THE BOILER

SPRING 2015

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THE BOILER JOURNAL is a literary journal that publishes four times a year online at www.theboilerjournal.com

THE BOILER accepts submissions online via its submission manager year round. Poetry should be 3–5 poems and prose under 3,500 words. Full guidelines and dates for upcoming issues are available on our website.

Credits.
Book Layout and Design: Sebastian H Paramo
Cover Image: "Study of Cat,"Gabriela Mendizabal

THE BOILER JOURNAL is published independently through its editors and generous funding from its supporters.

Distribution. Online

For inquiries email theboilerjournal@gmail.com

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ALYSSA NICOLE ANINAG

THE ONE WITH THE HAT

Most likely I will go to hell, the birdcage of the universe, and most likely I deserve to be there. I'm out of the house for the first time since my week grounding. During the Teen Mass while Father Joe transubstantiates the bread into the body of Christ, I imagine Eli and me *doing it.* He's wearing his hat deliciously backwards with his jeans shackling his ankles, my leather skirt riding up and up. His Ma away, slaving on the almond shelling line.

Eli's the type to sneak into your thoughts. You're only aware that you were thinking about him once you stop thinking about him, like now for instance goddamit. I'm sitting here in church trying to stop thinking about doing it with him.

Ma says I was born bad or born under a bad star it doesn't matter which, the outcome is the same — she prays for me. She believes praying will solve everything. Power in prayer, she says when she finds her missing gold hoop earring Pop gave her when things were still good between them. Thank *you*, she says as she hooks it back into her lobe. But what does she know? Nada except she thinks she got one over on me when she found one of Eli's hats in my bottom drawer between my old yearbooks and my first pair of baby saddle shoes.

Frankie and Sam, my two best girl friends, pray for me too. They pray that I *get some.*

Boys chase, no, lock those chicas into the you're-growing-up-too-fast birdcage. The mystery of sex lured Frankie and Sam into the trap and those girls senselessly handed over their virginity to their boyfriends as if they were paying for a pack of gum at the QuickMart. As fast as they dropped their panties the gate of adulthood, that compromised state of being, locked those girls in place for good.

I'm the virgin in the group, but I feel like I'm the oldest virgin to ever walk this planet. Ma and Pops have been together since they were thirteen and my lolo and lola grew up as neighbors in San Rafael Philippine province, ready to jump each other's bones any minute.

Now, as I wait in line to receive the Eucharist I trace the eyelets in the fabric of my halter dress. Earlier this morning, Ma was pissed when she found out I "accidentally" left my sweater at home as we walked towards the cathedral before mass began.

No self respect, she said.

I shrugged. If you got it, flaunt it.

I walked past her, my bare back fully exposed. I'm not gonna lie. I was pretty damn cold and a little part of me cringed when those words flew

out of my mouth. Frankie taught me about giving attitude. She talks to her moms like she owns her.

But Ma didn't let me slide. She put her foot down as if she were killing a harmless daddy long leg that crawled in to view. She came right up to my face before we entered the cathedral, You lucky we're in front of God's house she said while pinching the back of my arm.

After swallowing the Eucharist I rub the spot where she pinched, it's going to bruise no doubt. Deacon Mike raises the chalice before me. I see my heavily made up reflection in the golden goblet, broad strokes of blush and a blur of pink lips. I sip the bitter, cheap wine.

Ma eyes me up and down disapprovingly as I slip past her into the pew. Father Joe will have a word with you after mass about the way you dress, she hissed. She made the sign of the cross, kissed her forefinger, and kneeled.

While her eyes were closed in fervent prayer, I rolled mine hoping she could feel how hostile I was trying to act towards her. Lately, I've been getting real good at getting myself in trouble to the point of receiving week long groundings.

While punished in the comfort and confines of home, I get to read books and listen to my Pop's old Earth Wind and Fire records while Sam and Frankie are mackin' on their boys at the mall.

Eli, the boy with the backwards hat, often brings apple sized tomatoes and thick leaved spinach for my Ma. We — Eli and me — spend time alone sitting on the concrete slab in my backyard. I always wonder if he tells people at school about our hangouts. If he does, I'm curious to know what kind of reaction he gets when he mentions my name. All the girls crush on him because he's confident and smart and he looks like the type of boy who smells good. Eli is *that* kid, the kid that can get anyone he wants and can do anything he wants to do. But then again I secretly hope he doesn't tell anyone. He's Sam's older brother and dating your best friend's brother is some sort of crime I can't quite figure out.

Eli is the only boy I actually know and he's the only boy who has acknowledged that he knows the real me — the me who doesn't want to grow up too fast.

A few weeks ago, before Eli's abuelo died, abuelo tried to catch birds out of mesh wire and stakes. Reverting to boyhood Ma said shaking her head when I told her. Eli's abuelo caught a little finch, fed it, let it go, and abuelo died a few days after.

Capturing a wild thing and claiming it as his, Eli said as he played with his hat in his hands.

Reverting to boyhood, I said.

Exactly, he said.

In that moment I wished Eli had kissed me, but he wouldn't do anything impulsive as that. He just sat there fingering the bill of his hat.

On days like today, I imagine Eli showing up late to mass as a way to get out of his house. His moms is having a hard time adjusting to life after abuelo's death. Eli doesn't come.

But still, I imagined.

I imagine hearing his sneakers squeak across the church's marble floor, the noise ceasing when he hugs me from behind, interrupting my washing the chalice and crystal plates, he turns me around and plants one on me with the water running full blast; or he meets me at Oak Grove Park and we climb the slope of the levee and skip rocks across the Delta; or he drives me to prom in his pick up and twirls me in a blue satin dress and high heel shoes; or maybe he just holds my hand as we walk down the hall, takes off his hat one day, and says, wear it.

Now, the sun sets outside and the stained glass windows go black. For a second my heart races because out of the corner of my eye I think I see that hat. It's not him. Godammit, I think. I'm going to remain a virgin forever but you know, right now, that's okay. There's something about that hat, something about Eli with his backwards hat, that makes me feel alright being here in church praying with my Ma.

ERIN EMILY ANN VANCE

cling

A pale flag
that emerges from the soil,
hovers
stifled with dirt,
and cries,
it's sweet whiskey
snap
and you,
the ligaments of a chorus, dry,
split.

ERIN EMILY ANN VANCE

CHARLOTTE

a china girl sleeps
in a matchbox bed;
frozen
her tender bones tumbled smooth
by flesh-round stumps

LAURA CESARCO EGLIN

WHETHER

I wonder if I'll recognize years from now
when snow stops falling in different shapes
and the mountains are not in my window
the strokes of black and brown
paint as the barks I'd hear from that house.
If I'd written the dogs' names I might have
had a dozen words, but I wrote their sound
and filled twelve pages in a week. Four
letters for each open mouth. Will the gray
skies recount the days I had to turn on
the lights when I got up and keep them
on until it was darker and I'd finished
playing lighthouse? What colors will
the strokes have for the branches I made
sure to stock up each day? Eucalyptus
nuts I would throw into the fire like
the tea bag in the pot. A taste from outside.
I doubt the painting will have the right
colors for waiting to hear the sea. To have it
with me. A canvas is not long enough
to last seven days.

LAURA CESARCO EGLIN

MIDDLE IS NOT HALF

Years of not seeing you allowed your face
to escape me. But there are things
I still know and don't need
to remember. Your middle name
hangs together with that medallion
from the necklace that ends in the middle
of your chest. Making sense is best in twos.

Middles are important but not your navel.
That, I want to forget, and I can.
From the middle you can still look back
and forward is a matter of deciding
what the horizon is.

Your middle name that hides
from everyday life participates
only as a reminder on your chest.
The remainder of an I-told-you-so.

Nostalgia is at its most powerful
when it is about anticipation too.

JONATHAN TRAVELSTEAD

PAIN OF OTHERS

On I-64, heading home from the airport I find what was missing
from the pamplet of addictions. A wreck on the highway's fast lane shoulder.
Bad. Orange cones shunt the eastbound lanes together.
As if designed to draw attention only so we can then look away,
the rescue trucks ahead pincer the scene.
Flashing wigwags. Letters in gold leaf naming the town and station
they hail from with reflective trim made lambent by the headlights
of passing vehicles. I look. I don't want to, but I do,
then say it's so I can reconstruct the scene's events as if understanding the past
could change anything. On my left, the Wal-Mart box trailer has tumbled
and split in the wide, grassy median. A pillow's batting
bursts from its riveted seams, a superstores' detritus
littered behind it. Paper-thin televisions,
corrugated in plastic. Dolls, ripped from pink packaging,
dismembered likenesses of limbs flung ahead where rescue trucks
stage to protect the victims, firemen from traffic
in case the cones fail. This is how it must have happened: Westbound,
the diesel tractor jack-knifed, causing the kingpin
to uncouple from the fifth wheel, and where the trailer diverged
the unburdened semi did a half-left and dished the median so the last thing
the driver of the white Mazda 3 saw as she torpedoed
the truck's grill was a strangely human face wolfing the hood.
Motoring fills the dusk, unpuzzled before me. Portable lights

on tripods strung to generators. Sirens
and the lead man's shouted directives displace the air
I steel myself against when I crawl by, face set firmly in my prejudice
that the victim inside must be a woman. I steel myself against
the need that's always there and always will be
to look closer, that this time I'll glimpse the face I know entangled
with sheetmetal and flecks of paint
which share a shade of iron oxide. But this Plinko life
of random occurences I can do nothing to steel myself against.
All these meteorites falling from the sky I've dodged but will one day
crater, and splash molten earth onto someone close to me.
Fryman, Knabe. Mason, Alexander. Sure as whatever names
I've made up and appended in day-glo to the first responders' backs
who now help the victims, I know their effectiveness
comes in believing one day it will be their sons,
their wives pinned at the A post, pierced beyond the Nader bolt
where gloved hands cannot reach. I wish I were as wrong about their methods
and what afflicts them as I am about the blue feather
braided like steel into the victim's straight, blonde hair,
or that the driver has a chipped front tooth whose planes I could map
if asked, its enamel speckled with clots of blood.
No, of course it's not her, but they all are,
really. *Someone's* her, separated from *my* only by circumstance,
a thin scrap of time and place, ignition temperature,
and the spark of a small death suffered between two bodies.
Feathering the accelerator as if an egg nested beneath, I ask myself
Where do I get off being so lucky that I've carved

out the time for poems?, and *How long can this really last?*
Reader, I have a confession:
Sometimes I'm so afraid of flying my lungs forget they're
a life support system for a body. One wrong move and dead is dead
in any numbered world you're breathing in. Ionizing radiation.
Scraping your leg against an uncovered screw
packed on the L, days later tetanus, or the red lines of infection
beat a sprint down the home stretch to your heart.
Something mundane as walking back to our country's analog
of the *favelas*– or Johannesburg's *Homelands*–
your gutshot by a conscripted rent–a–cop for not carrying
your work pass. So many snares set between the night's driftaway
and gasping awake to an alarm's tachycardia,
you can't hardly move without getting some on you.
Wave a UV light over all this dust and watch it glow into evidence
of a world knitted together by misfortune.
Reader, remember your own conflict tours as we pass
the wrecks of other peoples' lives, saying to ourselves *at least that's not me,*
or, *at least that's not my someone trapped, bleeding*
as the golden hour slips away. We're lucky. We know exactly
how good we've got it. In my insufferable happiness
as I speed away from the accident scene
I call the only parent I have left because I haven't yet heard
his deep, comforting baritone today and then I call my partner whom I love
partly because of how hard she tries loving me. Friends wait
in my garage where we will roll cigarettes
and drink our dark beer in a timbre just below sinuous conversation

which moves from wood-turning to motorcycles,
but which ends the night in the key of gratitude, brothers.
Fire Department brothers I interchangeably love to hate/hate to love.
Air Force brothers I haven't seen in years,
and my one true brother in Germany whom I miss
so badly I'm weeping above the space bar as I type this.
We have everything in this world, and nothing is taken we do not
freely give. The clamminess in my palms when I buy
another plane ticket reminds me of the relative safety of my own life.
When, taking off or landing, the wheels separate from earth
or grab tarmac again and I know the roulette wheel's golden triangle
has again passed me by and in its tailwind is only
the bone-filling urge which expands until I am many-tongued
and helpless with it- near to fever with whispered gratitudes
like the Serenity Prayer into my clasped fists,
or a prayer for the businessman beside me who says every second
after eighteen is one in which we are really dying.
I turn, thanking him but not him- the fact of him-
in these words of the living: *Thank you that from this seat*
I look over this blessed wing and see more comfort than pain.
Thank you for every moment,
for every breath still in me is extra.

