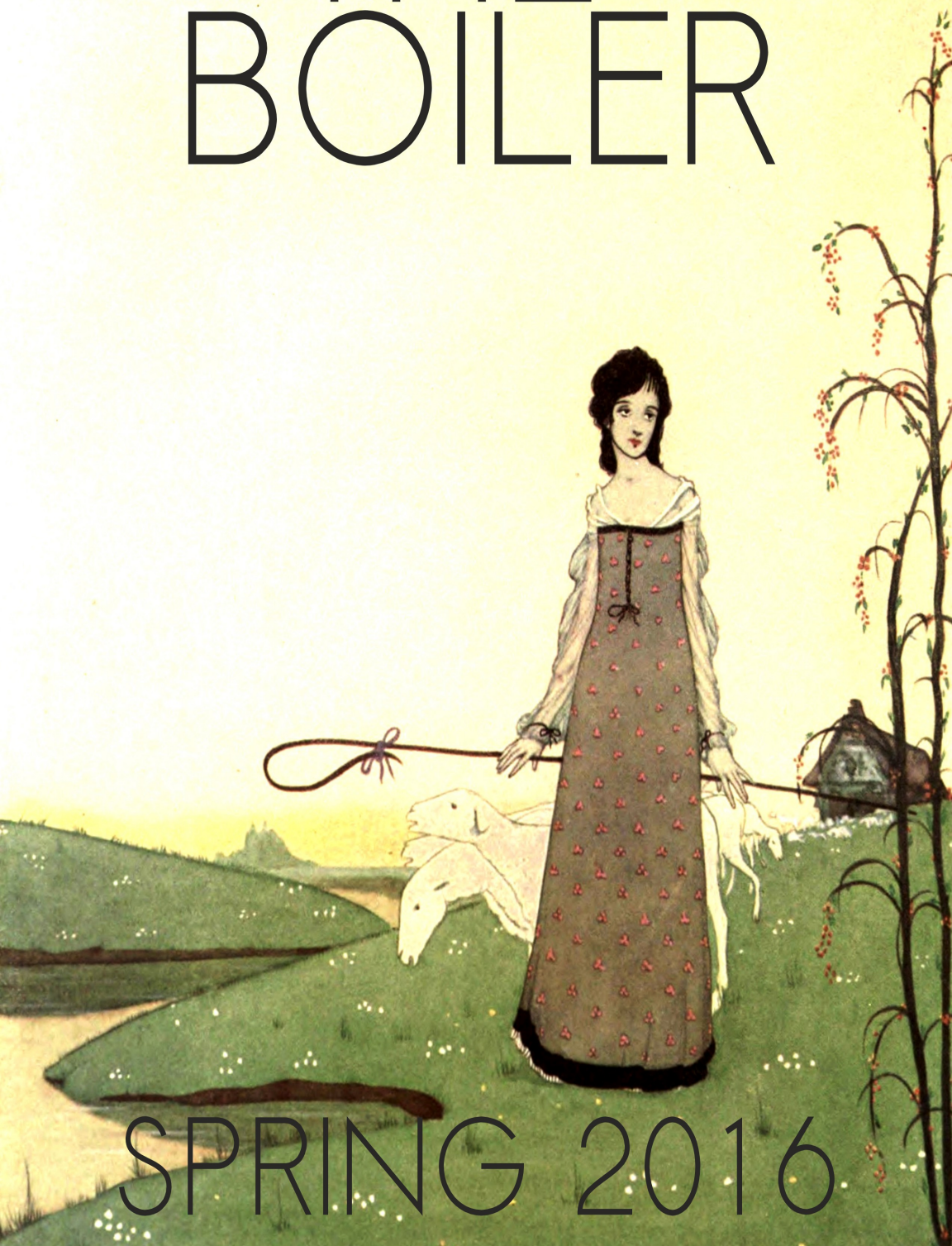


THE BOILER



SPRING 2016

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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.

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THE BOILER

SPRING 2016

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JACQUELINE DOYLE

RAYMOND

I didn't set out to lie to my husband. At first I just thought it was funny when Mark suspected I was having an affair. Maybe I also thought it served him right. For snooping. For the affair he'd had years ago. His affair, just a fling really, was long since over. I thought I was long since over it, but apparently I wasn't, since I took such satisfaction in my ruse of turning the tables.

It started with an innocuous note I'd made in my weekly planner. "Raymond@5?" Raymond is my girlfriend Felicity's poodle, who was at the pet salon getting a shampoo and cut, and Felicity wasn't sure she'd get off work in time to pick him up. Mark doesn't know Felicity, who's a friend from my last job, or Raymond, her large chocolate-brown poodle. I don't know why Mark was looking at my weekly planner. Maybe he'd been sneaking looks at my schedule all along. But that night he asked a lot of sharp questions about where I'd been. "Didn't you say you were meeting someone?" He stopped just short of asking who Raymond was, because of course he wasn't supposed to know. Just to be sure he'd been poking around in my planner, a few days later I wrote "Raymond lunch?" in the Thursday slot and sure enough, that night he asked what I'd done for lunch. Not casually. Insistently. He seemed pretty dissatisfied when I said I'd eaten at my desk.

After that I just penciled in R once in a while and watched Mark smolder. Our sex life improved. Not that it was bad before, but after twelve years, we knew each other pretty well, what buttons to push for what responses. Now things became a little less predictable in bed. He brought home flowers for no reason. Noticed when I got my hair cut. Complimented me more often. Things like that.

A pretty passive aggressive game, I know, penciling in those Rs, but I was annoyed that he was prying into my life, and that he was suspicious at all. I've always described myself as suicidally monogamous. It's supposed to be a joke. But maybe it isn't. Maybe it shows that I think fidelity is self-destructive when your partner has affairs. Or one affair, with a law student who was interning at his firm. Which he apologized for copiously, and we did the marriage counselor thing, but maybe underneath it still pisses me off. So I've been faithful, but I'm not sure it's a good thing. And I didn't mind letting him see how it felt. The not knowing. The never being one hundred percent sure.

Things went on this way for a few months, until we got a new coworker at the office. My supervisor walked in with this tall, hefty guy in khakis and a navy blue sport coat and said, "Marcy, I'd like you to meet Raymond. He'll be joining us in Accounting." I almost fell out of my chair.

"Raymond?" I said. Or squeaked, since I could hardly believe it. Later he told me that he couldn't figure out why I said his name that way. Had we met before? Had we gone out together way back in college or something?

Mark knew we were hiring, and when he asked about it I told him yeah, we had a new guy. We were sitting at the kitchen table, me wolfing down cereal, him eating toast. It was a sunny morning. I like to do the crossword puzzle—I love words—but I was in a rush that day and was going to leave it half finished. Which I hate. Sometimes the crossword puzzle is the most creative thing I do all day.

"So what's his name," Mark asked.

"Uh." I wasn't thinking. It was a reflex. I just felt like I had to lie. "Ted."

I should have said, "Raymond, which funnily enough is the name of my friend Felicity's dog." I've always thought of myself as an honest person. But I didn't say that. I gulped down the rest of my coffee.

"What's he like?" Mark asked, shoving the Times with the half-finished crossword puzzle into his briefcase. He gets the newspaper, even though he drives to work and I take the bus and the subway. He'd probably give it to me if I objected, but I never have.

"Older guy. A wife and a couple of kids in the 'burbs," I said. "You know the type. Pictures all over his desk already. His teenage son plays sports." Raymond in fact had one picture of his wife and kids on his desk. He wasn't old, younger than me in fact, and he didn't live in the suburbs. I've never had any pictures on my desk. Mark and I have been married for nine years, together for twelve, no kids, no plans for kids. We tend to think of people with kids as leading less interesting lives than we do. Though really, I don't know what's so interesting about our life. We've got a pretty nice condo in a high rise with a view of the Manhattan skyline. It's in Fort Lee, just across the bridge. We moved out of the city and bought at a good time for real estate prices. We make pretty good money. We go to plays and concerts and the opera, only once a month or so these days. We used to go more often. We watch foreign-language movies with subtitles on Netflix, and read *The New Yorker* and *The New York Review of Books*. We give money to NYU, where we both did MFAs, and Columbia, where Mark did his law degree. We tend to congratulate ourselves that we couldn't maintain all this with kids, but I don't even know if that's true. We'd need a bigger condo.

Raymond's life with two kids, second grade and fourth grade, didn't sound so bad to me. We had lunch together in the park across from our offices one day, and started talking. He told me he lived in Hoboken and his wife stayed at home, but she'd been a loan officer at a bank and would probably go back to that when the kids were older. He showed me pictures and talked about how great his kids were. His son's t-ball practices, his daughter's violin lessons.

