

# THE BOILER



WINTER 2015

# THE BOILER

WINTER 2015

THE BOILER JOURNAL is a literary journal that publishes four times a year online at [www.theboilerjournal.com](http://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.

**Cover Image:** Three male Tule Elks standing in heavy fog at Point Reyes National Seashore, California, USA by Wing-Chi Poon

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

Distribution. Online

Copyright © 2015 THE BOILER JOURNAL

All rights revert back to authors. No part of this journal may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the authors, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

For inquiries email [theboilerjournal@gmail.com](mailto:theboilerjournal@gmail.com)

# THE BOILER

WINTER 2015

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
SEBASTIAN H PARAMO

POETRY EDITOR  
SARAH LEVINE

ASSOCIATE POETRY EDITOR  
SHANNON ELIZABETH HARDWICK

POETRY READERS  
ALEX GREENBERG, ELIZABETH MUSCARI

FICTION EDITOR  
JOSEPH PFISTER

ASSOCIATE FICTION EDITOR  
SARA C. THOMASON

FICTION READERS  
BRYN AGNEW, LEIGH TIEGER

NONFICTION EDITOR  
M.E. GRIFFITH

ASSOCIATE NONFICTION EDITOR  
CARLY SUSSER

BLOG EDITOR & BOOK REVIEWER JANA E GREEN

# CONTENTS

KIMBERLY LAMBRIGHT.....	8
IN THE FIELD OF LEMON AFTERGLOW.....	8
KIMBERLY LAMBRIGHT.....	9
I MADE UP MY MIND.....	9
MELISSA CROWE.....	10
FORGIFTET GARDEN.....	10
MELISSA CROWE.....	12
STILL LIFE WITH GEESE AND OXYCONTIN.....	12
LAURA CRESTE.....	13
EXCERPT FROM THE BODY POEMS, A NOVEL IN VERSE.....	13
M.J. ARLETT.....	18
OCTOBER.....	18
M.J. ARLETT.....	19
SITTING WITH MY GRANDMOTHER IN KINGSTON, EAST SUSSEX.....	19
ALEXANDRA VAN DE KAMP.....	20
NIGHTGOWN.....	20
ALEXANDRA VAN DE KAMP.....	21
TODAY I AM NOT.....	21
MARK L. KEATS.....	23
MALE ADVICE.....	23
BLAKE KIMZEY.....	24
THE QUIET.....	24
EMILY PAIGE WILSON.....	29
THE FORTUNE TELLER PREDICTS A JOURNEY.....	29
EMILY PAIGE WILSON.....	30
POSTCARD AN ALMOST LOVER NEVER SENDS TO ME.....	30
JEFF HANDY.....	31
CARTOGRAPHY OF WHAT ISN'T YOURS.....	31
JEFF HANDY.....	32
REASONS FOR MOSS, OR: REASONS FOR BELIEF.....	32
SHARLA YATES.....	33
COMPOSED.....	33

JASMINE NIKKI PAREDES.....	37
I will lose him during the apocalypse.....	37
JASMINE NIKKI PAREDES.....	38
FEAST.....	38
DANIELLE SUSI.....	39
Black fossil in a slab of shale.....	39
LUISA A. IGLORIA.....	40
SALT CRAVING.....	40
LUISA A. IGLORIA.....	41
CASIDA OF THE SNOW.....	41
SARA RYAN.....	42
FAVOR.....	42
SARA RYAN.....	43
MAKING A MEAL.....	43
NAIMA WOODS.....	44
EULOGY COVENANTS.....	44
NAIMA WOODS.....	45
BURNING AT GOD.....	45
NADRA MABROUK.....	46
CLOVEN.....	46
NADRA MABROUK.....	48
FLIGHT 425 TO FT. LAUDERDALE.....	48
JOHN ALLEN TAYLOR.....	49
SALUTATION.....	49
JOHN ALLEN TAYLOR.....	50
BURY.....	50
RUTH FOLEY.....	51
ROUNDS.....	51
RUTH FOLEY.....	53
VOLUNTARY.....	53
ANTONINA PALISANO.....	54
THE WINTER.....	54
ANNA LAIRD BARTO.....	55
THE WHOLE FOODS EFFECT.....	55
DYLAN WEIR.....	62

VILLANELLE FOR THE VICIOUS ADDICTED.....	62
DYLAN WEIR.....	63
LIVING WITH THE DEAD.....	63
TIMOTHY GOMEZ.....	64
A LIST OF THINGS THINGS I'VE WATCHED DIE.....	64
SEAN THOMAS DOUGHERTY.....	68
DAY SHIFTS.....	68
AMY MARENGO.....	69
BODY→ATRIUM→VENTRICLE→GILLS→BODY.....	69
AMY MARENGO.....	70
the cloudbank.....	70
RYAN BENDER-MURPHY.....	71
PORT ARANSAS.....	71
RYAN BENDER-MURPHY.....	72
JUST GET BY.....	72
RYAN BENDER-MURPHY.....	73
ON THE FRITZ.....	73
STACEY KAHN.....	74
SLIVER.....	74
JENNIFER RENEE BLEVINS.....	78
EQUILIBRIUM, OR.....	78
MY MOTHER WOULD HAVE FELT THE SAME WAY.....	78
CONTRIBUTORS.....	80

KIMBERLY LAMBRIGHT

IN THE FIELD OF LEMON AFTERGLOW

Your worry canoe slows to anatomy,  
a floral lime paper against  
the breakfast table. I'm here  
to tell you even honor fades  
in the outback, the glim-glum,  
and that you will make it. All the myth,  
the decoration, the raft of your pearl,  
it will bog as you remain  
in the heavy sky and the bronze ring.  
Your tonality lit with incubation.  
I hallucinate your rib-temper, I unfurl  
the ark of your blueberry forest fever dream.



KIMBERLY LAMBRIGHT

I MADE UP MY MIND

In the Alaska aftermath the eyelid mountain  
crests, bests

toward the ultra-cabin. I cure  
the supermarket and  
there is always a girl being injured perfectly,

her eyes are wolf eyes,  
they will pin you down,  
make you over.

MELISSA CROWE

*FORGIFTET GARDEN*

That long, ugly winter over, I still can't  
put aside the death of the young giraffe  
at Copenhagen, shot by keepers  
while he lipped chunks of rye bread

in the zoo. And I'm sad because  
you're always lying—today you call to say  
you're mad with pain from kidney stones  
the size of walnuts and since you can't have

painkillers, you've asked the doctor again  
for the methadone our father has begged  
she not prescribe. I cry for the stones,  
which don't exist and which you say

may take months to pass and for your  
mutilating need, which does and will never.  
I can't walk the prettiest road  
in our neighborhood this spring—the one

with flowering trees that rain pink  
blossoms that brown almost before  
they hit the ground and fill the air  
with a scent like dying jasmine

and star fruit—because a rabbit lies  
melting into a tuft of grass in front  
of one house unrented since March.  
Did you know after they culled

that healthy calf, wrong  
for the breeding scheme, they fed  
his body to lions while a crowd watched  
from behind a fence? I can't look too long

at little boys at the grocery store, the park,  
with freckled cheeks like yours and curly  
hair so thick and cut so short it looks like fur.  
Did you know the Danish word for poison

is *gift*? You tried heroine at fourteen.  
What did you want? You nuzzled from some  
sweet hand while another you couldn't detect  
reached around to seize your slender neck.

MELISSA CROWE

STILL LIFE WITH GEESE AND OXYCONTIN

Brother, we heard your hunger cries; we rose  
to bring your milk. Now you eat pills  
and sleep with skinny women, blue ghosts

of other men's names inked on their breastbones.  
We kindled to sounds of your keening will.  
Brother, we heard your hunger cries and rose.

Dad told us years ago the bird let loose  
at the back of that deep V is feeble,  
that he'll wing toward a flock of ghosts

till sister, mother, father from him go  
and, like breath, his own unsung will  
evaporates. Brother, you cried. We rose,

and rise, at least as far as wishing goes  
(although you strut and stagger, steal  
and stick around). So like our own your ghosts,

your hollow honking song. We can't let go.  
Neither can we stay, hover still,  
abide your hungry cries. And if we rose  
to ours, what then of you, oh brother, ghost?

LAURA CRESTE

EXCERPT FROM *THE BODY POEMS*, A NOVEL IN VERSE.

The main character Lila is the middle child, with two sisters, Allison and Nina.

*I'm so afraid of ruining my life without knowing it*  
Allison says one day on the olive couch, sun-damaged  
and damp from bathing suit bottoms.

*Then don't have children*, our mother says easily.  
She's not precious about grandchildren.

Her girls are now 21, 24, 26.  
If any of us were pregnant  
it would be as ludicrous as getting knocked up at sixteen.

My mother filed my FAFSA for graduate school.

Psychologists call this extended adolescence.

\*

I dreamed that Allison died.  
Then Allison's dog got rabies.  
I was crying and kissing his dream face  
unafraid of being bitten and  
under this pure rage that my sister was dead.

I woke up drenched.  
Night sweats: even wet at the scalp.

Allison was alive in Park Slope  
and that dog –  
it didn't even exist yet.

\*

*Should I consider him dead to me?*

I asked. There was a new man wrecking my peace

while we ate pepper steak with too soft rice.

*They made a movie about this, the mother said.*

*It's called He's Just Not That Into You.*

*It's also called He's Kind of a Freak.*

The second movie doesn't exist but she was trying to be funny.

Then he contacted me, something stupid  
and chatty about the cold weather. It was January.

*Now what?* I implored them.

Nina said *Don't*.

\*

I met a psychiatrist who noted  
my symptoms and appetites,  
prescribed the necessary pills.

She had a dog in her office,  
a small curly one, entirely without charm,  
and encouraged her patients to hold it  
while they shared their feelings.

I said *no thank you* and  
made myself look like a sociopath.  
If you don't like animals  
no one will ever trust you.

*Have you ever been suicidal?*

*No.*

*Never ever?*

Wrong question.

\*

I like to sleep with a knife  
in my bedside table, in case of intruders.

Like I could wield it effectively if need be,  
though I can't cut up a raw chicken.

My mother finds the knife and takes it away.

\*

In the last years of his life, my grandfather was paranoid.  
Maybe too much Prozac, maybe not enough.

He hid the block of knives every night,  
afraid of burglars turning his own knives against him.

It's less crazy than it sounds.

Our grandmother had to search for the bread knife  
to cut her Italian bread each morning.

\*

*If I were going to kill myself I tell my therapist  
I wouldn't floss my teeth every day.*

\*

I make the outrageous claim that I would have been a doctor  
back in the day, meaning before modern medicine.

Because of my willingness to look at anything.  
Allison's boyfriend has a blackened toenail,  
loose like a tooth, that I offer to excise.  
He pours more rosé and says maybe.

The next day at the beach  
the nail is sloughed off in the sand.

Allison comes back from walking the dog  
and her boyfriend has his hands shut together.  
*Al I have something for you.*

*Is it an engagement ring?* She says wryly,  
knowing it might be true.

When she sees the inky-violet chip  
she thinks it's a seashell

leans in closer  
her face awash in understanding, revulsion.

She can't handle feet.

\*

When running into an ex  
it's always easier to hug, than make the decision not to.

I think of how we're all on top of a graveyard  
in Washington Square Park. 20,000 bodies below  
and above that his girlfriend  
saying she needs to buy more underwear.  
My friend Eddie lowering his shorts to remind me  
of his Hans Christian Andersen mermaid tattoo.

I finally hear *I don't want to keep you*  
as the cruelest way to say goodbye.

\*

It's astonishing that the sun so far away still hurts my eye,  
makes the green world turn, makes freckles bloom.

I try to catch it, really see the sun vanish  
without looking away.

Spots in my vision from the pinkest glare  
and green sea glass glows over the ground.

I knew a man who died of skin cancer.  
He had a collection of rocks that looked like potatoes.

He was a poet holding idea and image in his hand.  
The joy of saying *this* is like *that*.

