poetry*, and *Misfit Magazine*. Her greatest inspirations are Gran'ma Ginny and Edgar Allen Poe. Her greatest supporters are Gran'ma Ginny, her son David Luebke, and fiancé Christopher Hines.

JACQUELINE LAPIDUS is co-editor (with Lise Menn) of *The Widows' Handbook: Poetic Reflections on Grief and Survival* (Kent State University Press). A lifelong editor, teacher and translator based in Boston, she has also lived in Greece and in France, where she was active in international feminist groups. She holds degrees from Swarthmore College (history) and Harvard Divinity School (feminist and liberation theologies). Jacqueline's work has appeared in numerous periodicals and anthologies and in three collections of poems: *Ready to Survive*, *Starting Over*, and *Ultimate Conspiracy*. Her fourth, *Significant Other*, is available for publication.

NINA S. PADOLF has her PhD from Argosy University in Educational Leadership, her Masters of Arts Degree in Teaching, from Chatham College, and is currently enrolled at Carlow University in their low residency program working on her Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, Poetry. She is full time faculty for The Art Institute of Pittsburgh Online, where she instructs writing courses. She is currently putting together a variety of poems about her experiences in Dublin and real life challenges including her sister's murder, being adopted, meeting her biological mother, and other issues that she had in her earlier years in school.

JANE EATON HAMILTON is the author of 9 books of short fiction and poetry, including the 2016 novel *Weekend*. Jane's books have been shortlisted for the MIND Book Award, the BC Book Prize, the VanCity Award, the Pat Lowther Award and the Ferro-Grumley Award. Her memoir was one of the UK Guardian's Best Books of the Year and a Sunday Times bestseller. She is the two-time winner of Canada's CBC Literary Award for fiction (2003/2014). Her work has appeared in publications such as *Salon*, *En Route*, *Rumpus*, *Macleans* and the *NY Times*. She lives in Vancouver.

LYNNANNE FAGER is a white country girl who has most recently moved into the city—into the depths, into “the hood.” She has seen the racial tension of the 60s and 70s, and has lived in Marion, Indiana where racial tensions have been a strong undercurrent since the 1930 lynchings. In a town divided, there are lessons for all of us to learn. She is a writer of poetry and creative nonfiction, and is currently at work on a creative nonfiction piece involving race relations, and her daughter, in Marion.

CLAUDIA MCGHEE has been a poet-in-residence, freelance editor, information architect, software technical writer, journalist, writing outreach project coordinator, and eBook producer. Her poems have appeared in *Aileron*, *Asylum Annual*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Impetus*, *Fresh Ink*, *Lunch*, *Nimham Times Magazine*, *Slipstream*, *White Plains H.O.G. News*, *White Pond Reflections*, *Zephyr*, and *Putnam Poets* anthologies. Her chapbook *Paperlight* is forthcoming this summer from *Finishing Line Press*, *Georgetown, KY*.

LISA ZIMMERMAN's poems and short stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Natural Bridge*, *The Florida Review*, *River Styx*, *Colorado Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Cave Wall*, *Redbook* and other journals. My poetry collections include *The Light at the Edge of Everything* (Anhinga Press) and *Snack Size: Poems* (Mello Press). My latest collection *The Hours I Keep* is forthcoming from *Main Street Rag*. I'm an associate professor of English at the University of Northern Colorado and live in Fort Collins.

MARY ANN CAIN's fiction, nonfiction essays, and poems have appeared in literary journals ranging from venerable standards such as *The Denver Quarterly*, *The Sun: A Magazine of Ideas*, *The Bitter Oleander* and *The North American Review* to experimental venues such as *First Intensity* and *LIT*. Her novel, *Down from Moonshine*, was published by Thirteenth Moon Press in 2009. She has received two Indiana Arts Commission Individual Artist grants. Her critical work on writing theory and praxis includes a collaborative book (with Michelle Comstock and Lil Brannon, and a monograph, *Revisioning Writers' Talk* (SUNY Press 1995), as well as numerous articles and book

chapters about writing and writing instruction. She is currently Professor of English at Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne where she teaches fiction, creative nonfiction, rhetoric, and women's studies. Her latest project is a nonfiction book about the legacy of Chicago artist-teacher-activist Dr. Margaret Burroughs.