It got to be a habit, eating together. He brought lunch from home, and I picked up takeout. I told him my stories. He told me his. I liked learning about a life so different from mine. I'd forgotten what it was like to meet someone new, hardly even remembered that I *had* a story. I was becoming

interesting to myself again.

"Really, you were a writer? So how'd you get into publishing?" he asked. "Do you like it? Do you still write?" Not really, to liking the job. "It's okay, but selling subsidiary rights for books I don't like that much isn't what I thought I'd be doing." Well, no, to the writing. "I haven't written in a long time." Even that started to seem interesting instead of just depressing.

I'd been studying Raymond for a while before the lunches started. This was Raymond? There had to be some karmic principle at work, but this Raymond who'd dropped out of the heavens wasn't how I'd pictured the fictitious Raymond, who was lean and loose-limbed and had a French accent. Which doesn't really go with the name Raymond, but this was my fantasy lover, okay, and he had a French accent and even spoke a little French once in a while. "Je t'adore, Marcy," that kind of stuff. He had dark hair that flopped in his eyes and a wicked grin.

Raymond, Raymond at the office that is, was blond and a little beefy. Not my type at all. When I say beefy I don't mean fat, but solid. Muscular, with very white skin. You could see the blue veins in his neck. A very preppy dresser, which my husband Mark is not. I love the way Mark dresses. Even though he's a lawyer, he wears cool shiny suits with skinny lapels and black shirts and maroon silk ties. Raymond's all red, white, and blue, and looks like a former frat boy from the Midwest, which he is. Born and bred in Ohio, an accounting major at Ohio State. I didn't find him attractive at first, though some of the secretaries did. The receptionist with the cleavage was always leaning over his desk, asking if she could help him get settled. He'd fiddle with the picture of his wife and kids, adjusting the angle, and say no thanks.

Raymond's a good guy. He tries to do the right thing. He's definitely not a philanderer. So when we ended up in a hotel room at lunchtime, you might say we were both surprised. It was all so innocent in the beginning. Two adults talking about their lives. He was curious about me. He said he could be more honest with me than with his wife. Adultery kind of snuck up on us. It was a lot easier than I'd imagined, even after twelve years of suicidal monogamy.

We'd gotten to the point where we were confiding that our lives hadn't turned out exactly as we'd expected them to. We hadn't expressed any dissatisfaction with our marriages, but there was a sort of charged intimacy in our conversation, a kind of electrified attention. He put his hand on mine, or I put my hand on his, or we each reached for each other's hands. I can't remember. What I remember is him saying, "Maybe we should talk somewhere more private."

The hotel was not posh by anyone's standards. The bathroom reeked of disinfectant, and I didn't want to sit on the orange bedspread, though it looked clean enough. We were awkward the first time. He almost tripped getting out of his pants, and I didn't come when we made love, though I always do with Mark. But it didn't seem to matter. I grew so attached to the softness and whiteness of his skin, the blond hair around his nipples and navel, the sturdiness of his cock and how it shrank and curled up afterwards. He was gentler than Mark, different. Maybe that's what it was. He was

different.

I stopped penciling R into my weekly schedule when the actual trysts with R started, but Mark still asked questions. Especially when I began working late to make up for the long lunches. Mark would call me on my work phone and not my cell, probably just to see if I was there. "Oh, hey. I didn't think you'd be checking your cell. You must be beat. Can I bring something home for dinner?"

At home, I grew animated. I regaled Mark with stories about characters at work over our late dinners. My supervisor, who was rumored to be looking for another job. The receptionist with the cleavage, who people said was banging the boss. And Ted, the made-up guy who was Raymond—but-not-Raymond, older, with teenage kids and a boring life in the suburbs. It was fun, keeping track of the details of Ted's life and my embellishments. Ted's kid was elected captain of the soccer team. Ted's wife was on the Paleo Diet. They were considering a summer vacation at Disney World in Florida.

I felt self-conscious when Mark and I laughed at that one, newly aware of the unspoken accord between us that had governed so many of our responses for so long: "We're New Yorkers. We're too sophisticated for that." So we'd been to Paris and Bangkok and Rio de Janeiro. We'd backpacked in Nepal. Mark and I hadn't managed any real vacations at all for a few years, what with our work schedules and long-distance visits to family. And Disney World, well, I wouldn't mind seeing Disney World. Okay, it's dumb, but it might be fun. Raymond told me that his daughter, the fourth grader, had been asking for a trip to Disney World, and I googled it, just out of curiosity. They've got a luxury hotel and spa. It's not just for kids.

Disney World turned out to be part of why we broke up. Raymond and I, not Mark and I. Mark still doesn't know anything, despite all his doubts. I still love Mark, despite my doubts. We've got history, but it's more than that. Really, I don't know why I had an affair. I have a new appreciation for the lame "it just happened" defense that Mark used about his.

I wanted to go away for the weekend with Raymond. I couldn't let it go. We'd lie together, in what should have been post coital bliss, and I couldn't help myself. I'd start up. "We never have any time, together," I'd say, turning away. "What's the point in cuddling when we have to go back to the office in fifteen minutes?" I didn't really mean it. Or maybe I did. Six months of stolen lunches wasn't enough. I wanted more.

But so did his family, especially his daughter. She wanted her dad at her violin recitals, she wanted to go to Radio City Music Hall, she wanted to go to Disney World. Maybe it was his divided loyalties, or my complaints, or his sense of obligation to his wife, but the two of them were talking about Disney World one night and he was dragging his feet about getting time off at a new job and his wife asked him straight out if he was having an affair and he said yes. He confessed. Which he confessed to me, after we'd made love for the last time. He cried and said it was over. I would have paid more attention if I'd known it was the last time, but that's the way with everything, isn't it? You never know how a story will develop or when things will start or end.

We didn't have much in common really. I don't know what we would

have talked about if we'd spent a weekend together, I mean besides his family and Mark and the situation, which is not the same as the kinds of things Mark and I talk about. Raymond has never watched a foreign film or read *The New York Review of Books*. He works for a publisher but he's not interested in literature. He doesn't know where to find the best Vietnamese pho noodles in Paris, or in Manhattan for that matter. I certainly didn't want him to leave his wife and marry me. But there was a sweetness to what we had. A privacy.

I can't explain what it was, but my body knew what it craved and shut down completely. I could barely get up in the morning. The office was big enough so I didn't have to run into Raymond all the time, but just knowing he was there was too much for me. I couldn't make love to Mark any more, which I'd been doing all along, though I lied about it to Raymond when he asked. I told everyone I was having a mid-life crisis, which I guess I was, clichéd as it sounds. I took a leave from my job, even though I would have gotten my supervisor's position if I'd stayed. Because, then what? The thing about telling your story to someone else is you start to think about the narrative and how it all fits together. I mean how does the main character's past connect to her present, and where is she headed? What does she want, and what's preventing her from achieving it?

"I've become boring," I told Mark. "I'm not where I imagined I'd be."

He surprised me. "Take all the time you need," he said, "as long as you come back."

So now I'm living out in the middle of nowhere deciding what I want in life. It's not exactly a romantic cabin in the woods and it's temporary—a winter rental of a rundown cabin in a row of rundown cabins in the Adirondacks. Cheap for the time being because it's meant for summer tourists. There are electric baseboard heaters but it's pretty cold, and the décor is nothing to write home about. A print of an autumn landscape on the wall, and a faded mint green chenille bedspread on the lumpy double bed. I didn't bring much besides my laptop and some books. Yes, I'm writing again. Not writing so I'll get published in *The New Yorker*, which I won't. Or so I'll get rich and famous, my big dream as an MFA. Just writing to figure things out. I've written a few letters to Raymond that I won't send, and a few letters to Mark that I probably will. I've written some letters to myself and a sketch of the story I'm sharing here. And I've started a novel about a guy named Ted, who's turning out to be a lot more interesting than the Ted I made up for Mark. Ted's got his own life out there in New Jersey, and it's not uncomplicated. I think I'd lost sight of that in the narrow world I inhabited before my lunchtime forays into the unfamiliar. Everybody's life is complicated.

Raymond has come to stay, for now at least. Felicity thought he might like country living. He chases squirrels up tree trunks and makes me laugh. You could say he's my muse. After all, he was the one that started my new adventures in lying, and you can't write fiction until you can sustain a good lie. We walk a lot in the woods, learning the names of trees and birds from Peterson's field guides. "Purple finch," I say, and Raymond cocks his

head. “Haemorrhous purpureus.” Did you know there are 220 species of birds in the Adirondacks, 41 in the winter? I’ve decided that Ted will be a birder, and very attached to the family dog.