\*

As girls we made full body prints in the outdoor shower.  
Wet skin to the wooden slats charted height and size.

It hurt that I was not the thin sister  
but there was moss under foot  
on the red tile stone, and soap suds  
making a moat around the tiger lilies



on the other side of the wall.

There was grit of sand in the soap dish  
and above that the blue summer sky  
which would not darken for some time.

M.J. ARLETT

## OCTOBER

You don't know the names I have been  
calling you while you sleep.  
Nestled golden curled into yourself –

a fist tensed through the night.

I will keep you here and make you listen  
to what the morning sings.

The shudder of a swallow's call,  
throat frosted as the grass.

Creak of the house.

Sunrise, a yawn made of light.

M.J. ARLETT

SITTING WITH MY GRANDMOTHER IN KINGSTON, EAST SUSSEX

In the field next door, the lambs are bleating.  
The sound carries into the garden  
where my grandfather is pruning the hedges  
while my uncle steadies the ladder and winces,  
watching his father clip away a little too wildly,  
branches falling in a flurry  
of evergreen snow.  
The roses my sister helped plant  
are blooming, pink as her cheeks  
when she runs towards us screaming  
as the men chase her with the shears.  
My grandmother's liver spotted hands  
cradle mine under the wooden balcony  
while I toy with the rings on her finger.  
She asks which I would like to try,  
puts the chosen finger in her mouth,  
sucks at the skin, and eventually  
eases the jewelled band  
over the arthritic mounds on her knuckles.  
Together we slip the iridescent opals  
from her hand onto mine.

ALEXANDRA VAN DE KAMP

## NIGHTGOWN

Each night I sleep wrapped in a gown  
of crying stars. Whether they cry  
to plea or sing is always difficult  
and tenuous to decipher. In my gown  
of voices, I pitch and roll as if on a ship  
at sea. I dream of sisters and brothers;  
I dream of stroking my husband's penis,  
bright and flushed as an orchid, until  
we are interrupted by the blond shores  
of windows and the plaintive smell of cut hay,  
its disheveled sweetness. The world's a gallery  
hung with the obsessive knowledge of light,  
light that could be memorizing, as we speak,  
one claw foot of the world's daintiest  
bathtub. I don't ever want to say *until* again—  
it carries too much waiting inside; it is a parade  
of soft pelicans procrastinating. In the day,  
I pluck music from other poets' poems,  
and it falls like tender, snow-covered  
fruit into my hands. There is no greater joy.  
I want a nightgown woven from the wings  
of hummingbirds. Or do I mean from  
the birds of humming wings? Or is my nightgown  
just a linguistic invention—a cage of syllables  
cascading all about me, a rain of *hums*  
I wrap around me hungrily?

ALEXANDRA VAN DE KAMP

TODAY I AM NOT

a 23-year-old woman  
holding a lime-colored,

perspiring cocktail  
in a nightclub with black

octagonal mirrors.  
I'm not the word asleep

in my husband's mouth  
as a dark bird lifts

packages of bright  
wind on its somber,

steadfast back. I'm not  
myself at 20—a tilted,

unblinking match  
flaring down the black

of a British night,  
confident I will spot

the hostel up ahead.  
I am not a shoe, a *shush*

or a *shut-up*. Meanwhile, the rose  
pirouettes and scuttles

on its stem—a pink crab with soft,  
flirting claws and vivacious

thoughts. Today, edges scold  
and blur, so I lean

into charcoal algorithms  
and bleeding clouds. I'm not decisive,

not a precise record-keeper  
of animal or plant life. Saxophones

hum and sweat  
among the clairvoyant

petunias and lavender  
phlox. I am not

a fox—all sleek, nocturnal  
journal-keeping and inky

footprints in the purple  
grass. What a gas it is

to be an extra in a film—to populate  
rainy cities and street corners

with your pale arms and  
blurry sins! I am not

my whims, my short-winded  
whistle, my steamer trunk

of sequined fears. I am not  
an aptly-peeled pear.

MARK L. KEATS

## MALE ADVICE

When my fiancée broke it off, I took it in stride. I thought it would be different after the breakup—I thought that moving back home across the country would help. “A change of scenery,” my mother said. A year later I saw online that she had gotten married to someone I knew casually in high school. She looked happy, so I was happy. Well, not really. But, I’d been prepared for this very moment my entire life. When I was very young, my father used to say these kinds of situations were God’s way of making life interesting, a test of sorts. When I’d asked him how he’d fared so far, he’d said, without hesitation, as if he’d been waiting his whole life for someone to ask, “Straight Cs.” My father had also said that tension was a good thing—that that’s what one of those Greek guys had said a long time ago. “And who’s to argue with the Greeks?” he said. “It’s sometimes good to be itchy,” he continued one afternoon, having spent more time drinking than actually building the promised tree house. I remember that clearly because when he went out to get more wood, he never returned. My mother hadn’t been worried, though. “He’ll be back,” she said a day later. “He used to do this all the time when we first dated. But I stayed the course. You know,” she said. “That was my father’s motto. Stay the course.”

BLAKE KIMZEY

## THE QUIET

But above all else, even as dark film from an oil spill worked its way toward the rocky shoreline, it was quiet here.

\*

The girl and her father lived in a one-room wooden cabin. The roof was thatched with a tin-capped chimney overlooking Winter Trail Road. Today there was a thin tail of smoke coming from the chimney. Steam worked its way up the flue from boiling crab in a cast iron pot. It was breakfast time. A half-mile down the mountain Winter Trail Road was a pockmarked stretch of overgrown concrete and exposed rebar that hadn't seen a vehicle, government issued or otherwise, since the early 1980s. On paper there was a lingering joint agreement between the United States and Russia to build a bridge or tunnel across the Bering Strait. There were only rare sightings of government officials that helicoptered into the region, armed with surveyors and engineers who mapped and measured the coastline and then left only to be heard from again in half a decade. At least it was a predictable intrusion.

In their little cabin the girl and her father were able to forget the world for long stretches of time. They occasionally switched on a small battery powered radio and caught a BBC signal that reported news from the outside world. The news was most always bad and mercifully seemed a million miles away. Though today, on this early March morning, cold and blustery, that would change. There would be no need to check the radio. The news would break in front of them.

\*

To witness them here the girl and her father seemed like extraterrestrials living at the far ends of the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve in northern Alaska. The father was very much a pioneer, an explorer, and his girl his shadow. They were sandy-haired and brown-eyed, and the father was built thick and sturdy like a logger from Michigan. Though the daughter was lithe, they were so clearly father and daughter.

In the 1990s the father had come to work the southern oil pipeline and had deserted his contract a month and a half in. A survivalist and an Army veteran from the oil patch in west Texas, he packed a bag of gear and wound his way along a stream that forked westward through dense tree cover until he settled near Ikpek Lagoon, where the land he broke had been hard won. Supplies came slowly over the years, but he had built a home. He had started a family. And there had been heartache. The father liked to tell his girl



that the world would never know that they were born, lived, and died. Only after they turned to dust would the fossil record betray their existence.

And yet this part of the world held its own mysterious majesty. The girl and her father were happy to have it. All around them were towering Sitka and White spruce, their beautiful dark blue-green needles carpeting the forest floor. The girl and her father used the needles as toothpicks and chewed them so that the thick, sticky saliva could rinse the mouth. Orange-brown spruce cones with papery scales ornamented the hard-packed ground and bright green moss poked through the snow in winter. The girl and her father had worked dirt paths that criss-crossed the forest, of which a hiker might mistake for simple deer trails. When the girl was born 13 years ago her father had already been living at Ikpek Lagoon for a decade. Within the borders of the forest they were everyone.

\*

Ten miles north of Winter Trail Road was a village named *Kongiganak* full of Yupik people, who still lived according to tribal custom, fishing for Pacific salmon and seal. The Eskimo men lived in communal houses known as *gasgiqs* and the women lived in *enas* and they mostly kept to themselves. Even still they were protective of their territory, and so the girl and her father kept to themselves. All the father knew of the tribe was that their children were named after the last person in the community to have died, so that there was an endless circle of names that had never been broken.

Years ago the father had married a Yupik woman against the wishes of her tribe. She had died in childbirth, passing her name to the infant girl. That the girl survived was a small miracle, her little body purpled and wet with her mother's blood. A Yupik midwife, the girl's grandmother, had saved her life. She died before the girl turned two, and the girl did not know her family tree on either side. Her father was trunk and branch alike. The girl's mother was buried somewhere in *Kongiganak*, a grave marker the girl had never seen.

\*

Like the Yupik people, the girl and her father lived off the sea. They checked sea-strewn traps and pots for opilio and tanner crabs. They caught salmon in their nets. They occasionally brought in a seal, and they sometimes traded with the Yupik for furs, but hadn't needed to do so in more than a year. They would trade again when the girl fully hit puberty, when her chest filled out and her height settled. In winter, fishing was best just after six in the evening, near dusk, and that left most of the day for prep. The girl would set traps in the morning and return in the evening. In the meantime, there were nets to mend. Wood to chop. Food to prepare and preserve.

From the shoreline they would often spot commercial fishing rigs trolling close to Ikpek Lagoon, wayward and greedy and out of their normal waters. The girl and her father were losing catch to commercial boats, and

every month they tallied fewer crab. They didn't need much, but what little there was they were losing. The father told the girl tales he had read in a history book of Russians coming through in the 1800s, scouts in wooden skiffs anchoring off shore, poaching marine life and mapping the coast for Emperor Alexander I. And now history was repeating itself.

After dusk blinking lights from oilrigs worked like metronomes in the night sky, the oil rigging working the sea bottom below, the outside world closing in. It was possible to see the oilrig lights from the cabin porch at night, twinkling brightly through the spruce.

\*

Ringling the shoreline a dense cluster of spruce rose 200 or more feet in the air, the dark purplish bark, gray in spots, giving the forest and its middle distance color. The sun had just shown itself over the eastern horizon and webbed through the trees. On this morning the girl, tall and coltish and bundled in bear fur with caribou skin linings, came to the shoreline to unmoor her weathered wooden boat. It was a small boat, twelve feet in length and four feet across with a set of sunbleached oars. The girl handled it with skill. There were 10 crab pots to check and reset and the surf looked challenging, crashing loudly into the rocks.

The girl looked out across the Bering Sea, its vastnesses opening up before her. There was sea ice to contend with, making the water more dangerous and choppy. She saw a mammoth bit of sea ice overrun with walrus adrift and floating westward toward Russia. And to the girl's surprise and horror, the water was stained inky black, shining metallic in the early morning light. The walrus were covered in crude. Some howled in agony. Others slipped lifelessly from the ice into the water.

She had never seen water like this. The girl visored her palm and squinted toward the water. She saw that the sea spray was black, foaming wildly along the beachhead. Further out, past the first breaks, the sea roiled against the wind, unnaturally darkened all the way to the horizon where an oilrig bobbed on the surface. Its lights were flashing in alarm. To the south an injured oil tanker lolled in rough water, spilling its dark black guts. The girl put a handful of spruce needles into her mouth. She chewed the needles vigorously until her mouth worked into a nervous lather.

\*

The girl left her boat moored and sprinted east through the forest. There were downed trees that she hurdled along the trail. When she got to Winter Trail Road she could see that tail of smoke from the chimney rising through the trees. She sprinted up the mountain, the snow dirty and brown at the trail edges. She had memorized the switchbacks and ran swiftly in her moccasins. When she gained the top of the hill the cabin was in clear sight. Over the years the girl and her father had cleared the land surrounding the cabin and there was an opening in the forest canopy. Everything else was in its place:

the shed next to the house, firewood chopped and stacked along its side wall, a meat cellar dug into the ground beyond that, three laundry lines strung between trees, a ring of stones that made a fire pit for smoking meat, and a series of tanning posts staked into the ground.

