

# THE BOILER



SUMMER 2015

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SUMMER 2015

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# CONTENTS

- 9 CLAIRE WAHMANHOLM  
    My Life As A Nightjar  
    The Road is A Whip  
    Sirius
- 13 ARIEL FRANCISCO  
    Post Hurricane Miami  
    Silence Over Snowy Fields
- 16 MARYSIA SCHULTZ  
    Reap What You Sew
- 17 JARED HEGWOOD  
    Tempe
- 25 KATHERINE MARKEY  
    Midwest Persephone  
    In The Myth of Your Own Making
- 29 MARYSIA SCHULTZ  
    Reap What You Sew
- 30 EMILY O'NEILL  
    Altar to What I Won't Relinquish  
    Future Sense Memory  
    how to whistle
- 33 CAITLIN PRYOR  
    Castles
- 35 HILA RATZABI  
    Visitation
- 36 RACHEL MINDELL  
    Listen To The Dress  
    Devil
- 40 DEBBIE VANCE  
    Mary Alice & June
- 45 PAIGE QUIÑONES  
    I PAY THE GIRL  
    SUMMER, OR DAUGHTERS I HAVEN'T MET

49 DONNA VORREYER

Lost Birds

50 ANURADHA BHOWMIK

Food Coloring

Roots

Paper Dolls

54 STEVEN D. SCHROEDER

marginaliapocalyptica

marginaliapocalyptica

56 NICK MCRAE

The Beech Tree And The Crone

The Grandfather Tree

Clean

62 JULIA HENEY

Winter House

State And Main

Levithan

65 MARYSIA SCHULTZ

Silently Reeling

Tending the Lines

Rainy Market Day

68 ANNA B. SUTTON

Friday Mass

Pseudocyesis

Center Hill

72 GREG ALAN BROWNDERVILLE

A Message To The King

Easy

Body Shots



81 ANNA OJASCASTRO GUZON

Notes on Emerging

Lot

84 ROBERT LUNDAY

Bios Absconditus

83 WESTON CUTTER

One Face of Numerology

Museum of Tycho Brahe

In \_\_\_\_ness and in \_\_\_\_—

86 THE BOILER FLASH CONTEST

*WINNERS*

PATRICK SWANEY

MICHAEL TORRES

*FINALISTS*

KAYLA RAE CANDRILLI

SAMANTHA DEAL

TARA DEAL

97 MARYSIA SCHULTZ

Beneath

A Few Last Silences

99 JAMIE LYN SMITH

A Line Of Four Silver Maples

112 CONTRIBUTORS





CLAIRE WAHMANHOLM

MY LIFE AS A NIGHTJAR

Dear nightjar,

dear hunkered-down  
hunger:

teach me  
(born un-swan,

born a squat goat-  
sucker)

crypticity,

the art of lying low-  
hearted,  
splay-bodied,

hidden  
in bracken.

Sing your churr  
into the heath  
of my ear,  
into my moth-mouth.

Feed me dusk.

Your shadow-  
less flight,  
the crepuscular  
signature

of your feather  
is one

I am suited for.

As everything tumbles  
softly  
into smaller

and smaller things,

your whip-poor-will torpor  
is indivisible.

My heart is already tumbling  
into rock,  
into acorn,  
a thorn.

I am already  
lorn.

I am already  
nearly not here.



CLAIRE WAHMANHOLM

## THE ROAD IS A WHIP

Is a cotton-mouthed hiss.  
A kiss  
like burlap as

you drag your face along it. Feels  
like skin. Fills

your mouth  
with

friction. The sky is  
a hole.        The sky is  
an infinite mouth dragging its gasp across  
you.        At night, this  
thought unties  
you as

you stare into its throat,  
the wheat

of your hair  
patterned with tar,

the sky crumbling  
into your mouth like dirt,        onto your tongue  
like a song,  
which sings: *wring*

*my wrists with Black-Eyed Susan vine,*  
*my spine*  
*with common*  
*ivy.        Dust me with dusk, then*  
*dust me with snow, then*  
*soften*  
*the bones of my face, already frozen*  
*in*  
*a wink:    one*  
*eye open,*  
*one*  
*eye gone.*

CLAIRE WAHMANHOLM

SIRIUS

Heat unrolls its dog tongue across us  
like paint. Like panting.  
Like the way we're trying to breathe  
in this solder-air that fuses us  
chest to chest so that our lungs make  
a four-winged bird's four pink wings,  
which flutter as we take turns  
breathing. We gasp in fields  
of sawgrass and asters. We gasp  
in riverbeds and the beds of trucks.  
There is so not enough that our sight  
dies in patches—a star shape dies from  
my right eye, a pyramid from your left.  
Slowly these bite the fields into crumbs  
of constellations—the stray dog,  
the broken-winged bird, the torn sail—  
whose myths are bad-starred and blighted  
as we are. We reach around each other's bodies  
to feel the feathers, the mange, the sailcloth.  
We reach past the dark's teeth and it bites  
our fingers off and our hands get lost  
in the soft of its throat. Our elbows  
catch in its gullet. Shoulder by shoulder  
we tumble into a new, brightest heat.

ARIEL FRANCISCO

## POST HURRICANE, MIAMI

I step out into the unseasonal chill  
that fills the violent space left behind,  
watch the stillness of flood water

in the streets of this city reduced  
to nameless shapes in darkness,  
wind chimes hanging from the doorframe,

silent now in the aftermath like the hollow  
bones of birds they so resemble. I tilt  
back another beer until I'm looking up,

raise the bottle to my eye and blink  
away a few stray drops: a crude telescope  
to view the stars, blurred and imperfect

as though crafted by my own drunken hands.  
Funny how they're waiting when the sun sets  
on downed power lines and ruptured transformers.

Funny how they hold no ill will towards us  
for creating replacements, don't hesitate  
to return when their shoddy imitators fail.

Even dead stars give us their light.  
One twinkles occasionally and I recall  
looking up at the sky through the window

of my childhood room, catching the shimmer  
and making a wish for another week  
without school, or for the flood waters

to recede so I could play outside.  
But now I know that a twinkling star is just  
a satellite, another man-made thing

not quite as far away as the stars, though far enough  
to see the world as a whole. Far enough  
to see the hurricane somewhere out

in the Atlantic, spinning itself into nothingness,  
dissipating under its own destructive power.  
Far enough to see who still has electricity

and who doesn't, and yet far enough to not see  
me standing in my doorway. Far enough  
to not see itself reflected in the water. I toss

the bottle into the flooded street, watch  
the ripples, the way the movement makes  
the stars reflections waver, twinkle,

all becoming satellites, watchers, until a new  
flickering catches my eye,  
a glow emerging from the storefront

of a fortune teller across the street: candles being lit,  
one after another, and soon I can make out  
the silhouette of a woman shuffling tarot cards

on a tabletop, their worn out edges slapping one another  
with the silence of leaves drifting down  
from rattled branches to rain-soaked pavement

again and again, as if waiting for something  
or someone, the candle wax melting into puddles.  
I wade across the flooded street and knock

against the window, press both palms against the glass:  
one to show I have nothing with which to pay,  
the other for her to read anyway.

ARIEL FRANCISCO

SILENCE OVER THE SNOWY FIELDS

*For Robert Bly*

How can the mind fail to recognize itself?  
Through the plane's oval window: a harbor  
bites into the mainland like a great blue dragon.  
Heavy whiteness douses the landscape, forces  
it to forget what it looks like, what it is. Pin-  
pricks of car headlights like cinder drifting  
through the world, the remains of a once great  
fire; dull azure of frozen lakes, visible in  
shapeless patches beneath the falling snow,  
the sound of it settling on the iced surface—  
the echoing nothingness of erasure.



MARYSIA SCHULTZ

Reap What You Sew, oil on canvas

2011

TEMPE

The grass is cut 2 ¼ inches per neighborhood yard beautification standards and the scent of day-gone gasoline left from the lawn mower wafts into my nose. The shirt I'm wearing is damp with 2 am dew and ladybugs. An ant bed stands quiet but nervously close. Me and Jo lie on the ground smoking, admiring the stars.

The music from the house thumps in heavy and shifting beats. Red and blue light bulbs strung around the porch flash on our faces. The flash pattern was at first disconcerting, we kept thinking the police had come to raid the place, but it soon became comfortable, as if we're at the outer rims of a carnival. We're concealed from her husband and the rest of the guests, tucked away in the ferns, holding off in the deep left of the yard. Jo rolls a cigarette on her stomach. Her fingers deftly tighten the roll and she kisses one end, lights the other.

"It's really hard to drink when you're on your back," she smiles, still looking up. The red and blue lights fill the lines in her face. "But smoking is better— why no one pops a beer after sex." A bead of sweat sinks down the side of her nose and pauses at her left nostril.

I want to tell her that I think I love her; that I don't want to leave tomorrow. "Prob'ly," I agree.

"Are you drunk? You smell like it."

"I'm fine," I say. "Really. I'm just... God, I don't know." Jo makes me nervous and I always find myself apologizing for being curt. I imagine myself being Joe Cool with her, but men are dumb around women and myself dumber than most. Her age makes it worse; she's so comfortable with me, like she's got the upper hand in everything, even though, at 27, we're only five years apart. I'm often at a loss; rarely have answers.

She reaches over and takes my hand, squeezing it. Her palm is sweaty and soft. Her nails are cut short, painted a grayish-purple and intricately decorated. I'm amazed with her ability with a toothpick and glitter, even if it looks trashy. "I love the summer," she tells me and rings her fingers in the spaghetti-strings strapping her shoulder, towing the ribbed red shirt over her head. "I do this all the time. They're all too stoned or drunk. They won't say anything because they won't remember anything."

"David would— guarantee."

"He's already turned in your grades. You've already graduated."

"I'm not worried about my grades, Jo."

"He's too busy smoking with Ernie or maybe Matthew, sitting around that spotty little plastic table, getting high talking about super-string theory or making Carl Sagan jokes that aren't as much funny as they are mean. I was doing the wife stuff earlier, but I can't be around them long," she says and

pulls at the vent of my shirt, unbuttoning the collar. " They make me feel dumb and ignored. Let's just enjoy this time, now."

Large fern leaves, wet from condensation, hang over us, dropping mini-blind shadows on the ground and her chest, like we were in one of a Roger Moore Bond movies. In this light, with her curly black hair, she looks almost Polynesian. Her bare skin pinches mine when she rolls on top of me. Sometimes I wonder how they got together, how he married her when she has nothing to do with his world. Which then makes me wonder why I like her so much when the question is the same. I can't help it, try not to think about it, so I guess he can't either, which is just a whole goddamn problem. I push it away before a tiny bit of me asks myself how many times I've done that.

"You leave tomorrow." Her hand finds its way to my face and she brushes at my forehead with her thumb. She closes her eyes and purses her lips tight, small dimples forming in her cheeks. She kisses around my face, soft and damp. "I want as much as I can get out of you."

It's fumbling, difficult maneuvering around in the bushes. Small, thick and spindly leaves bite into my back as I'm ground into the dirt. When she calls me "David" I start to laugh but stifle it by biting the inside of my cheek. It's stupid and it hurts.

She rolls another cigarette as I retie my shoes. When she blinks it's slow. Gray smoke belly dances off the end of her cigarette. I have to close my eyes to avoid the need to kiss her again. "Will you stay?" she asks. Some car doors slam in the distance. People are waving drunken good-byes, stumbling.

"No. I don't think so."

"Then let's go for a walk. Here, take my hand."

"Okay."

The streets are cold, mossy cobblestone in the surrounding area. Tall remodeled houses stand quiet under the blue night, some hide under sycamores and oaks. Some houses are lit like jack o' lanterns. Jo pumps my hand while we walk. The moon moves fast behind the clouds, peeks through the quick gaps.

Jo walks barefoot, something I had cautioned her against before we left. In some places, the cobblestones are old and broken and sharp. I have to point out the bad places in the road for her. Her night vision is terrible and she's left her glasses back at the house. "I don't want your soft, pretty feet cut up."

"I'm fine," she says and licks her lips, uncapping a small bolt of chapstick. "I got a little redneck in me. My feet have some thick soles." She brushes at my hair. "You don't worry."

But that's all I can do once I see Miss Billie walking towards us, Miss Billie with the drawn-on eyebrows, wild-eyes and pink and green curlers, Miss Billie who's David's secretary, Miss Billie, in her teal taffeta robe, walking a leashed pig. I look at Jo, who's smiling now, waving Miss Billie over. She stoops and pets the pig, "I love pigs," she says. The pig comes up to one of my sneakers and sniffs.

"Hey," says Miss Billie. "What ya'll doing?"



"Running away with each other," Jo says, not looking up. "I like your pig."

"His name is Air Supply," Miss Billie says. "Like the band."

"Tonight's the party for the grad students," I say, stepping a few inches away from Jo. "It got hot in the house and really loud, so we thought it would be good for a walk."

"At three am?" Miss Billie asks.

"We're trying to sneak away so no one notices." Jo starts grabbing at my hand and I swat at her attempts. "We're gonna run away to Tempe, Arizona and start a new life. Gonna go west and propagate."

Miss Billie reigns the pig in tight when he starts barking at something in the bushes. "Where's Dr. Krakauer?" I can see that she's wearing panty hose under her robe. Her white Keds look brand new. "He has an early flight." She looks directly at me. "Early."

"He's tied up in the basement right now, Miss Billie. Gagged with a racquetball," Jo laughs. "But don't tell nobody. We're trying to keep a low profile."

"She's joking," I interrupt. "Seriously, Miss Billie."

Suddenly, the pig breaks free of her grip and rockets through some hedges. He wedges his head under a nearby car, his tiny feet digging away at the asphalt, desperate to get to his quarry.

"Oh, shit!" squeals Miss Billie. "Ronnie will kill me if he gets dirty!"

Jo pats me on the shoulder, smiles. "You can go get him."

I shoot Jo a look, but sigh and take a large step over the hedges. Thin and spindly branches poke at my crotch. "You could've gone around the other way," Jo says. "Just walk around it." But it's too late and I'm already over, brushing at my lap.

"What was it under that car," asks Miss Billie. "What scared poor Air Supply?"

She pets at the pig's head in short and increasingly rough strokes. Its eyes are wild and it lets out a guttural squeal, surprising for something so small. Its tiny legs bicycle furiously but futilely.

"Un gato. A cat," I reply. "It hissed at me."

Jo throws her arm around me and squeezes. "I think we should name our first child Air Supply."

Miss Billie hugs the pig tighter, uses one arm to scratch at her left calf. "Mrs. Krakauer, are you drunk?"

I start to walk away, tugging Jo with me. "Maybe just a little, Miss Billie. But nothing to worry about. I'd hate for Dr. Krakauer to be embarrassed by something like this." I wave back at her. "I'm going to take Mrs. Krakauer home right now."

"She's never liked me," Jo whispers in my ear.

But I don't. We walk several blocks mostly in silence except where we stop to look at some of the old buildings and the bright murals on their walls. Under the street light, an old and fading Dizzy Gillespie blows his horn beside who I think is either Ella or a water-stained and moss-covered Rosemary

Clooney.

Downtown is gorgeous at night. Most of the architecture is straight out of the thirties, the downtown area with tight streets flanked by tall buildings with hard-eyed eagles and Corinthian capitals hanging over us from a hundred feet high. The area is falling apart, dying in some places, while other lots are being refurbished, but unfortunately, not in the same streamlined style. Jo and I trace our hands along the lined brick walls.