STEPHANIE CAWLEY

MY NOVEL

The first half of my novel will be a series of tedious first dates
i.e. squinting in a dark bar at pictures of waterfalls

on a tiny screen. The second half will be a long description of a party
from the point of view of a dead person i.e. punchlines

with no jokes attached and platters of half-eaten crudité.
The first half of my novel will be a catalog

of street signs that, if mapped, spell out the names of the dead
scrawled around the places they died. The second half

will be a long-winded speech about the dangers of going outside
i.e. skin cancer, loose shingles, mountain lions. The first half

of my novel will be a long description of a single cheese sandwich
i.e. a last meal, i.e. a grave. The second half will be in the voice

of a woman who has never seen the sea. The first half of my novel
will be a series of forlorn soliloquies and the second the same

words in reverse i.e. a return to the point of origin, i.e. a tape
played back suggesting an endless loop. The first half

of my novel will be a collage of lyrics to sad songs i.e. an accurate
transcription of the inner life of a white ceiling slept under

by a grieving daughter. The second half will be the same
lyrics with all the verbs taken out, i.e. *love*, i.e. *hunger*, i.e. *gone*.

STEPHANIE CAWLEY

WEIGHT, COUNTERWEIGHT, & TURN

*Starring Joy Katz, Miley Cyrus, Donald Winnicott,
Mary Ruefle, and 28 Teeny Tiny Wild Mice*

To bring a baby into the poem,
you must, the poet says,
introduce a counterweight
for all that cuteness. Whatever
the opposite of cuteness
is, she says, do that.

In class, the students discuss
the sentimental via the pop star's
music video: teary close-ups
of a red-lipped trembling
mouth cut with shots of her pale naked
body straddling the heavy swing
of a wrecking ball.

I think about bringing a baby into
the world and what counterweight
I would prepare
to offer or suffer, the baby plopped
on one end of a seesaw, dense
and heavy as the universe
crammed in a nutshell.
On the other end: Big
Suffering, the beloved dead standing
on each other's heads.

But the mother and baby balance
each other as not weight but
mirrors. In the psychologist's
theories, the grim
tug of a frown starts the mirror
cracking. The problem is
how to look at anything
and let it be not-you, separate,
what it is and isn't.

The kitten, in the essay,
for instance, which is, the poet

writes, of course, cuter
than its mother, eyelash whiskers,
nose a smudge of palest
pink, eyes wide and terrified
and hungry. But, she says,
it's the cat we keep and not
the kitten, so which is worse, which
the true sentimental?

To put a kitten in a poem,
surely, even worse
than a baby. Or worse, the tiny mice
clinging to stalks of grass
in the pictures my friend sends me.
They grin and the smallest puff
of wind slicks back
their baby-fine fur hairdos.
To imagine a field mouse smiles,
the wind whispers, its own
sentimental, or not
sentimental, exactly, but failure
to see the clouds
for what they are, not horses
or houses, but water, in air,
holding its fragile shape.

STEPHANIE CAWLEY

THE GRASS ABOVE

—after Galway Kinnell

There was you writing me
letters about glass
broken in Georgia dirt. You
in a dream with long hair, vines,
a veined stone at your throat.
Then a bullcalf dragged
from darkness—a dark
world and the born thing
broken out of it.

*

I'm useless as a locket—flat
oval of memory, a gold chain
spinning at my throat, the weight of—
a dead cow, a ton sunk
in mud. Black-and-white, blue
tongue, soft horns, wet
hooves. I am this lowing
towards nothing—*sopping*
with darkness—towards
some branchy trouble.

*

If I could make you, I'd make you
the stars, my body
grass. We are a we that goes on
going. Despite this
branchy trouble
I invite. You are this bird
in the throat. This sky
gone dark.

*

All this a way of not
speaking about—to take
the grass above a grave
out of the poem. *Cow,*
dung, man, anything
they want. Bark
and branch, leaves ground
into dirt, moss against
a mouth, the grass pushing up
after.

*

What's beautiful
is dark—thorned hands,
smooth calves—to be
broken and held.
I should make you
the ground. Glass
in the dirt, and above—
grass, glittering

KATHERINE MENJIVAR

A DEMO TO BULIMIA

You already decided to end with fat, shoulder-to-shoulder with the ogre underneath the mirror nail filing & chewing split ends. The time your mother distributed it to your friends—you laughed it off: some clever joke catered to mouths full of bitter cocoa cake and celery sticks. Later, you buried yourself in cotton sheets hoping they'd soak the excess or everything until noon hit the sun-kissed window-sill kissing the curtains—spotlight where you kneel before the abyss face-down, ducolax in its first hour and your abdomen does not sink in and your thighs are still like Siamese twins. You raise our fingers into your mouth slow so your tonsils do not fight the counter clock -wise tickling of the uvula, with fingertips and fragile nails. Your cranial nerves shell-shock my interior so all that is audible: the spine of yesterday's lettuce leaves, a pea. I can only palm your shoulders for so long and give collutory from Listerine-cup thumbs with advice until you flush away in resolution or rinse for the rebattle, despite bile, despite the invasive voices chanting your name, she's there. You stop to hum "Here Comes the Sun" over the running faucet.

NICOLE STEINBERG

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED MOVING SOMEWHERE ELSE?

Nice butt, the charming sir
on the rickety bicycle says
so I curse a lot aloud & then
Alex is afraid he'll circle back
to kill us. There's nothing
to be afraid of, I say, though
of course I'm wrong. I could
get killed at any moment
for the things I want, like
a five-piece chicken nugget
combo deal or the reproductive
rights I thought I had or to be left
the fuck alone on the street
when I am walking & talking
with my lovely lady friend
who's new to Philadelphia
& marveling at all the trash
on the street, something I barely
notice after all these years.
We keep on walking—an act
of dumbfounding defiance, pupils
darting every which way, the way
women train their tired eyeballs
to do—witnesses to the sudden death
of each other's pleasant days.
It's a windy Easter & it feels fake
aside from little girls who float by
in pink dresses, riding the same air
that ruins our hair, whips our nice
butts & urges us not to look down,
to walk around the trash.

NICOLE STEINBERG

LOCAL

My fears are local
—Anselm Berrigan

What do you mean
when you leave?

My grief is air — nostalgia
aphasia — a caustic party

How to retool this blunt day — edit it
to the room where you let me squeeze
your knuckles as the needle entered
my big toe

I do intimate shit next to ambivalent
vending machines — I'm a person
dotted with pushpins — a stain
that forms a path from bungalow
to hospital — veins cornflower
as the inner lives of squid

In the world of no you
I learn to drink coffee
I forget why I ever liked the subway
I don't say goodnight — I'm scared
of night — but I have a TV

I live in a city of doctors and rats
until I leave

NICOLE STEINBERG

PIZZA IS CHEAPER THAN THERAPY

No one will mourn for my weekend,
which had the utter shit kicked out of it
& died at a pizzeria in South Philly.

The older I get the more people demand
my thoughts. At Weight Watchers &
on Facebook I'm required to weigh in.

My body responds to a fist with a pop
& a hiss. My therapist talks of *self-care*
as if I've never bought two jumbo slices

at ten o'clock at night or reblogged
pornographic GIFs of gooey, stringy
cheese—adorable & public love

notes to a lifelong hiding place. As if
at fifteen, I wasn't already the queen
of the secret second dinner. As if

I'm not the starving marauder in
the background of my life, licking
greasy fingers as I eat myself alive.

KRYSTIN GOLLIHUE

IT'S JUST NO GOOD

You are making a diamond with your legs,
you are making a portal.
You have a lot of anxiety about the weather.
Each and every foot is complicated,
though you are skeptical of motherfuckers
on Sunday. You have very discursive hands,
you are told, and they dry the dishes
in a really inefficient way. You wish you
could feel things about other people
but you can't. You need *gentle exfoliation*.
You need *100% machine washable*. You need
flammable warning. You need *side effects*
of the bloodstream. You continue to hide
your skins for all your moving.
A heat is rising from you,
a bubbling. Resist.
Your main concern is with
the stone, the thigh,
a place to fit the teeth, and
general safety measures. The difficulty
of the sonic wave is what is killing you.
What is your question? What is
your each and every?