There were three rifles the girl didn't recognize leaning against the front porch wall. When the girl entered the cabin three large Yupik men stood bundled in furs in a semi-circle talking with her father. They were speaking English, and the cabin smelled strongly of boiled crab.

"Darling, these men are here about the oil," the father said. The Yupik men nodded at the girl, their round faces stoic and wrinkled around the eyes. It had been years since Yupik men had been inside the cabin, and here they were, confirming bad news.

"It's all over the shore," the girl confirmed. "The beachhead is washed in it." The father gave her a small smile, meant to reassure. She had done well by him.

"You should know this is your grandfather," the father said. The words were surprising and came out quickly. The girl felt her cheeks redden. Her father gestured toward the largest Yupik man, his nose broad and lips full. The man's gray hair was gathered into a ponytail that spilled down his back, and he extended his hand. The girl took his hand, rough like a paw, and the man pulled her in and hugged her.

After a moment the man let go of the girl. There was an uneasiness in the cabin, and so the girl went and stood by her father, who put his arm around her and pulled her close. The girl glanced at the radio stashed in the corner. If her father had wanted to listen for news of the spill the radio would have already been switched on.

The men and the girl stood in silence. There was little to say. The oil would wreck the shore. The sea was poisoned. The girl imagined her crab traps and pots submerged below growing slicks on the surface above. The marine life choking on crude, birds tarred and de-feathered, lost to flight. The girl waited for her father to speak, for any of the men to speak.

"We're leaving with these men," the father said. "Your grandfather has invited us into their village. We'll move inland with them. Their offer is generous."

\*

The girl didn't want to leave. This was all she had ever known. But she knew there would be nothing for them here, not for many years. They could always return. The cabin would still be here. The helicopters would come sooner than expected this time. Government men would collect data. The oil company would set up camp. Cleanup ships would anchor and dot the shoreline. Official vehicles might find their way to Winter Trail Road again. The quiet would be lost. It already was.

The girl and her father gathered their things into two large bags. They followed the Yupik men out. There was a 10-mile hike ahead of them. They would travel first to *Kongiganak*, where the Yupik would break camp over

the following week. Then they would migrate south to the Kuzitrin River and settle on its banks. That was the plan. They would be near Teller, Alaska, where in 1828 the Inupiat had a fishing camp discovered by the Beechey Expedition. The small town had been called Libby Station before Sheldon Jackson renamed it for United States Senator and Secretary of the Interior Henry Moore Teller in 1892. This history meant nothing to the father and the girl, and even less to the Yupik. It was not their history.

Near Teller the girl would be close enough to go to school if she wanted. She would know her Yupik cousins. She might know her aunts. Everything would be different. The girl's father would continue subsistence hunting and fishing. The girl would help. They might stay with the Yupik. And they might move into Teller. And they might break out on their own, just father and daughter, the way it had always been. They would certainly regain the quiet. The girl would see to it.

EMILY PAIGE WILSON

## THE FORTUNE TELLER PREDICTS A JOURNEY

Patchouli's mossy morning breath  
edges out of incense. The teller spreads

purple velvet across the table between us,  
teases tea lights into flame with the crass

scent of a handful of matches. I am all  
cups and swords, more Major Arcana

than she usually sees drawn by a single hand.  
I was shown my first Tarot as a child.

On my grandmother's coffee table, her deck sat  
near stacks of photo albums. She'd point out how

*The Wheel of Fortune's* gold zodiac disc  
was so much like Prague's astronomical

clock, the lion's fiery mane on *Strength*  
the same as the beast of Bohemia stamped

on the back of all Czech coins. We'd sift  
through the cards before shifting to the

photos, lives lifted and cropped into  
grayscale squares, pasted onto pages

in the name of preservation. Nine  
children aligned in ceremonial dress;

all the girls in polka skirts, boys  
in suspenders. A stern matriarch,

dark hair twisted into a sloppy top knot—  
the jewel-encrusted headdress of *The Empress*.

Even with these visual cues, my grandma  
could only remember fractions, certain branches

of the family tree. I have learned to read

the deck the same way I read my family

history: to leave space for the stories  
once faces and dates have faded.

When the fortune teller reveals *The Hermit*,  
lone figure cloaked against the cold,

it does not unnerve me when she predicts  
a journey but can't foresee the place or time.

I know that each image holds its own context  
even without connective tissue to tether them  
together.

EMILY PAIGE WILSON

POSTCARD AN ALMOST LOVER NEVER SENDS TO ME

You already know this winter,  
this weather: January is still

more jam and back porch than cold  
burn and shovel crunch on ice.

You know the way honeysuckle sweats  
scent; the shores of North Carolina

will still be crisp when you come back  
but Europe will erode in your mind

once you leave. You can't cling to home-  
sickness like snow sticking to the streets.

What gratitude are you showing  
the ghosts of your ancestors right now,

the Atlantic Ocean for always opening  
both its arms to you?

JEFF HANDY

CARTOGRAPHY OF WHAT ISN'T YOURS

*“Things take the time they take”*

–Mary Oliver

About which, yeah, one could wrap up a discussion with a mere like “Duh.”  
But or consider: the charitable interpretation: things take the time they take

as in with hands. As in time is siphoned by the mouths of things, reed-sucked  
from swollen bodies. The bodies are up for discussion, but now we've defined it.

Close a door behind a cat and the cat will reach under. A panicked movement  
suggests the room is filling with gas. Tufts of carpet are clawed up, seal further

the room, the gas, the body. The cat's ear is flush to the ground  
like a scout troop predicting a train, but we don't hear so much

as vibrate. The world with an ear to it is a map of the world,  
non-axial, non-spheroid. Instructions, then, for when a hand appears

outlined or pale, stelliform under the door:  
let the movement play out, and be taken.



JEFF HANDY

## REASONS FOR MOSS, OR: REASONS FOR BELIEF

This morning I researched whether moss grows  
only on the northern side of trees and stones,  
and it turns out mostly to be true.  
In the northern hemisphere there is more shade  
on objects' northern side; in the southern hemisphere  
shade gathers to the south. Reason being: moss will dry out  
in too much sun and so prefers the shade.  
Which makes some disappointing sense  
for someone hoping to start a day debunking  
things he never questioned. Like my grandmother  
who preferred I walk a certain direction  
through the woods in case I got lost.  
Like how I obeyed her wish.  
Like some things: mostly true.

SHARLA YATES

## COMPOSED

I.

When you aren't home and I am left      I talk to your wife in the kitchen  
with the artifacts, the furniture      I pull a chair up to her urn  
from your past life. I tell myself      I like to think that we get along  
that there is beauty in sad endings.

II.

The outline of her silhouette flickers in the moments where she lived.  
I bump my knee against the monuments of that life left on the hallway table.

Her friends are still talking about you.  
What can I say?  
Instead I think of the wicker basket full of soy sauce and hot mustard she kept  
on top of the microwave. How unlike we are.

III.

I find your words scripted in the shadowed corners of drawers all over my  
lover's house. Your handwriting threatens to ruin everything, but not in a  
tangible way. I find the fragments and begin building—

You recorded a tape, the spine labeled in sharpie, "my schooling," but you  
only speak of the illness in a clipped voice that begs questions. I listen hardest  
when there is a thump against the microphone. You don't say that everything  
is going to be okay.

I put your voice back in the nightstand among lost keys and notes you wrote  
in order not to forget.

IV.

Alone

I pull out a pair of your jeans to see what size you wore and carelessly fondle  
your bust kept on the top of the refrigerator. I shove your boxes behind the  
door and find your winter coat in the closet. Slipping my arms into the  
sleeves, I am glad, guiltlessly, to be living.

V.

Terrified that your fate is my own, or worse—that there is such a thing as fate

Last night I dreamt you said *How very sad I am to be missing*. I wanted to tell you my fears so you could bury them with you. I wanted to share a joke and to fall into you laughing. But I couldn't look. Too afraid of what you meant by *missing*.

VI.

There's a photo of my lover wearing a blue knit sweater, standing on the side of a ravine flanked by towering pines in early morning shadows. I find photos of you on this same day. You are in a yellow dress and wide strapped sandals.

He is hounding the best angle to capture how deep the forest, how impenetrable, while keeping you in the frame.

In each you look amused, sloppily posing against a tree, your arm above your head, swooning, mid-swoon, saying something.

JASMINE NIKKI PAREDES

## I will lose him during the apocalypse

when the ground gives, right after  
our neighbor's dog tells me  
to wake up and clear my browser cache.  
Yesterday they found a megamouth shark  
washed ashore, dead. Maybe now  
we should get out of bed and worry  
about the high rises, how the quake  
will devour us, will devour everything  
that loves us back.

When the apocalypse happens,  
I'm afraid we will be on different trains  
going opposite ways. As the car tumbles  
down the platform, pressing steel  
to flesh to bone, I will remember  
how the night before, I fell  
asleep as he sat in the other room,  
listening to the hum of his laptop.  
I go to bed every night with a dread,  
and he says it is all in my head,  
and another day—

During the apocalypse a fault line  
shall halve our avenue.  
The underwater cables will have nothing  
else to broadcast but silence, the kind  
that follows the discovery  
of a thing long feared.

JASMINE NIKKI PAREDES

## FEAST

When we lived an hour  
from each other, I waited  
by an elevated platform

until the train ground  
up the tracks like a knife  
being sharpened.

Now we have become  
woman and man  
with the shopping bags,

lamenting the jetlagged  
nectarines at the nicer  
supermarket. The difference

between our cities is  
craving: blueberry  
and sweetsop. I am in awe

of the versatile cabbage  
and the carrot that has  
traveled miles, only to be

peeled naked at midnight.  
From our bed I can hear you  
eating. I refuse to say sorry

because there is nothing  
wrong with asking for  
another helping. I mean,

there are so many things  
we can do to a roast chicken.  
I have stopped counting.

DANIELLE SUSI

**Black fossil in a slab of shale**

In a river you come upon a coil

What have you of my spilled right lung?

Make a threshold whiter and wider

Was finding my vessel in ash not enough?

Bury me further. Build a pyre

above the mound

Set the final vision of me ablaze

There is no impending phoenix rising.

Silhouette is smolder

They'll call me cretaceous, metamorphic,

Gesture. Most mornings, I cry for you.

They caged my head, fully aquatic. Shook me.

Shook my brain. Filled me with all the properties of a stone

sifted from the stream. But I am no gold. I am charcoal. No.

Anthracite. To draw. To draw a flame.

LUISA A. IGLORIA

## SALT CRAVING

I dreamt of lines of fish drying, their bodies  
scaled and butterflied and left to leather in the sun,  
the coast and fishermen's nets gritty backdrop

to water's insistent reruns. You were somewhere  
on the beach, your body covered with sand, your face  
shielded from the heat by a newspaper. Drowsing

or asleep, you didn't move; you lay as if dead.  
I dug little holes and watched for sand fiddlers.  
I looked for whelks, brittle shells, and bits

of broken glass. Before mid-afternoon, you rose  
like an idol, ran into the sea to rinse off  
the crust of what had hardened and clung.

LUISA A. IGLORIA

## CASIDA OF THE SNOW

In the white sift from low-  
slung branches, I saw pages  
before the shadows of wings  
wrote their script.

*What is your intention?*  
I asked, walking into the heart  
of the cold to bring my one  
wish as offering.

Somewhere I heard the sound  
of an ax splitting wood,  
the soft weight of two halves  
falling equally to the ground.



SARA RYAN

FAVOR

*after Li-Young Lee*

A field of poppies blooms  
between my fingers—  
my father grabs a needle  
and tells me to hold still.

I am not a patient child,  
or a curator of pain , so I become  
a young bird,  
underneath.

I dig at a splinter  
until my palm begins to bleed.  
A rose opens.

I remember my small white hand,  
a ceramic plate, and a circle  
of red, growing as the heart  
in my palm pulsed free.

My fathers voice is low,  
and his fingers are much bigger  
than mine—he loses me  
in a story about Lake Shore Drive,  
or fire, or paddling a boat.