The bar that we eventually fall into is called Chinese Checkers. Through the door is a long, narrow and near claustrophobic hallway, with a high ceiling and a heavy skin of graffiti. The doorman isn't there to take our cover charge, just a barstool and table with a hat on it. Jo puts a few dollars in the hat. We walk hand in hand (something she insists on) and Jo leads us through the bottleneck until the space suddenly expands into a half room of wooden floor, jukebox, bar and-- where a far wall should be-- a wide expanse, a courtyard between hollowed-out buildings. The trees are decorated in strung Christmas lights and brightly colored ribbon. As we pass through the half-room, Jo leaves our order with the bartender.

We find a small wooden picnic-table under an umbrella next to a hanging piñata. After we sit we don't talk much. Jo angles herself away from a blinking blue Coors neon. Crickets jump across the mottled stone path. A breeze swoops deep in the courtyard and rustles the umbrella over our heads.

The waitress, a pretty petite blond with a curly bob, wiggles up to the table. Her tray's cluttered with napkins and limes. A lipstick smudge in the right corner of her lips smears outwards like from a kiss. She sets my Coke and three tequila shots down and with a snap of her wrist spins them across the table.

"Can I have this piñata," asks Jo and points toward it, a purple and yellow donkey.

The waitress' nametag says *Jewel*. "No," says Jewel and walks off.

"She's sort of pretty," Jo says.

"I think maybe I've seen her in a math class."

"You are so dumb sometimes," Jo says and laughs. She stands on her chair and unties the piñata from its branch. "These are neat."

I reach toward her, but it's half-hearted. "Jo," I say, "Stop, please."

Jo plops back down in her chair, props her sooty soled feet on the table. "I think Tempe will be good for you. I went out there once. For tacos." She laughs hard at her own joke. "Best goddamn tacos."

"I hope their graduate department will be good for me," I explain, but she's too busy pulling out the piñata's crepe hairs. "Finding an apartment was -- could you please put that down? It's not yours."

"You need to chill. They know me here." She motions for the waitress to come over. "Can I get some chicken fingers?" she asks Jewel. "I'm hungry."

Jewel grunts when she sees Jo plucking at the piñata. "We're out of chicken fingers," she says. "Our kitchen's small, so we close it down at 10."

"You don't even sell chicken fingers, do you?"

"We close in twenty minutes," Jewel says bluntly and gives Jo's feet a disgusted look. She takes out a pen from her apron and pokes at Jo's feet until she takes them off. "I'm going to give your table to another waitress. Thank you."

After Jewel leaves, I say, "You said they knew you here."

"I say a lot of shit."

"Why did you ask me to stay?"

"David flies out tomorrow, third time this month. I thought you might like another weekend of ole' Jo."

I scratch my head at this and take a long pull on the Coca-Cola's straw. "Sometimes," I say, "I hate you." And then I pull out the straw and poke in her direction, punctuating. "Hate. Like right now."

She laughs, holding the piñata in front of her face and speaks in a hee-haw donkey voice. "I don't know why."

"I'm serious," I insist. "I have fun with you, but you've got this stupid attitude like I'm a little toy-boy, call me up whenever you have the itch. You're condescending. A lot. I don't envy whoever comes next."

Jo leans forward suddenly and pinches my arm. "Hey, what's the matter with you? Don't say things like that." Using her legs, Jo pushes the table into my stomach. "You think I just do this? Find some boy, star-struck with my husband, seduce him? Teach him to fuck how I like? Break in another once I'm done with him?"

"I'm not in love with you," and she wiggles all her fingers at me. "When did I say I was? Never. We're just friends-- friends with privileges."

"It feels like more to me." I tell her and she gives me a weary look. "I'd like it to be."

"Is this so bad," she asks. "I like you. I really do. And I want you to do well. I just..."

"You're being unfair to me. You know how I feel"

"I don't give a shit how you feel. I don't."

"Because you feel the same way I do."

"No, Stupid. I love my husband. That's how I feel. Don't try to qualify my heart. Just because he's older, doesn't mean I'm with him for all of that academic money." She stretches her arms over her head. "Look it it rain! All the money!"

"When we're together--"

"Do we make love?" She glares at me, waiting for a response. "'Don't mean to be the bearer of bad news from the country of the grown-ups, but, hey, it's not. Sex is just sex. When you're fingering me, when I'm fucking you in the bushes. It's fun, but relationships aren't... none of that means I've stopped loving my man."

I can't say anything, can't stop turning my Coke around and then my ankle starts to itch. I'm embarrassed even though we're alone.

"Listen," she says. "Obviously it was a mistake to ask you to stay longer. I misread what we were doing. I thought we were both lonely, that we were being friends. Leave it at that."

"Friends don't fuck," I say.

"If the person you're fucking isn't your friend, then you're in trouble."

I don't even realize I'm counting the seconds of silence until I do. Jo reaches across the table for my hand, holds just my fingers. "Here, let's go see if Shoney's is open. I'm hungry for some breakfast. Would you like some eggs?"

I jerk away from her, knocking her drink over.

Brown, foamy liquid pours out faster than I expect and I twist my leg against the table trying to avoid it. Small squares of melting ice float on the Coke puddle in the middle of the table, some of it snakes into the grooves of the wood. I napkin up the mess, turning white napkins a reddish-brown.

Jo reaches down into her pocket, brings out a Ziploc bag of rolled cigarettes. Lights one from a book of matches in her pants' pocket. She shakes her head, pulls her hair loose. She looks at me funny. "I want to kiss you on the neck. To say I'm sorry. Will you let me?"

"Kiss your husband instead."

Her eyes blink fast, but she recovers quickly, folds her arms, pushes her chair back from the table, closer to the tree.

"Fair enough," she says, getting up. "C'mon. I want to show you something."

"I think I should maybe just go home. Tomorrow will be exhausting enough."

"A graduation gift." Jo stuffs the Coke-soggy napkins halfway into my glass, stacks the shots on top of each other, sets them on top of the napkin. As I get up, she tears a chunk of bark from the tree and puts it in her pocket. "Seriously," she says. "Let's part as friends."

When we get back to the house, it's empty. Lights are still on. The floor is a mess of red napkins and beer bottles standing in tight groups like brown army platoons. Jo walks into an adjacent room, reappears with a camera. "This way." She pulls on my arm, leads me toward the stairs.

Jo laughs when I step out of the bathroom. The suit is a size too big for me, the sleeves only an inch too long, but noticeable and ridiculous. The blazer's padded shoulders make my head look abnormally small. "Those can be taken out," she says, "For a natural look."

"Not going to bother with the tie," I tell her and when I kick at the pants cuffs that engulf my feet, the right loafer flips off and lands on her bed. I kick the other shoe off, into the bathroom.

"Why did we ever think this could fit me?" I ask her. I use the tooth of the belt buckle to dig a new hole in the leather. "He's not a little guy."

"Oh, wow," she says through her hands. "You're so handsome."

I nod at her. "This was a nice idea, Jo. Thanks. But there's no way it'll fit."

Her fingers work at the camera's lens, trying to pull me into focus. "Maybe not. Doesn't matter," she says. "This is fun. This is what I wanted." The camera whirrs and shoots. "There's something weird with that noise," Jo tells me. "It means the camera's searching for the flash add-on when it's not

there."

She hugs me around my arms so I can't hug her back, just smell the shampoo residue in her hair. She holds the camera away, points it at us, lays her head on my shoulder. "Say cheese." The camera clicks twice and she lets me go.

I step into the bedroom's bath to wash my hands. When I turn the faucet, the pipes groan and some water comes out in spurts. "Air in the pipes," I say. "The main flow must have got turned off for a second."

Jo hugs me again, but from behind and I'm a little uncomfortable with the forced intimacy of the situation. There's awkwardness with any partnered act in a bathroom. "How long could you put me up in Tempe?" She squeezes my right shoulder, "If I go?"

I almost fall over, but catch the cabinet over the toilet. "What?"

She takes a step back, folds her arms. "I don't have the time to pack anything. We'd have to leave right now."

I turn the water off and squint at her. "Again--- what are you talking about?"

"I could go. That could happen. Don't you want me to go?"

"No, no." I ring my arms around her waist. "I mean, yes. Yes, I do."

I trace my index finger down the inside ridge of her neck.

The floor creaks and we're no longer alone. "Jo?" Her husband.

Jo turns. "David?" And I think, was that his name?

He's disheveled, winky. Brown stains that look maybe like spilled coffee cover his shirt and a long silver and black striped tie unknotted hangs from a belt loop. His brown hair is scattered like the bristles of an overused broom. But with all this, he smells clean, like a hospital.

"Momma had a heart attack," he says.

Her hands are suddenly in his hair, cradling his neck on her shoulder, his arms wrapping her back. "Oh, baby," she's saying. "Is she awake? Breathing? How bad is it?"

They sit down on the bed together. I walk my back up against the wall, but too close and step on a nearby window's curtains so hard that they jerk the rod from its moorings and I have to duck fast to escape from being hit. Jo looks at me hard, but David doesn't seem to notice.

"I don't know, don't know," he says and places his hands on Jo's head. "The doctors keep rushing around me. Kept hearing the word 'hemorrhaging' and I can't tell if they're just so busy or if they're trying to avoid my questions. Terry got there before I did. He told me to get cleaned up or something while he waited."

"Oh, baby, I'm so sorry." She combs at his hair with her fingers like she does with mine. Strange to see.

"I just got back. I'm just too drunk and my momma's dying." He tries to smile, but it's ugly when he does. He stops, thankfully. "Needed to get some clothes and find you. I couldn't find you."

"I'm here, baby." She finally looks at me. "We went for a walk when the party got too loud. Later I was thinking one of your old suits would be a nice graduation present."

"Yes, yes," he says. "Good kid," then adds: "Smart kid." And then they were both looking at me, not mad, just looking me over like I was a stranger.

Halfway down the stairs, I realize that I'm still barefoot.

I peek my head in the door, hear the shower running. Jo's packing a suitcase, carefully folding several pairs of blue and white plaid boxers. I lean half my body inside the door and wave at her, trying to get her attention. Finally, she notices me.

"I forgot my shoes," I mouth to her and point to my feet, wiggle my toes.

"Fuck your shoes," she mouths back. "Go."

She looks around, grabs a pen and paper off of a side table, scribbles, then pushes the paper into my hand. "Don't let the name fool you," she says and closes the door, and then just before the clack of the dead bolt: "Best tacos ever, I promise."

Walking home, I take a different path than the one Jo and I ambled. Different houses, different lights, different cobblestones, different moon. I stop to call a tabby cat to me but it runs away. A breeze picks up, the air feels wet and I think rain's soon. Twelve blocks to the apartment where I'm sleeping on a couch. A stoplight down the corner switches to red. Twelve blocks to my two blue suitcases and a flowery carry-on that has my shaving kit and an Elmore Leonard paperback. Twelve blocks to two sleeps til my trip out of here. The street stretches out before me. "Twelve more blocks," I say out loud.

KATHERINE MARKEY

## MIDWEST PERSEPHONE

Wake me and I'll be a prayer.

Count the slow hours between dark and dawn  
like rosary beads—the litanies made by the lonely  
in crowded rooms. Listen to the slight breath,  
stale of sleeping bodies, all ripe with Midwest discontent,  
rough-hewn by the unease of empty hands.  
No way to unstick the darkness, I want to splay  
over the blades of your fingertips  
until I'm made lantern, bleeding light.

What's the key to living easy?  
The earth offers no recompense for its sufferings,  
so let us keep turning too. Spin me into the pull  
of your mouth, the gravity of your tongue.  
Sometimes it's nice to be touched  
a little too rough. Sometimes home is a man  
on the stairs, heaven a god without laws.  
Life, an invocation of want.

Want is the way you tear into a pomegranate—  
the skillful patience, the plucking of jewels.

There is good in this. Something like allure  
in the time it takes to destroy a body  
and enjoy it. Because the world is sure  
to fade even with the morning sun ringing  
above us, I burn the candle to resist the flesh—  
make of this cathedral a shadowed sepulcher.

Because my mother wouldn't want me to,  
of three brothers I would choose the one  
constantly burning, who can do the worst things  
without flinching. Who would rather parse out my bones  
like he's spitting seeds than see me walk away.  
Both flame and the oxygen it eats alive, the one  
who waits behind my teeth, singing in my sleep.  
Better to cut my bowtie lips than seek some other  
solvent, better to wish me stranded all than to die a good girl.



KATHERINE MARKEY

IN THE MYTH OF YOUR OWN MAKING

all sinew and sharp edges,

let your mother be

a white-tailed deer

stumbling

in the salt-stained streets

of crowded subdivision,

each motion an impulse—

quick skin, muscle

memory, a faith.

piston, axle, trigger pull,

marrow—liquid steel. let your father be

the snow falling around her, covering

the shotgun houses and empty yards,

dampening the earth

that bruises her feet.

write:

*think too much*

*and life becomes ruminant.*

and if there is any lesson  
to be learned,

let it be this:

pain belongs to no one,

and if there is redemption,  
let it be

the cracked tree limbs above her, the sky  
too close—a pressing down of stars.



MARYSIA SCHULTZ

Reap What You Sew, oil on canvas

2011

EMILY O'NEILL

ALTAR TO WHAT I WON'T RELINQUISH

What if we played unbroken.  
No wax spilled. Pretend the glass  
fast, liquid. Move like that. Like wishing.  
Like slipping into shallow water. I can't  
call this a ritual, just stealing. Lighter. Nail  
polish. Cookie fortune. Concert ticket.  
Generic enough to never beg interrogation.  
I'll take what you'll never miss.  
A dollar. A bookmark. Myself.  
As for the teeth, I've folded each  
brittle star into a drawer where  
they can't brand you anymore.  
I can't imagine biting a shoulder  
without tasting how you'd wince  
out the invitation to open  
wider. To sign my name.

EMILY O'NEILL

## FUTURE SENSE MEMORY

The holy war of the self  
lives in the ends of fingers.  
Our hands interrupted  
by other bodies every day.

How common it becomes to recalibrate  
the trebuchet. To cast myself  
through walls with unnecessary ferocity.  
When I first cut your hair we were praying  
down a trench in the Fens. Could've been a parlor  
trick, same as when I remember

keys fallen behind the bed  
or your belt a coiled snake  
around our ankles. I bet  
your clothes fit me like muscle.  
I bet the witch in my shears  
summoned blood to boiling.

A scalp is better than eyes  
as window to the soul. I hate  
the word *soul* unless music.  
Unless Otis unhinges his jaw. I'm taking  
your hair, my palms a warm locket.

In the past I've been a maudlin prophet.  
In the future I'll undress you on sand.  
Remember knowing how to storm  
the shore before I named the tension  
in your neck, your mourning  
dove *yes*, morning yolk spilling  
through our eyelids. Eight oily days  
until I'll know if armor is important.  
If you've been & won & gone.

EMILY O'NEILL

how to whistle

shoes make the man aware he can leave  
at any moment. we're affectionate strangers

because we're aware of the alternative.  
it's enough to buy the first round. to look away

& feel your wallet thinning. it's beyond plenty  
to chew a lip that isn't yours, to lace your body

into the scars of another's recent longing. I'm sure  
I've bled on sadder men. for this one, I apologized

but meant *you needed this*. he's sick & starts the shower  
for the third time, says I'm amazing for not churning

at the sugar of all we swallowed like new birds.  
I guess I forgot to eat dinner. he told me to be quiet

but revised silence with want. cracked pepper over me  
& chased the grit through every corner.

pinned me at the elbows & broke a finger  
holding on so tight. a February holiday

seems a cruel joke. let's celebrate loss instead of love.  
I'll eat a single pill for breakfast & feel wild

from un-sleep. I can't act kinder than I have  
already. I find rough, pretty men hysterical

& they find me old at the corners  
of my eyes & older still in the way

I walk home holding my own hand.