NATE LOGAN

BAYONET

You jog through the park during a Civil War reenactment, step on a dismembered hand clutching a pistol and it does not go boom. This little miracle makes you feel good. Your shoes are not stained by gunpowder or Confederate entrails. You express this joy to your running buddy, who says, "Oh, just you wait." And you think that's a pretty weird thing to say. Here you are: a gorgeous day, a choir of muskets adding *oomph* to your David Lee Roth tape, your jacket keeping you properly ventilated, and your friend says, "Oh, just you wait." The two of you pass thrusting Union swords. Mock screams begin to outnumber gunshots. If your friend waved his white sweatband, it would not count as surrender. You eye him, now a bayonet length away. You want to say the missing lawn gnome is your doing. You want to say he has a dumb haircut. You want to say his wife finds your track suit very attractive. But you don't. Instead, you smile a little. You let him go ahead as your feet inch closer to the dark, the trees dripping smoke.

ALLEN FOREST

The Masters Revisited, Rembrandt Syndics of the Clothmakers Guild, ink

2015

TAMAS DOBOZY

LIVES OF FAMOUS COMPOSERS

1. D. SCARLATTI

I don't know much about Domenico Scarlatti, though I know which sonatas I like (K 87 and 384). I prefer them on the piano, even if he wrote them for the harpsichord. They just sound better that way, on that instrument, though it's an accident, and never mind what the purists say. I know his father, Alessandro, was also a composer, big in Italy at the time, and Domenico left the country partly to get out from under his influence. He spent some time in Portugal, I believe, though I could be wrong about this, then off to Spain, where he was employed by a high-ranking noblewoman, possibly the queen, and spent the rest of his life writing nothing but sonatas, 555 of them if "the complete works" played by Pieter-Jan Belder is to be believed, and just generally enjoying the life of the court, walking marble hallways, gazing at frescoes, enjoying incredible banquets I always picture like some huge still life painting, including pheasants and truffles and heaps of pomegranates, and growing so fat he had to sit sideways at the keyboard. It sounds like such an ideal life, and maybe that's why I don't want to look too deeply into it, or verify my facts, since it could mean the end of another delightful fantasy, and I have too few of those already.

*

When they argue, she remembers everything—how many times she made dinner last week (7), the total number of times he did laundry last month (2), the fact that they visited his *mother three times as often (6) as they did* her *mother (2) last year. She remembers details, places, dates, sometimes even that it was six-thirty or eight o'clock. Sometimes, it's as though she's dedicated her whole life to compiling the exact number of times he's done his share of the housework, which according to her isn't high, and always follows the same pattern: she complains, they fight, he does what she asks for a little while, it dies off, she complains, they fight, and so on. Whenever he buys a new pair of shoes she says he's spending too much money and he reminds her that a month ago she bought a jacket for four hundred dollars and she says, "Yeah, well in September you also bought a pair of two hundred dollar jeans," and he says, "Well, you spend money on lots of clothes, too," to which she responds, "Like what, I mean other than the jacket, what?" and he yammers and stammers and apart from the jacket he can't actually remember anything specific, but he knows she does, he just can't be bothered to remember each individual instance, his mind doesn't work that way, and she says, "Sure,*

whatever," knowing she's won the argument: he's lazy, he's bad with money, he's totally self-centered. And after each argument he storms downstairs into his office and wonders if maybe she's right and in the middle of that he'll suddenly remember the leather bag she bought for herself when they were actually out in Toronto celebrating his *birthday, and he gnashes his teeth because it's too late, he can't run upstairs and throw that in her face, it would look too pathetic, which means in his own mind, down the basement, he's won a grand worthless victory. God, he hates that. His brain is full of holes.*

2. PALESTRINA

I know less about Palestrina than I know about anybody. In fact, I know only one thing: polyphony. Supposedly he invented it, or maybe just popularized it—different parts of the choir singing different things in different octaves all at the same time—and that it was viewed as a dangerous and radical departure by church authorities back in the 1400s or 1500s or whenever it happened because the main thing the Pope and cardinals wanted was for the words of each hymn to be *clear*, *understood*, *lesson learned*. Palestrina's music mixed it all up, to the point where sometimes the only sound was this scintillating beauty, totally without meaning, echoing off the walls of cathedrals, blending, clashing, building to a crescendo that was nothing more than the experience of itself. There were many—don't ask me who, since I'm kind of improvising here—who thought it was obscene, threatening. A hundred years later, of course, it was a different story. Palestrina had been rehabilitated. Polyphony was the way to do things, it was traditional church music, the time honored way of doing things as opposed to the crazy radical ugly things the current composers were doing.

*

Ever since he got a cell phone she calls him everywhere. She texts. She emails. During a meeting with the VP she calls to tell him to pick up bread crumbs from the store after work, but leave ten minutes earlier than normal so as to be home by five-twenty as usual, instead of using it as an excuse to get home late, which means visiting a bunch of other stores—liquor, books, snowboards—he always goes to. While he's delivering a PowerPoint on strategy to divisional council she texts to remind him to make sure The King Street Bistro credited the overcharged amount back to the Visa before the bill comes due, September 17. She sends one email asking him to look at the calendar to see whether the kids' swimming lessons don't conflict with soccer practice, and if not please fill out the online form to enroll them, then two more emails wondering why he hasn't yet responded to the first one. Then, just as he's taking the last fifteen minutes to shut down from work, clear his head, prepare for the onslaught of home—dinner, dishes, lunches to pack, kids to bathe, stories to read—she phones, leaving a message (he doesn't pick up), that he promised weeks ago to call Sleep Country and ask if it was really

true that if you paid in cash you'd get a really good deal on a king size mattress. But the worst of it is when he's driving, his phone ringing, it's illegal to pick up while he's in the car, but she keeps re-dialing and finally in a fury he answers it, and the first question out of her mouth is, "What's that music you're listening to in the background?" He wants to say Palestrina, that's always the first impulse, answer the question, but her constant phone calls create such noise in him he can't think straight and instead he says something like: "I'm driving. Is there any moment of any day where you don't feel like giving me instructions of some kind? I mean, half the time you could just call King Street Bistro or Sleep Country or any of these other places as easily as you call me." To which he receives The List*: all the things she has to remember in a given day—far, far greater, he has to admit, than the paltry few responsibilities she gives him—and moreover she actually* likes *to talk to him, that's why they got* married*, because she* loves *his company, and why does he have to be such an asshole all the time lately?*

3. DEBUSSY

I cannot say enough about Debussy, none of it factual. What facts I've got you could fit into a teaspoon. One time in Budapest I bought a CD from a tiny music store I came across during a walk through the 13th district because I was young and free to walk wherever and whenever I wanted and like most young people who are into the arts and pretentious I needed to own a copy of "Claire de Lune." I still have the CD, almost twenty years later, and it has no writing on the spine, which is infuriating when it comes to finding the CD among my collection, at least until I remember it has no writing, at which point it becomes easy. It's how I like to think of Debussy now, an identifiable absence, identifiable *because of* absence, and also because the liner notes of that CD say he called his father a "vagabond," which was, according to the author of the liner notes (no idea who), unfair or unjustified, I can't remember which. He referred to his father as something his father was not. That's good. Years later, I bought another CD, "Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli Plays Debussy," in which there's an actual picture of the composer sitting with some girl in a park on a blanket, like he'd been interrupted in the middle of a picnic, and the way he's dressed, with the kind of hat I think they call a "straw boater," and his weird goatee, and pin-striped suit, I think he looks like a vagabond himself, which makes the statement on his father even better. He's staring at the photographer like he wants to punch him in the face. Or maybe it's because the photo was taken late in life, and I seem to recall that Debussy died of some horrible disease, cancer of the ass or something like that, very painful, so maybe that's why he's sitting with such a straight spine, almost leaning forward, his eyes about to pop out of his head. "Please take the picture so I can stand up!" is what he seems to be saying. I think he died in 1918, and near the end I believe he composed his great Etudes in response to Chopin, which somehow manage to sound, at least to my ears, as if they're simultaneously as carefully put together as a house of cards, but also

dissolving, the notes not quite managing to complete themselves, and I wonder from the sound of this if Debussy lived to see the end of the First World War, the armistice and peace, or if he died while there seemed no end in sight, the armaments building up like a house of cards, the fields and meadows full of bodies dissolving.

*

When, once a month or so, they have sex it is, he has to admit, as if he was leaving his skin behind and becoming part of her—the most incredible feeling of all. But, more often than not, he just doesn't feel like it. It is the work, the kids, the work, the constant stress and feeling of enslavement, never one solitary second to just sit and do what he wants except maybe as stolen time, fugitive moments taken on the sly, knowing he'll get shit if he's caught, and otherwise always doing something for someone else. Even at night, after nine, when they're free, there's always something, laundry to fold, financial stuff to take care of, a birthday party or sleepover to organize, or, best case scenario, she wants to do something together, which always means listening to her talk about her work, or watching her movies, her TV shows, stuff he doesn't mind, necessarily, but which leaves him empty, like eating potato chips, the more you shove into your mouth the greater this feeling of nothingness in your stomach. And that's on the good nights, when they aren't exhausted and cranky and fighting, when she turns to him in bed and asks if it's her body that doesn't appeal to him, this feeling she has of being middle aged, breasts gone with breastfeeding, belly slack, and he can't tell her that in fact her body looks as good to him as it ever did, that he loves watching her naked, that on the contrary what he doesn't want to have sex with is not her body but her personality—he just really really doesn't want to fuck her personality right now. And there's a first! he thinks to himself. There was a time when he'd have fucked anything, anything at all, who cares about the personality, if the body was appealing. And so he's finally come around to feeling what she felt all those years when he was such a prick she didn't want to go anywhere near him, and he'd thought, Christ, it must be the beer gut, or maybe the hair loss, or, shit, I'm just old, worn out, a turn off, the rejection making them feel, both together, as if being there, as you are, was exactly the thing that numbered you among the missing.

4. MESSIAEN

He hated New York, or so I think I read, somewhere. Not many people hate that city, but maybe it was more hateable back in the day—the 1950s, 60s, 70s—when he went there. I don't hate New York, or, rather, I don't hate it until I actually *arrive*—and I'm always eager to go—but after two days I'm seething with a desperation to get out. That being said, I once watched a DVD about Messiaen, I think the title was *Crystal Liturgy*, close enough

anyhow, in the music library attached to the Lincoln Centre whose precise name I can't remember. Anyhow, I was typing on my laptop, taking notes (where are those notes now?), when one of the library attendants came over and commanded, "You can't type on a laptop while you're sitting in this section of the library." I looked around. Across the hall were other people typing on laptops. I looked back at the attendant. "Why not?" I asked. "It's the rules," she hissed. There was no reason, I knew she had no reason, she knew she had no reason, which was probably why she was so hostile. I put my laptop away realizing I was starting to hate New York again. But of course there's much more to Messiaen than hating New York—like his music for instance, which always reminds me of a kaleidoscope of sound. He used to go out into the fields and transcribe bird songs, a great activity for a composer—well, for *anyone,* really. He was deeply religious, a Roman Catholic, which is unheard of in ninety-nine percent of important artists in the 20th century, and I guess it's a miracle that he could believe in something so artistically spent and still create something worthwhile, which goes a fair way to validating the mystery of God. He lived in an apartment with his wife—and I have a feeling I'm totally wrong about this, but I like it so much I've decided to keep believing it anyhow—where he had to go down a hallway to use a communal toilet, even when he was a big-time internationally recognized composer. His most famous work, *Quartet for the End of Time*, was written in Stalag VI (or maybe Stalag V, or VII), where he was a prisoner of war under Nazi guard. He got all kinds of favors the other prisoners didn't get. Warmer room. More fuel for the stove. Relief on the work details. He and three other prisoners performed the piece—what was essentially its world premier—in the prison camp. According to *Crystal Liturgy* (the more I think about it the more certain I am of this title) the guy who played the clarinet, Henry Akoka, went on to escape from a bunch of camps, jumping on and off trains, even though he was warned by a sympathetic Nazi that it was better for him to stay in a soldier's prison than risk escaping and being caught and identified as a Jew, because then he'd go to a *much worse kind of camp*. But he escaped anyhow and managed to live out the war under an assumed identity along with his sister and brother, all three of them somehow thriving in Vichy France, which goes a fair way to validating the mystery of a slightly different God.