The wood is released from me,  
and I don't  
cry, but place my mouth  
over the cut: feeling  
foreign, feeling like the hand  
of a bird.

I am not patient. My father  
whispers in a clatter of silver.  
I become an eagle,  
underneath—  
my father, preening my wings.

SARA RYAN

## MAKING A MEAL

I find a spot in my kitchen  
that I do not love.

There, I peel a sweet potato.  
I smash garlic into guts.  
I cut my thumb and stuff it,  
singing, into my mouth.

Next, I dismember an animal.  
I relieve it of its skeleton,  
its dense assemblage.

It's sorcery: parts  
and bones and flesh and  
onion skins—brown moons,  
coalesce into broth,  
into red-  
lipped harvest.

The unused, the castoff  
roots, the dirt licked husks.  
In the stained core of the bird  
hides the deep, lush savor.

When I boil milk,  
the kitchen smells like my mother.  
When oil pops and blisters  
my skin, I become a blue plate.

I stop sharpening my knives.  
I collect these ruins like gold,  
roast them 'til honeyed.

My kitchen is a simmering  
orchard—nourish,  
fill, and enough.  
A cycle of ashes.

NAIMA WOODS

## EULOGY COVENANTS

Pray for the good live flesh. You pray.  
Don't talk about graves anymore. Think of falling.  
Remember all of the falling you've seen on the new lately,  
    their hands up, their bodies made to fail.  
You welcome ice cream and cake and cookies.  
Know you should go elsewhere to find sweet things.  
Sometimes you don't have the energy, you want easy sugar.  
Turn water into lemon tea. You don't drink these days.  
Grow flames in your belly from all that acid.  
You wait for the heat to bear witness, that burn in your stomach.  
The violence of our erasure feels enormous,  
    and you never got told the half of it.  
Your fear of the dead feels familial, like an apron wrapped around you.  
Pray for the good live flesh. Amen.  
Hope that after all this that you remember how to make good love.  
Recognize that there is a chance in the poem  
    to be more than an undertaker.  
Write down every name you've ever known.  
Hang those names up in your house and hope it's enough.  
You don't see the value in looking respectable.  
Make a whole new list of covenants. Between you and the bodies.  
You promise your bellied heat to all of the names that you don't know,  
    that are already gone.  
Promise your poems to yourself.  
Make a whole new language for praying grief.  
Pick up and pick up and stop from falling.  
You see every fear, full and waiting. You don't run.

NAIMA WOODS

## BURNING AT GOD

I've seen fires. They crowned the mountain and that makes them sound holy. How close does a burning mountain make the moon. Can you write a poem about burning these days that isn't about god. The moon is a god. Does a church wall burn like a mountain. I've seen wildfires. Heat rubs and rubs and flames. That's how mountains go, cooking pine. This poem keeps asking me for question marks but these are not. Can you set a god on fire by burning its floors. No one is afraid of the moon god burning. It's bloodless, bleached. These are not questions. Look, they burned the floor black. See, they've cooked the crosses. Can you write a poem about burning god. Point to the charcoal and say, look.

Somehow the burnings and the murders conflate. My partner asks me *what are you thinking about* and it's the computer and its depress. Its little warm bottom heats on my lap and shows me the Charleston news and its depress. I listened to an old radio show where a boy tried to burn a house down and doesn't—the trucks come too early, the fire barely licks the windows. Is that something different, getting hard from burn, like a power transfer: dust to dick. When the fire keeps him flinting.

The wood is sanctified against. The wood is sanctified and nailed and look at the grain. We are god with the wood. We are not moon god or bible god or man god. We are grown brown and we are grained by our skin's ash, lotioned again and again. How do they smoke the spirit out of a body. They took the walls and the floor. They took the wood with which we are god and licked its corners. We are not moon. See: how to sift through ashes. See: how they make the street a chimney. We do not wane. The grain needs no house and yet it was a house and yet it is now not. A church echoes. They meant to get the skin's grain but they only burned wood. They meant to get the god but they couldn't see it. There is power in fire but not the right kind.

NADRA MABROUK

CLOVEN

Two gray sheep can only live so long  
in your kitchen.

Your father, uncle and grandfather  
drag the two sheep  
past the hallway.  
Holiday dinner breathes  
and smells of wet wool.

Mother takes you to be bathed with your sister.  
Together, you sit cross-legged  
in the hot water  
and you, while washing her hair,  
start speaking.

Her small head meets your palms  
and your nails are too short to scratch  
into the scalp.  
You hold the small flow of urine inside of you  
before it changes the color of the water  
and ask her whether she knows why the sheep are here.

She shakes her head  
and your lower stomach fat folds in weakness  
to control the bladder.

You imagine your sister and yourself in their place  
feeling your neck pretending your hand  
were as thick as the butcher's.

They're going to kill them when the butcher is here.  
You say *tradition*, mispronouncing it  
but saying it as a little urine slips out,  
not enough to change the water.  
Hooves start gnawing into the floor,  
their bleating breathless  
as though calling to apologize  
for never watching over each other.

You run back into the bedroom

where it is warm. The blood  
never reaches this far  
but you imagine the pulp of it, their open mouths,  
the small square teeth of a toddler.

NADRA MABROUK

FLIGHT 425 TO FT. LAUDERDALE

Lorenzo feels disoriented after dozing off.  
“That’s the problem with flying,” he says.  
“Everything’s just hanging.”  
I am staring at the bleeding slit  
in the sky behind the wing, the leftover light  
pinched into a thin scratch, thinking someone  
must be able to tell the time just by the shape  
of its bend,  
but that person must be asleep now  
cradled on the lap of a shaking hour.  
Lorenzo keeps laughing and dozing off  
until i wonder if  
he is laughing at something only he can see.  
The children behind us are creating  
a prayer for the water we see below.  
They want us to slip into it  
like clouds, sensitive organs of unheld crystals,  
waiting for return.

JOHN ALLEN TAYLOR

## SALUTATION

*for Olivia*

Do you still have the jelly jars of river rock  
stacked in sun beams on your window sill—  
remember the afternoon knee-deep  
in the Little Spokane doing sun-salutation,  
two mallards afloat on the dark  
green river? We stood on the bank.  
It's not that I felt more alive than I do now,  
sitting here in Pino's Pizzeria during Boston's  
cruellest winter. Icicles the width of me.  
Snow drifts the height of me.  
Wind finishing the blind work of erasure.  
It's only that I felt more capable of it. Sun-salutation.  
This is not a winter or a summer poem.  
This can't be a love poem. This is your silhouette,  
seven weeks since your last letter,  
your aspen laugh your smoke your sweat.  
This is our eclipse. I look around  
at the other faces moored at Pino's late  
on this February night. It's comforting  
to be among these faces, my strangers,  
to be a regular in the worst square in Boston.  
I wonder about the man sitting across from me,  
whose bed he thinks of when he finds himself  
alone, above cold diner coffee. Whose touch  
is tobacco and home. Whose laugh his joy?



JOHN ALLEN TAYLOR

BURY

You say you'll be gentle  
because I've told you how he touched me, told you  
he whispered and shushed me when I was small,  
when I believed his *everything will be okay*.

I have no use for your careful touch,  
your asking permission. Hide me  
inanimate between your timid legs.  
Darling, bury me pelvis to pelvis deep.

Let's call this love. Imagine  
this will save me. Your *everything will be...*  
Let's pretend your wet hand on my temple  
will unclench my jaw.

RUTH FOLEY

ROUNDS

The invisible tattoo his fingers inked  
around my wrist, how long it lingered,  
the way I wish it held his scent.

The ache in my chest is a stone—no  
jut, no angle, just weight. Weight,  
curve and expansion.

The hours I wait are round, even if  
my clock no longer is.

I have started writing this upside-down  
and need to turn it around if you  
are meant to read it.

His mouth isn't round, but I think  
of it so. My hip would round under  
his hand.

The way we circumnavigate—first around  
each other, then away and back.

Buttons, his thumb working them.

Fists, the completion of the movement.  
There's a reason it's called  
a roundhouse.

Zeros, of course, if you write them  
the way I do.

Singing, layered and wheeling, voices  
that never manage to meet up,  
the pull of the oar through water  
and out to the air, gently, merrily.

Ice cream before it melts, the coins  
that might purchase it.

The spiderweb that hung in front  
of the kitchen window. The spider  
in the center. I'd like to say they both  
survived the storm, drops of rain  
taking everything. It was already  
too late for the unidentifiable  
bundle.

His ring spinning on the table,  
its surface: all edges, no corners.

Birds at the sea, ballooning and  
splitting above the shoaling  
forage fish. The billow of the school.

The truth might be round, or curling  
over itself like a whitecap or a roller.  
Sometimes there is no choice but  
to duck under and hope.

Not a child's galaxy of stars, but  
our actual stars—everything that  
orbits us or is orbited, some orbits.

My back at the edge of the bed.  
Even the shaking feels round.

Tires against the pavement or retracting  
into the belly of a plane. The plane's  
belly. Mine.

The arc of earth that separates us.

Emptiness is round, I think. I am built  
of hollows.

The lake, its edges, the well-fed  
fish, the snail. The spaces in between  
the sand, the surface of the pail, the lenses  
of the sunglasses balanced on my head,  
my head, which would press round  
to his palm. It would.



ANTONINA PALISANO

THE WINTER

Another pit. I forgive my continuing  
how I'd pardon insects their sound –  
with a sick gut, shrinking. Now  
the weird parlance of the sign:  
a candle won't flame, the animals fret.  
I find a bird's wing perfect & detached  
in the street. Struggle to eat. But think  
of the city's savvy plantlife, dianthus  
& creepers rooting under gray brick.  
The way the early sky is flat,  
then rising to abrupt substance –  
streaming ochre, a third dimension.  
The damp heft of hiding soil;  
light, hauled to its highest point  
in the morning's muscled relief.  
There is a body in a loved shape  
beneath this, though all things  
seem awful, oblate. Even now  
a kettle comes to boil;  
even now I try again  
to see it.

ANNA LAIRD BARTO

## THE WHOLE FOODS EFFECT

I went to the grand opening of Whole Foods with my friend Denise, and Shannon, of course—I can't get away from the kid long enough to pee. By the time we got there it was after 11, but we were still one of the first 1,000 shoppers so we each got a balloon and a free reusable shopping bag. The bags were yellow, with big green asparagus tips, like alien penises. Now everyone at the food pantry has one, stuffed with canned peas and other processed crap.

Whole Foods took over the old Johnnie's Foodmaster. It was trippy going back into the store where I'd shopped all my life and finding everything changed around. I almost walked in through the out-door. Luckily they were handing out maps. Only the fruits and veggies were in the same spot, but they looked way fresher—apples spilling out of crates, cucumbers stacked like Jenga blocks, broccoli in buckets of ice. Or maybe was it was the special energy-saving lightbulbs that gave everything a tasty glow.

The Toonies were out in force; women in Polar Fleece and tight leggings, squinting at nutrition labels; men in pea coats feeling up the apples. Toonies is what we call the newcomers who buy up the old row houses, like my grandparents' triple decker, and turn them into luxury condos. But me and Denise weren't the only Townies who turned up for the freebies. We saw lots of people from high school; Jesse Walford, voted most likely to succeed, ankle bracelet showing under his track pants; Angela O'Meara, hiding behind a fedora and dark sunglasses (she thinks she's a movie star ever since she was an extra in *The Town*). We even ran into John O'Reilly, who worked with Gramps at the Navy Yard back in the day. Six months ago he was sitting on the benches outside Dunkin' Donuts, shouting how he rather take two buses to Market Basket than set in foot in Whole Paycheck, but there he was, blocking the aisle with his handicap scooter.

"I just want regular lettuce!" he said, staring up at an avalanche of salad.

"Maybe the iceberg?" I said.