KRYSTIN GOLLIHUE

SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO DIE

You have suddenly become aware
of all the raw foods you ate today.
You ate them out of containers,
ate them as if they were all of them bloody.
You are always eating raw things
and then pushing your chakras to the floor.
You are always pushing your chakras
to the floor, fingers white, heart above head
above heart above duodenum, above the newest
hair, the newest lung, air moving
from lung to other lung
to newness to lungness.
You are a burial ground.
You are a grave crunching
under the sun, under skin, under wild
lettuces wilting at your feet. You are
the matter of your knees, which are
an integral part of your interface with the earth,
as is your digestive tract, your bedsheets,
your breasts, which at this moment
sit flatly upon your belly as if to say
that you feel better being over there
with the white bubbles of your flesh,
the bubbles of your sensation.
That heart beat is the cold form
of preservation. That heart beat
is the size of a child. That heart beats
like the long slow wait
of the body coming home.

PATRICIA CLARK

TRUCK FILLED WITH DEAD ANIMALS

Saw it on the interstate, open top cargo bed,
a hairy leg or two sticking up, a shiny hoof.
The name of the establishment painted, doorpanel,
was something like "Happy Ending Acres."
Do they pick up road-kill, I wondered, or make
the rounds of farms losing an animal, helping cart
them away? Once I thought I wanted to embrace
everything, could take it all in, reading, studying
the news, crime, the worst details, that mind
and heart could mesh what seemed, at first,
to be horror. Blinker clicked on, I went curving
out to pass the truck, refusing eye contact, then
blending back into traffic, turning the radio down,
a glance sideways, no more, at shorn desolate fields.

PATRICIA CLARK

WHERE RIVERS CROSS

Think leaf, maple of course—
or starfish clinging to the pier,
underwater, coral-red.

The hand goes on working
in light, darkness, chill—
yesterday swinging a hammer,
knocking in the post
to steady the young redbud.

At the park, the hand
double-gloved. Still,
it must flex to keep warm.

Asking questions of its
opposite—

Will you help add an equal force?

*Can you sub for me on day's
third shift so I can lie down?*

The left works on
bicep curls, kickbacks.

Four fingers and a thumb
linked by a fertile plain—

Look where the rivers cross—
Count which ones make it
to the sea.

Even the smallest
tributary leaves a mark
in skin.

The flexible hand
remembers each
object held—

feather, shell, the apple
warm from a lover's hand.

PATRICIA CLARK

PORTRAIT OF MY LOVER AS A WET LOG

The woods stand brown, slick,
and something from the sky
drips from their shoulders.

Do you fear, as I do, for the warming
earth, O sweet?

Beside me a half-tree,
pecker fretted with scabs of bark
hanging.

I can almost see my face
in your flank,
a shimmer of dream making me
pause, staring.

Let's meld if we can,
let's dance.

BRUCE BOND

THE ROOD

So when the cross begins to tell its story
to the dreamer, it starts with the tree
it was, the axe that broke its trunk in two,
how it yielded to death as each new
child yields to life. And the whole glade
felt a little of that birth, that blade,
the drops of sap against the crossbeam,
albeit rubied in wonder now, in dreams
gone deaf to the real cries in the room.
But a child is in there somewhere hidden
beneath sleep's images, inside the ear.
In the real wind now, come to listen
for a listener. Wake up, it says, I'm here.
And the live sound of leaves in the air.

BRUCE BOND

THE EARTH MOVERS

The child is the father of the man
who is, in turn, the master of the earth
mover, this god at war with its burden,
gorged and gorgeous. Consider the behemoth,
the Lord told Job, as if the master race
of monsters, earthly and divine, might be
enough, not to reason the cruelty of fate,
but to bury one man's cry in the beast
of another. Consider the bulldozer,
says the heart of the boy who longs to test
a patch of dirt, to strike indifferent nature
with his spade, consoled, empowered, helpless
to explain. Earth moves. It is no center
but falls in beauty through the still black air.

MARGARET CIPRIANO

CAUGHT

Start here: a basket of rusted bones
and the muddy riverbank I drop
them off. Say goodbye with a bullet, a kiss,
a Viking funeral. In my pocket, stone tongues
discuss my leaving, my gift to currents,
and I search for things in pairs. Reflection is like that.
The mockingbird overhead steals my voice—tells me, me,
We're all just looking for something to burn.
How hard to find a spark? Here: a match
to run down my body, a mouth full
of nickels. Don't scream yet, I tell myself.
Morning will taste like blood.
There will be feathers in my hands.

MARGARET CIPRIANO

GARDENING, THEN THIS:

Under dark dirt, the loam I separate and excavate,
I marvel at these small crawlers; their bones I can touch.
How different to live in inverse, underground and inside
out. Here, I probe for roots, fingers dumb-blind and reaching.
When we touch, I turn medieval, rip limb
from limb, toss into paper body bag.

In this garden, I choose what lives and dies.
It's so easy, I bend without hesitation—
I bend like rain, bend and infiltrate.

O, sunless, wild botany in black and white,
to be chosen like that, singled-out.
My brief power knows we, too, are removed—
are sick and special. I don't want to give myself up
quite yet. If I hold my hands together, let's not say prayer.
Let's say keeper of something dark gold and waiting.

ERIC TRAN

10 REBUTTALS TO A CLICKBAIT HEADLINE

*Australian Man Wakes From Coma Speaking Fluent
Mandarin Proving Again the Brain is a Wondrous Thing*
—IJReview.com

A stroke survivor makes his living touring schools with the story of his recovery. He told me he could only remember some words; for the rest he thought in rhymes: for *this* and *there*, he pictured *kiss* and *bear*, maybe *piss* and *hair*, *mist* and *snare*.

—

Sometimes the brain is the weakest link, the first chain to snap under duress. Insomnia, UTI, too few leafy greens can remove the names in your family, make you think the neighbor is being kidnapped, erase the ability to know if the cats around your feet are real or imagined.

—

My friend says that when on molly, whomever you're with becomes family. *But it's all real*, she insisted, *you're still close when you're sober again*. In high school, they told us MDMA burned holes in your brain, Swiss cheese in your skull. New studies show it still may cause neurodamage, but may also treat PTSD, may delete neurons but maybe the ones that hold onto violence, reflexes for balling your hands into fists.

—

I've stopped watching TV shows with violence, where characters are slammed against walls, knocked unconscious to remove them from fight scenes. I flinched each time, wondering how many concussions a person can get before they leave the scene permanently.

—

In sundowning, patients depend on the light to right themselves. They get confused by lengthening shadows, begin to shake and pace aimlessly, as if there wasn't enough light to remind them how to put one foot in front of the other.

—

Imagine finding your son awake from a coma, returned after months of silence. Would you cry that he talked again, or that you didn't know what he meant by *jia*, home, or *jia ting*, family?

—

Alien hand syndrome can occur after surgery to cure epilepsy. The hand can feel foreign, autonomous. It can be bratty and push away a chair you mean to pull close, or naughty and creep up your thigh while you sleep. Some patients give the hand a name and when it throws away their microwave burrito say, *Oh Henry doesn't like it when I don't eat well.*

—

A neuroprofessor once told me that time moves faster as you age because kids stuff boxes with toys spilling out the top and adults fold and tuck into suitcases. The brain improves with packaging, learns how to speed towards those last few days.

—

I spend a lot of time in my head thinking of synonyms, slant-definitions, things that slip around the edges. For *wondrous*, maybe miraculous like God, staggering like one drink too many. Precious like crystal glasses, sublime like looking from a mountaintop, unclear how deep the valley is below.

—

I once worked in a hospice where a husband moved in with his dying wife. He told me sometimes he stayed awake with his finger under her nose to know she was breathing. He was developing dementia himself, told me: *I just couldn't live without my wife, I mean son, no I mean my wife. My wife.*

J. ANDREW BRISEÑO

FOUR THINGS ABOUT MY FATHER'S FATHER

When my grandmother was pregnant her husband came home angry enough to hit her. She barricaded herself in her room with her wedding trunk. He shot through the door with a double barrel shotgun.

In second grade I was picked because of test scores for a free spot at the magnet school, which meant crossing the freeway to go to Morningside Elementary. Already then he had moved away, married another woman, but we went to visit him at summer, and my mother ushered me in front of this man I'd just met, had me tell him proudly where I'd be going to school. He said, "You can't go to school there, that's where all the black people are." Except he didn't say black people. I must have heard the word before because I knew what it meant. But I had never heard it *used* before, like how you might use a circular saw, for a purpose.

When his father was dying my father arranged to visit. Time had not been kind; he was blind, missing a foot, prone to seizures that would kill him any day. The day he was to leave, my father got a call. His father said that he had never told his newest wife about his first marriage. He wanted my father to tell anyone that asked that he was just an old friend—not even family.

I was named after him. I have filed his name off of mine like a serial number on a gun. I would do anything not to be him. I would shoot holes in anything or anyone that said otherwise. I would use whatever tool I had at hand to draw a line between him and me. I will tell you if you ask that he's not my family.