*

Sometimes, for fun, they talk about what their lives would be like if they got a divorce. "The best," she says, "would be if we each had the kids one week on and one week off, then you'd kind of get the best of both worlds. You'd be able to have a real family and be involved, but then the next week you'd be single and totally free to do whatever you want whenever you want." He nods, snuggling in a little closer to her on the couch. "Totally. I've talked to a few guys I know who've gone through the whole divorce thing, and they say that once you get over the feeling of despair and betrayal, the whole sort of absolute bottomless depression of it all, after a few years of that, maybe five, things kind of smooth out and it's actually pretty good." She leans her head

onto his shoulder and her voice goes off in a kind of whisper, "God, I could go to New York for a weekend and just pamper myself—buy some clothes, eat some nice meals without having to worry about where to put the stroller or remembering the diaper bag or getting a bunch of coats on and off or telling kids to get back into their seats and eat a meal." She waits a minute. "What would you do?" He puts his arms around her and leans his head back and gazes at the ceiling. "You know, I'd just like an average Saturday. Get up when I want. Eat a leisurely breakfast. Maybe go out to a greasy spoon. Keep to myself. No conversation with anyone. Maybe see a matinee." Those are nice, nights like that, drinking a bottle of wine, sharing their visions of how great life would be if they were divorced, all the things they want and can't have and can't allow each other, and letting that draw them closer together like two prisoners in a gulag.

5. MOZART

My knowledge of Mozart is confined to the play, *Amadeus*, by Peter Schaffer. The only thing that's important to me about this work—sad to say—is the giggling ninny that the lead actor, Tom Hulce, turns the great composer into. Nincompoop is another word that describes the performance. There's a great scene (it's been almost thirty years since I've seen the movie) where Mozart writes one of his great works on a billiard table, pausing in the midst of his notation to send a ball careening off the bumpers on each side and then back into his hand. His knowledge of angles was incredible. He giggles and pansies his way through some of the greatest music (or so it's said, I'm not a huge fan) ever created, as if it had nothing at all to do with him, with who he was, how he behaved, his absolutely frivolous treatment of his own talent, until the very end, where, anticipating his early death, he writes his great *Requiem* (I actually do like that piece of music), and in the movie they show him being tossed into a pauper's grave (or that's how I remember it, anyhow), along with all the required thunder and lightning and dead of night leafless trees dripping rain, as if from now on, from this point forward, no one will ever be able to do any great art at all unless they look and act *deadly* serious (cue: Beethoven).

*

She watches Hulce's performance—on a rare night when she's willing to watch one of his movies—and says it's unbelievable: "Mozart could not have written such powerful and incredible music if he'd been so idiotic," she says. He looks at her face, which might as well be miles away, in another country really, stacking facts until there's a row of them, like bricks, and after enough rows a wall, and after enough walls a whole reality in the shape of an exitless maze. He shrugs and says there's no proof that consistency of character produces great art, much less training or knowledge or skill alone. Idiot

savant *is a word, or two words, that come to mind. "It seems to me," he says, "that you're like Salieri," by which he means not the historical Salieri, but the character in the movie, who is unable to become an artist because he thinks he knows what an artist is, how art should be produced, the frame of mind necessary to achieve it, and this is precisely why he isn't and can't be one. In other words—well, he doesn't say this, it's too mean, but he* thinks it—*she has no imagination at all, much less any real experience with the inexplicable randomness of life, or, if she has, she's pre-empted it with her prescriptions—and what is great art but that which always despite all odds surprises us, that blows away our expectations? "After all, the whole point of the movie," he tells her, "is how Salieri sucks as a composer precisely because he* can't *understand how such a ninny could produce such great work, because he's locked in his stereotypes and conventions!" "And what about you?" she says. "You collect trivia. It doesn't add up to anything!" She pokes her finger into his chest. "Instead of doing the research, going through it, the books and articles and stuff, and getting* real knowledge *so that you know what you're talking about, you just remember or misremember a bunch of factoids, and then you build those up into silly little morality tales!" They sit there staring at each other—one of them is Salieri and the other is his mirror—and they both know this is all they're really arguing about.*

6. SHOSTAKOVICH

The guy with the big round horn rims sitting by a piano, the look in his eyes as if he's long ago given up on trying to keep himself alive—that's what I think whenever I see a picture of Shostakovich. We go through life with this illusion of control, that we can will things to work one way or another, even if only within a limited range. Not so Shostakovich, who abandoned himself completely to fate, whatever happened. His next phone call could be from Stalin saying his latest work was the greatest thing ever, or it could be from the secret police saying they were coming over to torture him to death on the living room rug. And yet, what is that look if not camouflage? Here is a man who could not make one move—*not one move*—for years and years, decades in fact, without the sense that he was being watched, scrutinized, judged on whether he should live or die, as if an entire life in its tiniest details could be set into a surveillance program and thus anticipated and controlled, like beads on an abacus. That, I think, would be enough to kill anyone, certainly me, make the light fade from my eyes, either driven to suicide or to exactly what I think I see in the photographs of Shostakovich from the 1930s onward. I mean, I'm talking about a guy who had tickets to foreign countries, including visits to America, and yet he always went back to the horror his life was, as if he'd either given up on having even the tiniest bit of freedom or he knew he'd never escape no matter how far he went. But that's not quite right, not really. Because quite late in life, when it seemed as if Shostakovich was recycling his past pieces and influences into yet another configuration of stale state-approved trash, he composed his late quartets, by which I mean numbers 8

and up, and they were, *they are*, by many accounts, amazing. I haven't listened to them, of course, since I don't particularly care for Shostakovich, but that's beside the point—that no matter how big the engines of surveillance, how many guys you have wandering around in trenchcoats and sunglasses (or whatever it was the KGB wore in those days), or how total the atmosphere of paranoia and fright, something always slips through, inexplicable, unaccounted for, astonishing—as if there was always another fact, one you never quite get to, that has the power to rearrange or explode all the others. This fact cannot be possessed, it never reveals itself, but you can listen for it nevertheless.

*

Once in a while, often enough, sixteen, seventeen times a year, they go for a walk with the kids, ambling along making sure no one steps off the sidewalk, no one runs in front of a car, no one wanders into a yard where the sign says "Beware of Dog," and they see something astonishing—a final few leaves clinging to a November tree like tatters of gold foil; the bright red of apples against a network of leafless branches; a certain taste the wind sometimes carries like a memory of the sea—and it's like they've been given candy, a bite to eat, something sweet, and once again he remembers their odd power of forgetting, almost like something willed, arguing like rabid animals one minute, and the next they can both, if both of them agree to, just let it go, have the fight evaporate as if it never happened, to just be together as if there was no history at all. These moments will come around, they can count on it, but each time it's somehow singular, one of a kind, as if it had never happened before and never will again, which makes it totally amazing and totally useless—as if tasting it once means you lose its taste forever.

JESSE DUTHRIE

INDEPENDENCE

The gymnasium is packed with forth graders and it is loud and beginning to get out of hand. A long table stands in front us lined with shiny brass parts and long wooden horns. We wait on Mr. Schriever, the music teacher. He is tall and pointed. Around kids his size is dwarfing. After ten minutes of stir-crazy anticipation Mr. Schriever saunters in through the set of double doors, his head down, his hands in his pockets. He waits in front of the table before his name is called by one of the forth grade teachers. He picks up a clarinet, plays out the opening to a sweet melody, sets it back down to the table, and moves on to the trumpet. He repeats this process on down the line. We fiddle in our seats, trying our hardest not to interrupt him with questions. When he finishes each song, we clap loudly, the snaps echoing off the rubber floors. We're eager to choose.

The last instrument Mr. Schriever approaches is a drum. It's a standard fourteen by seven inch snare with a silver metal shell. Heads pick up in the gym. Mr. Schriever picks up a pair of drumsticks off the table and begins to tap the drum awake. Snares underneath coil softly. He begins a rudimentary pattern. His left hand and right hand move independent of each other. His eyes are elsewhere, not focused on the drum or piece of paper, nor a single person in the crowd. They look at nothing. Patterns produced sound like marching bands down Main Streets on sweltering July days. A hive like buzzing noise projects when he presses the sticks press down hard. A constricting snap when they strike in pairs. Pauses occur so fast they can't be discounted as accidental; when the sticks come back to the head its certain that they weren't, the pauses reflect tension of absence. The teacher's playing is tremendously fast, the rolls and the snaps and the let offs. The sticks are frenetic and in Mr. Schreiver's face nothing demonstrates work.

Teachers hand out slips of paper with instruments written on them. Beside the name is a small line. "Here's what we want you to do." A teacher says. "We want you to choose your three favorite instruments. When you've decided, put the number next to the instrument on the sheet in one to three order." Mr. Schriever stands alongside the table as a flurry of students rush down to ask him to repeat their options. He meets them in Zen trance, his long hair disconnecting true eyesight, his back arching forward to project his voice down to their small ears. The excited would-be musician runs back up to his or her spot in the bleachers. They jot down their number one, two, and three picks.

I find the spot marked "drums" and mark a number one. I circle it several times to let Mr. Schriever know I'm serious. They might as well have just handed me the drumsticks right there on the spot. For the sake of process, I fill out saxophone as number two and trumpet as three.

That night at home, I tell my mom about the pending news. I'm certain that I will be picked for drums. She is excited but does not attempt to mask her own disappointment. She's wanted me to become a saxophonist my whole life. Unlike her parents who forced their plans upon her, she lets me find my own interests. Still, this is the one decision she attempts to sway. She plays Kenny G cassettes in our Toyota Camry station wagon and tells me that someday I will make as good a sax player as him. She tells me I have the brains for it. I nod my head and ask if her she really thinks so. I don't tell her I think Kenny G's songs all sound the same. They're a swell of noise that never change regardless of what cassette she puts in. Unlike the snapping and buzzing of the drums, it's soft. Unlike the radio songs my friends and I listen to, there are no words. It lacks an edge to sink into. We drive around town from soccer practice to school to karate instructions in our steel–grey Camry, Kenny G's cassettes humming through the speakers. When I can't take it any longer I'd hit the FM button as silent protest.

My mother was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, to parents whom, unlike their many neighbors, were not Mormon. Her father was an engineer for the government. In the high altitudes of the southern Rockies, he worked in engineering for the United States military. Her memories of this place are few. Inside my grandmothers house is a painting of the valley in which Salt Lake sits, a large body of water enshrined in the forefront. My mother will occasionally look at the painting and declare that she does not remember the water, only the air, which was dry, and the neighbors, who were kind.

Then her parents uprooted the family to Connecticut, where my grandfather took a job as an engineer with the Sub Base, designing submarine technology. On the second and forth weekend of each month he drove to Washington to sit in on classified meetings at the Pentagon. My mother played with her three sisters in their large colonial home in Flanders, under the sturdy oaks and the shade of the backyard elms. The time spent playing was a reprieve from the stern nuns at their Catholic schools, who wrapped their wrists with rulers and commanded them to recite Hail Mary's frequently. When my grandfather would return from D.C., he kept the house quiet and disciplined, non–bemused by the giggling of his four daughters.