When we first found out Whole Foods was coming, everyone got up in arms. Rents would go up, they said. Like they haven't enough already. Us Townies would be priced out town. The news called it the Whole Foods Effect. But Whole Foods sucked up real hard, the community by writing big checks to the Boys & Girls Clubs and Charlestown Against Drugs, and hiring people who'd worked at Johnnie's. They didn't hire Brian, though. He tried to tell me all the jobs went to the retards, the Somalis and the Spanish, making it my fault too since I'm half-Dominican on my dad's side—not that I've seen the guy in ten years, and don't speak Spanish nada. I said, "Maybe it's not

because you're white, but because you're an asshole," and that was the first time he hit me since Shannon was born. Even his mom says I should get a restraining order, but I want Shannon to have her dad in her life.

When a guy walked up with a paper cone of dried-up leaves, for a second I thought he was trying to sell us weed.

"Would you ladies like to try some kale chips? We have Cilantro Lime, Tarragon Dijon, Bombay Ranch—" He was hot, with sandy hair and muscles showing through his "Got Kale?" T-shirt. I wished I'd had time to comb my hair before I left the house.

"I don't know," I said. "What do you think?"

"I like the cilantro lime myself; it has a tang to it."

"I'll try that then."

I bit down as seductively as I could. Denise snickered.

"Mmm, not bad." Seriously, it wasn't. "Denise, you should try one!"

She wrinkled her nose. "No thank you. By the way, it looks like you have fish food on your shirt."

I turned around to dust my shirt off. When I looked up I saw Dan Corey, one of Brian's friends, standing a few feet away, over where the meat case with the 4-for-\$25 specials used to be. He looked down and played with his wallet chain but I knew he saw me.

I only bought like five things, but it turned out to be way more than \$40, which was all I had on my EBT card, so I had the smiley dreadlocks girl at the register take off the organic grapes and the whole wheat pancake mix. The Toonies in line behind me shifted back and forth and looked at their cell phones. I wanted to give them finger but I kept a grip. Instead I swung by the cafe on the way out, grabbed as many spoons, forks, and organic ketchup packets as I could and stuffed them in my purse, right in front of the security guard—big beefy black guy, not like those renta-cops Johnnie's used to have. He didn't seem to notice.

"That's so ghetto," Denise said.

"Shut up."

The other night I went by the house on Russell again. It was almost dark. Figures moved behind the beige curtains that replaced the Nana's Irish lace. Gramps was born in that house, in the third-floor bedroom with the fireplace and the slanting floorboards. His father bought it after he came from Ireland in eighteen-sixty-something to work in the Navy Yard.

When we were kids, my brother Colin and me were over there all the time, especially when Mom went off her meds and thought the Somali family next door was trying to poison us. Our favorite place was the roof. It was unfinished, no deck or railing, just tar paper hot enough to melt your jelly shoes in summer. We'd sit up there to smoke, tossing our butts into the Toonie's patio next door, and look out over the treetops and chimneys of Bunker Hill to the skyscrapers in Boston. In bad weather, the skyline disappeared behind the clouds, and it felt like a freak disaster had wiped Boston off

the map, and only Charlestown was still standing. After Brian and I got together, we'd sneak up there at night to have sex. He'd take me from behind and I'd come so hard I felt like I was out ahead of my body, floating over the roofs toward the city lights. Afterwards, our hands and knees were black with tar.

My grandparents held on as long as they could. That last winter they could only afford to heat the kitchen and parlor. They spent months hauled up behind plastic sheeting, watching CNN and the Weather Channel until they were as paranoid as Mom. With Colin at Concord State – dumbass won't stop breaking into cars – there wasn't anyone to shovel the walk. When they finally sold and moved to Senior Housing in Quincy, the Toonies on the block practically threw a party.

I've never seen the new owners, though I have a lamp they put out for recycling. (It's Crate and Barrel; still works and everything.) They repainted the house this antique green color with white trim. There's a wreath on the door made of gold petals the same shape as the mums in the window box. I'll never admit it to Nana, but I think it looks nice. If I had money I would decorate like that, simple but elegant. They got rid of her Virgin Mary statue, but the hand-painted sign, "This is not the a dog toilet," is still there, stuck in the grass between the sidewalk and street.

Before I left I checked the blue recycle bin, but there was nothing but newspapers and empty bottles of craft beer.

I've been going to Whole Foods more than I thought. Anything to get out of the apartment. I go crazy trapped in the house with Shannon all day. I want to finish my GED and go to school for Nursing Assistant or something, but I only have two classes left, not enough hours to get a daycare voucher, so I'm stuck until she's old enough for HeadStart – 13 months, three days...

I don't buy much at Whole Foods because it's mad expensive, but I like to sit in the cafe. It's clean, bright, and the walls are painted peaceful nature colors. On every table there is a clay pot with a real orchid – way nicer than anywhere Brian took me when we were dating.

One day I'm sitting in the cafe when this Toonie lady stops and says hi. She's pushing a boy about Shannon's age in one of those all-terrain strollers, in case your kid needs to climb Mt. Washington or something. Turns out she thinks she recognizes me from her yoga class. I guess I haven't let myself go as much as Brian says.

She bends over and makes googly eyes at Shannon. She's wearing black leggings and a puffy North Face vest. Up close I can see she's way older than me, at least thirty.

"What a pretty girl!" she says.

Shannon ignores her. She's busy playing with my phone.

"Thanks. I registered her with this agency downtown. They loved her photos. They're always looking for boys. I can give you the number." Her kid looks cute enough. Hard to tell through the graham-cracker facial.

"That's okay," she said.



“Really, it’s no problem. It’s right here in my phone. Shannon give mommy her phone back –”

“No, really. I don’t want Owen in a competitive environment.”

“The kids don’t even know what’s going on. They just like the attention.”

“I know, but I think I’d rather wait until they’re old enough to make up their own minds.”

I feel the heat rising to my face. “Shannon loves posing. It’s not like I’m forcing her or anything.”

“Of course not, I didn’t mean it like that...” She backs toward the door. “But thanks anyway. It was really nice meeting you.” She never stops smiling, but I don’t like the way she’s looking at Shannon, the same way the social worker does, like she feels sorry for her. Bitch. If there’s anyone we should be feeling sorry for, it’s Owen. She probably won’t even let him play Little League because he might strike out and hurt his feelings.

I look at Shannon bent over my phone, wisps of red blond falling in her face, forehead crunched with concentration. She’s so smart. She’s not even two and she already knows how to click on the games she likes. If I can only manage not to fuck her up.

Whole Foods has this 5-point rating system for meat. They won’t sell you a chicken unless that it was raised outside a cage, with lots fresh air and space to run around, not worrying about stepping on needles or dog shit. The higher the rating, the more expensive the chicken. To score a 5, the chicken has to grow up in an “enriched environment,” whatever that means for a chicken – maybe they play Mozart for them? I would give anything for Shannon to have as good a childhood as those goddamn chickens. I wonder how Owen would rate?

Sitting here, at the shiny clean table with an orchid, it’s easy to pretend we’re anywhere but Charlestown. We could be in Back Bay, or Lexington or fucking Europe, but I look out the window and there’s the parking lot, the Ninety-Nine Restaurant, and the Bunker Hill Monument sticking up (like a dildo, Denise says, for when you “don’t need no minute-man”). I’ve lived here my entire life and I’ve never even been to the top.

I turn back from the window just in time to see Shannon lean forward in her highchair, reaching for the orchid. Just before her fingers close around the pink petal, she looks over her shoulder to see if I’m watching.

“Bad girl!” I smack her hand. The broken flower falls to the table. Shannon screams. Heads pop up from iPads all over the cafe.

“That’s it, we’re going home.” I strap her back into the stroller and get the hell out before someone calls DCF on me. On my way out I grab a fistful of plastic spoons. Every time I go to Whole Foods I take something: salt, pepper, organic ketchup packets, brown paper napkins. Once I took a whole squeeze bottle of agave nectar, but the spoons are my favorite. It’s not like they’re better than the ones at Dunkin’ or Papa Gino’s. Or maybe they are. Maybe they’re made out of recycled prescription bottles. Maybe if you planted them in the garden, they’d grow.

The other night Brian comes over without calling first and sees the Whole Foods bags on the counter. He says he don't pay child support so I can buy fucking arugula. I tell him I'm saving money in the long run by not blowing up into a heifer and getting diabetes like his mom. His face turns bright red with purple veins running through it, like one of those heirloom tomatoes.

He starts opening the cabinets and pulling things off the shelves. "What are you doing?" I duck as a package of whole-grain pancake mix hits the linoleum. I'm thinking he's got money or drugs hid up there, but then he yanks out the drawers one by one. I'm scared he's going for a knife—he did that once before Shannon was born—but all he finds is plastic spoons in individual wrappers.

"What the fuck?" He rips the drawer from the cabinet and plastic spoons go flying everywhere. "What are you doing with all these goddamn spoons?"

"I'm saving them." I drop to my knees, start picking them up, and making a pile.

"For what?"

"I haven't decided yet." There's this lady on Pinterest who makes really cute lampshades out of them, but I don't know if I could ever be that creative.

Brian watches me crawling around the kitchen on all fours. He shakes his head.

"You're bat-shit, woman, just like your mom."

I feel like I've been punched in the stomach. I haven't seen Mom since the last time they let her out of the hospital. A friend of Colin's said he saw her sleeping outside the Malden train station.

I stand up so fast I feel dizzy. "Take it back."

He doesn't say anything. The hole in my chest fills with rage. I pound my fists against his ribs, but he grabs me by the shoulders and slams me against the refrigerator so hard I see stars. As I lie gasping for breath, I look up at the cracked ceiling tiles, the spoons stuck to the blades of the fan. I think of the ladies at Whole Foods, try to imagine their pea-coated husbands slapping them around their Crate and Barrel kitchens.

The commotion wakes Shannon, who bawls her head off.

"Jesus Christ, Brian! Do you know how many times I had to read The Hungry Fucking Caterpillar before she fell asleep?"

"Why don't you just get your new boyfriend to come sing her a lullaby?"

"What new boyfriend? The Comcast guy? The Kale guy? The old guy who smiled at me that one time on the 93 bus?"

He stands over me and I can smell his dirty socks. "Fat slut! For all I know, Shannon's not even mine." I stare straight up at him. His eyes are hazel like Shannon's, only lighter. When I met him in eighth grade, his eyes were what I noticed. At first glance they're brown, but the longer you look at them, the more they seem green. They're greener than ever now, the color deepening

where his pupils would be, except they've shrunk to the size of pins, floating expressionless across the iris.

"Who was it?" He presses his toe to my throat.

"What do you want me to say? You know she's yours."

He steps down. I gulp for air.

"Who?"

I don't answer. What's the point? He won't believe me anyway.

He steps down harder. I gag. I claw at his foot. The pressure increases. It hurts so bad I gasp the name of every man I can think of—my high school English teacher, Tom Brady, Barack Obama—just to make it stop.

I must have blacked out because next thing I know I'm standing on the roof at Russell St. It's still and bright. Snow sticks to the roofs and tree limbs. The sky is blue and I can see the skyscrapers ice clear across the river. It would be so easy to just step off the edge onto the cushion of air. I hear a child crying, and at first it's just another sound, like the traffic whooshing on 93, but it gets louder, filling my head and pressing me down on the linoleum. I open my eyes and I'm alone in my kitchen, surrounded by plastic spoons in individual wrappers.

The restraining order says Brian can't come within 500 feet of me and the apartment, but I still can't relax. It's just a piece of paper. What good is that if he decides to come back and make sure no one else will ever have me? The only way I can get any sleep is if I take Shannon into my room and shove the bureau against the door.

To distract myself, I finally started doing something with the spoons. I'm making chrysanthemum wreaths, like the one on the door at Russell Street. What you do is cut a piece of cardboard in the shape of a wreath, snap the handles off the spoons and glue them, face up, in rows, starting from the outside and working your way in. It's easy, but it takes a lot of concentration to line them up just right so they overlap like flower petals. It keeps me from thinking too much; about Brian and what he might do to me; Shannon growing up without a dad; Nana getting older; Mom's bipolar and if it's hereditary. To keep Shannon from messing with my wreaths, I spread out some cardboard, give her her own spoons and a pot of glue. She likes to spread the glue around and watch it drip off the spoon and puddle on the cardboard.