JILLIAN QUINN

POSTCARD ETIQUETTE (WHAT NOT TO TELL YOUR FRIENDS WHILE TRAVELING ABROAD)

You find out the hard way that there are things you can't tell your friends back home, while travelling abroad. Post pictures online, send postcards back home, but not your dissatisfactions, your twinging failures, the soreness in your spine that keeps you up at night in your hostel bunk bed. Friends will ask if you are having a good time, if you are grateful. You will say yes and fiercely mean it. But you're in a position of privilege, and you discover there are things no one wants you to admit, experiences they don't want to bear witness to – some unspoken, watery contract.

So do yourself a favor and don't tell your friends about how there are sounds your tongue can't take the shape of. You're 23 and in Sicily where your mother and her mother were born. Half of your blood might run from this country, but you quickly learn that you don't belong here. You clobber the language, and your skin is too white for a Sicilian's. Bronzed men missing teeth catcall, "*Bianca!*" when you walk down the road, your pale legs glinting like fish scales below your shorts.

Don't tell people that you are shit at taking things as they come, at gathering wildflowers nurturingly. You pluck them before they're ready, impatient to have the world figured out.

Don't mention that you fancy yourself a traveler, but you're starting to wonder if your identity is vain hope. You think of those people who say they can play the guitar when all they can do is pluck the riff to "Smoke on the Water" on the top E string.

Don't admit that, though you're in an endless, rapturous current of beauty and human history, you are scared. Some days you kind of just want to go back home where you know how the toilets work, and how your lover likes to be touched, and what time of year the sea turtles hatch out of their eggs on the beach near your house in Florida.

Don't tell your friends that you feel small in measure and in time. How many people walked this land before you? Beneath the place where you are staying in Sicily are the split stones of ancient cities, the split bones of kings. The world moved on and built an apartment complex on top of them. Even if you could tell your friends this, there isn't a word in English to describe the feeling. You wonder if there is a word for it in any language living or ancient. Maybe the dead people buried far below your bed knew the name of it, but not you.

Above all, do not tell your friends that in the pre-dawn sky, all

mauve and silver, there are silky, nebulous shapes that ripple in front of your bedroom window. There isn't an explanation for this, but you don't believe in ghosts. It must be some kind of trick of the light, however, you have to admit that it looks as if someone is waving to you, welcoming you to a world that no longer exists and isn't theirs to give.

You don't tell your friends this, but sometimes you wave back. Just in case.

CLARE PANICCIA

VESTIGE

—For B

The body splits, and I remember when
I was a child and there was no such thing
to stifle air, no singular blade to cut through
hide—Only an idea of ache far off
in a corner, a dark strand tucked between
flowerbeds or poured into the vase by
my grandfather's grave. In sleep
you turn, revealing the mark, the divot
on your back where they've lifted out
sourness, the golden fat, left the skin
to replenish and burn an impossible cell.
I came to face it first in your mother's eyes
when she saw the mottled dip, knew
she envisioned her son taut and stern,
a man not waiving to the arc of chance,
and now—My fingers trace over
the fold of it, feeling bombs beneath my
nail beds, the hot crater of life busy in
a hunger that descends down toward
your spine, the core of you. Were they
always there, those particles of carbon,
of blood, their membranes fiercely turning—
or, what they say: *metastasizing* as I gripped
your shoulders, sucked from you a ripe seed,
waiting. A vestige of error. I want
to stoop down to your mother's child
and smooth out the wrinkle on his scapula,
rend the root before it takes. Pattern
the stars in any other way if only to keep
his body's form as it grows into you, your
figure, the sharp edges of our circumstance
rushing fast ahead.

LENA KHALAF TUFFAHA

NAMLEEYA *

We name a place by what it keeps
out what it wards off,
name our sanctuary after what can consume it.
We live on the edge of a growing desert
and water with abiding faithfulness
the apricot trees, the midnight-skinned eggplants.

We take what is sour and let it smolder
in sugar in flames
to loosen the knot of sun and time
at its core,
to stave off a winter in jar after jar
of what light has made,
what our hands have gathered.

We hold the ravenous march at bay
in the shade of a quiet cabinet.

We remember that, even in its name,
stone harbors some
of the damp alphabet of ocean.

* –*Syrian Arabic word for pantry, derived from the word for ants.*

CHRISTINE HENNESSEY

ANIMAL CONTROL

I.

We didn't have forests or fields, so we played in the sump. It was Becca's idea to borrow a pair of pliers and cut the wires that circled the depression, peeling away steel to reveal a way in. In summer we jumped in puddles deposited by runoff, circles of liquid with a vague chemical scent. In winter we brought sleds, slipped down the edges and landed in the gray snow, where we licked its wetness from our thin gloves.

The sump had been ours for months before we found the first paw print. It was near the hole Becca had cut in the fence, the indentation large and clearly defined. We stood over it, staring, silent, at the four small holes that crowned it, a halo punctured by the creature's nails. They must have been sharp.

Dottie started to sweep the print away, dragging her tennis shoe over the animal's path, but Becca kicked her away, told her to leave it.

"It's important," she said, chewing on a strand of her greasy blonde hair.

"Why?" I asked.

She looked at me like I was stupid, so after that I didn't say anything.

II.

Each day we counted the paw prints, which were multiplying. They appeared each afternoon, always bigger than the day before, as if the animals—dogs, we decided, because there were no forests near us, no wild places at all—were growing. Becca named them. Geronimo was the largest, Alfred had the sharpest nails, and Winston was nervous. He took mincing steps along the edges while the others sauntered through the sump languidly, as if they owned it.

We made up stories about the dogs, pretended that we could turn ourselves into them. Becca was always Geronimo, mostly so she could to bat us around when we misbehaved. Once she bit Dottie's ear. It bled, and at first the bright red bloom shocked us, especially since everything else in the sump was gray and faded. Then we howled, Dottie loudest of all, and ran in circles until we were hot and sweaty. We striped off our sweaters, threw them in the shallow puddles of water, knew our parents would be angry and didn't care.

III.

The dogs were like so many other things we'd heard about but didn't believe in. College. Vegetables. Checking accounts. So on the day they finally appeared, shaggy and mottled, yellow eyes ablaze, we froze. Our mouth hung open and I was suddenly conscious of our teeth, useless flat nubs.

The dogs stood on the rim of the sump, gazing down at us. Geronimo snarled, as if we weren't worth the effort of an actual bark. Alfred's nails glistened in the sunlight, pinpricks of twitching silver.

Becca and Dottie began to cry, but my eyes were dry as I scanned the sump for the third dog, nervous Winston. And then I felt his snout pressing against my back, his paw on my leg. I remembered Dottie's ear, how red the blood had been. When I imagined this moment, I pictured myself running, scrabbling up the sides of the sump, reaching for something different, a future I'd never seen and couldn't describe.

But the walls were steep and my friends were crying and everything was already dirty and damp. Instead of running I turned around to face the dog. I opened my arms wide.

L.C. STAIR

UNFORTUNATE SIDE EFFECTS

2012:

Julia dated him for a few months. They were happy. She texted him the night before and he didn't respond. He had always responded. She was impatient to go to him but she had her toddler at home so she had to wait. She washed dishes, checked her phone, folded clothes, checked her phone, made lunch, checked her phone. Then, when she could leave her son with his father, she drove out of the driveway toward Mark's house. She called a friend on the way and admitted she was scared of what she would find there. She saw his truck parked in its usual place. She heard, from her car as she got out, his TV blaring. The dogs rushed her when she opened his front door. She put them in the kennel outside and went back inside and called his name, repeating it louder and louder.

Julia felt like she was going to throw-up. The 911-operator kept asking her to make sure he was not breathing, but she knew just by the color of him, he was definitely not. She stayed until the police came and answered their questions.

She had discovered the unfortunate side effect of military engagements, a successful veteran's suicide, and it is one of many unfortunate side effects of her life. The sight triggered in her a greater imbalance than she had had before. Finding him wasn't like seeing someone's dead grandmother lying on her back in a satin-lined casket on a planned afternoon. No, it was Mark sitting on his sofa where he had been watching TV, dead from a gunshot to his head.

1986:

In the early 80's, when the automobile seatbelt was still optional, my two sisters and I squeezed into Dad's small truck with one of us, usually Julia, on the floorboard at our mother's feet. The truck's paint was rich in the way the ever-expansive oceans are blue. In a span of ten years, she'd take us from North Dakota to New Jersey, meet up with us in Louisiana, and let me learn to drive her before she was sold to a hunter's ranch for twenty-five cents. She was born the same year as me and somewhere in the heart of Texas she's considered vintage by now.