My mother's sisters departed one–by–one. The first, Kathleen, left for the west coast. Next her sister Maureen, who left for Eastern Connecticut State University in Danbury, dropping out after her second year to get married and start a family. Karen was the third to leave, heading to Boston College to study microbiology.

My mother was beach blonde with blue eyes and a thin, Irish nose. She rode her bike from her house in Flanders, empty in last years of high school besides herself and her two Irish Catholic parents, all the way to Niantic. Fifteen miles both ways. She likes to tell stories of arriving in Niantic, how she'd move through the town and maybe buy an ice cream at the Dairy Queen or stop at the beach for a quick swim before heading back home. And

though she had friends, she always is alone in her stories, and never does the tone scratch loneliness. Quite the opposite. Her departure from her family, if only on the off days in the Connecticut humid heat, tell me that she had always wanted to get out of the house, with her sisters gone, and be able to move on her own.

She wants me to be a saxophonist, but she won't say why. I think she likes the instrument and never learned to play. Or it's possible that she's listened to too many Kenny G albums and has become romantic with the sounds of the melodic horn.

A group huddles around the door when Mr. Schriever posts the list to the wall with a piece of Scotch tape. I'm no longer thinking about my mother and what she wants. I think only of myself. We run up in packs, choking the hallway. I cram in until it's my turn to view the list. I find drums. Unlike saxophones and flutes, the amount of names posted underneath is few, a stanza to a poem. I read them off. "Brittany··· Brian··· Bryan··· Mark." I look around the page for a second list of drums, that maybe there's a second drum section included or maybe it's broken in two parts. I find nothing. Piles of people push behind me, waiting to get it. I won't move until I find my name under a list that says drums. Not finding a second list I return my index finger back to the original.

"Brittany...Brian...Bryan..Mark."

I can't help the swelling in my face. It feels like a sucker punch to the gut. Voices around me shout which instrument they'll be playing.

Rob yells, "Trombone!"

Alex yells, "Trumpet!"

Sarah yells, "Flute!"

Voices don't echo in our elementary school; the ceilings are too low and the halls are too narrow. Instead they ring out sharply for all to hear. Each voice reminds me of my defeat.

"Jesse? Jesse?"

I turn around. It's Pat and Rob. Rob's got a big smile on his face and Pat is wearing a toothy grin.

"What'd you get?" Rob asks. "I'm trombone. I'm the only one."

"I don't know." I say, my head down.

"Aren't you in saxophones?" Pat asks.

"Yeah, I think so." I say. I hadn't even looked.

"Me too!" He says. "We start next week. I'm going to get my parents to take me down to Stewart's Music this week to pick out my saxophone. You want to come with me?"

"I'm okay."

"Hey man, are you alright?" Rob asks.

"Yeah, I'm okay." I say.

"You don't look okay. Are you sure you're okay?" Pat asks.

""I'm okay. Trust me, I'm okay."

I turn around and walk down the hall, trying to muster up some

strength to make it through the rest of the day. I can't even make it back to the class before the swelling in my face starts leaking out. I try to slink into my chair and duck my face in my hands. I'm trying to get the tears to cut off. After the entire class gets back and Mrs. Hobbit gets things going she notices me with my head in my hands.

"Everything alright, Jesse?"

I won't return her question. When she comes over and puts a hand on my shoulder, I look up at her with tears in my eyes. "What's wrong?" She asks. I can't decide what's worse: not getting drums or crying in front of the class. It's a tight spot, so I don't say anything. She leads me back to a couch in the corner of the class. When the class has a break, she comes over and asks me what's going on. I tell her. She says she'll see what she can do. She says that this is the way the world is. She tells me that I'm going to have to learn to deal with disappointment.

My mother consoles me at home, as I scream in frustration over not getting what I want. It's pathetic in many ways. Has she spoiled me too much? Given me everything I asked for when I needed it? If this is not the case, then I should be able to take this blow with stride. But I'm too childish to look towards the lesson that can be learned.

She knows more about disappointment than I'll ever know.

After graduating college, she packed up her belongings and drove north to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and settled into a single bedroom apartment. With her freshly printed degree in business administration, she took a job running books for a law firm. She wasn't there for the work, and could have cared less about how much she made as long as it footed the rent.

She was there to be won over by the town, which was anywhere but Flanders. At night, she stopped in at the dive bars, the small cafes and popular joints. She'd made friends quickly. Together they'd sit at the bar, sipping white wine, while local musicians took to the stage with acoustic guitars and played music in the same vein as Cat Stevens, Dan Fogelberg, James Taylor. Soft acoustic melodies, sung with poetic lyrics that helped romanticize the shoreline city with its archaic brick roads and it's winding turns leading to nowhere.

Then a night came when she met my father, whom like many men of that era, came into town with a guitar, some pot, and an unkempt beard. He was a stonemason working in Connecticut, not far from her home in Flanders, and they connected immediately. He'd sing her songs– country, folk– and in time they were fast in love. When he asked her to marry him, she was left with a choice. Either she would move back to Connecticut, where my father had his masonry practice established, and get married and begin a family. Or she could stay in Portsmouth, stay with the music that crept out of the open barroom doors and the persistent salt–water smell of the Piscataqua River and the quiet individuality she'd come to love.

My father would not move north, to be with her. And she conceded to leave the city behind her, to return home, to lose autonomy, to be

dependent once more.

When I return to school on Monday there's been an amendment to the list. Mrs. Hobbit tells me check it again and when I do I see my name scrawled underneath "drums" in pencil. I pump my fists up and yell out in the silent hall. My voice bounces sharply off the painted bricks. I realize the noise and run back to class before I get caught. When I get back to my seat I try to play it cool. I can see Mrs. Hobbit smiling but she offers few words. I know she feels guilty for giving in. There was a lesson I was supposed to learn from not getting what I wanted. I could have learned something valuable here. But that was what the weekend was for. I had Saturday and Sunday to sit around our condo, Mom reassuring me that I was supposed to play the sax. Perhaps Mrs. Hobbit knew that the weekend was enough suffering for me to endure.

The day after I find myself moved into the drum section, I bug Mom to drive me down to Caruso's Music in New London. It's the same place my sister Lindsey bought her clarinet two years earlier. I remember the store and the cacophony of noises creeping out of every corner. When we enter through the back entrance we stroll past black baby grand pianos. Another pair of doors opens into the main hall. Electric guitars stack one wall. Men sit on amplifiers and pick out chords that revert back underneath them. An antechamber of wood with mounted acoustics; I cannot hear the sounds that come from inside. On the far side eight drum sets line up in two rows. There's a four-piece jazz setup- one high tom, one floor tom, one snare and one bass- with dark colored Zildjian cymbals sparsely decorating the exterior. A Tama Rock Star kit sits intimidatingly: eight toms, two double bass drums, painted jet black with enough cymbal power to bother a deaf man.

I walk past and look at the sets but don't consider touching them, my Mom watching and tailing behind me. In the back corner of the shop there's a crate with the heels of sticks popping out. They vary in color, width, length, and brand. I pull out a pair and slide off the cover, like a soldier inspecting a sword. I test instinctively: the right weight, the right movement around the fulcrum, the right grip of wood around my sweaty fingers and palms. I pick out a pair of Vic Firth 5A with solid wooden tips. When I tell the salesman I'm just starting out, he throws in a pair of blue grip tape. He opens the package and winds the tape around each stick carefully. When he is done, he hands them over he asks me what I think. I pick them back up and swing at the air. The grip is tighter than before, almost as if they're a part of my hands. He asks me if I want to try them out. I sit down on small beginner kit and begin hitting the drums spastically. The salesman and my mother laugh, as I swing about the kit in kinetic strokes. I don't play long, just enough to get it out of my system. I don't lose a stick in the process. Someday I'll make sense of the big and complicated machine.

For a long time it has been just my mother and my sister and myself. It's the family unit we've built since I was two, when my father left in a rage, jumped

in his white Bronco, and left the family behind.

When my mother decided to move back home to Connecticut, she did so with no great aplomb. Her and my father wed in small ceremony, attended by close family and friends. Then the moved into a three-bedroom home together on the outskirts of Norwich, Connecticut, where my father left each morning to lay brick and my mother stayed home, raising my sister and me.

She was 29 when he left. I remember the morning that the marriage was over. I was two, and memories do not stick at that age, only fragments of visual details, like the shaded oaks that hung in our back yard or the swing set that my sister and I played on. But I remember a series of images all pressed together, the morning that my sister and I were playing on the swings and my fathers truck door slammed and the wheels spun out before it raced down the street and was gone. I remember my sister opening the screen door to the kitchen, and asking my mother what was wrong. My mother holds her head in her hands, crying, and my sister repeats over and over, "What's wrong Mom? What's wrong?"

Once again she was alone; independent of her marital strain but left with no support. In the months and years that followed, she lost it all: the bank seized the house, took her Jeep. She worked part time at boutiques to put food on the table, and asked her older sisters and father for financial support.

And then we moved away from Norwich to a condo in East Lyme, a half hour south of Norwich, near the warm salt-water beaches off the Long Island Sound. On the first morning we had moved into the condo, which was small: two bedrooms, a nook of a kitchen, a single bathroom, an unfinished attic. My sister and I stood by the front window, with the shades drawn, and we bent up the blinds with our fingers and looked out into the complex with the identical condos forming a circle around a sort-of cul-de-sac of residences. Outside kids played in the narrow, paved road that connected each home. We looked and were afraid to go out on our own. Then our mother opened the door, and forced us to find our own way.

For the first six months of drum lessons, our drumsticks never touch an actual drum. They ricochet arrhythmic patterns off plastic disks. Drum pads are an inch thick, with solid plastic rims, filled with resilient Mylar that provides immense kick back to the drumstick once it makes contact. The sound it makes is a soft tap, opposed to the loose echo the old snare Mr. Schriever played during the orientation. The sticks chip and splinter at the tip. Indentations form at contact spots they shouldn't have made: reminders what is supposed to be hitting where. I hold the pair, once glossed and shiny maple. They show signs of decay. The blue grip tape is loosening at the top from pinching too tight. Need to lighten up the fulcrum and let the swing of the stick do more work. I cannot force my arms on the down stroke. See the tip crack near the top? That is from eyeing the book when I did not trust my timing. I tell myself these things when I am playing and when I am not. In bed and when I am in route to school.

"Mr. Schriever? Why can't we play the real drums?" I ask, early in our lessons.

"Because it's too loud, man. If I had to hear four snare drums going in this small office all day I'd be deaf." He says.

"When do we get to play the actual drums?" Bryan asks.

"We'll get there, man. We'll get there. For now we got to work on getting basic rudiments down. Once we have that all set, dude, we'll move up to the bigger and better things."

We carry our drum pads under our arms from class to class along with our sticks and our Buddy Rich Drum Rudiments book. Each night at home I practice for hours, the noise a droning tapping of wood against soft plastic. As Lindsey tries to do her homework, she yells to Mom that my drumming is annoying her. Each hour of repetitive rudimentary work is closer to obtaining mysteries. I'm working at opening up a complicated procedure, one stroke at a time.

One night I'm behind the kitchen table, standing with the drum pad in front of me, the Buddy Rich book beside it. I'm trying to work on a pattern called the paradiddle. In a four-note pattern its complexity is slightly harder than a standard drum roll: left stick, right stick, left stick, left stick. What is more difficult is that once the first paradiddle is completed, the book instructs that the second paradiddle be completed inversely to the first: right stick, left stick, right stick, right stick. I read the sheet music over and over. I understand what my hands are supposed to do and how they are supposed to accomplish the task. I start slow and put the sticks down on the pad, not tapping to a beat. Though my brain knows the pattern, my hands won't coordinate. They revert back to a standard drum roll. They want to repeat the double drum roll after the first paradiddle. Once I manage the first paradiddle, I can't remember to start the second. When I do, I blank whether or not to start with the right hand or the left. I look at the sheet music for answers but it becomes hieroglyphics.

Mom sees me struggling from the living room and comes in to the dining room. She looks at the book and sticks and me. Though she knows nothing about drums, she knows that something is off.

"How's it going in here?" She asks.

"It's hard, but I'm starting to get it." I say.