CAITLIN PRYOR

## CASTLES

We play at the past,  
leaping inside the bouncing fortress.

They say at this age  
you're faced with yourself—

you return like planets,  
older even than the nobles

who used to fuck and fight  
in bastions like these.

While we jump, a double rainbow  
promises a messenger, or doesn't.

Under such auspices we forget  
our debts, our doom, our nothing

yet to mortgage—our twenties  
in the twenty-first century.

In the garage someone flips a switch  
and the castle's heart goes silent.

The viscous early summer  
sucks in the lavender battlements,

the gates implode as the palace exhales.  
We sip our beer. Is this pleasant,

watching the bounce house fall  
and rise, topple

and thrum to life again.  
Over and over its spires collapse

like a closing hand,  
clutching the strange people in its palm.

Now you see it, now—  
we chuckle and say cheers.

When the laughter fades,  
the walls begin to hum again.

The castle's denizens call out  
from under the turret's heavy lightness

and the towers rise once more.  
We save each other. Someone

has to end the trick, has to bring back  
what's disappeared.



HILA RATZABI

## VISITATION

The spirits line up at my writing desk at 9pm  
Like they've done every night since the hurricane.  
They toss seaweed scarves round their necks,  
Place hands on hips, stare at me greenly, accusing.

I'm used to this by now and too tired tonight,  
So I open the office door and let the cat in.  
She hisses and pounces and chases  
The spirits down the stairs.

When I'm hungry I head to the kitchen,  
Open the fridge and find the spirits lounging  
Among the rotten turnips and radishes  
I refused to eat from the CSA.

I move to the den, turn on the TV.  
The spirits perch on my shoulders,  
Whisper spoilers in my ear,  
Press all the buttons on the remote.

They leave passive aggressive notes  
All around the house:  
*Forgot to take out compost again*  
*Left lights on in the living room*

I climb the stairs, brush my teeth,  
And find the spirits curled up  
With the cat at the foot of the bed.  
Their snores are an earthquake that rocks me to sleep.

with the levels –  
  
she has them just so.  
  
We stick with diddly,  
  
we expect equivalent  
  
levels, equate and  
  
familiarize ourselves  
  
with TARE. My bone  
  
hand ruffles the curtains,  
  
my levels are high then  
  
higher. I've been perched  
  
here for decades. Text  
  
when you're outside.

little pleasure in destroying the manicure her mother had given her. "You ever been swimming in there?"

"Are you kidding?" Mary Alice asked. She studied June's face and saw she wasn't. June had freckles all over and wore no make-up. Mary Alice thought she looked a little like one of those hippie models from the magazines, though her hair was dirtier. "No, I haven't," she said.

"Want to?" June asked. She swung her legs lazily, knocking her bare heels against the granite.

Mary Alice did not want to, but she didn't say no.

"Sweet," June said. "Follow me."

Mary Alice followed June as she stepped over the guardrail. They had to scoot along the edge of the quarry a few yards until they reached flat ground, then they followed a wide path cut for trucks that wended down into the pit. Mary Alice felt her heart beat faster, and her fingers started to tingle. She worried about her car, whether she'd locked it. She'd left her phone in the cup holder.

"The water's wonderfully cold," June said as they walked. "There's this little cove? We have to stay there so the workers don't see us, else we'll have to make a run for it. You can get fined a hundred dollars for swimming in the quarry." June said a hundred dollars like it was a great sum of money.

"My mom says she saw a barracuda in here once," June said.

"Barracuda are saltwater fish," Mary Alice said.

June shrugged. "That's what she said." She had a tattoo of a squid wrapped around the earth on her shoulder.

"What's that for?" Mary Alice asked, touching the tattoo.

"My mom and I have the same one," June said. "It's how the world will end."

Mary Alice didn't know what to say to that, so she said, "Oh."

"You have any tattoos?" June asked.

Mary Alice laughed. "Me? No." Just imagining her mother's reaction made her mouth itch.

"You should get one while you're still young," June said. "But somewhere your skin won't stretch too much. My mom has a friend who got this beautiful tattoo of a woman on her belly, but after she had a kid it got all stretched out. Now she looks like a fat whore." Mary Alice didn't say anything, and June added, "The tattoo, I mean, not my mom's friend."

"Right," Mary Alice said, and tried to laugh.

"Anyway, it hurt like hell," June said. The path they'd been walking on bottomed out and continued in a level circle around the quarry, but June stopped. "Here we are," she said.

The water was still about twenty feet below them. Mary Alice peered over the edge and felt her stomach clench. She'd have to jump.

"How will we get out?" she asked.

"Climb." June peeled her tank top off, and Mary Alice tried not to stare at her tiny breasts inside her pink cotton bra. Then she unbuttoned her shorts. "You won't want to swim in that," June said, indicating Mary Alice's uniform. "It'll drag you down."

Instead, she followed. June stopped beside the rock wall and smiled.

"So? What are we looking for?" Mary Alice didn't see anything.

June took a deep breath and dipped beneath the surface, and a moment later Mary Alice heard her voice echo from inside the granite wall.

"It's a cave." June's voice sounded faint, though Mary Alice could tell she was shouting. "Just dive under."

No, no, no, no, Mary Alice said inside her head. No, no, no, no, she said as she held her breath and went under. The water here felt extra cold, like it was full of ghosts. She kept her eyes shut and her arms outstretched. It took her three dives to find the opening, and when she finally did she swam a long time underwater for fear she'd come up too soon and bump her head.

It was cold and very dark, but once her eyes adjusted the ceiling seemed to sparkle. The water glowed with trapped light.

"Isn't it beautiful?" June asked. She was holding on to the rock wall, her body lifted half way out of the water. "It's my favorite place in the world."

"My favorite place is IHOP," Mary Alice said without thinking, and immediately she regretted her words. She swam to the wall beside June and held on. The cramp in her side worsened.

"Do you know any prayers?" June asked. "Every time I come here I wish I knew a prayer to say."

"No," Mary Alice lied. She knew lots of prayers.

"Too bad," June said. "I thought you would, what with St. Ignatius and all."

"Sorry," Mary Alice said. She gripped her side, trying to ease the cramp, and closed her eyes.

All of a sudden, June started belting out Bob Dylan lyrics. Her voice filled the cave and sent little sound ripples across the still water.

"Not so different from praying, is it?" she said when she had finished, and a heavy silence surrounded them. Mary Alice slipped back into the water as though it might protect her.

It *was* different, Mary Alice thought. The silence after June finished singing was deafening, but when Mary Alice said Our Father at night, over and over, the words filled her body, and the silence she heard then was not empty like this, but full. The cold water touched her body everywhere and gave her shivers.

"It's getting late," June said.

"Yeah," Mary Alice said.

They swam beneath the wall into the quarry and squinted in the too bright light. Mary Alice's pupils burned. She studied June's movements as she climbed the rock wall and did her best to copy them when her turn came. It took her a long while, but she made it. She pulled her uniform on over her wet skin and felt the vulnerability of being wet when she wasn't supposed to be. The sun had moved low in the sky and slanted through the air like a fiery arrow. The single cormorant was gone, and they walked back to their cars in silence.

“See you around,” June said, standing beside her old yellow Volkswagen. Mary Alice could see her baby pink bra through her wet tank top and felt her own thick polo cling to her curves. Tomorrow, she decided, she would not wear the white sports bra over her regular one. If her nipples were hard, everyone would see. This did not make her feel ashamed.

The girls got in their separate cars and pulled away. The sun-baked air inside Mary Alice’s car was hot and thick and smelled like steamed carpet. She followed June until she turned down a residential street, then she kept driving. She kept the windows rolled up, letting the heat surround her body as she took the rosary from the rear view mirror and fingered each round, wooden bead.

RACHEL MINDELL

## LISTEN TO THE DRESS

The truth is a home haircut and a dead bulb

the street seen through a dress

heavy damp, strung

from the window frame.

A sink trap below and the window

beginning to burble. Tell me

about the realest things. Show me how

you comb. Traipsed about,

the dress held downing and sad

it said to the can't cart of my mind, that

let-go skull, it said real isn't this street, isn't

rolls for supper or the biggest batch

of mail/wad of dough. I went wet, I went

heavy and isn't that home. Now, isn't that.

RACHEL MINDELL

DEVIL

Death doctrine

at the peninsula

is key-shaped,

hand-drawn.

Equitable to

squat diddly,

ghetto level

thread counts.

Here, you dropped

your hankie. Between

dealers, we put

a pebble in the door.

Slamming fucks



DEBBIE VANCE

## MARY ALICE & JUNE

It was a Tuesday in August, fifth period, and Mary Alice rested her chin on her open palm and gazed out the window as oily mirages drifted through the parking lot like floating water. The hem of her navy blue khaki skirt was torn; she'd have to ask her mother to sew it tonight or else tomorrow she'd receive a demerit. One more demerit meant detention. Sister Hilde was talking about some ancient heroine who burned on a pyre and was thus named a saint, and the sweaty boy in front of her smelled like overcooked cabbage. *Pray for us sinners*, Mary Alice recited to herself as she held her breath, *now and at the hour of our death*.

When the bell rang, instead of turning left down the wide, cool hall toward her sixth period pre-calculus class, Mary Alice turned right and walked outside through the tall glass doors. The sun was hot and dry. She got in her car, a gently used Buick, gold as wheat and big as a boat, and drove away. By the time Sister Francine realized she was absent, it would be too late. She would receive a demerit after all; she would go to detention and think about the sins she had committed, hopefully excising the root of evil from her carnal body, a subject lesson in purgatory.

The radio played commercials for cleaning services and prescription drugs, and after five minutes Mary Alice had three different telephone numbers memorized, though she would dial none of them, and could list in entirety the negative side effects of one antidepressant, unremarkable in its final warning: death. A rosewood rosary dangled from the rear view mirror, a confirmation gift from her mother, and Mary Alice touched the silver crucifix. The poor man hanging there grimaced.

"It's a nice day out," Mary Alice said to Jesus. "Don't you know that?"

Mary Alice drove with the windows down and tried to enjoy the cool wind whipping through her hair, making her nipples hard, but always in the back of her mind she heard the Sisters' grim warning: It is a sin to indulge in the desires of the flesh. Look at Our Lord upon the cross, they'd say, he gave his body unto death for the salvation of the world.

Mary Alice was no savior. She was just a sixteen-year-old girl, and she was beginning to think she was missing out on something.

She drove to the granite quarry at the edge of town: a big, empty place full of echoes. There was a lake in the hollow, and sometimes kids swam there, though they weren't supposed to. It was deep and cold, and there was the danger of falling rocks. Mary Alice sat on the edge of the cliff and leaned her arms on the metal guardrail that circled the quarry. She squeezed

her legs beneath the safety bar and let her feet dangle over the stain blue water far below. She watched a cormorant soar through the gulley and imagined what it would feel like to be weightless in all that granite cool air. Construction equipment hummed across the quarry, punctuated by the loud crack of breaking rock. Mary Alice closed her eyes and thought how much better this was than math.

Then she heard the crunch of tires on the gravel behind her, an engine die, a car door slam. She kept her eyes half-closed, hoping whoever it was would leave her alone. But whoever it was sat down beside her and slid her long, tan legs beneath the guardrail easily. She didn't wear shoes, and her toenails were dirty and ragged. Her legs were prickled with blond hair, and a silver bracelet of stars hung loose around her bony ankle. Mary Alice followed the girl's legs up to her face; wild, unplucked eyebrows were all she saw.

"Hey," the girl said. "You're Mary Alice, right?"

"Yeah?" Mary Alice answered.

"I'm June. We went to middle school together?"

"Oh yeah, hey," Mary Alice turned back to face the quarry and pretended to be terribly interested in the single cormorant that flew there.

"You go to St. Ignatius now, right?" June said.

"Yeah," Mary Alice said. She hadn't come here to have a conversation, wasn't that obvious? People only came to the quarry to make out or smoke weed or be alone. Did she see a boy or weed anywhere? No.

"So you believe in God?" June asked.

"We learned today about a woman who was murdered because she believed in God," Mary Alice said. She had begun to think the cormorant was trapped in the quarry, the way it circled round and round.

"I have an uncle Lenny who killed himself because he didn't," June said.

"Sorry for your loss," Mary Alice said.

June shrugged. "I didn't know him that well." She trimmed her fingernails with her teeth and spit the torn pieces into the quarry. "I come here a lot. It's not far from my house actually. It's best at night because there are all these white lights? From the extraction sites? They leave them burning all the time for safety or something, and they sort of reflect off the water. At night it's so black except for the reflected lights it feels like one giant hole to the center of the earth."

"Uh huh," Mary Alice said. She'd never been to the quarry at night, and the neighborhoods around here weren't exactly safe; they were what her mother called "seedy."

"Are you named after Alice in Wonderland?" June asked. "This place sort of reminds you of the tunnel she falls down, doesn't it?"

"I'm named after my grandmother," Mary Alice said. "Lewis Carroll was on acid when he wrote that."

"Maybe," June said. "That's still cool though. I'm named after a month." June laughed at herself, and Mary Alice bit her fingernail, taking a

"Right," Mary Alice said. The last thing she wanted to do today was drown, though to be honest, she thought, it might be better than revealing her under garments. She turned so her back was to June and pulled off her light blue polo. It got caught on her head and for a moment she was afraid of losing her balance and falling sideways into the water. She was wearing a thick white sports bra over her regular bra because her boobs were so big; they were painful and made her feel fat. She would've taped them down with athletic tape like she'd seen girls do in the movies, but the thought of adhesive on her nipples made her want to vomit. Beneath her skirt she wore nude Spanx her mother had given her for her last birthday. Every part of her burned pink in embarrassment. Standing beside skinny June in her pink cotton bra and teal cotton panties, she felt like a giant, naked seal.

Mary Alice snapped the edge of her Spanx and tried to laugh. It was better to acknowledge your shortcomings, that way other people couldn't laugh behind your back. June didn't even look; she was putting her hair in a ponytail.

"Ladies first," June said, gesturing for Mary Alice to jump.

"You sure it's deep enough?"

"I've done this a million times."

"But you're sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure, just jump." June made a move like she was going to push Mary Alice over the edge, and, out of fear, Mary Alice jumped. Hitting the water stung her feet, and even though she had pinched her nose, water still went up. She plunged far beneath the surface, and it took longer than she thought it would to fight her way back up. When she broke free, she coughed and spluttered and blew her nose so hard that snot coated her lips.

"Okay?" June called from above. "You didn't hit anything?"

"No," Mary Alice called back. Was there something she could have hit? Mary Alice searched the water for rocks or barracuda. The water was cold and clear, and Mary Alice could see her own white legs treading beneath her.

"No, you're not okay, or no, you didn't hit anything?" June called again.

"I'm fine," Mary Alice said.

June let out a little yelp and jumped, her arms glued to her side like a pencil. She came up laughing and floated on her back.

"God, that feels good," she said.

Mary Alice didn't like to float—she didn't like to get water in her ears—so she stayed upright. They swam in their own worlds a while, not talking, and the whole time Mary Alice worried about fish. She kept feeling tentacles brush against her legs, or razor sharp fins. But every time she looked down, she saw only her own body. There are no fish in quarries, she told herself, not entirely sure if it was true. There are no fish in quarries.