In North Dakota, my father drove me through wheat-colored fields where the ground was recovering from the cold of winter. In the tape deck, Bob Seger sang about a rock. I felt as if I made my father's happiness.

"Why do people die?" I asked him.

“All things die.” He shifted the truck into a higher gear.

“Will you die?”

“Yes and so will you, one day.”

I became sad. I did not want to lose my father.

“You only die once,” he said.

Still, suffering scares me, even if it is only once.

The apartment was a stopover where our parents decided to divorce. She fought him with cruel words and we were the spectators. When she asked who would come live with her, we put our heads down and stood beside our father, like a chain of daisies.

“We’ll live in our own apartment and have so much fun decorating it.” None of us made a move to join her. “I’ll buy you whatever you want,” she said.

“Will you buy me a go-cart? A real one. The kind grown-ups drive.”

“Yes,” she smiled.

I walked over to her and stood at her side facing my sisters, feeling smart for managing such an agreement. She didn’t keep her promise; instead they made up that night as though dragging us though it was nothing.

I should make a North Dakota shadow box with rooms furnished by happy and strange objectified memories. There should be a lazy boy recliner, twin beds, insulation crammed between a window pane, shag carpet, a missing grape scented watch, a forbidden room, and bowl of split pea soup for my mother to pour onto my head.

We moved into a two-story house with a long kitchen where dad would cook southern meals and I would sneak bites of shredded coconut from the pantry above the basement stairs.

My father had Playboy. I walked five or six neighborhood boys into my parents’ bedroom with the assuredness of a seven-year-old genius. I said, “Look” and pointed to the pile of magazines. A busty woman in red on the topmost magazine’s cover photo smiled back. To my surprise, instead of praising me, they looked at me blankly and left.

As children with developing anxiety disorders, my parents did no favors when they decided to spring on us that we were moving. “Wake up,” said my mother, “We’re moving to New Jersey.” My sisters and I sat against the living room wall, watching movers through tired eyes.

The next morning, I wiped the sleep out of my eyes, looking out of the truck’s canopy windows. We rode through a gray-blue morning on Interstate 94 heading east. It took two nights and two days. My sisters and I took turns squeezing through the truck’s slider window from the camper into the cab of the pickup. I remember riding between our parents, enjoying the scenery.

1986 through 1989:

The loss of our North Dakota life settled in time. We lived in a townhouse for a good five years before moving into an actual house. It was on the right side

of a tick-filled road that dead-end off an interstate. In this house, we sang songs out loud, drew figures of women in gowns, wrote stories, learned to play guitar chords from our mother, made treasure maps, swam in a small above ground pool, and took gymnastics. Dad was happy too. He took up scuba diving, started woodworking in the garage, grew a veggie garden, and took us camping for a week at a time. Then, just when we had grown comfortable and at home in New Jersey, he began priming the doors of his truck. It was as if the truck's transformation marked our own. He never finished his plans to repaint her because we moved again, to Louisiana.

1996:

There is an unsettling in Louisiana. Its people, like the soil, can only hold so much water before becoming flooded. Even among everyday families that live there, few are knowledgeable about the soothsayer, referred to as seer (pronounced s□-□r). Julia's boyfriend's great uncle was a seer. The 80-year-old Cajun told fortunes with a worn deck of playing cards. He read her fortune. Spades, clovers, diamonds and hearts of red and black told her she was so evil in a past life that today she still pays the price. He said she might have been a powerful practitioner of the dark arts, Black Magic.

Julia grew to be the type of person who appears like she doesn't give a shit. And in some ways it's true, she doesn't give a shit that the weather is nice or that you're happy to see her. Julia will drown in her own want for love just to put you off with an invisible self-sacrifice. She cannot let you love her. She cannot risk the heartbreak.

Little does she know, she is amazing and that every part of her, sadness and caution signs included, make her a funny-as-shit satirist. My sister enjoys the irony and freedom of life, but at a safe distance from people. If she were Catholic in the 1500's, no doubt the Catholic Church would have canonized her, but she would have denied the attention only to continue to sulk in peace.

Today, she lives with our father and her youngest son in a 2500 square foot home with a Victorian turret and green-shingled roofing. Her job as a card dealer in a smoky and employee-abusive casino keeps her working until 3:00 a.m., after which she sometimes goes out with friends and drinks until noon.

Indeed, Julia's life is truculent. We lived in five states and twelve rentals by the time she was eleven. When the postage stamp was still 25 cents and a gallon of gas was under a dollar, our mother was fine-tuning her mental illnesses, which lead to Julia's running away when she was sixteen. She moved in with her first boyfriend who sold drugs, did drugs, and did my sister. She stopped asking our parents for things and they couldn't help her even if they tried.

I was gone the night the police came to our house, drinking every night I could (and most nights I did). I returned and learned that the police questioned her, taking down her statement. It went something like: she had

finished getting gas and a man got in the truck, pointed a gun at her and made her drive him around. Julia doesn't know this, but I found Dad's wallet a month later in the back of her 81 Honda Civic. She had reported it stolen and finding it caused me to wonder what really happened that night.

There was also this event: before there were pagers or wireless phones that fit in pockets, she made a call home for rescue by phone both. I answered.

"Can you pick me up?"

"Right now? I'm in the middle of watching a movie."

"Please, I need you."

"Where are you?"

"I'm at the Pit Grill."

I pulled under the bright lights of gas station fifteen minutes later. She opened the door and maneuvered onto the seat with care. She was injured. She began to cry and told me her boyfriend had slammed her head against the kitchen stove and kicked her in the stomach. The night was clear enough to see the Milky Way, but its beauty didn't mean much to the situation. She put her head against the door and said nothing more about her suffering for many years.

It didn't matter that she was a runaway or that she had been beaten. It didn't matter if she was carjacked. It didn't matter that I was drunk and depressed from having my heart broken. It didn't matter that my older sister was on her knees on pebbles praying to God begging to be martyred to save the family. It didn't matter that our father avoided home and relied upon drinking. None of our sufferings mattered when the tidal wave of our mother came back to drown us— but my mother is not the focus of this story.

2000:

After the carjacking and the beating, she became sober overnight by swearing off drugs. Her moving back home was a relief to us all and in time she fell in love with a better boy, one who made her laugh. Happiness overcame her and spilled out until there was nothing left. Depression led her to a poisoned watering hole and after drinking a taste of it there were only poisoned thoughts.

She was far superior in her commitment to self-inflicted chaos than I was. When she learned he cheated, again, her heart hurt like it was scorched from the inside out. This time, he was in love with the other woman and leaving her. After she successfully ate all the bottles of medicine in the house, she continued to argue with her husband. Shaking, nauseous, sweating her sadness, she refused to let him take her to the hospital. After all, it was death she wanted. He was able to carry her out of the house and drive her to the hospital after she had become too sick to fight him off.

The emergency room staff jammed a fat plastic tube down her throat and she cursed them all to hell, mumbling threats from her esophagus. They had to restrain her. A doctor took our parents aside and said she waited too

long to get treatment, “Your daughter’s liver might fail.” It was the first time Julia appealed to the hopeful possibility of nothingness and ate pills like an antidote.

Death, in the form of an overdose, almost shut down her organs, twice.

2013:

Julia said she was thinking of Mark’s death when she ate all her Klonopin*. The hospital monitored her and determined she was not a risk to herself. They sent her home. Klonopin can cause confusion, it lead to her accidentally taking them all. She doesn’t remember, but we do, when she returned home, she ate all the other pills in the house. She was readmitted to the hospital. This time the hospital sent her for treatment for three weeks.

When I rode along side my dad listening to Bob Seger, he said death only happens once but I think death can happen in small doses. Julia did not die, not in her physical form, but she has accumulated liver damage and other illnesses for having been close to death too many times in her life. As for her having had evilness in a past life, no, that’s not it.

My sisters and I share a mother who loved us equally as strong as she destroyed herself around us. Her genetics run through our bodies and we deal with the chemical imbalances imparted in us. My sister Julia lives in a neutral world, where powerful concepts of love and being somebody’s something special, are impossibilities that tend turn into catastrophic prophecies.

*“But when it comes to prescription drugs that are not only able to kill you but can drag out the final reckoning for years on end, with worsening misery at every step of the way, it is hard to top the benzodiazepines. And no ‘benzo’ has been more lethal to millions of Americans than a popular prescription drug called Klonopin.” CCHR International. CCHR International. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 July 2015

KEEGAN LESTER

brca1 is a human tumor suppressor gene

brca1 is a human tumor suppressor gene, which produces a protein called breast cancer type one. it once stood for berkeley, california where perhaps two lovers in stiff vanilla pressed lab coats, living months on chinese take-out and bad cafeteria food, went from lab to bedroom to lab until they discovered what this translated. one must have turned to the other like the driftwoodlapping against the shore forty miles away, needing something to land upon after having been lost at sea too long, and said: look at the variation, at the movement.