"Yeah? That's good. Do you need any help?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"No, Mom."

"Let me help."

"Fine."

She walks around to the table and looks at the book. It's laid out in quarter note sheet music with little L's and R's underneath, instructing the drummer which hand goes where. I explain to her how it works. When she asks how she can help, I think back to our lessons in the music room.

"Can you clap your hands in time?"

"Yes."

"Okay then, watch me." I begin clapping steady as a metronome. "You just have to keep the beat the same. Don't speed it up or slow it down. That way I can drum along to it."

"Sounds easy enough." She says.

She stands across the table. I listen to her claps and count down until I'll begin the first strike of the paradiddle. One, two, three, four. Then I hit the first note on the left hand on her first clap. The second note, on the right hand, comes down a little before she claps a second time. I stop what I'm doing and let out a hard breath.

"What's wrong?" She says, her clapping stopped.

"Keep clapping." I say.

She starts again, her tempo strong and even. She has a natural metronome inside her. She had been a musician once, a pianist. Her parents gave her little freedom when she began playing. As my mother sat at the wooden piano in their living room, her Mother and Father joined her on the stool and interrupted her practice to mark her progress. My Mom showed them the songs. They hounded her over each note. She could never be alone with the piano. They continued to bother until she gave up playing. She was never sure if it was because they were proud of her or because they saw something in her and wanted her to develop it. Either way, she quit before she could find out.

I work the left hand and then the right, attempting to land the timing on each one of her claps. It's slow moving. By the end of an hour I make it through a full measure, completing a single paradiddle. She doesn't ask any questions. She's found a comfortable way of sitting in a chair that allows her to clap in time without looming too large. When we finish I look up to her and she smiles. She wants to know what we've been doing and I try to explain to her how I'm separating my hands from one another. It's a drumming process Mr. Schriever calls "independence."

PALOMA SALAS

Detail of Fruit

PALOMA SALAS

Sweet-Toes

JENNIFER WHITAKER

THROAT-SONG

In his dying he was a bird with a jewel
caught in his throat, struggling and soundless.
Alighting on the bedpost, he cocked his head
at the pinched smell of eggs dyeing
somewhere in their small tins.
His razor beak clicked open–close,
open–close, the choke dumbing him,
panicked feathers falling
to the unmade earth below.

Listen to me, little throat–bird:
those are your stunted eggs,
rank and shocked garish with color.
Listen to me: I am that stone.

JENNIFER WHITAKER

HOME

Sometimes when I walk the path next to the field

when I see my footprints walk in the mud behind me like a second person

when the red flock of pine needles weighs down the shed roof

when the irises have pushed past flower to thick, pale pod

I think of our first autumn in this house:

how the birds collected at the feeder like supplicants

at the altar of our great fortune, being here and alive—
but I never thought about that then, knew nothing

of the way the next year would feed us loss with the first frost,
the way those we loved would later hurt,

of who'd be left to pack up what remained,
of who would leave us in the waste and blank of his death

Sometimes I can see us sitting in the past field's flush and daze
Sometimes we pull him back from the river gasping

JENNY MOLBERG

PHOSPHENE

There is a way to see the other world.
My father quarters the red potatoes,
strips the husks from the corn
like little dresses, extracting
the shrimp from their shells
while I, on my back
in the sun, press my finger
against my eye because when I do
globes appear over and over.
Some are red; some are long-dead stars.
When a slit of sunlight
rushes in, I shut tightly the doors,
and close my ears to stop
the paddle of waves or somewhere
a gull, wrenching open a clam, the squeak
of a crab's machine-like legs. And after
the shrimp shells, my father plucks the legs
in fingerfulls. He pushes my mother
gently with the blunt
of his hand on the small
of her back from the kitchen.
I orbit the low red sun, keep
pressing and pressing. My father
stirs each ingredient into the pot
by a timer. By now, I know
his knife is running along their backs.
Or, he is washing the veins down the sink. Or,
look, look at the sun on the bay. It's in flames.

JENNY MOLBERG

MIRROR

The little girl spoons
the peas into the milk.
(How is it that those hands are mine?)
My mother's long hands,
reaching to pull the plates away.
My father's voice from under a door,
the balcony impatiens
that wither, fall, pucker, bloom,
today's sun that flirts,
the bee as it curves its abdomen over
a weed flower, the dog as it sniffs at the bee,
the dog in midair, the bee in its teeth,
the stinger's depression on tongue,
the flinch, the paw, the cower.
Hold a mirror up to clouds: you'll see.
The way our lives pass as storms.
The way I am young and old at once.
The way, when we remember,
we take out the memory, change it
before it returns to the cagy coves of the brain.
Seaweed in current as it wafts and sways,
knowing nothing of itself,
or the sea, or the moon as it pulls the sea,
or the fish that rubs with silvery scales,
like a cat would, against it.
I am all of this, and none.
By this, I mean God.

JENNY MOLBERG

OUR LADY OF THE RIO GRANDE

after the installation pieces by Dan Flavin, military barracks, Fort D.A. Russell, Marfa, TX

for my sister

I let you walk ahead:
blued silhouette, little
sister, *luz de día* in desert,
dazzling, dressed in what you've yet
to live. Bulbs buzz
in the barracks. Standing before
incendiary hallways
we are parallel in panels
of electrified glass, rarefied neon:
mock mirage in this,
the West Texas we knew, noble
gas, glow lamp, plasma, you
on one side of the light and I
on the other. This is how
we see ourselves,
swelling out like hours.
Us, Texas, the hills
bulbous as fractured skulls
dusted and surging, sanded smooth.
You, stepping back from the light;
I, stepping towards, backlit by blue.
You, humming violent, violet—
now yellowed, not yellow of aging
but yellow of new light, or also
yellow of our aging together. You,
little echo of me; me, looking on
now green, now blue, now violet, now pink.
Little sister of light and dark.
Little wasteland beacon.
Little saint of glowing hope, scintillating
in tumbleweed wind.
What lies ahead of you. What lies
behind me pulsing fluorescent
in the red canyon between us.

CAITLIN THOMSON

THE CHURCH DOWN THE STREET

They called it Bargain Basement Faith,
and I did not know how to interpret that.
I imagined the aisles of the church lined with
clothes discarded from Value Village
and Goodwill, large bags of transparent plastic
stuffed full of children's tee shirts.
Of course they could have called it Bargain
Basement Faith, because they believed in the essentials –
the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Everything
else had to go. Or perhaps the church only met
during emergencies, fire licking the walls
a congregation of strangers kneeling together.

CAITLIN THOMSON

TITHE

We have left our dimes to the gods,
placed pennies on gravestones,
just like mother told us. A childhood of
giving away small change. *The quarters are ours*
to keep, everything smaller belongs
to what we do not understand, she told us
this with a kiss on each cheek, before licking
our palms. I wear a business suit to work.
I have a child in daycare now. A wife that
cooks me meals and asks about retirement
funds. I empty my drawers, my jean pockets,
of small change. I visit the graveyard without
my family, and leave all the dimes
at the statue of Dionysus. I don't know
what you do with your pocket change,
or if you have any, but I imagine
that you still give it to beggars on the side,
to any parking meter that is flashing red.

JENNIFER GIVHAN

BLOOM

The boys next door are ignoring my son.
It's playground politics, the fragile and shifting
power dynamics of these early friendships…
I'm leaning on a stucco patio column beside our blue
clay water fountain, crying. He doesn't understand
they're not listening on purpose: *Mom, they just can't*
hear me. I'll talk louder. He doesn't understand why
I'm crying: *Did I hurt your feelings, mom?* He's perched
on the red brick wall that separates our small
patches of yard, laughing at jokes he's not
a part of. Calling out punchlines no one asked
of him. I try coaxing him in. Clouds are moving
lower in the humid summer sky. Afternoon
monsoons. *Let's finish* Harry Potter *together*,
I call, trying to remove the quaver from my voice.
He's pulling greenish-black leaves from a tree
I've kept insisting to my husband is sick and should
be dug up, something newer and brighter planted,
but he always says there's nothing wrong: *It's just*
burning in the sun. Well, burning isn't normal, is it.
My boy brings me an impossible blossom
from his tree, for perhaps it was his all along,
the tree that didn't even bud springtime when
all the other neighborhood trees were proud, colorful
with blooms. I've carried these hurts since childhood
like large plants in deep ceramic pots. I keep
them in the shade of a spare room that cannot get
enough light. I water them too often, and they sag.
I search our parched corner of the backyard
but cannot see where he found it—this gift
he's still new enough to accept, and he's giving me.

JENNIFER GIVHAN

BIRD WOMAN

Sacagawea emerges from the hedgehog cacti
in the lot behind our crumpling house
heavy with cradleboard & mistaken

for a token of peace. Listen
to the rustling in the sagebrush.

Nights earlier, the children, accustomed
to planting where scant grows, nodded
their grave approval as I plucked

the eye-sized coins from my pockets
then dug into the worthless dirt, burying
half a dozen of her, six dollars I'd saved since

liberating the second-born from my body:
& what is the body but a slave? What
can I teach but traitorous love for each other?

We put one gold coin into the dirt
eagle-head up toward the muddy sky,
an experiment in variation or luck.

Listen: she died first when she was 22
of putrid fever, leaving orphans
for Clark while her trapper-

husband captured younger Shoshone brides
then again when she was 94,
after she'd spent seventy-two years

on Wind River.
We watered the dead

earth with a bright orange pail.
We watched it break open.

When one of her flew away, we turned
to the mounds, waiting for the other

five. Sometimes we catch her staring into the sky

& counting the countless birds, crying.

ANGIE MACRI

GOLCONDA

after Lorca

Minerals
of the earth's vessels, veins.
A girl with dark eyes
watches semis run, diamonds
circling the ring finger
of her dreams.
A ferry has run, the pride
of a woman whose husband
called this place Sarahville, a name
changed by men who thought of Corinth
but then a citadel, a market grown
on a shepherd's hill, minerals traded
in a fortress. The Cherokee have crossed,
a dollar a head. River traffic
has docked at the wharf: showboats
with melodeons and barges
of fluorspar through the lock
and dam. Warehouses fill
until the flood wall is built, until
the dam is moved upriver
to the largest twin locks system
in the world. Like the rest,
she wants to go: iron to water,
through miter gate leaves. A girl
with dark eyes watches
semis run, hubcaps diamonds
in the sun above old
paths of melodeons,
discarded veins.

ANGIE MACRI

UNWEAVED:

bottomland forest, forest
on the slope, post oak flats, prairie,
the mound on the ridge, limestone,
shale outcroppings, creek, the pits
that indicate homes, chert, and the people
who moved between, using
each before being buried.

With the terrific sound of the earth
turning inside out, awesome in tons,
the Springfield and Herrin seams
were upheaved day and night,
the light east of the County Line Road
constant, brilliant as if the heart
of a star was burning out.

The sap of the silver maple
and the weight of the river birch,
the mines stripped across
them all with heavy machines.
The panther crossed the ridge
on its way.

ANGIE MACRI

SWEET EVERLASTING

Sweet everlasting spreads leaves, each with its one vein,
through Eight Mile, Four Mile, Mud, Conant.
The prairies form from old forests or lakes. Fire is force
at Plum Creek, Flat, Crow, Dutch, Smooth, Horse.
They broke the sod with its deep rods away from the fire
in Grand Cote, Jordan, Looking Glass, Poor, Old Pearl.
Prairie, green, no one remembers such names
but historians and great-grandfathers who come
to meet death on earth. Butterflies draw poison from milkweed
and, as monarchs, rule bluestem, allium, ambrosia, goldenrod,
pasture rose, senna, dandelion, quinine, cordgrass. Read
white, seeds, sweet, all everlasting to me
in my father's books mildewing on their edges, in his journals
of what he's seen, in what I've found where grain and coal now fall.