"Come here, I want to show you something," June said. She started swimming the breaststroke toward the quarry wall, and Mary Alice cursed under her breath. She was getting a cramp in her side and wanted more than anything to go home and hide her body safely beneath her lilac covers.

PAIGE QUIÑONES

## I PAY THE GIRL

on my lap a twenty,  
press it between her breasts.  
She winks, calls me honey.  
In the corner, there is a man  
and there is a woman lying  
on the man like a skinned rabbit.  
A silken animal barely  
writhing to the song. I cannot  
see her face, only loose  
rings of hair, a slick back,  
the bright soles of her feet.  
I think of his wife undressing  
for bed, wondering where he is.  
Or perhaps he has no wife at all  
and will unlock his door  
to find a darker room.  
His girl presses and presses  
against him with no urgency;  
this man has come before,  
will be here long  
after I'm gone. I call over  
the nearest girl, her faux fur  
boots shining. I fold a dollar  
into her waist, run  
my hands over her breasts.  
She tells me they're real.

PAIGE QUIÑONES

SUMMER, OR DAUGHTERS I HAVEN'T MET

Heaven is a river  
filled with flat stones, girls  
lining the bank,  
skipping rocks.

As I pass each one  
and touch her curls,  
I see her future  
unfurled  
in my palm:

first kiss,  
missing breasts,  
whiskey breath.

Sons. Some have none.  
They've all got  
my June-dark skin  
and mouths that  
can't quite close.

One girl catches  
sight of her fate,  
steps further

into the white water,

begs me to hold her under.

*Please*, she says.

*I don't want to be born.*

DONNA VORREYER

## LOST BIRDS

My temperature spikes untamed and alien, a wheel of sweat with each fevered reach at sleep. The bathroom beckons with its cold tiles. But I had forgotten your robe still nested on its hook, the talons of your broken comb.

A still life of lost intimacies.

I fill up the sink to float my hands, cracked and curled to claw with trembling. The glass block window permits a haze of shimmering half-light, offers a view of three eggs hatching in nearby branches. I arrange an altar on the shower ledge – slivers of pink soap, bobby pins, your hair pulled from the drain.

I worship for hours, all disarrayed devotion.

One fledgling falls from the nest and snaps me lucid, sends me outside to stoop and hoist the barely-feathered wreck back home. I have heard how mothers reject their offspring if handled by human hands, but I am no longer human. The mother bends to preen and feed it welcome.

This is something like a second chance, something like mercy on the animal I am.

ANURADHA BHOWMIK

## FOOD COLORING

Friendly's on Friday, when kids eat free: browns and their discounts. You point to my clear sundae cup—*Didi, you're coffee brown, and I'm chocolate brown.* Blanks in the blocks on your kid's menu crossword: predetermined. Colored letters look better inside white space; hot fudge tastes best on vanilla—you scoop up white with a silver spoon. For now, you can pretend. Almost missed myself: brown backwash melted into the whitewash. Sketched self-portraits on display in a first grade classroom: dark chocolate brown lost in a Crayola box with peach and apricot. Color your skin softly, use Brown sparingly: don't press too hard now. Six year-old crayon scribbles streaked like chocolate sauce—smeared across your face, smeared across mine. The way we'll be defined, denied, wiped off the mouth.



ANURADHA BHOWMIK

## ROOTS

Search the thick Super Saver paper  
for sales on top soil, gritty Miracle Gro,  
and cow manure that Baba turns

with a curve-blade *seni*: mixed with skin  
from butternut *mishti lao* and bitter, warty  
*korola*: crunchy rind now a yellow puree.

Cold hose mist washes pollen off white  
flowers, split lima bean seams, and long  
squash strings: fingers he twists to grip

onto the canopy net, draped over steel  
stakes dug into dry clay clusters. We pop  
cubed okra and green pepper pods

out of black plastic trays, scatter red leaf  
*data shak* seeds. Stalks sprout straight  
and I fall behind, holding the roll

of heavy-duty thread that Baba ties to  
low splintered stakes for cherry tomatoes  
and slender lavender eggplants

inside wire cone cages. He bends to mend  
broken plant stems and drops the ripe  
and rotten in the torn plastic thank you

bag in my hands: knees cracking,  
heels of his feet slipping and sinking  
into the mud-caked earth.

ANURADHA BHOWMIK

## PAPER DOLLS

Strips of masking tape stick to white cement walls,  
pastel Multicultural Day flyers fall to the polished

fifth grade floor. Bulletin board trimmed, paper  
garland tacked, cardstock hands linked by craft

fasteners. *One family*: laminated cutout kids;  
ceramic skinned, chapped cheeks cold

and red. Freckled brunettes lipglossed with tousled  
tresses, push-up bras, and polka dot dresses. Pressed

and folded: my paper figure wedged in a locker door,  
the crinkled class worksheet scrawled with *India*.

*One community*: unscathed scissor lines, crayon scribbles  
in the cookie cutter head. Gingerbread face burnt

brown, crisp-edged like scabbed *gorilla legs* masked  
in threads of black bang curtains, drawn back

for a torn hole target. Red spots of spit spill  
from lip cracks, *Hindus eat rats* drips on toilet paper

sari scraps, stuck to the monster in the magnetic  
mirror. Tucked under a taped-up, Avril Lavigne poster:

modification modeled with clean polished fingers  
to fit flawlessly in a bleached chain. Sink and retreat

from the squeak of Air Jordan feet—cheerleaders  
arm-lock the slack-jawed snickers of scruffless football

players. Fist pumps for the *dot head* destined to drop  
bombs on dominoes falling to the floor, slamming

the door: red, code-locked like letter blocks printed  
on rolled-up shorts and jerseys, branded on the hallway

banner for *One school*. Fanned flyers become balls,  
crumpled by the clutch of paper dolls.

STEVEN D. SCHROEDER

marginaliapocalyptica

boy meets girl  
waiting in line  
to take a number  
to get on the list

boy loses girl  
at the test site  
in a holding cell  
all in yr head

boy finds girl  
if this statement  
is true-ish & a lie  
is where you are

boy is phone trace  
& satellite photo  
& heat signature

girl is twig askew  
or trail off cliff  
or birdsong still

I am investigators  
close the streets  
this close to you

are you  
you?

STEVEN D. SCHROEDER

**marginaliapocalyptica**

yr cure is no  
way to treat me

my pain rates  
on a scale of 1  
thru waiting room

X-ray & MRI  
are no way to ID  
required for entry

anesthesia is  
no way to please  
provide insurance

crack yr window  
between 10 & 2  
some Tuesdays

automate yr door  
I trade kidneys for  
what's behind

euthanasia is  
no way out of this  
is not an exit

NICK MCRAE

## THE BEECH TREE AND THE CRONE

*Crone to Reader:*

The Beech, he draped me gingerly in moss,  
a shawl to keep my shoulders ragged, fringed  
with berry bugs. My feet the brambles shod  
and bade me bleed the red clay red across  
dead deer trails, paths until then unimpinged  
now bloodmud, bogged, a red-black promenade.  
Did you not see me bend the cedar bough  
into a fragrant crown? Could you not smell  
the air I conjured—rooster, kid goat, sow  
upon it heavy? Hemp and asphodel?  
Should not the hemlocks twist their branches down  
to hold my head half-hearted hard between  
the dirt and cloudless sky? Should I not drown  
their roots in nightshade, larkspur, castor bean?

*Beech to Reader:*

My wood slopes down into the Land of Sheep,  
and, slow, the Holy Crone draws tight her shawl

and, bent low, crawls and claws along the path.

No sheepkind in the valley stir from sleep  
though lupine creeps the Crone between them all.

O crafty crook, O ancient polymath!  
And look now as she crests the hill and springs  
up from the dirt. And look, her shawl falls back,  
her face pure light, a scouring sun. It sings  
loud light like laughter, nova, thunder crack.  
And look, the sheep whip, waking, round to see  
what star, what god burns, white and alien,  
but find there just the dawn-red rising sun,  
light filtered through branches of a tree.

*Crone to Beech:*

O Brother, save me from whatever ails  
the farmer with his phone grown to his skull,  
the preacher with his lacquered fingernails,  
the doctor dim, his pockets overfull.  
O friend of windless waters, lord of lichen,  
hang me from the rafters of this shack  
before they drag me from my wood. I frighten  
less at nothingness than going back.  
Sweet Brother, I'll be satisfied as long  
as airplanes skitter past unknowing high

above this wood, my hut, my patch of beans.

As long as what I reckon right or wrong  
suits you, it suits me, too. As long as I  
am matriarch of all my in-betweens.

*Beech to Crone:*

Whenever was your brother, Sister, half  
the tree your daydream offered—undergrown  
and sickly, an abandoned winter calf.  
All prayers and blessings owed you, Holy Crone  
festooned with sage and silk—who blew into  
the babies' mouths and cured them of the thrush—  
could never hush your brother's bugaboo,  
his druthers lonely more than love can crush.  
Ought not your wishes fix the knotted heart  
these scrub-pine hillocks pilfered lovingly  
as oak regards scrub-oak? And what dark art  
will bid your brother sing the open door—  
the song that drives the sailor out to sea,  
the song that holds his vessel close to shore?

*Crone to Reader:*

An outstretched hand does not itself assume  
beneficence, just as, for instance, worms—  
however split the Beech's trunk, with room



enough inside—may not be offered terms  
for habitation, yet may habitate  
therein and nonetheless be grateful, while  
the Beech himself—as ever obstinate—  
insists they are unwelcome, loathsome, vile.  
Which comes as no surprise. Long years beneath  
his heavy limbs my hut hid, hardly me  
inside it ever, though I hung my wreath  
upon the door: white sage to purify,  
alyssum leaf to calm the soul-sick tree  
who nightly prayed the tree gods let him die.

NICK MCRAE

## THE GRANDFATHER TREE

On a cliff above the bay there stands a tree,  
and on the tree, a face of knotted vines  
with eyes set back so deep no one can see  
what form they take, just shadows. Even when  
the low sun slants between the bramble spines,  
it cannot touch the eyes shrouded therein.

Below, the nose, a branch stump disarrayed  
by lichen, slopes down, steep, into a hook.  
And then the mouth, lips greener than a blade  
of barley grass, the thin vines braided, twined  
and ancient, never mind the tender look—  
nor mind the scowl, as old as any mind.

And hanging low, a long grandfather beard,  
the moss fronds dry and pale and rustling in  
a wind too rank with salt to go unfeared.  
As wind, so tree. Beside the sea, this place  
is unassailable, though innocent  
as yet of war, watched over by the face.

Yet nothing that can be cannot be, and so  
the tree, the great grandfather tree, will wait.  
The cliff may soon erode—the tree outgrow  
its shelf—but even if it does not stand,  
these eyes one day will see blood drawn in hate,  
though they gaze up through the water from the sand.

NICK MCRAE

## CLEAN

Dad looped a chain about a young buck's rack  
    of spikey antlers and—the chain cinched tight  
around the front-end loader—climbed behind  
    the tractor's wheel. He pulled a lever, raised  
the carcass from the dark barn's hay-strewn floor.

The headlamps fluttered, weak, then flared to life.  
    Suspended now, the deer swayed back and forth—  
swayed gently, almost imperceptibly—  
    its double cast in black upon the wall.

Hooked blades in hand, my father and my brother  
    set about their work. The blood streamed black  
and violet on the straw as stroke by stroke  
    they hacked the belly open, spread it wide.

I looked on, frightened, tentative, enthralled.  
    Inside the deer's dank husk there grew an absence—  
empty flesh, all empty but for light,  
    for air, for blood and membrane, empty but  
for emptiness, for sound though it was silent.

Still empty then of suffering, I turned,  
    I looked away. The world had not yet filled  
me up with fear of losing anything,  
    had not yet burdened everything I saw  
with metaphor. But I was ten years old.

The sounds of cutting done, I turned to see  
    my brother scoop the organs, hooves, and head  
into a barrow, lean the shovel slicked  
    with blood against the wall, and wheel the offal,  
steaming still, out through the moonless dark  
    into the woods—coyotes yowling, hungry.

JULIA HENEY

## WINTER HOUSE

The kitchen stove heats  
to make the coffee. The bread,  
risen of its own

accord in the bowl,  
needs no kneading, goes happy  
into the oven.

The shades fold up, locks  
unlatch, windows swing—gesture  
at the trees outside

who chatter, suffer  
their heavy new foliage,  
then fall down to rot.

On this warm morning,  
they kiss and pick at each branch  
within reach, childlike.

The house is amused.  
No one occupies inside  
now. There is no need.

JULIE HENEY

## STATE AND MAIN

At the crosswalk in the center  
of the town I own

by memory, rightful heritage  
of childhood, et cetera,

I place you again: friend  
with a black dog on a red leash.

In this gray landscape,  
it is evening.

You are bundled  
against the weather.

It has been a long winter.  
No one can touch you.

JULIE HENEY

## LEVIATHAN

Love too was a reason for carrying on:  
as for hope, which cannot be sustained,

its pastels begin to melt  
in the heat. Summer season:

the curtain hangs limp from the rod,  
eerie in its drape. A blank sheet

hides a hospital bed and  
its patient. When one says *perfect stasis*,

there is still urgency. I have no doubt  
you've seen it too. This object

hung in an open room. The wind enters  
in a ribbon, passes through

you, your hair. The curtain

does not move. Your eyes  
confirm the thing and you believe it.



MARYSIA SCHULTZ

**Silently Reeling**, oil on canvas

2014



MARYSIA SCHULTZ

Tending the Lines, oil on canvas  
2014





MARYSIA SCHULTZ

Rainy Market Day, oil on canvas

2014

ANNA B. SUTTON

## FRIDAY MASS

Ceremonial gymnasium—two hundred children lined up like empty cups on the yellow-wood bleachers that folded open from the wall like a fist, released. The smoky bite

of incense pouring from the censer never could overcome the pervasive sweat of adolescence; buzzing fluorescents drowning out the sound of the penitential act. From my place

at the back—where the unbaptized lot tended to settle, rooted in our original sin, out of the way—the scriptures were a crow's song. Come spirit, flame tongue, sacrifice

and a list of demands. I watched as my schoolmates held their mouths open for the Host. In class, we were allowed to take an unblessed wafer, to feel the way it melted

against our soft palates, down our throats—how I wanted to understand the taste after the Word was made flesh.

ANNA B. SUTTON

## PSEUDOCYESIS

I carried grief in my belly  
for nine months—breasts swollen  
with milk. I heard a heartbeat

where there was none but my own,  
saw a blinking presence in the salt  
lake of my abdomen. It wasn't

a mystery to the doctor who sliced  
a smile across my lap, who told me  
about a dog nursing a row

of stones. Nature plants its ghosts  
inside us sometimes. Still, at night  
I sing lullabies to the empty air.

ANNA B. SUTTON

CENTER HILL

Moon lilt, sloping to the shore—tonight  
the lake is quiet as a glass of water set

by the bed. Midnight thirst, throat smoked  
like straw catching. Matted grass pulsing

like tongues underfoot. Are you here?  
Is it quiet? Can I tell you now, there are

bodies sunk in this lake? Let me show you  
the chimney ghosting ten feet deep. Before

I came to the water, I was told a man wrapped  
in barbed wire was thrown from the bridge.

Even the most beautiful things are full  
of our blood. This holler is heavy with sacred

stones and broken glass; its mud was once  
a valley—like prayer, waves fall back against earth.

Greg Alan Brownderville

## A MESSAGE FOR THE KING

You can't miss it. There's a plywood sign,  
its white paint zebra'd  
with weathering, that says BRUSH ARBOR REVIVAL.  
Jalopies line the road and flap  
their rusty wings. A peculiar people  
wade the night, the boot-smooching mud.