KEEGAN LESTER

to all of this which does not just seem

to all of this which does not just seem, but is extraordinary. to a time when extraordinary was a thief machine. to the thief machine & the small hands needed to operate that machine. to the hands of children that adults go to when they lose something. to the unbroken thinking of children. to the something foreign, the feral, to the different ways light breaks against the faces my mother catalogs: always growing, fig not far from the branch.

KEEGAN LESTER

to the tin band that read: keegan matthew lester

to the tin band that read: keegan matthew lester, 21841 seacrest lane, huntington beach california, eader elementary, the onewith a brontosaurus imprint on the top: to the man who told me to believe in what we could not see, and called it science,before telling us they were mistaken. to the letter i received from science a few years back: we here at science want toapologize. we had our own misgivings, but wanted to see how it would play out. we are sorry about your brontosaurus. therewere cartoons & movies & books, we were too late to call it off. museums were doing well. people could look at the scale ofour hyperbole for the first time & understand the way we love. we literally made a skeleton of hyperbole, to teach you todream again. museums kept their lights on, due to things we made up. we got adults to make up stories for children to explainthe feasibility of something so large & terrifying & confusing, that only ate plants, that only a comet could have killed,vegetarians loved us in the 90's. now we sell drugs & will be in business for a long time. would you like some drugs? also,pluto: not real. sorry about that too. we grew tired of discovering. we wanted to create things too, just this one time. wewanted to know what it would feel like to paint rooms for an afternoon. sorry. sincerely, science. to the prayer science and iwrote together: god rid me of god. god help me give up credibility today, so that i might be able to make somethingfor someone else.

DEVIN KELLY

SHENANDOAH

This evening I listen to Keith Jarrett
play *Shenandoah*, that faint recording
where, if you listen close, you can hear
the scrape of his fingers on the keys
& the silence between them
punctuated by the moan of a mouth
bent over the piano. I've come
to think of music not as sound
but as silence, the gap between
two notes & what can fill it. If you
listen to Jarrett, you can hear
the human hesitation about
what comes next. The idea
that beauty must follow beauty
& the fear that it won't. This is why
I avoid conflict. I'm so scared
of everything, &, as such, I
create it. I want the soft hush
of a resolution, that pregnant joy
that comes with just the right note
at just the right time. Those nights
where she would leave me in the bed
while she went to wash her face.
Think of that as silence. & then,
the coming back, her body
like the kind & gorgeous arc
of a bass clef, with the night humming
its low notes. Think of how beautiful
it is to be arrived at. Her hands
as long & lithe as a pianist, & my body
ridged with broken keys, her piano.

DEVIN KELLY

LULLABY

I assume all pain burns a hole
in the chest for us to use
as an ashtray. We never smoked
in bed, our bodies limp & raw
from too much fucking, or, simply,
too much. But I have two windows
right there, easily propped open,
& I know I'll quit eventually
but I can't quit you yet. Somewhere
a dog is lapping up a bowl of milk
that a man, stiff as a cactus,
laid out for her. He will go outside,
sleepless, & stare at the stars
& the dog will curl around his
socked feet until morning.
Placitas. Encino. A town where
people pray to life their own
mythologies. I know you can't sleep.
I know I can't sing much
of a lullaby. I can rhyme two soft
vowels until they form a cloud,
or wrap an arm around your breasts
like a towel. I can rise from bed
alone, open the fridge, drink milk
from the carton, put coffee on,
& wait, imagining what it must've
been like to be the first man
to draw a line between the stars.
Somewhere, there is a town
where the night shines so pallid
& full of light that your nipples
& your nose would cast a shadow
down, all the way, to your toes.

CADE LEEBRON

BARCELONA, 2008

We went to KFC because it was closer than BK
and it wasn't that we were lazy, it was that there were all
these demonstrators in our way, chanting *death to Israel*
and burning torahs. And it's not that I find that book especially
holy but Toby from Texas said *cover your hair*, my Jewish-
looking hair, so that I wouldn't be identified as one of those
people to bring death to. I got fries instead. We watched
the burning from the second story of the Kentucky Fried
Chicken off Placa Catalunya and I thought first that this wasn't
what I had expected of Europe, free world, old world.
But it was exactly what I knew then, at 16, to expect of Europe,
death for girls with dark curly hair, burnt hair, that gas chamber
kind of hair. There's a market for Holocaust
fiction and it might all be Jewish pre-teens in America.
There's a market for white meat, for buckets and buckets
of muscle but I'm more interested in what is left
behind, the fat that must coat the floors of those chicken
places, those little slaughter houses that I've never
hair-netted myself into.

CASEY PATRICK

THEORY: INTENTIONAL WATER LANDING

Who hasn't stood atop a mountain or skyscraper,
or paused trimming meat in the kitchen
and thought, *I could*. A move so small
it's nearly accidental.

After days of nothing
but blue it all starts to blur. So many are expecting me
to fail, it would almost be a shame
to fail them. The night a black loop,
so dark I can't see my hands. My navigator
snores beside me, smoke signals
of breath small reminders: *I exist*.

Here's how it'll go when we land:
my name in the headlines for days, in a record book
no one will open. The stars and their useless shine.
But my want is untamable. (*I exist*.) I've been a silhouette, then a mirage.
I could do it. Slip into the vanishing
like the moon disappearing into day.

CASEY PATRICK

THREE ATTEMPTS AT TRANSLATION

Je est un autre. —Arthur Rimbaud

I. I is someone else

In the alley, unbuttoning your shirt.
Tending rugburned knees the next morning. Alive
in the wild body of summer,
burning. At Hawk's Tattoos, watching my face in the mirror
as the needle sings on my ribs
and my body is a music I nearly recognize.

II. I is another

In the car when you held my hand
as we sat by the depot
among the detached trains
I listened hard enough
I heard you blink
like some kind of pulse.

III. I is an other

You asked me to show you the city.
I showed you my hands, a better map.
At the river, you watched the water move
and I watched myself want.

ROBERT CAMPBELL

DISAPPEARING ACT

What sort of beast
will I make of myself?

On the rack: sea monsters,
wizards, glow-in-the-dark

bones, roman armor. Life,
friends, is unfair. The party

supply store is closing
now. Bottles of champagne

pose like onyx busts.
Bags of tinsel just

hang there. I want to pick
the cloak purple as scorn,

the hook-shaped hat.
Instead, I snatch

the googly-eyed black
glasses, thumbing quarters

in my pocket. If history
is the victor's footprint,

the rest becomes
a pantomime, a drawn-out

disappearing act. *Abra-*
cadabra, I'll say, then pull

white flowers from
my throat for a stranger,

for the elderly man
at the counter, held

too many times
at gunpoint. *Alakazam*,

I'll exclaim, then vanish
into blue smoke.

ROBERT CAMPBELL

DAVY JONES, AGE 29, DISCOVERS THE JOYS OF
DEMONING

The office reeks of tuna: someone's awful lunch haunting the maze of cubicles, the mauve dividers. Davy opens the window, half-remembers a line by Thomas Hardy: *What does this vain-gloriousness down here?* He mouths the word vaingloriousness. He imagines his co-workers typing at the bottom of the ocean floor, his tie-choked boss drifting gracefully among the moon-eyed fishes, heels dragging sand like smoke, undisturbed even by eels that shiver across his vested shoulder. Davy is smiling big. His chest feels wide as a ravine accepting all travelers upon the gray-waved, lolling deep of plastic push-pins, linoleum halls, muzak. His socks feel wet. Something wired in the back of his head squeals joy. *Vaingloriousnesssss*, he croaks, now audibly; *What doesss thisss vaingloriousnessss down here?* He does not know if he's awake or dreaming, if the old receptionist has become a mermaid singing opera over intercom, or if he really is clutching the boss's tie, lifting him off the floor by his hair with the other hand, Davy's rancid death-maw widening with green heat, teeth inching closer to his throat, pouring black perfume.