ROSS LOSAPIO

PRAYER WITH A RINGING PHONE

This far from the ocean, the gulls don't waste any
movement keeping aloft, taut feathered curves catching
whatever breeze the Walmart parking lot spirals upward.
They drop for scraps of doughnut, spilled jelly beans,
a fake mustache floating in a shallow puddle
by the cart return, motor oil blurring its edges
into purple motion, something alive—
asphalt not much different from the hard-packed sand
the winter we rented that house on the beach, sang
and shucked ears of corn on the porch,
tossing leaves straight into the water, silk
and seaweed and mermaid purses. The squeal of peeling
husk slipping beneath the timpani of waves. I walked miles
hunting nautilus and snail shells—most thumb-sized,
but the largest hand-like, curling over into a chitinous fist.
I dropped it back into the surf immediately, the unexpected heft,
I thought, was claw and tentacle. It's hull, instead,
filled with ice. At the house, my dog made a meal
of the telephone cord dangling errantly
into his crate. We set mouse traps
on the counters to keep him away from untended leftovers,
ran him for hours at the end of a rope to burn
his manic energy, and still he yelped all night, snapped
at hands that strayed near him during the day.
I didn't notice the severed phone line until, hours later,
someone called. *Hello?* I asked, gnawed wire
hanging limp. *Hello?* A missed connection,
a question floating, unanswered in the aether. I knew
we'd have to give that dog away. I begged him to be quiet,
to be docile. There are no unselfish prayers,
except maybe the one that goes, *Throw away the outside*
and cook the inside, eat the outside and throw away the inside.

LANE FALCON

SILVERFISH

A better me would brush him

with the edge of one palm
onto the flat of the other, close him

in that apricot egg of darkness,
elbow up a window,

fling him free.

LANE FALCON

GIRL

You stand on your toes, one hand
a shallow clasp on the edge

of the desk, six inches above
your head, the other reaches

for an empty water bottle. You knock it down,

but first, your gaze tips to me,
because what's defiance without

a witness? And I see an old intent,
polished.

LANE FALCON

STAINS

I've become the kind of woman
who grunts when she sits
and rubs what she spills
into the wool of her slacks.

Eight hours a day, my lap's
under a desk, how many stains
have set without my knowing?

Eight spiders a year bite us
while we sleep—maybe once
I woke scratching pink
behind one knee.

GEORGETTE EVA

CASSANDRA DUNN NOW

Cassandra Dunn sat in the hypnotist's waiting room, filling out a clipboard of pastel-colored forms, wondering what it would be like to be a different person.

Cassandra Dunn had no kids and was terrified of heights. She enjoyed baking and had an entry-level position in a firm. She was allergic to cats. She loved her mother and father. She lived in a fifth-floor walk-up next to a man named Jason Hardegree, who worked in a microchip factory during the day and played disc jockey by night. On his days off, Jason Hardegree went fly-fishing and would ask Cassandra Dunn now to collect his mail for the weekend. This happened often.

Cassandra Dunn now never had so many days off for someone to collect the mail, but she certainly didn't like the idea of someone assessing her senders, bills, or trashy celebrity magazine subscriptions to cast judgment. Cassandra Dunn later would go somewhere one day, perhaps Italy, maybe Minneapolis, but Cassandra Dunn now was the type to stay at home and relish the weekend watching movies edited for television, being a good neighbor by keeping the volume at medium to low, and keeping personal dance time to a minimum. Jason Hardegree was the type to ask if he could run a long orange extension cord from Cassandra Dunn's apartment to his own, because his electricity was shut off for reasons unexplained to Cassandra Dunn. Though billing was the natural assumption. Water was free for tenants. Electricity was not.

Cassandra Dunn now filled out her name in small, acute print at the bottom of the pastel doctor's application below her signature. She debated whether two hours from now, after the appointment, before she got home, if she would have new handwriting, perhaps cursive with excessive curlicues and bold strokes that dipped below the line salaciously. Cassandra Dunn now was stuck with small print, which looked childish on checks. No one, however, as the cashier at Cassandra Dunn's bodega pointed out, wrote checks anymore.

"Ms. Dunn?" the receptionist asked from behind the white counter, jolting Cassandra Dunn back into the office. Cassandra Dunn got up to return the completed forms with a small smile, teeth hidden. Her family called this a "Frog Face" because of the way her lips disappeared when she stretched them into a smile. In photos over Christmas and Thanksgiving, the Frog Face can be seen right dead center, because, along with this unattractive smile, Cassandra Dunn was also the shortest member of her family and the most unwilling to fight for a spot in the back. Perhaps Cassandra Dunn later would be more vocal about it, demand it even, and Cassandra Dunn now

wondered what sort of speech she would later make, what food she could later hold ransom in exchange for a proper position. Perhaps her famous baked apple braid would convince her family that she meant it.

The receptionist broke into her thoughts, informing her that the doctor would be in shortly, and Cassandra Dunn, had Cassandra Dunn been a different person, would've attempted small talk with her, something about the weather or the line of work or the type of people who came into a hypnotist's office, which she was actually interested in hearing more about. But as she ruminated over an opening, she realized that it was taking her too long to summon a possible topic, missing the opportunity completely. Instead, there was just silence.

So Cassandra Dunn now dejectedly followed the receptionist through a sturdy oak door and into an office to sit. Right when she came in, she spotted the framed diploma on the wall. The gold seal looked immensely important and respectable, and she felt impressed, mainly because she didn't realize that hypnotism was an occupation requiring some sort of degree.

Frankly, she always believed that it was a gift one had naturally, possibly earned through meditation, hereditary, or simply chocked up to gullible, disillusioned victims like Cassandra Dunn now. She didn't like to dwell on the money this session would cost. She decided to view it as supporting a local business. Two weeks ago, she had discovered Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome as a guest on a morning radio show. Perhaps Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome wanted to be a radio personality and needed capital.

"No, this is as real as it gets, Cassandra," Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome said when she posed this theory aloud. "I'm sorry if you think that, but I have been practicing for over twelve years and helping people is what I wanted to do. I'm prepared to help you as well, if you're willing."

Cassandra Dunn now blushingly apologized for the attempted joke, regretting the bold behavior, and agreed readily to being helped. Perhaps, the Cassandra Dunn in two hours would be able to laugh this off. Perhaps Cassandra Dunn later won't dwell on it over dinner like Cassandra Dunn now surely felt like doing.

"So you're having trouble with anxiety?" Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome asked, peaking at her above the clipboard. "Could you describe what you're anxious about? Or what gives you so much stress?"

Cassandra Dunn thought about work. How she waited three days to hear back from Harold Morris about a pitch, how she spent that time contriving how much Harold Morris disliked it and wondered if Harold Morris wanted to let her go. Perhaps she made a typo or the color scheme was off. She didn't want to hear any of it then, and the safest place in the office to get away from the e-mails and ringing phones was the supply closet. Even so, she got in the way of the afternoon assignation for the Mailroom Clerk and the Temp.

Cassandra Dunn now heard their high-pitched laughter at her hasty escape.

"Hypnotism, as you know," Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome

went on, "is a great way to combat anxiety. I bypass your conscious mind to speak to your subconscious mind, to those emotions."

Cassandra Dunn felt dubious about this. Cassandra Dunn later might be the type of person hypnotism would work for, but Cassandra Dunn now certainly had reservations, despite filling out the forms. "Now, Cassandra, you have to be open to my methods if this is ever going to work," Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome said calmly, and she felt egged on by the professionalism. Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome's twelve years of experience loomed over her smugly. "You really have to open your mind," Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome stressed.

She sat back on the leather lounge, gathered her hands above her stomach, and exhaled. She shut her eyes and thought about what an opened brain would look like.

A part of Cassandra Dunn wanted to tell Jason Hardegree that no, that despite being cool about Jason Hardegree's mail, she didn't see the point of the orange cord running through the hallway. He promised that it would be only a couple of days tops, but the orange extension cord was really in the way in her apartment. She tripped on it twice when going to the kitchen for middle of the night water. Cassandra Dunn now wondered how much use Jason Hardegree got out of one little extension cord, anyway.

"Are you opening your mind?" Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome asked patiently.

Once, on a plane, she pulled out her laptop to work. Feeling luxurious, she pulled out some headphones to listen to music, only to have her secret disco mix blast to the entire tail end where she sat. It took two songs before she realized that the headphones were defective, and everyone around her was too polite to say anything. Though, their amused, tight smirks and sideways glances said it all. She continued to cringe about that incident.

"What are you thinking about, Cassandra?" Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome asked calmly, sounding as if she should've made a revelation by now.

Cassandra Dunn admitted to the airplane incident and Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome advised her to focus on the backs of her eyelids, on the darkness, on Professional Hypnotist Jacob Newsome's calming voice. Cassandra Dunn wondered what it would be like to be a new person.

–

Cassandra Dunn now walked past Jason Hardegree's door towards her own, following the exposed orange cable. A rather bright light beamed from under Jason Hardegree's door into the hallway, and when she entered her apartment, she could make out the lyrics to a club song thumping hit through her walls.

She shook her head, closed her eyes, and focused on the back of her eyelids as she turned the key in the lock and entered the apartment. Taking that first step over the threshold, she felt a tight jerk above her toe, and she stumbled inside. She opened her eyes in shock.

That club thumping was gone, as if the record's needle was jerkily

pulled back. She sagged with relief. She didn't like the music Jason Hardegree blasted into her apartment, using her electricity.

Who was Cassandra Dunn kidding? Clearly, Jason Hardegree wasn't preparing for a grand disc jockeying show. She knew Jason Hardegree spent nights at home, using her electricity. She could hear Jason Hardegree mucking about next door.

Cassandra Dunn now pulled out the orange line from her apartment and tossed it into the hallway. A loud crash and a sharp yell resounded through the shared wall as she decided to go sit and watch television. Maybe something with action. Maybe something with a car chase. Cassandra Dunn felt like something fast. Something thrilling. Something loud.

Cassandra Dunn went to plug in the television, bending down and unsettling weeks' worth of dust behind the set, before she stepped back and sank into the couch across the room. She made herself comfortable, luxuriating in the spare throw pillows, stretching out her limbs way past the confines of her couch, smiling as she relished the gratifying silence she hadn't had for a month. There was no pounding bass. There were no dropped beats. There was only much-needed peace. And with feet propped up and arms spread out, Cassandra Dunn dug into her pocket, popped a stick of gum into her mouth, and wondered what Cassandra Dunn now would do later.

JEANANN VERLEE

TRUISM

Last night I tangled my face
tight around Bobby Flay's lips.
Yes, Bobby Flay—master chef—
and yes, it looked as awkward
as you imagine. So much red hair
and freckle mashed together—
no telling where one cheek ended
and the other began. Blur. Like
elephant art. Everything has
happened so fast, I'm standing
in a room full of packed boxes,
dumb as a gull. Bobby is a go-
getter. Makes things happen.
Until he moved his hand up my
skirt, he didn't know. Was
surprised by the firm of my ass.
Couldn't have known how I bite.
He spotted me outside Mesa Grill
trying to hail a cab. Stuffed his
entire tongue in my mouth. Bam.
Shameful, they say. Celebrity-
kissing on the street, cameras
popping like fireworks. Bobby
promised to make me his wife.
We already named the children:
Bartleby, Hephaestus, and Thum-
belina. He says he's loved me
since boyhood. Spent each
of his days longing. Used to park
his car in front of my apartment,
hoping for a glimpse. Left every
woman who ever loved him.
Wrote a whole book of vegetarian
recipes just for me.

JEANANN VERLEE

THE PROPOSAL

Strangers gawk in awkward amazement.
Her once unspoiled skin, cracked and peeling.
The smell of char as she passes.