The last step is to take the wreath outside and spray paint it. I've made a pink one for Nana, a silver one for Denise, and an orange, green, and white one for Colin, though I don't know if they'll let him have it in prison. Now other people are asking me to make wreaths for them, like Nana's friends in Senior Housing. Denise says I should sell them on the Internet. Maybe when Shannon goes to school—eleven months, fifteen days...

It takes over a hundred spoons just to make a one little wreath. Every time I go to Whole Foods I stock up. Luckily, it's only 425 feet from my front door (I Google-mapped it on my phone). They got these new dispensers. You press a lever and a spoon pops out the bottom, like those old-fashioned cigarette machines you see in dive bars. Probably, the dispensers didn't arrive in

time for when the store opened, but I like to think it's because of me, that I was costing them thousands of dollars in plastic. But the dispenser don't stop me from stealing; I just use my stealth. I sidle up, open my diaper bag, and pump the lever fast as I can. The security guard stands with his arms crossed, staring at me. I just smile and keep pumping.

DYLAN WEIR

VILLANELLE FOR THE VICIOUS ADDICTED

*for Phillip*

His construction paper hung heavy  
wet on the walls. The spot still  
dripping letters from his fingerprint.

Art therapy—bullshit twice. Still, we finger painted  
self-affirmations, taped to the walls where  
his construction paper hung heavy.

Then, *code yellow*. Phillip's discharge date.  
*You haven't got his meds right*. We wept  
dripping letters from his fingerprint.

Sardines packed in the splinter of a window.  
Phillip, done with crystal, sent back to the mine.  
His construction paper hung heavy,

blocking the doorway, I read what his hands  
had said: *This is the best day of my life*  
dripping letters from his fingerprint.

Phillip, needed safehaven & got sidewalk.  
Last words: *This is the best day of my life*.      *So far*.  
His construction paper hung heavy  
dripping letters from his fingerprint.

DYLAN WEIR

## LIVING WITH THE DEAD

*Please*, come in.  
make yourself at home.

My house is not so much house as weigh station. A lane never ending and one's just curb  
and sleeping bags. Nevermind everything you see that reads: *In Memorium*.

You'll be a plaque one day. You'll be here indefinitely. Walk while you can. Climb my many  
broken steps. The bedrooms are so big without bodies. Get to know our ghosts.

The many men who slept in the twin bed before me never mixed well with water. Run  
your fingers along the dinner table. Familiarize yourself with the threadbare leather face.

Beware the basement. Floods come freezing and often. Cut the power off. Gut out life.  
Sub-pumps will suck the stomach dry. The newly-naked floor – blinding – like the

Coppertone baby's bottom and the darkness that yokes her with exposure. Make sure  
you've scrubbed the surface with buckets of water and bleach. It's important. Keeping clean.

TIMOTHY GOMEZ

## A LIST OF THINGS THINGS I'VE WATCHED DIE

1.

Along the caulking of lime bathroom tiles, one ant carries the body of another ant, scurrying to avoid droplets of sink water.

I cup tsunamis in my palms.

Splash first against my prickly cheeks then against the wall.

Two semi-colons rinsed away into the holes of a sink strainer.

2.

In a looming Catholic church, my siblings embrace me. I remember a game my grandfather and I used to play: we'd each stand six feet from the refrigerator and toss souvenir magnets at its belly. The only way to lose was to miss. Neither of us ever lost.

We'd laugh beside a table with a cheap metal frame around its edges and laminated floral print, riddled with coffee stains.

My grandfather's mustache still had black in it.

I cry in the church. But not because I miss my grandfather. Instead, because my siblings cry, all circled around my awkward little body.

They talk about camping trips I never attended. Restaurants I never ate in. A Pinto I swore I sat in once. A faint memory of me waving at my father from a car seat, him walking across the greenest grass.

\*We got rid of that car before you were born\*, my brother says. Inside a box of cherry wood, a monument to a different family that looks eerily similar to mine.

My father cries. I know to hug him. And so I do.

Perhaps I know this too much.

3.

My first dog is Winkles. The 'R' left out on purpose. As my mother puts the Subaru in reverse, retreating finally from the Almadale house, my father approaches.

\*I'll see you soon\*, he tells me.

\*But where's Winkles?\*, I ask.

4.

In the hallways of our high school, a boy spits on me and calls me a poser. This same boy in middle school Language Arts tapped me on the shoulder and said \*Look\* with his tongue out. On it, a small tab of paper.

In his house when we were both younger, his younger brother cursed like wildfire and ran along burnt carpet. I never met his parents.

This same boy will see me on the streets of our hometown when we're both twenty-four.

His hair will be long and he will wear his plaid shirt open with no t-shirt underneath. Torn shorts.

\*Dude, you live in New York now, right?\*, he'll say.

\*That's real cool, man.\*, he'll say.

\*Yeah, gonna move out to Vegas or Bakersfield or something. Just somewhere.\*, he'll say.

\*Clean for six months.\*, he'll say.

\*Thanks, man.\*, he'll say and walk up Mayflower towards the hills.

A week later, his friends will raise money on websites for services. I wonder if I should attend but don't.

His sister explains it all in writing, that tolerance subsides as quickly as hives.

5.

I learn too late that my Uncle was married once.



I wonder if chunks of his liver ever clogged up the shower.

I wonder if he prayed to the collage of images of my grandmother framed behind an urn of her dust.

I wonder who will get his car, a Chrysler with solid metal rims.

I wonder if it's disrespectful to drink the leftover beer.

I wonder where the birds beneath the towel that chirp incessantly will go. Will they recognize the absence of my uncle's well-groomed beard? Will they shed feathers on newspaper or be let go? Will they remember their instincts? Are these things pre-loaded? Or will they just continue to yell out for seeds served up in Dixie cups?

6.

Under anesthesia, we do not dream.

Countdown from Ten.

Nine

Eight

Sev—

\*Okay, we're back.\*

Was anything moved? I hobble to a recliner and watch Judge Judy for forty minutes.

Someone on the radio says, void an afterlife, death would be much like this pause.

We just would never know.

7.

\*They just melted in the olive oil in five minutes. That's it. What a pitiful life.\* , I say.

\*A delicious one.\* , Melanie says.

I don't respond.

\*You must be in a bad place to not be able to handle making an anchovy sauce.\*

8.

Fall leaves line the bridge above the boat-sprinkled pond deep inside Central Park. They're never this color back home. I choose the best one to take home to a girl who wears the thickest black eyeliner I've ever seen.

They don't keep this color, I realize. Brown and broken in the bottom of my bag just a few hours later.

Leaves yellow when their connection from a tree begins to dim in the Autumn months. The leaves need chlorophyll to stay green, but constant exposure to the sun would otherwise bleed them of it, would leave them faded like paper, if not for the trees. The tree replenishes its children.

The yellow is always there though. When the chlorophyll is gone, other already present colors are merely being released. Orange and yellow and red.

When the leaves die, something isn't taken. Nothing stolen. Instead, something that was always living underneath is revealed.

## SEAN THOMAS DOUGHERTY

### DAY SHIFTS

We are bored & abandoned at dawn rising with our backs bent, under labor our lives stitched more vividly by the wounds in our language, our own country with highways the jetty we stand on of heavy drinking, with machinery rhyming the rain, cursing managers whose asses we won't kiss. Go ahead, fire us, we'll sing another portrait of ourselves—barges & truck stops & dead children & spit on your tie. We'll piss & burn on your manicured lawns. We'll suffer all summer without air-conditioning. When each breath to breathe becomes work, we are what we are inside an invisible system—we will implode it with a voice, & a guitar. Fuck the dying elms & cut down the Cherry tree. I slept on a bus station bench, the shouting of small children, tied with a string, crossing the street, the simple gift of a cup of coffee & a cigarette. To cross carrying our own crosses we cross carrying Hop-Scotch & Double-Dutch, the old men playing Dominos & the boys spitting old rhymes like rusty ammo. Who is there to understand? The night sirens sing their eulogies & last night another kid shot down. The blue light of an afterhours joint, no one speaks until this old brother turns to me, *didn't you get the message?* A voice like sunlight through a broken factory window.

The terrible chords of the bar band, that scaffold I climb, hands bound with coarse cloth, tethered to a scaffold, (Jesus you wrong, they knew exactly what they were doing & they did it anyways, sometimes forgiveness isn't worth shit. But in the late evening of a humid week there is still a chance at redemption. So I will trick them into believing I quit & disappear into another stupid job in the cold & work my hands raw lifting things, & spend the last years of my life sitting by the shore & drawing in the sand with a stick. My daughter draws with a stick in the sand, what are you drawing I ask her? *The sound of God weeping—*

AMY MARENCO

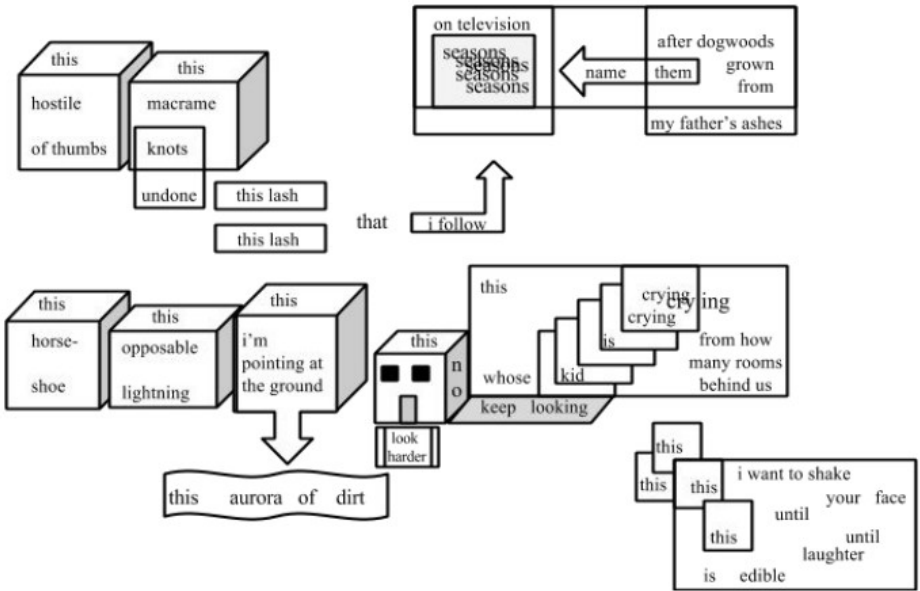
BODY→ATRIUM→VENTRICLE→GILLS→BODY

The S-shaped heart in his head  
fills his eyes with fresh blood  
for as long as he doesn't stop  
swimming. I watch reruns  
of laymen and scientists  
bickering about how best  
to kill him before he chews  
an island to pieces, the children—  
morsels of the future. I tattooed  
his silhouette on my forearm  
to show strangers: I'll bite you,  
but I'm misunderstood;  
I'm hungry for something else  
you sort of resemble, bobbing  
on the surface and not at all  
out of reach. I watch reruns  
of laymen and scientists kissing  
loved ones and solid ground  
goodbye before searching  
whitecaps for his larger-than-average  
body—his heart, his heart. His heart:  
a poker-face laying down a flush and losing.