Under the moon the silver rice.

King David, half-naked  
on the levee, gets in a godly tizzy and speaks  
in tongues. It sounds like "Come in a Honda,  
leave in a Volvo. Come in a Honda, leave in a Volvo.  
Econolodge: thirty-nine, ninety-nine."

The queen, unmelting, hisses  
mistily from her tower, sees  
his praise arms  
flung up filthy white  
like a gas station toilet seat.

David waves at her window and laughs.

"Honda Honda Hyundai."

He lays hands on the people.

"God, turn these silver fillings  
into heaven-highway gold."

"O God, bless this little infinite  
a-growing in Mama's belly."

"Come in a Honda,  
come a Honda, come a Honda.  
Come in a Hon', Econo-ninety-nine-a-Honda."

Silver o'clock, and David dances Arkansas.

Work your way  
into the scrum. Tell the king  
we cheer him, we love him for these nights.  
But before you kiss his face and go,  
urge him  
not to be too proud not to be too proud.

GREG ALAN BROWNDERVILLE

EASY

This  
is a bowl of rice cooked  
in cinnamon milk. I'm clinking it down  
in the middle of  
1990. Behold:  
a giant, pink, heart-shaped cookie.  
I've cut the hot milk cake, and now  
I'm mixing up mimosas. I'm building an altar  
to Easy Lee.

Easy  
is my spirit  
wife. She loves  
a sporting man. Here hangs  
my Michael Jordan Starter jacket.  
Now I need  
some music. Two unlabeled cassettes  
stare out the windows  
of my jam box, their spools, like eyes  
of owls, stuck in senile, crotchety panic.  
The batteries are low:  
push play, it sounds like demons.

I uncork a bottle  
of strawberry wine. I'm trying to remember  
what moving from thought to thought  
felt like in the year before the Web.  
This is wild  
marshmallow blossom, dried and crushed,  
from our wedding in the woods.

I now present  
the first of two aquariums  
I kept as a boy. I must have been  
eight or nine when my grandfolks  
bought it for me. Alive  
with wavy golden fish, it's confetti  
in slow motion, like a happy memory

in slow motion, like a happy memory  
turning scary.

Vicki from *Small Wonder*  
is a girl bot  
with a control panel in her back.  
Her reruns are playing  
in black and white  
on this miniature TV. And I'm building  
an altar to Easy Lee.

I'm coloring a picture of the Mater Dolorosa  
with the nubs  
of my boyhood crayons. Auburn  
for drawing hair,  
tawny for filling in the skin  
"high yellow." I'm coloring  
the girl I wed  
before escaping childhood. The wedding  
was the men's idea. I didn't want  
a ghost queen, but I got one anyway. Easy  
wore a teenaged girl to marry me in. A virgin  
named Gladleen.

This  
is the shirt I wore for the wedding.  
I'm using it  
to clean the blood and rust  
from my guitar strings. Every Thursday  
belongs to Easy—  
cakes and spells and songs. I dream  
her into bed. The men said never  
take another lover. Said if I did,  
the love would be cursed.  
The love has been cursed.  
I'm stacking lovers' photographs, a luckless deck  
of cards. With my very days and years, I'm building  
an altar to Easy Lee.

I now present the second aquarium.  
It stands for the worship party where  
Easy commandeered *my* body.  
It happened  
in the Revel woods, off Highway 33.  
I didn't remember at all. I'm not sure  
where my self went off to. Doubt  
I got it all back. The men called a self



a “global non.” The men said  
I put a dress and makeup on, and wept  
my face to gleaming. This aquarium,  
with its fish of many colors,  
means there are  
alien selves inside my head, an otherworldly  
slow swirl  
of notions and emotions.

Here’s a photograph of the girl  
named Gladleen. Once,  
by chance, I glimpsed her at a basketball game.  
We were still  
in junior high. She sat in the stands, eating  
Frito pie with a white plastic spoon and  
rooting for Palestine–Wheatley. She was  
a real girl I didn’t know at all.

Wine all over the altar  
is for the nights I walk—wine spilled  
for the stranger, and the women since  
my wedding. Two or three of them loved me,  
never knowing I wasn’t free.

Spilled wine for the dark, wet streets  
bleeding red light, bleeding  
red light, red light in the rain.

## BODY SHOTS

Original issue—

1

Several phone calls and a couple of road trips later, I found the girl they called Gladleen. All that questing, and she was down the street the entire time. She ran a restaurant in my city. We arranged a get-together, and I met her at her private studio above the restaurant. She was working on a sculpture called “The Afterlife”: two fat-ass, taxidermied mice playing Twister on a Wonder Bread bag. The artist stood to greet me. All tall and tight in her waxed black jeans. Red powder-brush hair and a fitted T-shirt that said “Support Southern Rock.” She reached out her hand, I gave it a squeeze. “I like it,” she said. “Nice, firm dude grip. Don’t present me no bouquet of noodles. Hi, I’m Gladleen.”

2

I started meeting Gladleen for drinks, mostly at her restaurant. Both of us were plowing through breakups. We were at the mercy of ourselves, a place you never want to be.

One time, she said, “Let me see a picture of your lost lady-love.” I pulled one up on my phone and handed it over. She handed me her phone and made me watch a video of her ex-boyfriend. He was sitting on a tailgate, muttering unintelligible things to a My Buddy doll. The star of the video was Gladleen’s disembodied laughter.

3

For a time we avoided discussing our odd past in Arkansas. Fear of awkwardness, I guess. But avoidance itself is awkward, and one evening at the restaurant, Gladleen finally asked me why, as a boy, I had been willing to “marry a thighjacker.”

I tried to explain: “I remember when I was little, when you walked into McDonald’s, they had these life-sized cardboard cutouts of teenaged burger flippers, but if you moved around and got a different perspective, the burger flippers would hologram into older franchise managers wearing white shirts and dark neckties and grinning themselves silly.”

"Yes," Glad said. "I remember those. Your point would be?"

"Lot of times when I was little bitty, maybe four or five," I said, "when I would pray to Jesus, and think about those pictures of him hanging sensually, half naked, on the cross, with his flowy hair, lean body, and small wrists and ankles, he would start hologramming into a woman in my mind. And I would feel ecstatic but also wretchedly guilty about it. To make amends with God, I'd force myself to detonate the body of the lady Jesus in my brain, or I would cross her out with thick, dark, imaginary lines. I hated doing that terrorism so much. I can't even tell you. I wound up having to see a psychiatrist because the detonations and lines got so intense, they started happening on their own, almost constantly, till I couldn't even concentrate at school."

Glad poured me a gill of scotch neat, herself one too, and clinked me with her wonted toast: "Wonder Twin powers, activate." Then she said, "You know, the night you got married, my aunt dragged me into the swamp because she was helping with the wedding preparations. She was keeping me for a few weeks and didn't have anybody to leave me with. I had never seen any religious ceremony of any kind except at the COGIC church. I didn't know the first thing about what was happening in those woods that night, but when they started singing, the drumming noise looked like it was rippling and looping all over the air. Lassoed me something fierce." She squinted into the memory. "When I waked up, I was still a virgin, but my body wasn't."

4

After one of our many drinking nights at Gladleen's restaurant, I started staggering down the street, looking for a taxi, addled as hell. I stopped, almost lost my balance, feeling quoozy. Looked up and watched a cirrus cloud mummify the moon. Right beside me: a bar and grill with outdoor TVs blaring. I fished my phone out of my pocket and stared at it. Too drunk to realize I had picked the worst possible spot for making a call, I dialed my ex-girl.

*Ashlee gets the left hand going here ... There's another one to the midsection!*

"What's up? You too drunk to hail a cab?"

*North-south position now—hammers away to the side of the carcass!*

"Glad? I was trying to call—"

"Oh my god! I *told* you not to drunk-dial her!"

I looked down at my phone. "What? How did you—?"

*... boom with the right hand again! ... End of the round! A few more seconds, she might have pounded her out!*

Glad was practically shouting: "I put my number under her name in your phone!" By now I could see Glad walking toward me down the street.

*Or is it over? It is over! It is over!*

## Assimilation remix—

1

Day one of the art experiment,  
Glad takes my clothes off  
and wields her fancy camera. Shoots me all over  
at close range. The camera, like a playfully vicious dog,  
snaps at me  
again and again, up one side and down the other.  
All the while, the artist mumbles strangeness.

“Your brother Set persuaded you  
to crawl into a box.”

Kneecap. Snap.

“The hand of one  
baptizing in the wilderness. One for Montenegro.”  
Snap. “One for Mount Athos.” Snap.  
“One for Istanbul.” Snap. “All these yearning, burning bones.”

“Something to feed the catfish.” Snap.

“When you refuse the maenads grabbing—”

Left foot, right foot. Snap. Snap.

At the end she says “decapitate”—  
snap—  
and shoots my face.

Makes me leave my blue jeans there, and gives me a pair of shorts.

2

Day two, Glad gets me drunk.  
Three o’clock in the morning, restaurant long since closed,  
she walks me up to her dark studio.

“Meet Eurydice,” Glad says and flips the lights on.

I see my photos glued all over  
a shirtless, headless, thin, originally male  
mannequin. My jeans recut  
to wrap the legs tight. A dark-blue football helmet

mounted on the back, suggesting a woman's ass.  
Pocked orbs like cannonballs glued  
to the chest, in a plain white bra.

I kneel before Eurydice. Up close,  
to my hazy brain, the blue jeans' zipper  
turns into Tutankhamun's death mask.

"Get off your knees," Glad says.

"Pick her up and carry her downstairs."

I do.

"All right. Now lay her down on the bar."

Glad places a lime wedge  
above Eurydice's neck. "Undo her jeans  
and lower them a little, not too much.  
Now lick."

I wetten Eurydice. Glad gives me  
a sea salt grinder, and I make it snow.  
I lick it up.

She takes a bottle of Kah, pours  
tequila on Eurydice's belly. I slurp it up.  
Glad says, "It's time for the lime  
kiss. Greg, repeat after me."

*I'm looking for the face ...*

*I'm looking for the face I had ...*

*I'm looking for the face I had  
before the world was made ...*

I bend down slowly. Take  
the lime between my teeth.

ANNA OJASCASTRO GUZON

## NOTES ON EMERGING

One is thrown into eighteen fathoms, expecting  
to steady oneself or graze  
a surface underneath yet footing never presents  
as an option. For a child, this experience  
is, at the least, unraveling. While adults  
may marvel: *Have I ever known anything?*  
One feels one's lungs filling with  
something other than air  
and different from what should be  
mundane. This is when one becomes inhuman  
some being that does not live  
inside a home, with portraits, desk lamps  
an upright piano. One becomes an animal.  
One that does not own a thing  
and has daydreams of death:  
a body pinned, an SUV and sweating  
shuddering, even an odor emerging  
while every warning-siren  
in one's vicinity, is resounding.

ANNA OJASCASTRO GUZON

LOT

It's arduous work, getting away  
not from it all, but from that big lie  
that you didn't foresee, when you  
were still acquiring a sense, for concrete  
buckling beneath you, beside you and  
within the most shaded passes  
of your periphery, where edifices  
are composed of old-town building blocks  
the kind that upcyclers relieve  
from their lot over-ridden by packs  
of collared, spayed and left behind by those  
who had had enough to roll into  
bubble wrap. *There's no room,*  
they claimed of their ins-and-outs.

ROBERT LUNDAY

## BIOS ABSCONDITUS

After the bees fled, birds followed.  
People forgot how to do what the birds and the bees do.

We lost nest-knowledge, hive-knowledge; all eggs except Fabergé  
and honey including sweet talk disappeared. Ants left;

good riddance some said to the fire ants, but wherefore art thou  
to the sugar kind, annoying though they were at times –

no trails of collective labor on our countertops,  
no dynamic dotted lines on plaid to animate our picnics.

Someone tried to stroke her cat and cut her hand on cardboard:  
a decoy, deployed how many hours since the feline went fugitive?

Dogs: taxonomized, glass-eyed, cold to all offers  
of walks in the park or cheese-flavored treats.

Stables, barnyards, zoos, even the sewers where rats swam  
in our filth – all fled; and the wilds,

quiet as an after-hours shopping mall. How could earth  
be earth without insect, fowl, amphibian or furry four-legs?

The film had jammed in the projector, the flow of life no longer flowed.  
An ark, a fleet of arks on auto-pilot had invaded;

creation decreeted, and consciousness, the human ray,  
the flashlight into cosmic darkness: flailing and purposeless

without our companions. We fondled field guides, bestiaries, fables,  
forgot which brutes had been real and which imagined;

mascots, manuals, and constellations, our only comfort and consolation.



WESTON CUTTER

MUSEUM OF TYCHO BRAHE

Infant with mouth open, halfhour  
of tonguing air then wailing want, *you*  
*are the answer to a question you'll never*  
*understand* I say, let her suck my nose+for  
a moment I'm salve, satisfaction, then  
no, more screams, later  
at the ATM Ellen punches numbers  
while I slide my hands into her backpockets  
to touch realer money+my nose  
to my knowledge has never  
been solution to any thing other than  
maybe the odd question we pose to the two  
year old who along with where and when  
to hold on vs let go of pee is learning  
how the world is Legoad: *what does daddy*  
*smell with? what do daddy's new glasses*  
*rest on?* tho I can't imagine she'll some  
day ask on looking at old pictures why  
I got new glasses her first year by  
then knowing *just because* is one of living's  
most insistent choruses or because who  
really gives a shit why the guy she'll  
likely never want to believe sees her as clearly  
as he claims chose to change how  
he sees or because it's actually no  
easy trick, guessing swap+value, how  
you might replace a thing+what  
with, one black-framed view for a  
nother, baby's cries for silence, blank  
flesh given over to scrollwork reading *Stacy*  
or *Hamad* or *mom*, some name you  
can only say you can't even begin  
to say what or how much it means, how sweet  
and easy it fits like a lock against the key  
that is your often answerless tongue

WESTON CUTTER

## ONE FACE OF NUMEROLOGY

Never saying you're sorry means falling  
in love with the strange shapes mercy

takes and calling out what they appear  
to be, look a bunny, look a set of head

phones, I woke up wondering how  
many feathers I'll ever need+*for what* is

my favorite phrase to push off the boat  
I'm certain my head or life is, such

liquid, such pitch+tilt, such oar+splash,  
some days the sky fills with wind, clouds

whipping past geometrically, as squiggles  
or a broad camaraderie of gray+I've

never known what's important, still don't:  
love or mercy, the reasons

I invent and cling to re why and how  
what happens happens, whether

or not my flesh will continue to be  
cloud enough to ease me through

this sky of living or if I need to be  
come the bird I once dreamed I'd had

tattooed perching upon a tattoo of  
an anchor, both on my bicep which

in the dream was huge, strong enough  
to let me pull myself completely free

from the shape+countless confusions I keep  
being forgiven for dream+guessing through—

## WESTON CUTTER

*In \_\_\_\_ness and in \_\_\_\_—*

The minute the two-year old says *I'm sick* and sticks her finger down her throat ushering back out dinner, breakfast, she'd said *this* and *this* when asked what hurt, pointing to the center of her back, the hem of the skirt you'd purchased so she could learn fabric's grace as it uncloak+furls, that with work it's possible to rule against the gravity that pulls dropped fork to plate, hands to one's sides, puke to floor you just washed or didn't, actually, it only feels that way, everything seems like something you've just traced touch again/finally/again over sighing *there*, dog with inconsolable need to feel needed, sheet spread not-quite-smooth against bed you somehow keep dreaming on, in, living feels more and more like the venue and less the concert you'd once imagined or feared it would, not anticipation then gnarly solos +sing-along choruses then hoped-for encore but instead days of empty chairs, weeks of good-enough acts roughing out longing-shaped bags of melody made in hope+foolishness, garages+basements till suddenly someone strums a string of chords so spooky and austere it can only be real as whatever's giving your daughter the fever she steams against yr neck as you whimper *You Are My Sunshine* out of tune in such a small voice it's a miracle it fills the room in the house in the city beneath the moon that is you assure her still there those nights like tonight you can't spot its glow and her tiny hot lips on her window whispering *it's there* a sort of proof regarding truths you *I Do*-ed to years back and have breathed so deeply since they've gone law-like, elemental, holy as the song it feels as if you're remembering the first time you hear it.