A constant, almost inaudible sizzling.
Heat pours off her shoulders like a bad radiator.
She moves between tables, sipping other people's

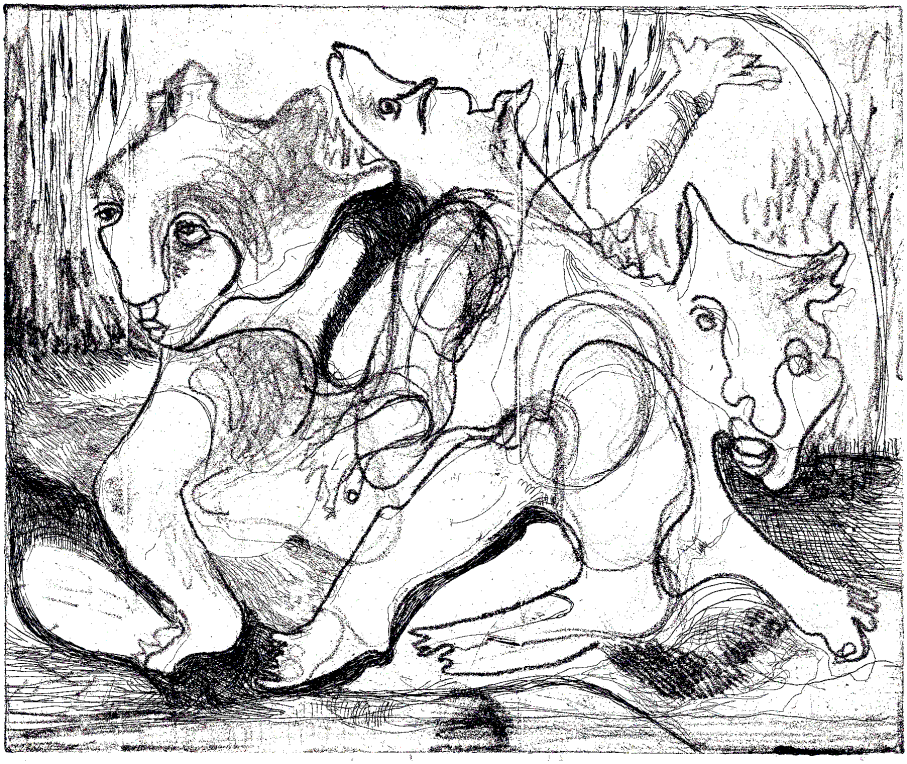
bourbon, laughing at unintentional jokes.
Wears a collar of orange flames, little else.
Friends offer up water glasses, chase after her

with wintry coats, patting down the flare.
She offers charmed giggles, politely
removes patches of skin as they curl upward.

Plucks fried hair in wiry clumps, peels away
shriveled chips of blackened muscle.
In passing whispers, friends recount the tale:

her lover arrived at her door,
knelt at her feet, reached to his pocket.
How tears swelled out and down her face,

lips already mouthing the word *yes*.
Then, in his hands, only matchsticks and butane.
How he doused her toes. How loud the rumble.



GABRIELA MENDIZABAL

Gertrudes

ELOISA AMEZCUA

AUBADE

we lack a selvage
somewhere in sleep
our cells died

bones and tissue pooled
in the mattress
but we unravel

at the margins
unstitch the seams
until we've found

fragments of flesh
ready to be made
whole again

careless undoers
untanglers of threads
we mend the frayed edges

piece by piece
to a semblance
of perfection

this morning
we fabricate each
other into being

ELOISA AMEZCUA

AFTER SYLVIA PLATH

how can anyone write about bees

but because the bathroom fan at the motel
in Killington buzzes so loud

the constant hum while I shower

I face the faucet
my fear my fear my fear

a swarm will come and it does
every drop stings I have no protection

little bees melt into this body
reddening

the iron smell of water like blood
fills nostrils and drink

yes
I drink

savage mouthfuls tiny creatures
slice my throat

I swallow
lather splattered insects and scentless soap

from my ugly wrists to torso
and he waits outside the locked door

a pressed shirt
another wedding another suit

grey water pools past itchy ankles
I open my mouth spit out

the progeny the wings

ELOISA AMEZCUA

INCIDENT

Kitchen dimly lit
Behind my eyes
Look for memories
The table brown
too clean for
My incident

by the streetlamp
flashes of static
I don't remember
Think harder
the mess
sitting in a swamp

outside
Call it loss
a thing
The tile white
I made it
of my own piss

heartbeat too fast

for a memory I'm

for my body

tired Of falling

Seizure Look

I know too much

DALTON DAY

DENTIST

after Annie Clark

Blood explains the body / & its need / to worry / See at one point in my life / I wasn't afraid of heights / or death / or my limbs not being / my own / See at another point / I could have met a king hunted / by gentleness / I don't think it was you / I've been incorrect before / I hope I will be again / Because the body is more than blood / It's teeth / & static / See I am afraid of this & / that / If I am incorrect / then these decoded days / are gone / and probably won't be coming / back

DALTON DAY

UN-MYTH #24

This is where moths go. That's what you say before pointing to your mouth. When you tell me things I like to listen to them. You are so honest with me. Now that I have this knowledge, I imagine all the moths in the world, fluttering around porch lights & street lights, without any idea of where they will end up. Of course, they think they are looking for the moon. You have said this thing, & it may or may not be what will really happen. But I trust you, & you trust me. Such we must do in this world of dust.

TAL ABBADY

UNDER THE HOUSEKEEPER'S WATCH

The house was sold. That was the news from Venezuela. In October, amid tightening controls on private property, through fears of economic collapse and threatened home invasions that had stalled the process for years, my sisters and I finally sold our childhood home in Caracas. The sale of Quinta Solete ("Little Sun"), when it was final, brought deep relief. It also left me feeling oddly unmoored – the same furniture and carpets that were the contours of my world as a kid remained at the time of sale. My father, who rightfully claimed these things, ultimately abandoned them there. But it was our family's designated TV room that my mind leapt to, the room where I'd been surrogate-raised by my family's housekeeper of 40 years. It would soon be rubble, that languisher's haven of ours. We'd been raised in a fringe of wealth under our maid's constant watch. We'd sat on fault lines that would eventually crack open our country, if not our home. According to President Nicolas Maduro, who has condemned soap-operas as the cause of homicidal sprees in Venezuela, we came of age in a lethal little incubator.

Growing up, I told few people about Yolanda and that she shared her corner of our house with the dogs. Most middle and upper-class Venezuelan families had live-in maids. Even the houses were built with maids' quarters. But school children rarely spoke of their maids. Every Sunday, in her closet-sized bathroom, I'd watch Yolanda pull curlers from her hair and pencil in her best eyebrows for church or a date with friends. My younger sister and I often played in her "quarters." Her room was a small, squared space just steps from the back patio. During the day, our three golden retrievers stretched and panted in that patio, and ate mangos that fell from the mango tree flared above their heads. At night, they slept inside, pressed like supplicants against Yolanda's door.

Unlike other kids' maids, Yolanda never tried to be my confidante. She braided my hair, yelled up the stairs that dinner was ready and was the quiet witness to the self-absorbed lurches of my adolescence. When I was 14 and in the grip of a bad depression, dropping hints to my bewildered parents that I planned to commit suicide, Yolanda was secretly dispatched to hound me around the house. Once, I ignored her tapping on my locked bedroom door. She grabbed a steak knife, rammed it into the keyhole and forced her way in. Do you want some *arepas*, she wanted to know, knife in hand.

More critically, Yolanda was the enabler of our soap addictions. My sister and I spent hours with her in the TV room with its sliding-door window, traffic hum and the thumb-sized roaches that lived in my parents' book collection. We watched every episode of *Cristal* and *Topacio,* 1980s soap-operas that got housewives and military generals alike to put their feet

up at nine o'clock sharp. The stories were always a variation on the same themes: women impregnated by priests-in-training or landowning heirs smitten with Vogue-worthy slum girls. *Telenovelas* were our national crack. Yolanda would bring us trays of shredded beef and fried plantains. Then she would wedge herself between my sister and I and the three of us ate and snarled at the unconvincing snubs of Carlos Mata's character. In the end he would be on his knees for working girl Jeannette Rodriguez – bridging poverty and wealth, setting an re-setting their country's fractured political bones.

I nursed fantasies of being the sleek-haired *barrio* girl played by Grecia Colmenares in *Topacio* and was blithely unaware of Yolanda's "before" life – that she'd left Barranquilla, Colombia for lack of work opportunities; that a sweet-talker there had left her pregnant and took off, derailing her plan to become a hairdresser. It turned out the teenager who showed up one day on our doorstep was the daughter she'd left behind.

Yolanda's skin was always cool to the touch and thin as an old shirt, even in the damp congestion of that room. Above us was a Guayasamin painting of the mountains surrounding Quito – where my father spent more and more of his time. I'd been to Quito as a girl when my parents had planned a move there, bringing Yolanda with them. We all stayed in a house in Cotapaxi with a swimming pool that simmered with black worms. If you split them in half, which I did with murderous gusto, you had two worms that pulsed equally with life. I admired the worms' solution for death, their awful ubiquity. I spent that summer in the real, cold fog of Guayasamin's mountains, eating fresh berry ice-cream, splitting worms and playing with the children of the Andean groundskeeper my father had hired. His two sons made a game of peeing on my legs, and my mother would have to chase them off.

Just before the start of school, a bloody coup attempt ended our pastoral days in Quito. My father continued building his business there and split his time between Venezuela (where we resettled with Yolanda) and Ecuador. The family narrative held that my parents had an unassailable marriage despite the fact that he was rarely around. Years later I would learn I had two Ecuadorean half-sisters, born in a parallel life, while I was growing up.

Back in Caracas, we kept telling ourselves Yolanda was part of the family. We'd never had it any other way – she had been there since our births, cooking, cleaning, accompanying us on our beach vacations, co-parenting and receding into her corner at night. My mother scolded me if I ever referred to her as 'maid.' She bought Yolanda clothes and gifts from the U.S. She and my father also bought her two small apartments in Caracas so Yolanda could own property and earn rental income. Still, the question of her custodial, salaried rank in our home sometimes jabbed us in the ribs. Yolanda often joined us for restaurant dinners and concerts. One night, we'd all been getting ready to go to hear Ilan Chester, a cross-generational pop star. Yolanda wore a floral-patterned dress my mother had bought her. Then an old friend of my father's showed up unannounced. My father offered him

Yolanda's ticket, no questions asked. A reconfiguration shuddered through the room. I did not offer to stay home instead. I simply watched Yola, as we called her, walk with bloodshot eyes back to her quarters.

On a trip with us to New York years later, awed at the sight of shops lit like cathedrals and humming mobs, Yolanda wanted to rush to the one store she'd read about – Macy's. "We'll see about that," said my mother, cutting her off. When she contacted a friend in New Jersey and asked to extend her stay in the U.S. to visit the woman, my mother denied this. "Who's going to take care of Quinta Solete!" my mother said. Yolanda didn't ask again. That night I heard her padding around the room we shared, unable to sleep. The next morning, my mother, newly diagnosed with the cancer that would end her life, served Yolanda breakfast and took her shopping. To the outside world they stood on opposites of an unquestioned social chasm in Latin America – maid and employer. But they steadied each other as they walked down the sidewalk. They'd both known the preternatural loneliness of unhappy bonds with men. My mother was, by then, standing fearfully on the edge of my father's life as he was mostly gone and preoccupied with a second family he'd formed during their marriage. "I've caught *el viejo* with his hand in the candy jar!" Yolanda once hissed over the phone to me one day when my mother and I were living in New York. My dad had brought a mistress to stay with him in Solete, and Yolanda had been asked to wash her clothes. The open rage in her voice was unfamilar. When I was young, the tall, severe-looking black man in a suit who occasionally appeared in our home to see Yola was the man who'd run off after her baby was born, my mother had gently explained to me years ago.

After my sisters and I had left Venezuela to make lives abroad, and my parents, too, had left, Yolanda moved into my little sister's bedroom upstairs. From that perch, she tended to the empty house that my parents had no intention of selling. We were gone, but Yolanda dusted the furniture and washed the floors. Well-loved, she received visitors. She waited for our own scarce visits and never took down the torn, circa-1980 horse posters in my room, or the yellowed clippings of pop star Ilan Chester that my sister tacked to her wall in 1986. When our late -childhood parrot, Roberto Carlos, died, she bought another parrot. His name: Roberto Carlos. All around her the plaster was cracking. The family pets had died. But these things had no admission in the moldering fort of our home.