JEN KARETNICK is the author of three full-length books of poetry, including the forthcoming books *American Sentencing* (Winter Goose Publishing, May 2016) and *The Treasures That Prevail* (Whitepoint Press, September 2016), as well as four poetry chapbooks. She is the winner of the 2015 Anna Davidson Rosenberg Prize for Poetry and runner-up for the 2015 Atlantis Prize and 2016 Stephen A. DiBiase Poetry Prize. Her work has been published recently or is forthcoming in *TheAtlantic.com*, *december*, *Guernica*, *Negative Capability*, *One*, *Prairie Schooner* and *Spillway*. She works as the Creative Writing Director for Miami Arts Charter School and as a freelance dining critic, lifestyle journalist and cookbook author.

SANDRA DE HELEN lived and wrote in Oregon for half her life. Now she is a Californian. You can read her work in *Mom Egg*, *Stillwater Review*, *Lavender Review: Night Issue*, *Generations of Poetry* and "pay attention: A River of Stones." Her chapbook *All This Remains to be Discovered* was published in May 2015 by McCorkle Ink, and the mini-chapbook *Invert Sugar* was published in July 2012 by Binge Press.

LAURIE HIGI is a poet, wife and mother of four. She raises chickens in South Whitley, IN. She is an avid supporter of local creativity, including poetry, art, and photography. She has a Bachelor of Arts in English Writing from Indiana University. Her poetry has appeared in *Confluence Literary Magazine*, *Surreal Beauty Magazine*, and *Bohemia Art Magazine*. She has also published an interview in *Reality Serum Magazine*. She has also served on the editorial board for *Confluence Literary Magazine*.

SHARI BENYOUSKY's poems draw upon many aspects of her life: as a professor of English at Indiana Purdue University, Trine University, Indiana Tech, and Ivy Tech, but more importantly as the rebellious daughter of a pastor, the ex-wife of a chronic addict and the granddaughter of a suicide. I am the author of a collection of poetry and John Eric Hawkins photos entitled *The Ancient Shape of Man* and have won several grants, including the Indiana Arts Commission Individual Artist grant.

AIMEE R. CERVENKA holds a BA in Biology from Rollins College and an MFA in Creative Writing from the Inland Northwest Center for Writers at Eastern Washington University. Her work has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *the Ampersand Review*, *Ascent*, and others.

NATHALIE KIRSCH is a poet living in Boston, MA. She is a supervisor at an independent book store and an MFA student in poetry of the Writing Seminars of Bennington College. She holds a BFA in poetry from Emerson College. Her favorite pastimes include over-hydration, making plans to break plans, vinyasa yoga, and figuring out which characters are going to fuck on television shows. Some of her work can be found at Electric Cereal and The Bohemyth.

REBECCA HART OLANDER's poetry has appeared recently, or is forthcoming, in *Brilliant Corners*, *Queen of Cups*, and *Yemassee Journal*, and her critical work has appeared in *Rain Taxi Review of Books*, *Solstice Literary Magazine*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*. She was the winner of the 2013 Women's National Book Association poetry contest, judged by Molly Peacock. Rebecca lives in Western Massachusetts where she teaches writing at Westfield State University and is the incoming director of Perugia Press. You can find her at rebeccahartolander.com.

LUCY M. LOGSDON's publications include *Nimrod*, *The Southern Poetry Review*, *Heron Tree*, *Rust+Moth*, *Gingerbread House*, *Rose Red Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Literary Orphans*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Tuck Magazine*, *The Miscreant*, *The Grief Diaries*, *Iodine Poetry Review* and many more. She received her MFA from Columbia University in NYC. Recipient of a Macdowell Writing Colony Fellowship, she currently freelances in southern Illinois and Indiana, offers manuscript reviews, and runs her Etsy store, *LLCollector.com*. She is working on several chapbooks, and hopes to have two out within the next year. She also plans to complete her author's webpage by that time.