EMILY BLAIR

BALLAD

Your love's got me looking so crazy right now, from the right, from the left and in close-up. If you only knew all the things that flow through my mind while I'm dancing in a desolate industrial district with only a flaming car for warmth. Turn around! I'm trashing your bathroom, I'm startling a dove, I'm smiling at your image projected on a curtain. Near far wherever you are, I'm part of you indefinitely, flying over tall buildings in a helicopter. Cause I am your lady and you are no one, no one, no one can get in the way of uh oh, uh oh, uh oh. I'm in love, sweet love, surrounded by a thousand tea-lights. I'm on a balcony in summer air; I'm fallin' in and out of a convertible from some leftover teenage dream. I've got no shame instead I've got a model of the city and I'm burning it up, baby. There's a ninja breaking crockery in my heart. Now I get, I get what I want — every now and then I get a little bit I-I-I-I — how do I get you alone? I had a vision of love and it was wearing a crown and dancing in circles under the stars, it was holding up traffic in both directions, it was leaning against a glass-block wall — And I can't stop thinking about — do you believe in life after love? If so, how do I, how do I, how do I live?

EMILY BLAIR

THE ONE

In the midst of a dystopia, we shared a cigarette. You revealed your supernatural abilities: to send anything aloft using a rubber band, to ignore pop songs and unpleasant people, to make a masterpiece from a pile of parts. Also, your face. We set out on a long, long road trip through a devastated American landscape full of car troubles, android doubles, roommates, red states, slumlords, scare chords, flooded basements, cracked pavements, lattices of laser beams on every side, and explosions unfolding in slow motion like flowers. Now you hide your x-ray vision with eyeglasses and tons of stuff I thought had been thrown away in the hallway closet. Do you like my cyborg arm? I use it to slam doors. You simply dematerialize when you disagree. And so it took me almost twenty years to realize that you don't enjoy the countryside. Sorry for all the camping trips. You like to make a fire, even in the woods. And it's wonderful how you can move furniture with your mind—you've transformed our abandoned subway tunnel into a cloud palace, but this lamp should go right back on the street. You can illuminate this place with your hands, you pyro, the same way you light up my life.

PAULA MENDOZA

DEVIL'S NIGHT

I called my heart a catapult, you named yours AK. Mine, medieval. Yours, borrowed. Together against walls shell-pocked and all the glass broke to brighten an afternoon inside a palm's hour. We lived in its clutch. I like how it zags like lightning, you said, and raised an arm to slice the air, making machete clearing-brush noises nothing like weather. Was it Zeus or Thor, I ask, and you said both, and I think that myth is anyone dead. We picked the larger pieces off the floor, sent bolt after bolt hurtling into the street. All the windows are mouths big and toothless. I lay on pieces ground down, more or less harmless, more or less powder. I would wake to some blue shone ragged through. And it almost meant morning if I had a day. We sleep anywhere they aren't. We know that isn't bird call that trills into the freeze. After the storm, we held between us my red scarf. Like the mother's cord you said, you are my brother I said, you are my brother you said. My teeth clamped on its knit and I hissed, this is my tongue and your tongue too. So you tugged at the red word and drew my dragon's tongue toward you. Reeled me in, fist over fist. I am your brother. You are my brother. This is my tongue. And yours. And we roared all the fire left us.

PAULA MENDOZA

ILLUSIONIST

my face folds into blurs
in the mirror, formless,
then reforming.
Paula's anatomy
Dalís a melt, body of
I's divested of I.
Vertical puddle, or
the conjurer's
cloak, crease of collarbone
and drape
of shoulders, arms
furl, and I
languid in the glass
desire
a hand
with long, thin fingers
to gather the nape
of my neck
desire
a dark, low voice
to blot a bruise inward
at the bore of my spine
the marrow aperture
resolving
his
exclamation of
ta da! and in
a single flourish
for his hand
to throw off
the skin of me
and there she'd be—
the woman—
 sawed in half
 made whole.

PAULA MENDOZA

I DELETED ALL YOUR EMAILS

For the phrases my arms and thighs
at slender intervals contrived
to ignite, I am indebted to cinder

the light it was.
Poring over a hybrid erotics
in bed, misprisioned cognition—

contagion. A marvel,
the myriad ways some wraiths
secrete their reedy news.

Oracular the voice you can't
put a face to, severed
by subway doors slid shut.

I swear, there was a man there
but turning my head
only caught scent of ocean

and mangoes. It's not an apparition
if it doesn't appear. I am not
sorry, in any case, neither jeweled

nor glass. The panic to pin me
must have been of being
shorn. Sweet as any giving in.

I mourned you voluptuously.
Scraped to shadows, now.
Here—

where no one darkened.
Here, where no one lit.

JIM REDMOND

FOR ALL THOSE I HAVE LOVED

sometimes my night sweats
deliver me

little flowers of salt pressed into the skin's
verbatim appeal, but never back under

the body, a slow bloom, the brain is a lotus eater
and you are always too far, two or three beds over
in the infirmary

or the hotel room's hasty ensemble
the half-way house
of my memory

a lease your name
has never touched

I can only remember
so little

from then

because of
the drinking
bad genes
bright fear of mine eyes

everything blurred back
into your face
which blurs last

I can only remember you as you were
all winter
without a coat

in a city where the water had gone to rot
where the public transit traveled the same imperfect circle
where the average police response time was 1 hour and 35 minutes

where we sat together beneath the body's infinite regress
across Diego Rivera's industrial star chart
in a museum that would be stripped piecemeal by private collectors
to cover the people's debt
when we were both
still children
in that way that says
we don't have to say it just yet do we
you without a jacket
trudging through the snow
to the Amtrak
and me now
looking through the closet
without the one I finally lent you
and always
the time you taught me to hold
the same difficult chords on the autoharp and strum slowly
and to not stop no matter the hurt
to L Cohen's "Famous Blue Raincoat"
again and again as a way of remembering
before you left us once more unannounced
on a night like tonight
with all of these calluses still humming

JIM REDMOND

THE BLANK SLATE

The lives of amanuenses:
huddle of blanks above history;
the soft hands of the non-voting public
waiting for someone else to give say.
What do you dream of
when all day *And God*
said to me is whispered into
your handwriting? Does a different
darkling undo that ex nihilo?
Can you only unleavened
make haste of your mind
under cover of night?
And awake to the words like a wash
bowl where one does not see
their own reflection, but what
shall become each morning.
To know your name
is a name that will not
be remembered in the book of life,
but where you wrote
I Am that I Am will forever take fire.

JIM REDMOND

FINAL PRESENTATION

What is the meaning of life, or death for that matter, while I still have you here, 45 more minutes left of class, and already the silence creeping in. And I wonder, is it really just one, or are each of your own silences a unique pinprick, a number on the diabetic test strip, showing the blood sugar of this great “American” condition? As Michael Foucoo might say, I’ve watched *Forest Gump* three or four times now, but it only makes sense of its own time if *you* see it on VHS [my emphasis]. I guess I have an old way of seeing, shot through with Red Bulls and Mario Kart, that this department continues to deem unsatisfactory, but when the professor explained the emotional limits of kitsch, how it created a new kind of silence in art, and which way could we possibly go from here, I thought, perhaps the indigenous peoples of Halmahera (where approximately half of the population is now Muslim and half Christian) we briefly mentioned three months ago could teach us something more true about this impasse. Perhaps we should be thinking in terms of the Wikipedia page for dialectical materialism. Perhaps the difference between ritual and politics at these or any other fine Subway locations will help us refine our thesis statement, now that I’m noticing, in a completely new way, the Black Forest Ham I’m about to take another bite out of. But before I begin, I would first like to tell you about my scholarly method, which I’ve taken mostly from my third-grade teacher telling us to free write about corn for hours every day, her eyes all homogenized like a warm glass of milk, as she led the grand march across the school year, slowly filling up a large map of Michigan with the paint of our tiny handprints, where instead of The Pledge of Allegiance, a moment of silence was to be given each time we were told to look upon our own works, which mostly meant a new and terrible kind of self-awareness, the critical mass of 27 eight-year-olds’ internal monologues leaking into one another. Should we not give that same knowing look here, along with whatever that vaguely Nazi sounding guy’s name was from somewhere deep in the dregs of our course pack, knowing too that there is

nothing outside the text? Should we not “dash,”
as one of the core objectives on the first page of the syllabi
indicates, “a few Lacanian mirrors against such rocks,
braid a Plato’s beard or two to Thelonious Monk, sneak a little
Caesar into our word salads,” with those same small,
unwashed hands we started out with? Sure, such an approach
could be said to lack any number of things, to include
etc, etc, as well, but at least I have some handouts
of the first giant panda to give a live captivity birth in over 20 years
that you can look at before I move on to the second slide
of my PowerPoint on this very important topic.

CONTRIBUTORS

Emily Blair's work has appeared in *Sixth Finch*, *Amethyst Arsenic*, *Blue Lyra*, *Stolen Island*, *WSQ*, *Cura Magazine* and the *Mississippi Review*. In 2014, she received a New York Foundation of the Arts Fellowship in Poetry.

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