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WELTER

2011

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Welter, an annual literary journal, is published by
the School of Communications Design at the University of Baltimore
1420 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201.

The Editors thank Dean Diedre Badejo, President Robert L. Bogomolny, Kendra Kopelke, and Christina Gay, without whom Welter 2011 would not be possible. We also thank Cynthia and James McCabe, Ms. Rocca, Daeva, absentee fathers and their children, Sarah, Mama Layne, Kid A, and Mary Elizabeth Bergman.

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Printed in the U.S.A.

Dear Readers,

We love squirrels. And sometimes, squirrels get hit by cars. And sometimes, cars get hit by trains. And sometimes, trains of thought take us far, far away from our pathetic lives. And sometimes not.

Making *Welter* can get a little squirrelly at times. So we end up having these constant pissing contests between two polarized schools of thought. It's either, *Welter* should be serious, very serious; that it's a place of sex, depression, and suicide. Or it's like, *Welter* shouldn't be that serious, as if a hundred squirrels could type for a hundred years and they would have *Welter* 2011. You might be able to catch it when you're flipping through.

Just hold on to yourself for another second while we get through this last bit of self-indulgence. We promise, you're almost to the good stuff. We just really want you to know that empty-minded decisions were cast aside in order to create greatness.

The futile pursuit of perfection, our mild quest to reach out and touch the face of the sun and join the canons of the heavens themselves is immortalized within these pages. We searched for words. We searched for transcendence; understanding, meaning, and stuff like that, or something.

Wait, what?

The Editors

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Here Is Your Poem

Summer Reibert

I have been in love with your meanness
since it was being cultivated in locker-lined hallways.
When skipping history class together meant writing our own
I loved you, talking the principle out of our suspension,
caught smoking in the hall.
Too proud and indignant to hide in the bathroom
Not like the rest of those girls.

We experimented with kindness, LSD, spreading each other's legs, and
boys too old and stupid to care we were 15.

We grew up, a little, and dancing on a stage, naked together you said you
wanted something more than poems and happiness. You said, "I want
something that can be judged."
Wanted to wear a string of pearls and visit the White House on Christmas.
Wanted someone who didn't write poems about spreading each other's legs.

We smoked more hash, just a little
Then you went to dye your chestnut hair blonde
And I sat in your empty room, trying to write a poem
about spreading your legs in the White House.

Neurological Diseases in Domesticated Hamsters

Jack Combs

Maybe I figured it would scurry,
the little bugger, but I dug him up
with a trowel—the wooden grip
shoving grains of Earth into the
small cushion of my palm. I didn't
have to go very deep until I found him,
sandy and motionless, heavy like a fat,
wet baggy stuffed with minced tea leaves.
My sister screamed as I poked him with
the cold tip of my handheld tool. He'd
rolled over enough that I could see his
purple belly, and I jabbed him till he
began to tear at the sides. He was so soggy.

And although I didn't squirm when
his left eye ball jetted from his skull from
all the pressure that I caused with my tiny
exertions upon his body, I felt bad for making
my sister cry over this little hamster: the one
she had buried in a ceremony a few days
before, which I had excavated and was now
examining to determine the cause of death.
I placed him back in his hole and covered
him the best I could. I patted down his sandy
ceiling and rubbed the dirt from my fingers.
Maybe I was thinking of God—or something
like the Easter Bunny, but I closed my eyes like
I felt I should, and said some words that went
unheard.

Sunday

Caitlin Elizabeth Thomson

We speak of water. I tell him that sometimes,
when the lake is quiet, my feet skip like stones

in the shallows. Four, five times before the splash.
Minnows swim around my ankles and I scatter bits

of leftover lunch. Ham sinking
into those mouths below.

He laughs at the thought. Like Jesus?
He asks.

Jesus doesn't skip,
I reassure him.

Father

Andrea Phillips

When I was young, I remember father meaning Lou Falieno, the steelworker husband of my babysitter Marlene. Lou came home at six every night, stopping only to throw down his lunch tin and grab a beer before settling into his recliner. At five of six, if my mother had not yet come to get my brother and me, Marlene would herd us into the basement with warnings not to make a sound. Lou did not like noise. Lou did not want to see any signs of Marlene's day job when he came home from work. Lou did not like children, not even his own, both of whom were terrified of him. I felt very lucky that my house did not have a Lou Falieno.

In high school, I started dating. The boys became much more interesting once they could drive. I never dated mean young men. I dated nice young men, but I never told my mother about them. I had to remember that my mother spent five months in a home for unwed mothers when my father got her pregnant. I had to remember that my mother did the best she could. I had to remember that without my mother, God knows where I would be, and that she never really wanted children either. I dated nice young men who paid for dinner and complimented me on my vocabulary and never raised their voices and I was always terrified that my mother would find out about them.

I was never promiscuous. I knew that my gift to give could only be given once. I clung to my gift, refusing to take the bow off the package. There was nobody at my house cleaning a gun and asking these boys what their intentions were. Nobody to tell me that I could have been dead in a ditch for all they knew when I came home late without calling. I knew that my father had once been one of these boys and that my mother had once been me. I knew that I was the only one making sure I didn't end up like they had.

Some years back, I found my mother's diary in a box in the basement. I flipped through it until I saw my father's name and then I felt like I was seeing my fate written in her girly script on the musty page. "That cute guy came in again today," she had written. "He wasn't in my line, but he kept staring at me. Before he left he asked for my number. His name is Drew Santoriello." I could not fathom that three lives were created from this one chance encounter. My very existence hinged on nothing more than a cute guy getting the phone number of the register girl at the local Burger King.