Neither did seismic political change. When left-wing president Hugo Chavez started rolling out his Bolivarian revolution, sending tremors through upscale neighborhoods like ours, Yolanda was hardly jarred. "Ese loco," she called Chavez. Crime soared. Thousands left the country. The rich feared being dispossessed. Rumors spread that pro-Chavez squatters were occupying homes that sat empty or were "underused." Twice, thieves tried to break into the house, scattered by alarmed neighbors who were quick to call the police. Yolanda, sole occupant, never considered leaving Quinta Solete. She would continue to inhabit the rooms where my 80s yearbooks sat in neat stacks and my now-dead mother's clothes hung in plastic from the drycleaners.

Every time I called from New York or Florida, or wherever I was

pretending not to lead a miserably lonely life, it was the same question: "Cuando vienes?" When are you coming? She had conceived her own law of return for us, and she had faith that we would come out of our awful dispersion outside Quinta Solete.

"Do you remember the other day when we were caught in that rainstorm in Chacao?" she once asked during a call. "That was fifteen years ago," I said, wanting to hang up and avoid her sadness, just like I could barely stand to read letters she wrote with grief-stricken affection. Her words kicked up my own mourning for our old landscape. For home. I resented her intrusions, even if I knew full well that my own life had thinned since leaving Solete, since the drenching, iron rains of Caracas, since running like hunchbacks from our street to the front door during a storm.

The last time I saw Yolanda, she was shrunken and wasted few words. I was holding my 8-month-old son.

"Don't give him the pacifier," she ordered with a strange new power to give commands.

I pulled the rubber plug from my baby's mouth and uncorked his squealing. I held him up like a prize turkey and she smiled. At 38 – when women contemplated being grandmothers in the Barranquilla of Yola's youth – I'd finally become a mother. For years I'd been a reporter in South Florida, but that credential meant little to her. A baby – that was the natural order of things, the answer to her perpetual question, asked with undisguised concern as I aged into my childless mid-thirties: *Still no boyfriend?*

But the smile was just a flicker. Yolanda lay on a small bed I'd never seen before, in the television room, losing her short battle with stomach cancer. The TV had been quiet for weeks, its black screen glinting sunlight from the window. Yola's niece and grandnieces had moved into the house to care for her, and then lived in it until the sale to deter squatters. My sister and I had flown in from Florida. We joined them in what was a quiet vigil, one where the living grope around the dying with the dumbfounded recognition of what their own bodies can look forward to.

Yolanda said little – even a few words seemed to gut her energy – except to make the sort of requests she'd never made before. "Take him away," she told me once when my son sat and babbled on the edge of her bed. Otherwise, she lay in bed with a proprietary air, bemused at all the fuss around her. And she studied us. She studied our faces with that same wrenching focus that my mother had in her last days. I felt her grafting my image onto some canvas of the mind, making it hers for the taking. And I understood that this is who I was, someone with no real national claims. American. Venezuelan. It hardly mattered. I was someone lucky enough to have been one of Yola's charges in a country called Solete.

A few days into my stay, my brother-in-law lifted Yolanda into the wheelchair he'd rented for her. He pushed her outside to the garden where she used to plant roses and serve us mugs of chocolate milk. I thought I'd go sit with her, spot possums in the trees like old times and ignore my dread of how

little she weighed and how watchful she'd become from that last vantage point in our TV room.

But I couldn't stay. I left the vigil. Two days before Yolanda died, I was in Tel-Aviv in a long-distance call center full of Eritrean immigrants. I dialed the number and Yolanda's niece – our home's new keeper – put the phone to her ear. Yolanda couldn't talk. She was all breath. But I felt her listening. *She can hear you,* a nurse once said of my dying, silenced mother. *Hearing is the last thing to go.* I spoke Yolanda's name into the receiver and heard her silence. I hated how far I'd drifted from her, from the things I'd known as a child, from the room that had held us as the TV droned with stories of sudden wealth and classless love. The sky darkened on my end, or it was already dark and I hadn't noticed. I said her name again. Two young men just outside my cabin door drank sodas and chatted in Arabic. She was still listening.

JOHN OLIVER HODGES

NOODLES AND SOCKS

The soup contained exactly two tiny dumplings and approximately three thousand thick noodles. When an Asian tourist sat down beside me and ordered the same thing, I could have warned her about what she'd get—*here, suck on this!*—but I felt a bit some grumpy. The Korean diners beside her asked her, as they had asked me, where she was from. "Not China," she said several times. "Hong Kong," she pronounced slowly, her voice that of the boy Urkel, whom you might remember from a show called *Family Matters*.

"Ahhhhhhh," the Koreans said.

Urkel and I small-talked it. She wanted to connect. As we both were alone, why not? I felt kinda sad when she screwed her camera to the end of a shiny steel pole, held it out in front of her and smiled, snapping off some selfies, chopsticks in hand over her steaming bowl of noodles.

I was full, even while chewing the damn things, and said to myself, *Why you doing this? Why are you eating these noodles?* I simply hated the idea of leaving food in the bowl for the *ajumma* to see, a real strong statement on what I thought of her cooking, eh? Finally I could take it no more, and anyway she'd probably recycle the unused portion. That was my thinking, so "I'm too full," I said in Korean—*nomu pebbuloyo*—and the *ajumma* did her magic trick, made my bowl disappear. I paid the 5,000 won. In my thank you I called her *agassi*, which means young girl. Her face darkened. She said, "Aigooooo," and told the other Koreans what I'd said. I said, "Look at me, I am a grandfather."

They looked me over, but no, I did not look like no grandpa to them. Though my hair was silver, my complexion was clean, shiny, a result of discovering sun block in my early thirties during the time I was married to a seventh generation Floridian who knew about such things. I was, in their eyes, *chal sengyossoyo*, or handsome.

I walked around a ton of a bunch more then, the rain falling down out of the clouds making puddles on the ground that women in sandals stepped into while holding the hands of their daughters, who also wore sandals or colorful flipflops. The rain dripped from awnings, ran in the gutters. I stood upon an overpass watching its raised pattern dance in the Cheonggyecheon Stream that shot off into the distance where eventually it connected with the Han River before finding its way to the Yellow Sea.

I found my way to the subway. Rode the purple to the brown. Was carted to Itaewon where I'd lived for the last two months. I came here last summer too, don't ask why. My original reasons don't matter anymore. I just came. Last year I picked a few shells off the beach. All I took home with me were those shells and an empty carton of Seoul Milk. It's the best milk. I love

it. It's so creamy, so fortifying. Korean cows are fed different foods, or something, I don't know, but this time I bought some socks to take home. That's what I was doing at the Dongdaemun Market, searching for socks. After buying a ten-pack of socks scalloped nicely with ocher and navy blue stripes, that's when I rewarded myself with the big bowl of "Dumpling Soup."

I got off the subway at Noksapyong Station. I walked up the hill to the room I'd been renting from a black guy from Ohio. Pardon me for mentioning it—that he's black—but blacks are not always treated so well here. He'd been having trouble finding fulltime work, so it pleased me to see him living the good life in his nice Itaewon apartment. He'd taught English in Korea for five years running, and wanted out now, only the prospects back home weren't so hot. This morning, while he was at work, his Korean girlfriend poked her head out of his bedroom while I was writing shirtless and sweating at the kitchen table. I hadn't known she was home. I made a small noise of surprise and she paused and I quickly slipped on my shirt and she stepped out and we talked a long time in the subdued light, she leaning against the sink in rumpled shorts and her face a little greasy from sleeping. She had lived in New York City for four years, she said, and wanted to go back so bad. Two days ago she came across a receipt stuffed in a book—it was for an expensive item she bought at the MOMA gift shop for a friend. She'd kept the receipt and the receipt made her nostalgic.

Her leg skin was peeling from a burn she got during a five day vacation in the Philippines. She and her Ohio sweetiepie had stayed at the Shangri-La at three hundred dollars a night—that was for the cheapest room. I saw some of their photos on his Kakao Talk page. Under a picture of them drinking from the same coconut was the caption, "Say yes, please!" and I thought: in the Philippines he proposed. She told him she would consider it, but upon returning she found the receipt. The receipt had sorta made the decision for her, and she was telling me now all about the ex she left behind in New York. In the thing of it I told her of my ex who'd flown home to Korea from New York to be with her mother who was ill. The mother died, and that was the end of us. Of course there's more to it than that, but . . . I did not say that my ex had lived in Woodside, the same neighborhood of Queens that she had lived in. Nor did I say that my ex pronounced the word "Woodside," as did she, without the W—*Ooodside*—which is to say *too cute for anything under the sun*. She wanted to exchange contact info. For some reason everybody wanted to connect today.

The Ohioan was home when I arrived, his door closed. I imagined him back there sulking, and was afraid for him. His beautiful, smart, Korean girlfriend with the good English speaking skills was everything to him. A deep well of sadness may have been waiting for him to fall down into and go splash in. I remembered how it was for me, my splash into the sadness. About my sadness my ex said what she said about all sadnesses of the world, that time solves everything. She was Catholic. We had talked of marriage. When her mother died, there was too much distance between us. Some stuff happened, and now she refuses to talk to me. The closest I could get to her was to visit her house, and take a few pictures of it.

By the door I took off my big-ass shoes then snuck into my room and pulled out my pack of new socks. The socks looked really good. I envisioned myself coming to love these socks in a very personal way. Perhaps one of my students would remark that I wore the same socks every day, and I would tell the story of how I bought them in South Korea during a pouring rain, then treated myself to a huge bowl of dumpling soup that was mostly just noodles. I was very excited to try these socks on, only as it turned out, they were too small.

CONTRIBUTORS

Tal Abbady's writing has appeared in *The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, BBC Travel, The Satirist* and other publications. She was born and raised in Venezuela and lives in Madrid.

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Angie Macri is the author of *Underwater Panther* (forthcoming from Southeast Missouri State University Press), winner of the Cowles Poetry Book Prize. Her recent work appears in *Arts & Letters, Heron Tree*, and *Sugar House Review*. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she teaches in Little Rock.

Gabriela Mendizabal has recently aligned, along the heater under the lightly grey, wooden blue windowsill, six paper bags each differing in size, color and quantity of contents. As soon as they topple over one another, to the sound of the many kitchen voices, she will prepare a basket; she will fill it with a spoonful of graph paper, and the old, underneath of a bed some-knitting, short-railing, cool classification of the dew inside of cotton mornings. It will be a specific oddity, like a charlatan mount of insistent derangement.

Jenny Molberg won the 2014 Berkshire Prize for her debut collection of poems, *Marvels of the Invisible* (forthcoming, Tupelo Press). Her poems have appeared in *North American Review, Copper Nickel, Third Coast, The New Guard, The Rattling Wall, Mississippi Review* and other journals. She has been nominated for a 2015 Pushcart Prize, and was featured in *Best New Poets 2014*. Currently, she teaches at the University of North Texas and serves as Production Editor for American Literary Review.

Caitlin Thomson's work has appeared in numerous places, including: *The Literary Review of Canada, Radar, Going Down Swinging,* and the anthology *Till the Tide*. Her second chapbook *Incident Reports* was recently released by Hyacinth Girl Press. You can learn more about her writing at www.caitlinthomson.com.

Paloma Salas is a bird curiously poking at water bulbs as her stomach grumbles. She paints with precisely sparing methods, with a specific notion of intersection. Colors flush with a demure translucence of forms as they flourish with a bodily cadence.

Jonathan Travelstead served in the Air Force National Guard for six years as a firefighter and currently works as a full-time firefighter for the city of Murphysboro. Having finished his MFA at Southern Illinois University of Carbondale, he now works on an old dirt-bike he hopes will one day get him to the salt flats of Bolivia. He has published work in *The Iowa Review* and on *Poetrydaily.com* among others, and is the author of *How We Bury Our Dead* (Cobalt/Thumbnail Press, 2015).

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Jennifer Whitaker's first book, *The Blue Hour,* won the 2015 Brittingham Prize in Poetry and is forthcoming from The University of Wisconsin Press. She has published poems in journals including the *New England Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, Four Way Review,* and *Radar Poetry.* Jennifer currently lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, where she teaches writing and is director of the University Writing Center at UNCG.