AMY MARENGO

the cloudbank

this cloudbank



RYAN BENDER-MURPHY

## PORT ARANSAS

Transformation is a crime. Cylinders of it, too.  
First breath out of the water and  
you cannot hear the clicking of keyboards.  
A white rat runs in a field. Its red eyes are juiced  
hours later in a lab. That's the rub.  
The ticket passes from one signal to the next  
until a fist hurls onto the freeway  
and accidents ensue. But let's  
get back to you, fresh now, water  
borne and the plentiful tides rake  
society from the skin. The thickness of sunshine  
booms, curtains away those images  
projected from a screen.  
Even that one trickle of water going down  
your nose is enough to be alive.  
You forget the emails sent to you in the dead  
of night, when fingers smash the only  
things it seems they have left. Nobody  
can have a word with you. Wind is  
perfect, for once. It blows the green  
spiral of lines right from your head, the pie chart  
glides away, and numbers turn into the artistic  
rendition of birds. You look at a cloud  
overhead, average patch of white,  
and staring at it so long  
you fade into a network of yourself,  
full of ravines and jagged nooks.  
It moves slower than a hello  
said 200 years ago from one person to another.  
A thing, floating above another—  
nobody will see that as clearly as you.

RYAN BENDER-MURPHY

## JUST GET BY

I get lost in my email and focus  
For so long on the beach  
Background. Sometimes that is what gets me  
Through the week, knowing that the ocean  
Will keep turning as more emails appear,  
That the beautiful blue wave will grow  
As the window does—it will grow so much  
That I will forget that I am even working,  
Even responding to the requests  
To work.

All of this happens for a split second,  
The one in which atoms expand, somehow to account  
For the heart I have been granted, the language  
I have been given, the broomstick  
I ride now, poking holes into the sky, clicking boots:  
A small island appears in my heart.  
And a small lawn chair and a small beach ball.  
And a small table with a small book and a small sandwich.

When tissues tear and men snap  
The small island grows into a continent  
That houses love and only love.  
I sleep in half of myself and stay awake  
Breathing the salty air and lying in the lawn chair  
That has grown into a bed.  
Everyone whom I have ever wanted to talk to  
Touches my head, and it feels like time has touched me  
Granting me an eternity to grow in its fields.

RYAN BENDER-MURPHY

## ON THE FRITZ

A groom wearing dark blue rivers  
and a bride donning the finest rock dress  
from the Stone Age  
walk out of a church.

A computer is cranking out  
as much rice as possible.  
I am typing on the computer  
*rice rice rice rice.*

My boss brings me a sandwich,  
chips, and a fountain drink.  
I sip from a straw and watch  
as the man kisses the woman, alone.

When they step into their limousine  
I type *aerial joy spheres*, and bubbles fly.  
I type *amphibians gettin' jiggy wit it*, and frogs dance  
in overalls. I type *smoke you sly bastards*  
and mechanical guests creak cigars to their lips.

On the drive home, I take the scenic route  
and glance through the passenger side:

the sea  
of gasoline is burning  
into a forest;

drone planes  
are becoming storks.

Something like this has happened before...

I give the computer a little shake.



STACEY KAHN

## SLIVER

When we are five and eight years old, then six and nine and so on, people ask us if we're twins. My brother bristles at the suggestion every single year because after all, he's three years older and the only boy, which means that he enjoys a spotlight that follows him around like a shadow, that keeps him company in a way that I just don't get. I'm the youngest and one of two girls, but the other girl looks more like our dad's side of the family—small, with hips that only venture slightly past her waist—while I grow to be an echo of my mom's side, short, curvy, and contained. The ways in which I don't look like my sister mimic the ways I'm nothing like my brother, a boy who gets in with the popular crowd and always has friends, a boy who sits down to tests as if he's writing a good friend a letter: calmly, naturally, knowingly, with grades that reflect his effortless way. I am quiet and dreamy, and nothing I do is effortless; I spend my adolescence pulling oversized shirts over the swell of my hips; I temper uncoolness with bouts of defiance. I seek out other dreamy weirdoes who make their homes on the sidelines, where we admire people like my brother from a comfortable distance because they have a certain grace that eludes us.

When we are fifteen and eighteen years old, the distance grows and my brother goes to college. My sister is in college at this time, too, and I face a particularly difficult year all by myself. My parents are there but I am still a teenager and keep my problems close to me, because my heart speaks a language I'm convinced my parents don't. Instead, I spend nights in my room letting my sadness spill out until a knock sounds at the door or my name is called from downstairs. That's when I gather it all back inside of me, quickly, like a person caught with a myriad of items they've been trying so hard to hide, and I go about my days a little bit heavier from the words I collect but keep to myself.

College finally reaches me, too, though, and it's in college when I learn that writing buoys me, that this is how I stop from sinking into sidewalks, that this is where all the words should go. It's not a perfect method, but it's the only one I've found, and I write to peel the skin off things and bite into them with purpose.

When we are twenty and twenty-three years old, our only uncle dies. I'm not home for the funeral, not home for the unveiling the following year, but this death buries a part of me with it. My mother once called my uncle and me the "loveable black sheep of the family," but death turns him into a black hole, and now that connection and all the talking I thought I'd do with him after college goes with the rest of the nothingness. I see my father cry for the first time in my life, I see what siblings are supposed to look like, and it

has nothing to do with resemblance. I stop writing for a while.

And then when we are twenty-one and twenty-four, twenty-two and twenty-five and so on, I see my brother less and less. There is the exception of family birthdays and yearly holidays, and some times in between, but those barely count and our encounters feel rehearsed. He will start saying we should all hang out more, but his words are just words and their meanings are wrapped presents with nothing inside. In time, when we are whatever age—it doesn't matter—he moves home to New York and contents himself with a nine-to-five suit job; I quit the three jobs I'm working to act upon a delayed dream of moving to California, then live there with my cousins. My biggest regret from college is that I didn't go out west earlier; I learn at Thanksgiving that his was not joining a frat.

Writing eventually comes back to me. I write about my parents, my uncle, New York, the boy who broke my heart and who I'm afraid broke it for good. At some point I realize I never write about my brother, at some point I realize I've left the sidelines of his playing field and found my own. Because I don't see him often, I don't speak of him often either; friends who have known me my whole life have met him if not once, then never. They say to me, I forget you have a brother. Sometimes I forget, too.

\*

When we are eighteen and twenty-one years old, I follow my brother to college. My first year there is the final year for both of us—the year that he graduates, the year that I find that my identity is not tangled in our genes. But this process is not an easy one for me. My mom and I start speaking often; I never cry, but she senses the emptiness in my voice and asks my brother to fill me back up again. His solution is to fill me with alcohol, to drop it off and then leave. I ask for something girly—watermelon vodka—and share it with people I know are not my friends. These not-friends are like most of the people at the school; boys in dirty sports caps and girls in pristine pearls, both with popped collars and a starchiness that could break them. But no one here allows themselves to break, because cracking is bad form and I am in the worst of form when I finally decide to leave, when I discover that my brother and I have absolutely nothing in common and I go to another school.

But before I put my escape into motion, my brother and I sit across from each other in a dining hall on some indistinguishable night. Clinks and clanks of plates seep into our silence. I notice his freckles, which are just like mine—like whispers, easy to miss if you aren't paying attention—and push around some mashed potatoes with my fork. Finally he says, "How are you doing?" and I shrug, so he shrugs, too, and then continues eating. After awhile, he checks his watch and says, "Things will get better," then gets up to put his tray away and leaves. Maybe he didn't know what to say; maybe he didn't want to say what he meant; maybe I should have said more. But I would never know because I would never ask, and the words of this conversation, like all the ones that came after, hung loose and incomplete.

\*

I should mention again that there is a sister, but she finds her way occasionally into my writing for a reason I can't explain. She is the oldest, but it never feels that way to me because she's stormy and her moods are like sandpaper scraping against herself and everyone else. She takes small things to be serious and serious things to be small, and when we're together, her words flood me like an ocean and I provide "yeses" and "nos" like ornaments, like archipelagos that the ocean just envelops. Often, I feel like the older sister, trying to dispense advice and mitigate crises that are only small annoyances to most people. At some point, I make friends with someone four years older than my sister and find myself confiding my secrets in this new girl, asking for advice, acting the way I think I should with my own family but somehow can't. One day, over wine, I tell this friend, You're the big sister I never had, and it's almost like I've made my real sister disappear, and then I disappear for an instance, too. This is when I realize that we siblings have all disappeared from each other, because the three of us have taken our differences and built fences over the years, fences we stand behind and don't try to look over, don't try to dismantle.

\*

When I am twenty years old, I fall in love for the first time, I meet the boy who eventually breaks my heart and makes his way into my writing. His departure marks a pattern I fall into for years, a pattern where I think all men are wrong for me and I keep them at arms length, despite wanting to be touched, despite wanting to fold my fingers into the spaces of a larger hand. For a little while, it's okay to cling on to friends, to form an alliance with the ones who've also been hurt and self-quarantined. But eventually, they all start re-attaching themselves to other people, and it feels like I'm talking to them from across a large, expansive room. This starts to happen at the same time I begin talking more and more with my mother, which reinforces and solidifies me and lessens the sting of being alone. She is my blueprint: short with wavy brown hair, calm but careful. She tells me all the time, God matched them as he made them, and though I don't believe in god, I believe in what she tells me, and am comforted by that.

When my cousins in California unexpectedly lose their mom, I'm struck by the fact that I'll lose my own mom some day, too; I'm robbed of the ruse that people you love are immortal, and I start feeling like I'm fifteen years old again, my sister and brother off and away somewhere I can't see them, myself a young girl wielding a sadness too large for her. What happens when my parents, when half of the people who've known me forever, are no longer here? And what if forever never happens with somebody else, someone who's supposed to put forever in a ring around my finger? Where will my siblings be if forever falls apart, if forever's just a word that I repel?

If god really matched them as he made them, I wonder if the same is true of siblings, and then I worry that I have no matches at all. Because how

can I find anyone else when I can't even recognize the people who are myself, and myself them? How can we find each other if we are so unable to see one another? I let my siblings stay gone, though, I let the fences remain and watch them stack up because I don't know how to go about dismantling them, and it's easier to stay on the side that I built. I'm afraid that I will be the only one left standing there, though, wishing I could see over the fences that I myself erected but never tried to take down.

\*

When we are twelve and fifteen years old, I catch my brother on a night he's feeling particularly like a teenager, a night that feels like a gasp or a stretched out sigh you're caught in the middle of, that goes on until you run out of voice or breath. He sees me dawdling outside his door, pretending I have some business precisely in that spot, and for once, he calls me in instead of ordering me away and tells me to sit down on his bed. He has math books spread out on his comforter, pages beyond my understanding, things that always feel impossible when you haven't learned them yet. I suddenly don't know what to say, but it doesn't matter because he says, "Do you know what this is?" pointing to the CD player behind him, pointing as if it is the music itself. When I say no, he explains how this band, Nirvana, is important, and we listen to the same song twice. I won't know for years why this band is "important," but for now, the fact that he says it's so is enough. By the end of the night we are both repeating the line, Grandma, take me home, Grandma, take me home, and we get lost in the lyrics that for some reason make us laugh. Right now it seems unreasonable that I will ever substitute my siblings for anything else—for writing, for friends—because right now we are laughing at nothing at all, the type of laughing that buoys you and makes you light. Our laughter lifts me up like a balloon so for just a moment I'm above and not behind the fences we've only just begun to build around ourselves. If I had stayed there hovering above, if I had stopped laughing and looked down, maybe I would've seen the world behind my not-twin's fence, and maybe it would've looked exactly like mine.

JENNIFER RENEE BLEVINS

## EQUILIBRIUM, OR

### MY MOTHER WOULD HAVE FELT THE SAME WAY

During this year's trip to the beach, we took a ferry to the island with the feral ponies because you can't get there any other way. You're supposed to stay 100 feet away from the ponies, but my brother and I got closer to take pictures for our father. The lack of restrooms (or any other sign of civilization) on the island made me feel anxious and claustrophobic. My mother would have felt the same way. She died two Januarys ago. We scattered her ashes in the ocean during last year's trip to the beach.

I helped my father into the water at the point where the sound and the ocean collide, because that's where he wanted to enter. The sand beneath our feet was viscous and goeey, sucking us down like wet cement. My father didn't have the strength to overcome the sand, and I didn't have the strength to hold him upright. He fell slowly, like an imploded building, as the suck and pull burrowed us deeper in the sand.