CHRISTINE JACKSON grew up in New England but now teaches literature and creative writing at a South Florida university. That is, she is supposed to teach, but she probably learns more from her students than they do from her. She also plays jazz piano and acoustic guitar. Her poetry has been published in print and online publications, including *The Sandy River Review*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *Stay Weird and Keep Writing*, *A Quiet Courage*, *Verse-Virtual*, and *Ekphrastic*. http://cahss.nova.edu/faculty/christine_jackson.html

TASHA BUSHNELL has an English degree with a concentration in writing from Indiana University—Purdue University Fort Wayne. I was the Media and Technology Coordinator for the former Poet Laureate of Indiana, George Kalamaras. I have had poems published in the literary magazines *Confluence* and *Map Points*. I have been happily married for over 20 years and we have two awesome daughters. I've worked at Indiana's largest and best loved independent bookstore, Hyde Brothers, Booksellers, for 17 years.

STELLA FINEMAN received her MFA from DePaul University and has had two books of poetry published, *The Cake-Eater* and *Port of Gaul*. Her poetry is forthcoming in *Chestnut Tree Review*, *The Roanoke Review* and *Tampa Review*. She has performed at the Around the Coyote art fest and continues to read her work in many Chicago-area venues. Stella was first inspired to write after reading Anne Sexton. She continues to find inspiration from her three cats: Taffy, Raisin and Shadow.

KATARINA BOUDREAUX is a writer, musician, composer, tango dancer, and teacher—a shaper of word, sound, and mind. She returned to New Orleans after circuitous journeying. Her chapbook “Anatomy Lessons” is available from Flutter Press. Her play “Awake at 4:30” is a finalist in the 2016 Tennessee Williams Festival.
www.katarinaboudreaux.com

CHRISTIAN MCPHERSON has situated herself neatly in the Midwest, somewhere between the fringes of reality and the gods-to-honest-truth. She began writing and illustrating short stories and poems at an early age, inspired by Grimm's fairytales, ghost stories and early onset depression. She is the mother of one, holds a degree in anthropology from Indiana-Purdue University Fort Wayne, a lover of all things vintage, and a basement bookstore frequenter. Her favorite color is the taste of coffee. She wishes on everything and always brakes for cats.

AMY JO TRIER-WALKER lives and works on a tree and herb farm in Indiana, and she is the author of *Trembling Ourselves into Trees* (Horse Less Press, 2015). Recent work can also be found in *New American Writing*, *Caliban*, *Ghost Ocean*, *Tinderbox Poetry Review*, and *inter/rupture*, among others.

JANE EBIHARA is a retired teacher and grandmother living in rural Allamuchy, New Jersey. I have been published in a handful of journals and anthologies and have one chapbook, *A Little Piece of Mourning* (Finishing Line Press) published in 2014. Many of my poems address the journey of aging—my own and that of others around me. Time is moving too fast these days and I am a bit frantic to capture what I can.

TARA BETTS is the author of *Break the Habit* and *Arc & Hue*. Her chapbooks include *7 x 7: kwansabas* and *The greatest!: An Homage to Muhammad Ali*. Her writing has appeared in *Poetry*, *Essence*, *Nylon*, *Obsidian*, *Callaloo*, and several anthologies. Betts earned her MFA at New England College and her Ph.D. in English at Binghamton University. She teaches at University of Illinois-Chicago.

CATHERINE MOORE is the author of three chapbooks (*Finishing Line*, *Kentucky Story*) and *Wetlands* (Dancing Girl Press, 2016). Her poetry appears in *Cider Press Review*, *Wicked Alice*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Caesura*, and various anthologies. She won the *Southeast Review's* 2014 Poetry Prize and was awarded a Nashville MetroArts grant. Tweetable @CatPoetic.

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