# THE BOILER FLASH ESSAY CONTEST 2015

## JUDGED BY DANIEL NESTER

### WINNERS:

Wednesday Night At The Maplewood by Patrick Swaney

On Being Remek by Michael Torres

### FINALISTS:

Attempting to Teach in a Desert by Kayla Rae Candrilli

Prescriptions for Pediatric ICU & Post-Survival Success by Samantha Deal  
City/Living by Tara Deal

### SEMI-FINALISTS:

To Cole's Dad by Linda Davis

I Want More by Thomas Gibbs

Manifesto by Jill Kolongowski

The Origin of Monsters by Erin Leigh

Heart in the Bushes by Lacy Arnett Mayberry

How To Clean A Horse by Coleen Muir

Hangers by Joanne Nelson

Thirty Years Late by Adriana Paramo

Kennedy Meadows, 1968 by Lori White

Thanks to all who submitted, our readers and editors, and Daniel Nester. We received hundred of submissions and many of them were great, but we regret we can only select a few outstanding pieces.

PATRICK SWANEY

## A WEDNESDAY NIGHT AT THE MAPLEWOOD

This is a story near the end. This is you and me and a pitcher of Miller Lite and a pitcher of

Miller Lite and a pitcher of Miller Lite. This is the girl on the barstool with a birdcage tattoo on

her back flirting with the boys shooting pool. This is the boys shooting pool and flirting with the

girl with a birdcage tattoo on her back and swaggering outside to smoke a cigarette and a

cigarette and a cigarette and coming back to the pool game and ordering more drinks and

drinking. This is early summer when the heat is still a novelty. This is money in the digital

jukebox. This is your long fingers distractedly drumming the bar. This is the woman who orders

a mixed drink because it's her drink and she tells the young bartender how to make it and drinks

it and tells him it's good and orders another and drinks it and pays and tips and leaves. This is the

young bartender with the tourist t-shirt from Florida that talks Cincinnati baseball or keeps quiet

or turns his head up toward the TV with baseball or up toward the TV with basketball or

restlessly inventories and rearranges and cleans because he's new and stays busy. This is the

waitress whose man shows up with her baby boy who makes her smile for the first time tonight.

This is you silent. This is "Wagon Wheel" on the digital jukebox again and then again. This is

the boys shooting pool singing along. This is the woman in the red shirt and the man with the sad

eyes, in from out of town with their motorcycles parked out front, dancing near the bar, a little

stagger, a little empty, a little elegant. This is Red Shirt coming up to you and saying I'll let you

dance with mine if you want. He's a good dancer, isn't he? This is Red Shirt  
saying nothing and  
pulling me away from the bar, mostly steady. This is Red Shirt's body, thick  
and strange,  
swaying, pressed close to mine and her dark hair and makeup and teeth. This  
is Sad Eyes with  
his belt buckle and his boots, stiff but practiced, dipping and shuffling, his  
hand in yours, his  
hand on your back. This is a new song and you dancing with me and me  
dancing with you like we've done and we've done. This is us laughing and  
sweating. This is you moving away. This is  
me letting you go and letting you go. This is one more pitcher of Miller Lite,  
just one more,  
because this is near the end or this is very near the end or this is the end or  
this is.

MICHAEL TORRES

## ON BEING REMEK

Remek means a JanSport backpack stocked with Krylons. Remek is memory. It means a bedroom window splintered open for fingertips to find the way back in. It means friends in black hoodies and jeans hopping into someone's mother's Astro van. New York fat caps and German thin tips like dice in your hand. Remek means of paint fumes. It's flat black and polished moonlight stolen from the top shelf of the 99cent store. The Remek of adolescence, being sixteen and nodding to Tupac playing through ripped speakers. It's someone turning it down to whisper-shout, *Stop here. Go, Go*. It means feet grinding gravel, feet pressed into fences. Fingers surrounding metal, it means leaping six feet in one bound. Or getting stuck. Adidas in the air. Prints pressed into dirt. The infamy of Remek and wanting to see your name on every cinder block city wall. It's mapping Pomona, California. The rattle and hiss of Remek. It means sighting police by their headlights and knowing which direction to run. Every road leads home. Morning dew on the front lawn and a bent window screen. It means going to bed with a Rorschach test of spray paint on your hands and three hours of sleep. It's looking for cotton balls and your sister's nail polish remover before school. The Remek of carved classroom desks, the Remek of dust wiped clean. The drill bit in your pocket you think means forever.

Remek of remembrance of the many other Mexicans who belong to names their fathers did not give them either. Names created, or taken from textbooks or the end of a song, names from the wandering imagination, plucked like an orange –something glowing– among the branches of the mind. Names like Dier, Mase and Rage. Names like Teal, Kaon and Siris. Names that resonate in the calloused palms of handshakes. This means the only loyalty you know. Remek of words learned but concealed; tucked into the grooves of your knuckles where all men keep secrets. It means knowing fear and pretending you don't know what that means. Contents under pressure. Remek is memory and how the past can call back. It's being unable to forget the names of conflict, names like Dusk, because when you are told to fight, Remek means staring at him as if you will shout in the swinging speech of young men. Remek is adolescence and adolescence is knuckleheadedness. And when a circle is created around the two of you, Remek means trying to find something to hate him for –his worn shoes, the tattered cuff of his jeans –but realizing he is more like you than he is not, and that years from now you will remember the dark face of Dusk for this reason, for having to grow up in a town lost to potholes and dropouts, where boys



take on new names because what their fathers gave did not suffice or could not be pronounced. Or both. The ruin of Remek. And your friends will say – “You gonna fuck that foo up, Remek?” – in a way that was never meant for afterthought. But you won’t. They will turn their heads at you like dogs being whistled for. And you will lie and say: “Why? I don’t even know him.”

KAYLA RAE CANDRILLI

## ATTEMPTING TO TEACH IN A DESERT

The blonde boy in my composition class is a snarky one. He, unlike the others, understands the semi colon and the tonal aside. I am attracted to him for this. He condemns the prison industrial complex, the decline of credible news resources, and writes satirical analyses of country songs. I feel under qualified to teach him.

His mother went missing four months ago. Went to a 24-hour Wal-Mart and never came back. I think about this when the sun goes down and I'm still too many blocks from home, how gravel under my feet feels like the scuffle she might have had.

When I get coffee with the blond boy, before I leave to teach at another university, I ask him how he is doing. He knows what I am really wondering and shrugs it away. I tell him, "Write about it" and feel overbearing; I am not his teacher anymore. I tell him to "keep in touch." We will not.

The night before I move to the deep south, I buy two packs of L&M Reds and while leaving the gas station, I check my height on the measuring tape that lines the exit—still 5'4. There are two fliers on the door: a Methodist Church advertising summer art classes, and a missing persons. "Have you seen this woman?" No. My stomach turns for my blonde student, who is no longer my student, the one that won't keep in touch.

Months later, I dream that my new porch has been white washed, all that's left: two rocking chairs. I sit like I do most mornings, light my cigarette with a white lighter. Everything is colorless in this dream. When I exhale my drag, I rock backward. The porch's railing has disappeared and my front yard is a sand dune, a dune that leads to another and another, forever—a bright desert. I take my few stairs down to the sand and it burns my feet; the heat wakes me, and my sheets roll like dunes. Still groggy, I think to something my blonde boy said over coffee: "There's really nothing. So many things could have happened, that nothing happened. She's just gone. Poof."

I imagine his mother out in a desert; I want to fall back to sleep; I want to bring her water; I want to pitch an umbrella; I want her quenched and shaded when I ask her how she could leave her son.

SAMANTHA DEAL

## PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PEDIATRIC ICU & POST-SURVIVAL SUCCESS

Watch television in the morning and wait until the afternoon to use crayons; watch cartoons first, then devote everything you have to *THE SANDLOT*. Be careful with sunlight. You should never imagine the weight of a broken-in baseball, should never think of tree houses or flashlights. Twice a week you will dream of running—learn to expect this, the unavoidable: bedpans and glossy cardstock—

The fourth grade class of Hardin Park Elementary is Thinking-of-You!  
That uncle who took you dove-hunting wants you to Get-Well-Soon!

On the second day of the third week, use the beige phone with the bright numbers to call your best friend. Talk to him for 12 minutes. Do not be surprised when nothing changes.

In your grief, don't dwell on the privacy of bathrooms. Don't stare out the window; devote everything you have to every wild card in every hand you are dealt—there will be many games of UNO in this place. Don't forget to thank the nurse with the gentle hands and the white hair when she brings you a spoonful of water. Someone with cold hands and a bowl of water will wallpaper your right leg in cotton and plaster, layer after layer until the shell hardens—don't worry about feeling this.

When the pediatric orthopedist sweeps in to check on your bones, he will not look at your face; be sure you don't hit him with your plaster-heavy leg. That way you won't disturb the UNO cards stacked at the foot of the bed; pay attention to the insightful minister—later, your mother will tell you that he drove two hours to see you, and you refused to say a word. You should feel guilty. You should thank the spoonful of water for being so wet and cold; you should thank your mother for eating her solid food in the bathroom with the door closed so you don't have to smell what your body can't absorb. Don't close your eyes too often, or for too long; try to listen to the pediatric orthopedist when he swings by your room to poke at your ribs—don't kick him in his handsome soap opera face.

Don't expect anyone to look you square in the eye; there will be times when you consider jumping out the window, but you should never hurt in front of your mother—the hurting here is very contagious.

This is how to breathe while the nurse with the not-so-gentle hands scrubs the gasoline out of your scalp; this is how to pretend you're asleep when the night nurse comes in to check your vitals; this is how to pretend you feel it when the intern touches the big toe of your right foot; this is how to pretend you don't feel it when the not-so-gentle nurse changes your broken I.V.

Later, you'll need to know how to explain it to your friends so that it seems funny—This is the right time for gag-reflexes and vomit stories. You'll need to laugh when they laugh; you'll need to keep yourself from staring out the window—Remember that cancer girl from across the hall? She knew how to stare out the window without arousing suspicion. This is how to cultivate avoidance behaviors—how to circumvent the kicking of that pediatric orthopedist who you want to kick so badly. This is how to tell the truth, how to unlearn, omit, ignore, overlook—Never forget: this isn't where you live. Don't sleep with both eyes closed; don't let yourself die—your mother will never forgive you for it

TARA DEAL

## CITY/LIVING

### April

On the subway, a warning: “In NYC, it is illegal to paint a real gun to look like a toy, and it is illegal to buy a toy gun that looks real.”

On the sidewalk, springlike, chartreuse, my new beginning, then three teenagers. One pulls out a gun that looks like a toy. He tells me to hand over everything. (No.) I don’t even stop walking. I look like I know where I’m going.

I stop to watch a man try to move his gigantic sofa into an apartment elevator, and it can’t be done. The mover says you’ll have to leave it at home. He means wherever it came from. The man says he loves this sofa. The mover says, move on.

### May

A letter lost on the street. The envelope is sealed. A man bends down to read the address. Because it might be for him.

### October

My niece wrote: I am polishing my snow globes, waiting for something to happen.

I had moved out of New York, temporarily, and so I read it across the ocean, in a flurry of paint chips like Spun Twilight and considered the Borrowed Light of a Silver Cufflink kind of city turning satin, glassy, glossing over the lack of sequins with flurries of glamour, desire, adventure: no, really, what I meant to write back was: be careful, don’t crack. But I didn’t say that either. Then reached out for my sparkle pen and distilled, that is, dispensed some glitter.

## July

Outside, a discarded cardboard box says: Become Your Dream. The message is written in thick black marker. But the box is ripped, a little soggy. It will not even be a box for much longer.

A man walks into the hardware store and tells the clerk: I need something for cutting a skull in half, you know. The clerk asks: how old?

## November

The painter who lives next door to me put three of his large canvases in the trash room. Each one was an abstract composition with splashes of pink and black and gold and white. What was he thinking? All three paintings looked the same to me. Later, however, I saw that two of them had been taken.

## October

My black-and-white 1948 postcard of the midtown nighttime New York skyline has splashes of gold and pink. Someone colored it in.

When I bought it, I thought I'd frame it and hang it up, but I didn't. I already lived within that world (down near the ground) and didn't need a reminder of it. So I put it in a box and moved around and then, one day, took out the postcard (which I had forgotten about) and propped it up on my desk in London. Where I had moved all of a sudden.

Where every evening, I could look at my tiny vision/version of New York City and imagine how fantastic it would be to live there. I remembered the shimmer across cross streets. Was it possible to return and get back in? Where was the entrance and then? What would you say to people?

## April

A man on the street says the end is near. A man on the subway says Abandon Ship! A vendor on the sidewalk says fresh coconuts. A man on the steps says America, the beautiful. A man selling jewelry gives me a poem to read. It is written on joss paper from Chinatown, a rough square of brown paper with a gilded center. The paper is more beautiful than the poem, and I keep it.

I keep at it, that is.



MARYSIA SCHULTZ

Beneath, oil on canvas

2014



MARYSIA SCHULTZ

A Few Last Silences, oil on canvas

2014



JAMIE LYN SMITH

## A LINE OF FOUR SILVER MAPLES

Word was out in the township that Roby was back, living in a trailer behind someone's house along 521 somewhere. The place belonged to people who weren't relation to him but who Roby kept calling family. Paul knew the malleability of that term: Roby was his blood cousin. They were raised up next door to each other with only a line of four silver maples and a broad, open expanse of lawn separating their houses. Shoutin' distance, as Paul's father had said. Only most of the shouting came from his brother Ennis' house, so Roby was at Paul's a great deal, nose pressed to the glass of the storm door, asking if anyone could come outside and play.

It had been years since Paul saw Roby. With seven years between them Roby drifted off Paul's radar when Paul left for college, then the city, where he taught school. Roby had long since disappeared into construction work where he was always changing jobs, getting fired, arguing with the boss or flitting in and out of doomed ventures in self-employment. Roby had such bad luck: perennially left holding the bag by some unsavory partner, only to wind up in small claims, jail, bankruptcy, or lien. Last Paul heard, Roby was in the middle of his third divorce, ducking his soon-to-be ex because the girl wanted her truck back.

It was early spring when Paul stood in the driveway at the farm, arms goose-pimpling in the shade. He could smell the heavy perfume of apple and cherry blossoms on the breeze despite the cold, dank weather. Stacking bags of mulch to spread in his mother's flower beds, he was so lost in the shadows of his own mind that the first he heard of the vehicle was its radio blasting *I ain't askin nobody for nothin...if I can't get it on my own...*

Paul looked up to see a light truck overshoot the driveway. It was a v6, 4wd, with a deer dent in one side. *If you don't like the way I'm livin...* The motor groaned when the driver put her in reverse. Paul noticed the broken slider, one side tinted glass, the other with half a Harley Davidson sticker peeling off. *You just leave this long-haired country boy alone...* No tailgate, bumper held up with 8-gauge wire. One well-muscled arm hung out the window, thick with ink: dragons, a mermaid, a melting skull, confederate flag next to the Eagle-Globe-and-Anchor.