After my brother and I helped him crawl to shore, we sat him in the green tailgating chair we had brought with us. I walked back into the water at the same spot. I passed the site of our earlier incident and continued out to where the water was deep enough to swim. I swam through alternating pockets of cold and warmth, farther and farther out until my father and brother looked like small feral ponies on the shore.

When I finally turned to swim back to them, I discovered that I had been swimming with the current the entire time. Now I felt the force of two separate currents conspiring to keep me. Even when I exerted all of my energy into my stroke, swimming against them was like running on a treadmill. The water was so deep that I was only able to touch the sand with my feet when I submerged myself to my eyeballs.

As I fought against the currents and gasped for air, I thought of Edna Pontellier walking naked and alone into the ocean, and I decided that the end of *The Awakening* is not nearly as romantic as I had first believed when I read it as a 19-year-old college student on dry land. Drowning is unsexy and demoralizing, lonely and silent.

Right before my mother stopped breathing, my father and I saw a wild white and gray cat scampering across the surface of the snow through the window of our hospice room. Then the nurse told us that it was over, that I had just lost the one person who knew me before I was one person.

I submerged to my eyes, activated every muscle, and rooted my feet into the sand. I started walking toward my family, using the strength in my

legs and torso to propel myself through the cement-like sand and resist the pull of the water. When I needed air, I popped my head above the surface and drew greedy, desperate breaths, like a hanged man freed from a noose.

When I finally reached my father's side, I collapsed on a beach towel. My brother and father said they could tell I was in trouble out there, but they didn't know how to help me. I told them there was nothing they could have done.

# CONTRIBUTORS

M. J. Arlett is an MFA candidate at Florida International University. She was born in the UK, spent several years in Spain and now lives in Miami. Her work can be found in *Portland Review*, *Gravel*, and *The Fem*.

Anna Laird Barto holds an MFA from Emerson College. Her work has appeared in *Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built and Natural Environments*, *Newfound Journal*, and is upcoming in *EDGE*.

Ryan Bender–Murphy's chapbook, *First Man on Mars*, was published by Phantom Books in 2013. His other work has recently been published in *Better*, *Cartridge Lit*, *Country Music*, *Deluge*, and *Everyday Genius*. He has started a journal called *Hardly Doughnuts*.

Jennifer Renee Blevins holds a BA in English and Theatre and an MA in English from Wake Forest University. She is currently a third year student in the MFA Creative Non–Fiction Writing and PhD Literature programs at the University of South Carolina, where she is also managing editor (reviews) of *Modernism/modernity*, the official journal of the Modernist Studies Association. She is working on her first book, *Persistent Leak: My Father's Gastric Bypass and the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill*, which juxtaposes the concurrent disasters of the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and her father's catastrophic gastric bypass experience.

Laura Creste is an MFA candidate in poetry at NYU, and a graduate of Bennington College. She works as a co–public relations editor at *Washington Square Review*, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Phantom*, *Bodega*, *plain china*, *the Silo*, and elsewhere. She has also written book reviews for *Full Stop* and *Bustle*.

Melissa Crowe earned her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College and her Ph.D. in English from the University of Georgia. Her work has appeared in journals like *Atlanta Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Seneca Review*, and her second chapbook, *Girl, Giant*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2013. She's co–editor of *Beloit Poetry Journal* and lives in Asheville, NC with her husband, Mark, and their daughter, Annabelle.

Sean Thomas Dougherty is the author or editor of 13 books including *All You Ask for Is Longing: Poems 1994– 2014* (2014 BOA Editions) and *Scything Grace* (2013 Etruscan Press). Recent poems in *North American Review*, and *Best American Poetry 2014*. He works in a pool hall in Erie, PA.

Ruth Foley lives in Massachusetts, where she teaches English for Wheaton College. Her work appears in numerous web and print journals, including *Antiphon*, *The Bellingham Review*, and *Sou'wester*. She is the author of two chapbooks, *Dear Turquoise* (dancing girl press) and *Creature Feature* (ELJ Publications), and serves as Managing Editor for *Cider Press Review*.

Timothy Gomez holds an MFA in Writing from Sarah Lawrence College. His work has appeared in *Connotation Press*, *No Tokens*, *Epiphany*, and others. He currently lives in Whittier, CA and teaches at Aspire Ollin University Prep Academy in Huntington Park. He also co-hosts a podcast about friendship and feelings entitled Fairweather and writes at his website [timfiniteme.com](http://timfiniteme.com).

Jeff Handy's poetry has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *Anthropoid*, *Bird's Thumb*, *Cartridge Lit*, *Gandy Dancer*, *The Mojave River Review*, *SOFTBLOW*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. He is a Poetry Editor at *DIALOGIST* and a particularly sweaty resident of Austin, TX. You can find him on Twitter @j3ffhandy.

Luisa A. Igloria is the winner of the 2015 Resurgence Prize (UK), the world's first major award for ecopoetry, selected by former UK poet laureate Sir Andrew Motion, Alice Oswald, and Jo Shapcott. She is the author of *Bright as Mirrors Left in the Grass* (Kudzu House Press eChapbook selection for Spring 2015), *Ode to the Heart Smaller than a Pencil Eraser* (selected by Mark Doty for the 2014 May Swenson Prize, Utah State University Press), *Night Willow* (Phoenicia Publishing, Montreal, 2014), *The Saints of Streets* (University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2013), *Juan Luna's Revolver* (2009 Ernest Sandeen Prize, University of Notre Dame Press), and nine other books. She teaches on the faculty of the MFA Creative Writing Program at Old Dominion University, which she directed from 2009–2015.

Stacey Kahn is a writer and arts educator currently working at the Brooklyn Museum. She has an MFA in nonfiction creative writing from Sarah Lawrence College and an EdM from the Arts in Education program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She's the co-host and co-creator of the NYC based reading series Big Words, Etc. and is currently working on a collection of essays about the forgotten borough she grew up in.

Mark L. Keats was adopted from South Korea at the age of three. He earned his MFA in fiction from the University of Maryland. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Eastern Iowa Review*, *Foundling Review*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, and many others. Currently, he is a PhD student in English at Texas Tech University.

Blake Kimzey's fiction has been broadcast on NPR and published by *Tin House*, *McSweeney's*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Five Chapters*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Hobart*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Short Fiction*, *PANK*, *The Masters Review*, *Surreal South '13*, and included in *The Best Small*



*Fictions 2015 Anthology*. He is the recipient of an Emerging Writer grant from the Elizabeth George Foundation and his chapbook of short tales, *Families Among Us*, an Indie Bestseller now in its second printing, won the 2013 Black River Chapbook Competition and was published by Black Lawrence Press in September 2014. Blake received his MFA from UC-Irvine and now teaches creative writing at UT-Dallas. More @BlakeKimzey

**Kimberly Lambright** is the author of *Ultra-Cabin*, forthcoming from 42 Miles Press. Her work appears most recently in *Bone Bouquet*, *Wicked Alice*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *ZYZZYVA*, and *Sink Review*. She lives in Austin, TX.

**Nadra Mabrouk** holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from Florida International University, and is a two-time scholarship recipient of the New York State Summer Writers Institute at Skidmore College. Her work has appeared in *Best Teen Writing of 2010*, published by The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, *Jai-Alai*, *RHINO* and others. Her chapbook, *How Things Tasted When We Were Young*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in spring of 2016.

**Amy Marengo** received her MFA from Virginia Tech, where she currently teaches first-year writing. She has recent or forthcoming work in *Pleiades*, *Cimarron Review*, *DIALOGIST*, among other journals. For more info on publications and awards, please visit her at [amymarengo.com](http://amymarengo.com).

**Antonina Palisano** holds an MFA from Boston University, where she received the 2015 Academy of American Poets Prize. Her work has recently appeared in *Washington Square Review*, *Witch Craft Magazine*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, and other places, including the *Best New Poets 2015* anthology edited by Tracy K. Smith. She lives in Boston.

**Jasmine Nikki “Nikay” C. Paredes** was born and raised in Cebu City, Philippines. She received a BFA in Creative Writing from Ateneo de Manila University and an MFA in Poetry from Sarah Lawrence College. She is the author of the chapbook collection *WE WILL SEE THE SCATTER* (dancing girl press, 2014), which won first prize in the 2015 Maningning Miclat Poetry Competition. She currently teaches Creative Writing in the Ateneo de Manila University.

**Sara Ryan** is a first-year poetry MFA candidate at Northern Michigan University and an associate editor of poetry for *Passages North*. Her poetry has been published in *Boxcar Poetry Journal*, *Bear Review*, and various teaching anthologies, and is also forthcoming from *Jai-Alai Magazine*. She has finally returned to the Midwest from a four year hiatus in South Florida. Everything is new again.

**Danielle Susi** is the author of the chapbook *The Month in Which We Are*

Born (dancing girl press, 2015). She is a columnist for *Entropy*, the co-editor of *HOUND*, and the Programming and Media Coordinator for the Poetry Center of Chicago. Her writing has appeared in *Knee-Jerk Magazine*, *Hobart*, *The Rumpus*, and elsewhere. She received her MFA in writing from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Newcity has named her among the Top 5 Emerging Chicago Poets. Find her online at [daniellesusi.com](http://daniellesusi.com)

**John Allen Taylor's** poems have appeared in *Booth*, *Dialogist*, *Devil's Lake*, *The Cresset*, and an anthology of Spokane, WA poets called *Railtown Almanac*. He currently lives in Boston, MA and serves as *Redivider's* poetry editor. He makes strong, bitter kombucha.

**Alexandra van de Kamp** is a native of New York and has recently moved to San Antonio, TX with her husband William Glenn. She taught writing and rhetoric at Stony Brook University for eight years. She is the Creative Writing Classes Program Director for Gemini Ink, a nonprofit literary organization based in San Antonio. She also teaches in The Writing Program at University of Texas at San Antonio. Her poems have been published in numerous journals nationwide, such as: *32Poems*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *River Styx*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *Sentence*, and *The Connecticut Review*. Her full-length collection of poems, *The Park of Upside-Down Chairs*, was published by CW Books in 2010, and her chapbook, *Dear Jean Seberg* (2011), won the Burnside Review Contest, judged by Matthew Dickman. Her new chapbook, *A Liquid Bird Inside the Night* (2015), has just been published by Red Glass Books—an independent press based in Brooklyn, NY.

**Emily Paige Wilson** is an MFA candidate and graduate teaching assistant at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Her poetry, translations, and reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Adroit Journal*, *Asymptote*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *PANK*, and *The Raleigh Review*, among others. In addition to Kert Green and Brauer fellowships, she has received the 2012 Emma Howell Memorial Poetry Prize and was first-runner-up in the 2014 Indiana Review Poetry Prize. She rules her life like a fine skylark and tweets @Emmy\_Golightly.

**Dylan Weir** is a Chicagoan and MFA candidate in Poetry at the University of Wisconsin, Madison where he teaches creative writing. He has work in (or forthcoming from): *Rhino*, *After Hours*, *Catch&Release*, *Cleaver*, *Mobius*, *H\_NMG\_N*, *The Legendary*, *Literary Orphans*, *Melancholy Hyperbole*, *Red Paint Hill* & others. Dylan is Co-Editor of Interviews & Reviews at *Devil's Lake*.

**Naima Woods** is a writer and educator living and working in the countryside of Southern New Mexico. She is currently pursuing her MFA at New Mexico State University. Her work can be read in *Nepantla*, *Blackberry: a magazine*, *Broad*, *Specter Magazine*, *Bone Bouquet*, *Glint Magazine* and elsewhere.

**Sharla Yates** is a poet and writer from the Pacific Northwest, currently living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is working on a short story collection *Heavy*, while finishing her MFA at Chatham University. Her poetry manuscript “What I Would Say If We Were To Drown Tonight In The Ocean” was a finalist for the 2015 Villa *Paper Nautilus* contest. She owns no pets, but dreams of birds.