Last Paul saw him, Roby was a skinny twelve year old, all knees and elbows and the hungry look of a horny kid hoping for something, anything to let him stick his peter in it. Now, even slouched in the bench seat, Roby's bulk made the truck appear toy-like.

"Hey cuz," Roby drawled, teeth gleaming. "Long time no see."  
Paul smiled.

Paul's mother was fast asleep in her chair with the cat in her lap, Bogsy's enormous paunch warming her legs as they snored in unison. Paul adjusted the blinds to take some of the glare off Helen, turning around to hush to Roby when the younger man strode into the room, sending Bogsy bicycling his feckless paws across Helen's stomach.

Roby laughed and caught Bogsy, hefting the poor thing into the air as the old feline arched indignantly. Helen's eyes flitted open.

"Put my cat down," Helen said. "Or you'll pick your own willow switch."

Roby chuckled and bent to gently drop the cat to the chair. "Awww, I wouldn't do nothing to a cat," he said.

Bogsy ran for his life.

"How are you, Aunt Helen?"

"Glad to see you, Roby," Helen lied.

Roby hugged Helen, who offered him a seat but did not stand on account of her sore legs. When Paul's eyes met his mother's, he shrugged.

They chatted obliquely, while Roby coughed gently and intermittently into his hand. Paul sensed that Roby had read his unwelcome straightaway. If nothing was offered you—a slice of cornbread in buttermilk, some ice tea -- you could bet you weren't received. Paul noticed the tightness around his mother's eyes whenever she smiled at Roby. The sanctimony of Helen's distrust and thinly veiled hostility gave Paul a quiver of irritation towards his mother. Paul remembered how it hurt his father when Helen inked "Paul" and "Shelly" on dixie cups before each family picnic, her pretty mouth flattened into a straight line, as if the misfortune and grit that Ennis lived in would somehow backwash into the mouths of her children. Ennis noticed, and worst of all, Roby noticed. Paul knew that Helen's persistent, and not-so-faint sense of superiority made Roby seek her approval.

"You mind if I get myself a glass of ice water?" Roby asked.

"Why sure, help yourself," Helen said. "My legs are awful weak."

"Cups in the same place?"

"Just where you left them."

Neither Paul nor Helen took thought of the small cash Helen kept hidden in a coffee can in the cabinet just up right of the kitchen sink. They heard Roby open the refrigerator and rustle around.

"Mind if I make a sandwich out of this ham?" Roby asked.

"Course not, go ahead," Helen said.

They heard Roby open the cupboard door, sneeze, then run some water. It would be months before Helen noticed the money was missing from the coffee can. She would remember the racket Roby made in her kitchen and blush with shame for suspecting him, and more shame for being right.

Helen leaned in to speak to Paul, pursing her lips and gesturing towards the kitchen with her chin.

"What's he doing back here?"

"I don't know. He seems all right."

"Take care not to cast your pearls before swine," Helen said, and adjusted the pillows in her easy chair. Roby returned a moment later, stuffing a red bandana into his back pocket.

"You're looking good, Auntie," Roby said, sitting down and taking a big sip of water.

"Well sugar," Helen murmured, "One must get old, but nobody has to get ugly."

Bogsy growled a low, rumbling sound from his hiding place beneath the coffee table next to Roby's chair. Roby reached down and scooped the cat up again, cradling Bogsy to his chest as the cat writhed. Roby scratched Bogsy's ears, chuckling.

"It sure is good to be back home," he said.

#

Paul showered, changed into a clean shirt, and drove to his Shelly's, wondering if his baby sister knew about Roby. He knew the two of them took to palling around together at one point, years ago. Shelly thought Roby was sober because he was working. Shelly didn't know that Roby didn't need to drink when he was chewing down pills. Pills that made him smarter, stronger faster but just a tad less meticulous with everything from measuring the framing to mixing the mud at work. When Roby lost his job she took him in.

It did not go well. Paul knew Roby and Shelly had a falling out, and that Shelly refused to keep any company with Roby. In Roby's defense, Shelly could be a bit quick. Paul had long teased her that her astrological sign was a burning bridge. He admired that in her, and he kept it in mind.

There was no answer at the sliding glass door of the beige doublewide, so Paul pounded on the man-door of the pole barn that Wayne referred to as his shop.

"Come on in!" Wayne bellowed.

Shelly had the baby hanging from one breast, its tiny face grotesquely concentrated into a puckering scowl, one hand cradling him to her chest and the other holding up a wad of audio wires while Wayne anchored them to the wall with a drill gun. Her long blond hair was usually a frothy web of waves, but now she kept it pinned up so that the baby wouldn't pull at it.

"Go for power," Wayne said. Paul resisted the urge to roll his eyes. She and Wayne made such a show of everything, it got under his skin sometimes. Shelly caught the look on Paul's face, and he examined his nails. The TV snapped to life, revealing a screen split into quadrants.

"Look at that!" she said to Paul, "We got *eight* deer-cams now."

Paul stared at Shelly, this strange woman who was his sister. She stood underneath a 12-point buck that she had taken herself, first year out. Wayne pointed to Shelly's bow. It was a high-end model with sleek camouflage print and walnut detailing on the recurve.

"I wanted to start her out with a crossbow, you know, cause they're lighter," Wayne said, "But she wouldn't have it. Said that the guys at the

VFW told her they was for pussies and I laughed so hard I didn't know whether to throw her down on the floor and bang her right there or wash her mouth out with soap."

Shelly kissed Wayne and Paul felt a shiver of irritation run through him. He reminded himself that this was his sister's husband, but he still wanted to punch Wayne in the throat. Instead, Paul smiled back and placidly accepted a beer. He reminded himself at times like these, that Wayne and his sister were just about all the company he had.

It had been difficult, moving back to the township. Paul was no social magnet. Plain of face, tall and mild-mannered, he was too bland to arouse even nominal speculation. His mildness matched the understated, neutral tone of his classroom, and each year he seemed to fade along with its beige walls and eggshell-colored laminate cabinets and dull steel sinks. He wanted to stand out, but he did not know how. Or for what. Escaping notice might be a boon for others, but for him if offered neither solace nor refuge. Paul's mind wandered back to Roby, and he waited until Shelly stepped into the house to put the baby down before telling Wayne that Roby was back in town.

"What happened with them two?" Paul asked.

Wayne spit a stream of tobacco into a Styrofoam cup, thought for a moment then said, "Shelly tried to help him. All he had to do, and I mean all—was stay off the drink. Within three days he was back on it—and mean as a snake. Shelly said Roby was screaming and raising Cain, cussing her and throwing things around the yard, beating on the door."

Paul waited for the rest of it.

Wayne ran his hand across his lips. "She had to call the law."

Paul tried not to look surprised. "They pick him up?"

Wayne shook his head, stuffing a napkin into the cup before tossing it into a trash can. "When I got there the sheriff come and said he was gonna put them both in stir."

"Wait..." Paul said, "They were gonna pick *her* up?"

"There's your justice system at work. Damn law's so poor it does you just as much good not to call it."

Paul frowned. "He hit her?"

"She says no," Wayne said, "But I don't know that she'd tell me if he did."

Paul nodded. That was true. Shelly was a tack, and a brass one at that. She'd never admit defeat. "No sense you winding up in stir with him."

"You know it," Wayne said. Paul's heart softened a little. He remembered asking Shelly before the wedding what she saw in Wayne, a rough man who seemed to be made entirely out of callous, vulgar parlance, and mechanical knowhow. She had laughed at Paul.

"That man loves me to the point of sheer stupidity," she said, smiling. It was one of the few times that Paul saw his sister compromise her demeanor. Her face turned childlike as she added softly, "He does the dumbest stuff you ever saw in your life to show off, but he'd kill for me."

Paul had looked at her, shaking his head. "You want that, little sister?"

"Want that?" Shelly said. "Someday he may have to."

Wayne was walking around the shop tidying things up, and the dull thud of an empty oil carton hitting the metal trashcan jolted Paul back to the present.

"...She didn't know Roby was all twisted up on that oxy. When he first come back and they started running around again she told me *I'm just so glad he came home and got out of that godforsaken city. Maybe up here in the country, with us, he'll get better...*"

Wayne shook his head. "Then look what it got us."

"I'm just going for a beer with him," Paul said. "I'll see what I can find out."

Paul dropped his eyes, fishing for his keys to avoid Wayne's gaze. "That's your sister."

"Daddy wouldn't like it one bit for us to just turn our back on him," Paul said. "He's family."

"That may mean something to you," Wayne said, "But I don't know what it means to him."

"Blood is blood," Paul said.

#

Roby had a crowd gathered around him at the bar when Paul walked in the door at Buckton's *Breeze On Inn*. Roby sat at the bar with his new girl, a woman Paul had gone to school with but whose name he couldn't remember. Roby had his arm around the woman's puffy shoulders, and was running his thickly callused finger down the glittering beads of an earring so long it grazed the straps of the woman's sheer tank top. Her hair was brown at the roots, red in the middle, and blonde at the tips. Paul could hear his cousin all the way across the room.

"We were going at it on these like, 80-grit sheets in the camper," Roby said. "Her knees was all scraped up."

The woman ducked her head, letting her hair hang over her face then tossing it over her shoulder as she giggled. "80-grit!"

The men standing around them laughed. Roby leaned in to the woman's collarbone, then nibbled on her ear. She swatted him away. When Roby dodged her, he saw Paul.

"Hey cuz!" Roby yelled, "Come meet my best girl."

Roby introduced him to his friends, and bought a round. Then Paul bought one, then someone else, then Roby and Paul again and soon nobody was keeping count. The lady friend of Roby's went out for a smoke and didn't return. Paul handed the barkeep his keys. Roby tried, again and again, to call his best girl but the best girl was no longer answering her phone. Neither Paul nor Roby could drive by last call, and now seemed as bad a time as any to start the long walk home.

The moon was full and hung low over the cornfields that grew wider and longer as they staggered their way out of Buckton. Paul glanced at Roby's profile, so much like his father's. Roby was recalling the time that Paul's

father picked Ennis up by the throat for telling Shelly she had nice legs. That's how Paul's father had been; a little larger than life.

"Your dad," Roby said, as if reading Paul's mind. "He taught me how to be a man.

Paul nodded. "I been back with mom at the farm since he passed away."

"I sure miss him."

"Pretty hard not to," Paul replied.

"I didn't make the funeral," Roby said. "I didn't have a suit or gas money and I was too ashamed, when I was still torn up on hard stuff."

"You past all that now?"

"I let it go after I screwed everything up with Shelly," Roby said. "That about broke me. She's like my sister, you know? You were gone and graduated, but her and me were in school together, all the way through."

Their boots scuffed along the gravel, kicking up tiny pieces of rock that punctuated the silence. Roby stopped and took Paul by the arm.

"It meant a lot to me you come out tonight. Being seen with me in public. It seems like everybody done give up on me."

"Don't give em no more reason to, and you'll be all right."

"I mean to," He sighed. "I'm gonna need help."

Roby's eyes were clear and pooled with tears in the moonlight. Paul remembered the last time he saw that look on Roby's face, when Roby was a boy in trouble for something while Paul was babysitting him. Paul had swatted him across the bottom and sent him to his room, where Roby screamed and ranted and raved, repeatedly throwing a baseball against the wall in a flawless imitation of Ennis. When Paul finally had enough and flung open the door, Roby shrank against the wall, raising his hands up pleading surrender. Paul remembered feeling terribly ashamed of scaring him so.

"I'm sorry, Paul," Roby had said, covering his face. "I'll be good. I'll be good I promise."

He was saying the same thing now.

"What can I do?" Paul asked.

"Just what you done tonight," Roby said, "Treat me like a human being."

#

Roby stopped by the farm to see Paul nearly every day, but Paul didn't mind him coming around. Paul was grateful for the company and for the slice of life that Roby afforded him. Monday to Friday, September to May, Paul taught all grades of chemistry at the high school. Saturdays he helped Helen with her errands. Sundays they had church and then Paul would go to see Shelly and Wayne. It had the feel of lather, rinse, repeat, as did all of Paul's days --until Roby spun back into them.

Helen snoozed, Shelly and Wayne were busy with the baby, but Roby was always doing something. Frying a big batch of shrimp up, making gumbo and calling up a passel of friends in to feast and play guitar in the yard until

all hours. Taking a canoe down the river, fishing all day amongst the live oaks in the dank watering holes where Paul's father used to take them as boys. Rigging up a potato gun with PVC pipe, just to see if they could still do it, and nearly blowing a hole in the side of storage shed. Even just an afternoon of cornhole or picking off crows with a .22 was fun with Roby.

Paul took to returning the visits. People that Paul didn't know were always stopping to see Roby, have a smoke, borrow a few bucks, kick back a beer. Roby brought out things in Paul that Paul didn't know he had in him.

Hanging out with Roby's crowd, Paul was startled to find that people liked him and that he could make them laugh. They went to a party and Paul got so rowdy that he threatened to punch someone who called him a faggot. Roby had his back and threw in a few good fists himself, and they ran to the car laughing, peeling out of the driveway and laughing like a couple of teenagers.

"Man, You shoulda seen the look on that guy's face when you went animal on him."

"Animal?"

"Yep. Animal."

Paul let go of the steering wheel and pounded his fists on the roof of the truck, howling. Roby joined in and they goofed the whole way home, with Roby intermittently shouting, "Son of a bitch!" and Paul letting out another baling yowl.

That night they built a fire in the ring next to Roby's trailer and listened to the local bluegrass station croon songs they remembered from childhood. Old hymns wafted promises of peace across the fog rising from the swamps...*Going up home to live in green pastures, where we shall live and die nevermore*....Paul woke up in the morning, the mandarin glare of light in his eyes. He hurried home and got Helen to church on time, speeding a little along Birch Road as he declined to explain where he had been or what he had been out doing.

"Now mama," he said, "You don't need to worry about me. I'm making new friends."

"Will wonders never cease," she said. He looked at her, and there was a little gleam of both humor and hurt in her eye. Paul knew she appreciated all he did for her. He had been trying hard for a long time to convince himself, and her, that it wasn't too much to ask of him. She patted his knee.

"It's about time."

#

It had all started simply enough: Paul had been working in the garden, sweat running down his back so hard he'd already taken to dousing himself with the garden hose in twenty-minute intervals. When it rained, it seemed that the angry sky did so only to heap humidity atop everyone's already well-substantiated misery. By 11:00 in the morning, Paul retreated into his office, the air conditioner drowning out the sound of his entrance. Helen napped in

her chair with the cat on her lap. Boggy opened and then closed one green eye as Paul slipped past.

His cell phone was lit up with a handful of messages—a bank deposit, the weather update for the day, a couple texts from Roby. What was Paul doing? Did he want to goof off and do a little fishing?

Paul didn't mind, though he never had been much of an outdoorsman. Roby was the one who thrived in the woods: dragging back sticks bowing with the weight of squirrels, bagging four good meat deer every season, a pile of rabbits each February, setting buckets of catfish sitting on the porch at dawn all summer long.

Paul said yes, as long as there was booze and shade.

"You're not gonna believe this place," Roby said, steering the truck onto a narrow lane, passing Paul the blackberry wine cooler they'd been swilling out of a gallon jug. "The guy don't even live here. He's got 300 acres that bump right up against the Hillier place and that woods runs all the way to 229 on the Minks County line."

"How'd you meet him?" Paul asked.

"I was doing work on the house and he was there for an inspection," Roby said. "I started joking around with him, and in a few minutes I had the guy trying on stilts to mud and tape drywall. So when I asked him if I could come on back and fish a little he said, anytime."

They turned the corner and the double row of trees opened onto a wide lawn, revealing a two-story Victorian mansion. Paul could tell the man had money in it: stained glass windows, freshly painted and finished wood siding, a tri-tone slate roof, brick sidewalks meandering around the gardens. He whistled low.

"Don't put the coffee on..." Roby waved at a security camera and grinned, then waved his middle finger. "That thing don't even work. He thinks this is effin' *Green Acres*."

Paul took a draw from the joint that they passed between them, eyeing the deep ruts and sinkholes on either side of the driveway as it deteriorated and narrowed towards the woods. "Do you think we should just get out and walk?"

"Hell no!" Roby said, "I got us in 4-wheel."

Paul felt good, a humming in his chest cavity from the cool drink and a pleasant mellow feeling from the wine and the weed. They parked the truck in a small clearing, then hiked in another quarter mile, slapping at mosquitoes and winding their way along the deer trail that snaked through thin underbrush. The trail ended at an abandoned stock pond, half covered in algae, surrounded on all sides by thick woods of silvery beech trees, mottled live oak, and formidable black walnut. A felled tree served as their bench, its mossy top a little soggy and seeping into the seat of Paul's pants.

They passed the hours in relative silence, only occasionally noting the changing light as the sun shifted downward through the trees, or moving to a cooler spot. Paul was feeling a little woozy. Instead of wearing off, the buzz was getting stronger, fuzzier. The gallon jug was empty now, a deep plum ring staining the bottom rim. Roby's restlessness was playing out, his



twitchiness sketching up the water.

Roby ran his hand through his hair, and said, "You ever hear anything about my dad?"

Paul shook his head. "Last I heard he was down to Orient."

"Oh, he got out of there after a while and got another church to take him on. That man could fall headfirst in a outhouse and come out smelling like a rose."

They heard a strange chirping sound, then another.

"Sounded almost like a Nextel," Paul said.

Roby shook his head and frowned. "Nah. Just a cricket or something."

There was a small pause, a question in the air, as they stood, cupping their ears to draw in the sound. After a few moments of listening to the woods hum, Paul relaxed against the tree. Roby sat next to him, shoulders hunched up, tense. Paul turned and looked his cousin in the eye.

"You ain't like him, Roby," Paul said.

"You're drunk as shit," Roby grinned. "We better get you out of here."

#

Paul kept his eyes on the frayed laces of his boots to keep his balance. He noticed that the ground was black, silky, and cut open nearly to mulch from the deer hooves that tracked across it. Roby trailed behind a few yards. When Paul stepped out into the clearing, he froze. A black cruiser was parked next to Roby's ex-wife's truck. The sheriff leaned against the truck with his arms crossed, and his Deputy coolly trained a gun on Paul.

Paul raised his hands, dropping his fishing rod. Roby had melted into the woods.

"What's going on, TC?" Paul asked the Sheriff.

The deputy lowered his gun slightly, his face folding into confusion. "Mr. Burress?"

Paul had taught both the Deputy's daughter that semester. Given extra help to the girl with his science fair project.

"Well, sir," TC said. "We was hoping you could tell us the very same thing."

When they read his charges, Paul felt half certain that urine would run down the inside of his leg. He was a 43-year-old schoolteacher. He did not know he had possession of a stolen truck, or that there was a slit in the barrel seat filled with methamphetamine, a good half ounce of marijuana and a bunch of pills Paul couldn't have guessed the use for. He did not know he was committing criminal trespass, perhaps also getting a DUI, and fishing without a license.

Mercifully, T.C. let him wash up with a half-empty water bottle and change into an old pair of Roby's jeans that were in the truck. They kept asking Paul if anybody was with him, how on earth he had wound up here, what he was doing with all that stuff.

When he wouldn't talk, they arrested him. For everything.

At county they took his statement, his belt, his shoelaces, his driver's license, what little money he had on him and his picture.

"You're telling me," TC said, "You were just out fooling around and you didn't have no idea that you were driving a hot vehicle? That you don't smoke even a little weed and are just as solid ignorant about that crank in the truck? That you did all this on your own?"

Paul didn't say a word. They couldn't prove anything in that truck was his, and Paul was pretty sure that the charges weren't going to stick. For once innocence and naïveté might work to his advantage. Even if it took a bevy of lawyers he was not about to sing on family. Blood was blood.

"Mr. Burress," TC said. "Please."

Paul just shook his head, declining a lawyer for the time being and asking to be tested for the drugs they found in the car, thinking that would clear him, and thinking of Shelly. She told him recently, upon learning that Paul and Roby kept company, that Paul was dumber than a box of hair and had better quit running around acting like his balls had just dropped.

#

Aunt Helen stirred a little in her sleep. She shifted her thick legs and uncrossed her ankles on the footrest when her car keys clinked gently against Roby's callused palm. Bogsy hissed at him. Roby gave the cat a good shove with his foot, but as he crept out the screen door Bogsy fled outdoors.

Silently, Roby dropped to his knees. He reached for Bogsy again, but the cat bounded into the garage and hid under the car. Cussing softly under his breath, Roby glanced back in through the window and saw Helen's chest rising and falling in unbroken cadence, her lips trembling some with each exhalation.

He went to the car, and eased it into neutral, giving it a good shove to roll it down the driveway, popping as little gravel as possible. The movement startled Bogsy, who hid under the porch. Roby threw the parking brake on, got down and scooted on his belly into the crawlspace. His shirt grew damp from the thick, untended earth, and grit made its way into the waistband of his jeans. He reached and finally clasped the cat firmly by the collar and the back legs. When Roby tossed Bogsy indoors, he caught the screen with his forearm and left a smear of blood on it. By the time Helen woke up, the blood would have turned brown. She'd hobble over to the door, notice it, and spit on her apron, rubbing out the stain, never realizing what it was.

Roby was breathing heavily, and sweat stung as it trickled down his neck and into his skin. He was cut all to ribbons from running through the cornfield where he ditched the first car he'd stolen that day. Roby knew what he needed to do and didn't mind doing it to Shelly. He remembered his daddy saying, "Better to be hated for who you are than loved for who you ain't."

That was the problem. Yes, that was the problem, Roby thought, as he started Helen's car. Nobody ever saw the good he did, who he was inside. Everybody remembered every mistake that he got caught for and some he didn't, but nobody caught him doing good, like putting back that old lady's

cat.

He dwelt on that the whole way down the road, until he turned into the driveway at Shelly's house. Nobody was home.

#

Shelly waited a long time to see Paul, two hours that gave her plenty of time to worry. She clutched her purse to her side, full of cash from the house safe. She had hurried out so fast she had on a set of mismatched flip-flops. Paul finally emerged, looking calmer than she thought he would. T.C. read off the charges and slid the bail sheet across the counter.

"Is there anything you didn't get arrested for?" Shelly asked, counting out the bills.

"I wouldn't know how to do all that if I tried," Paul said.

TC looked up from processing Paul's paperwork, and exhaled through his nose. "Mr. Burress. I wish you would just tell us what's gone on here."

"I thank you, TC," Paul said. "You treated me decent."

Shelly and Paul stopped at a drive-through on the way home from jail.

"Talk," she said, passing him the paper bag limp with grease. When Paul finished, the ice had turned their sodas flat and watery, and they were closing in on turnoff to Birch Road.

"I knew it," Shelly said. "I knew I should have shot him when I had the chance."

When they pulled into Shelly's drive, Roby was stepping out of Wayne's garage carrying Shelly's bow with one hand, a .38 tucked into his belt. He let his hands drop to his side when he saw Paul.

Shelly was already rolling down the window and leaning out of the car.

"You dumb son of a bitch!" Shelly said, pointing to the bow. "I'll kill you."

"No you won't," Roby said. His voice had a strange evenness to it.

"You're holding the damn thing upside down," Shelly said.

"Pawn shop won't care, little girl," Roby said grinning. "Hi, Paul."

"Hey," Paul said.

Shelly made to open the car door, but Paul firmly took her arm, and turned her toward him.

"Don't."

"Let me go!" Shelly said, whaling on the side of Paul's head with her fist.

"Shelly!" Paul said sharply, "Anything you ask for you ain't getting from him."

In response, Shelly head-butted Paul and clawed at his ear.

"He's robbing my house!" she screamed, punctuating each word with a blow on Paul's head, torso, neck.

Roby walked around to Shelly's window, put a hand on her shoulder

and squeezed. She writhed underneath his grip.

"Look," he said. "It's only because you were such a cunt to me when I tried to apologize to you."

Shelly smacked his hand off her shoulder. "Get off my property."

"You broke my taillight."

"Fuck. You," Shelly said. She made to bite his hand. Roby jerked back, and rested his free hand on the grip of the pistol. Paul slowly reached over, took Shelly's keys out of the ignition, and tossed them out the window to Roby.

"Thanks, cuz," Roby said.

"Are you in this together?" Shelly asked.

Paul shook his head no at her, and put his finger to his lips.

"Please," she whispered.

"Let's talk, Roby," Paul said. "I'm going to step out of the car."

"You took a fall for me," Roby said. "I appreciate it."

Paul never took his eyes off Roby. "You mind if I step out?"

Roby considered. "Long as she stays in it."

Paul leaned over to Shelly. "Give me your phone."

"No."

"Give me your phone and I'll get your bow. I'll get that."

Shelly stuck her lower jaw out, dug in her purse, and handed the phone to Paul.

Paul moved slowly. Every sound seemed amplified: the door handle buckling, the car door hinges complaining squeak, his boots popping the gravel.

Roby kept his eyes on Shelly. "I need to get on the road."

"You don't have to go like this."

"They won't give you no time, Paul," Roby said. "You're respectable."

Paul edged towards him, but Roby's shoulders stiffened slightly. Roby walked to the back of Helen's car and tried to angle the bow into the trunk. It would not fit. Paul watched. Roby didn't look like a lost little boy anymore. He looked hopped up, the adrenaline alone making him shaky.

Paul said, "How about we make a deal."

Roby tried to go past him, but Paul put up an arm. Paul knew that Roby could whoop him good without even getting winded. "Hey," Paul said.

Roby looked at him. They were eye to eye, nearly. Paul reached in his pocket and held out his phone, and Shelly's. "You'll get more for these than you will for that."

Roby frowned at Paul. "I could just take both."

"You don't need that bow."

Roby looked at Paul, shook his head.

"Let her have it back." Paul knelt down and slowly tossed his phone, then Shelly's, at Roby's feet. "Don't leave like this, cuz. You might want to come back someday."

Roby nodded. Paul slowly reached up and took the bow off the roof of the car. It was surprisingly light, had pink camo detailing and bit of dark

maroon deer blood staining its leather sling.

Paul met Roby's eyes, and extended his hand.

"You done a good thing," Paul said. Roby's hand met his, and they shook. Roby avoiding Paul's gaze, and shuffled his feet. It was over in a second, that moment. Roby skip-turned quickly around, got in the car, and roared out of the driveway. They heard the dull thud of the bass from the radio when he turned it up at the end of the driveway. Roby waved, grinned, and was gone.

#

They found Helen's car a few weeks later down in Kentucky. One of the handguns turned up at a pawnshop in Virginia Beach, and one was used later in murder in Champaign. They never saw Roby again.

Paul was mostly exonerated by the grainy video of Roby, waving at the security camera they had passed at the farm. His lawyer got all the charges dropped with the exception of contempt of court, and a reprimand from State Wildlife, Fish and Game. The Judge gave Paul probation, and spoke very sternly to him from the bench about "the company you keep" and "complying with the law regardless of the family bonds you feel."

Paul lost his teaching job and went to work at a grocery, rising from the ranks of bagger and stock boy to cashier, then assistant manager and manager.

Late of an evening, usually on a Sunday when the store was closed, Paul would turn on the bluegrass program and let the strident fiddles, and high lonesome sound lull him into a bit of the past. The glorious summer when he learned that he had a streak of danger in him and could live a little, even raise some hell if he felt up to it. His thoughts would turn to Roby, and wonder where he was and if he ever would come back. So as the radio wept *lines on the highway, take me where I want to go...* Paul would think of them as they had been ten or fifteen years ago, young and with some hope. He still had some, foolish as is was.

# CONTRIBUTORS

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**Tara Deal** is the author of *Wander Luster* (poetry chapbook, Finishing Line Press) and *Palms Are Not Trees After All*, winner of the 2007 Clay Reynolds Novella Prize from Texas Review Press. Her work has also appeared in *Alimentum*, *Blip*, *Conium Review*, *failbetter*, *Sugar House Review*, *Tampa Review Online*, and *West Branch*, among others. And her shortest story can be found in *Hint Fiction* (Norton). She lives in New York City.

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**Anna Ojascastro Guzon** is a mother, writer, teacher, and former physician. She is also a co-founder and program director at YourWords STL, a volunteer, tutoring organization in St. Louis. She is a graduate of the New School's Graduate Writing Program and her work may be found in the *Best American Poetry blog*, *Bone Bouquet*, and *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, among other literary magazines.

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**Emily O'Neill** is a writer, artist, and proud Jersey girl. Her recent poems and stories can be found in *Five Quarterly*, *Profane*, and *Split Rock Review*, among others. Her debut collection, *Pelican*, is the inaugural winner of Yes Yes Books' Pamet River Prize and she edits poetry for *Wyvern Lit*.

**Caitlin Pryor's** poetry is forthcoming or has appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Redivider*, *Nimrod*, *Faultline*, *The Mississippi Review*, *Poet Lore*, and elsewhere. She has been the recipient of the Mississippi Review Prize, the Ron McFarland Prize for Poetry, and an Avery Hopwood Award. She holds a BA from the University of Michigan, an MFA from The New School, and a PhD from The University of North Texas, where she worked as a teaching fellow and served as the Managing Editor of the *American Literary Review*.

**Paige Quiñones** is currently earning her MFA from the Ohio State University in Columbus, OH, and earned her BA from the University of Florida in 2013. Her poem "Blood Sport" was recently a finalist for the 2015 Indiana Review Poetry Prize. She is currently working on a manuscript that engages with her biracial heritage, female sexuality, and young marriage.

**Hila Ratzabi** was selected by Adrienne Rich as a recipient of a National Writers Union Poetry Prize and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is the author of the chapbook *The Apparatus of Visible Things* (Finishing Line Press). Her poetry is published or forthcoming in *Narrative*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Drunken Boat*, *Linebreak*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, and other literary journals, and in *The Bloomsbury Anthology of Contemporary Jewish American Poetry*. She holds an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College, and lives in Philadelphia where she founded the Red Sofa Salon & Poetry Workshop.

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**Marysia Schultz** was a resident artist and fellowship recipient for both the Vermont Studio Center and DNA Gallery (Provincetown, MA), in 2014. She will be returning to Provincetown in 2015 for a second fellowship with DNA Gallery. She is a resident with La Mano Pottery in New York, and has shown with Exagere Gallery and Expose:NOLA, in New Orleans, DNA Gallery, the SoHo20 Gallery, and the Hotel Chelsea, in New York. Schultz graduated from Pratt Institute (BFA, 2010), where she was the recipient of the Schuback Endowed Scholarship and a Barrett Scholarship. She currently lives and maintains a studio in Brooklyn, New York.



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