The first boy I ever loved I wasn't in love with. He could grow a beard. He brought my little brother his old Legos and showed him how to use them to build the space station on the front of the box. He took me to buy my first car and he taught me how to drive a stick shift. When he drove me home, he made sure I was in the house safely before pulling away from the curb. He was, at seventeen, a man among boys. When I broke up with him in a hotel room on Valentine's Day, he sat on the edge of the bed with his face buried in my waist and he cried and kept asking why it hurt so badly.

For many years, I did not fall in love. I wanted everyone to fall in love with me and did anything I could to make it happen. I thought of nothing else. I would lie awake for hours devising ways to outwit their stubborn hearts. I sent myself flowers. I left platters of cookies on their porches in the middle of the night and then didn't answer their calls for two days. I used compliments and smiles and v-necks to build them up to incredible heights, and then I watched as they hovered precariously at the peak. When they fell, I lost interest immediately. They became embarrassing to me. I often wouldn't speak to them again. I noticed this pattern in myself and, alone in my car, I would ask myself if it was really about my father. I swore it wasn't and so I let the matter drop.

I once saw my father at a yard sale. I hadn't seen him in many years and the sight of him was so shocking that at first I did not notice the two small children with him—the boy riding on his back and the girl clutching his hand. They both called him "Daddy." They were young enough to be mistaken for my own children. My father did not see me, and it felt very important that I look over the faces of those children, to be certain that no traces of my brothers or me could be found there. On the way home, I told myself that I must have misheard him calling those children "love" and "darling." That could not have been my father, who kept such a careful grip on his young blonde daughter's hand.

I met the son of a violent alcoholic. This man's son had not spoken to his father in close to twenty years. This man's son told me, "I will raise my boys to be good and honest men, but my daughters will own my heart." I knew then that I would marry him.

When I did marry him, three years later, it was my brothers who escorted me to the tree in the vineyard that served as our altar. I would not have done it any other way. I had one beautiful best friend on each arm. My heart was as light as air and my father never once crossed my mind.

POST-ITS

John Grey

FEAR NOTE

This long dark siren
thousands of miles away,
now heard through e-mail.

LOVE NOTE

It's time I came early
to ask, to call, to retrieve,
to say to time ...
two in front,
everyone else behind.

NOTE NOTE

Typing is found to be safe.
My fingers move fast,
even faster when I hear
what's happened:
the train wreck, the disappointment
over seating arrangements,
the knife in the back,
the curious affair
of the snore in the dark.

BREAKUP NOTE

What she is,
what I just saw
is unexpected and
when we break apart,
when I hear it,
nuclear.

PERSONALITY NOTE

you know exactly
who to hate

LONESOME NOTE

I'm out there somewhere
with no zip code,
without proper postage

GUILT NOTE

work time,
would tell me
write this morning,
wrought it in iron

TONIGHT NOTE

your house

amana memories

Carl Palmer

she reads in midnight whispers
to my now calmed infant sister
mesmerized by mother's voice

seated in the kitchen silhouetted
in the glow of an open oven door
reflected in her face as she scoots

over slightly invites me to hop up
huddle in closest to the heat as I
listen to her story accompanied by

milk bubbled gulps rubber nipple
noises sissy's slowing grunts and
sighs as tired tiny eyes fall asleep

mom tilts the book for me to look
follow her finger under lines of
words I am far too young to read

from pictureless pages characters
emerge each given unique speech
scenes seen in a two year old mind

with magical skill mom interprets
printed words to adventure worlds
beyond my world safe by her side

I begin to imagine how someday
I'll read books myself from library
shelves recite by rote written notes

translate letters to sounds to words
skillfully decipher black and white
amaze all audiences awed at my art

perfectly pronouncing six syllable
words barely heard as crowds cheer
rise to their feet call out my name

I awaken to the morning light never
remembering how I got to my bed
or when her story became my dream

Denied the Rite

Layne Humphrey

On the nite we were denied the Rite
I was blessed to linger in the remarkable gyrations of a people Mothers,
aunties, fathers, uncles, brothers, sisters, co-workers, neighbors,
A tribe... My tribe... Once again denied the rites of wedlock

That night, just like all the others since I was old enough to go, I was
abiding in the fierce defiance of being who we actually are Gathering
together in the fierce nocturnal ritual, here in our
night bright temples
Undeniable, revelatory, righteous… our ceremonies of movement and drink
Our rite ... Our dance.... bopping, grinding, life affirming, inexorable
Our indomitable movement toward union
Even if only blessed by the sacraments of sweat,
cologne and libations poured by a bartender named Dawn.

We remain devoted to each other in a society that takes our gifts but denies
us the sanctity and privileges of our unions.

And so we will love, cherish, and care for each other ... Any way
In spite of it all
longer than last call
past closing time…

The Wounded Deer

Joel Allegretti

I.
The leaf uneaten.
The stream untasted.

II.
The bullet fulfilled.

Arthur

Lenore Glover

I know Crazy. I also know Crazy's more sophisticated younger brother, Mentally Ill (but he's another story). Crazy sits at the kitchen table smoking cigarettes, listening to the same songs over and over again, drinking cup after cup of black coffee while tapping one foot under the table. That's Crazy.

Crazy tells you how he can gradually taper off his medication and not be crazy. That sort-of works until the dosage is down so low that the voices start bugging him again. And that's when the Jehovah's Witnesses knock at the door—and he knows they're either an emissary from God or an emissary from Satan—but either way he invites them in the house to talk.

I know Crazy. Crazy has the same loop of song endlessly running through his head. Every now and then he has to go over to the piano and compulsively play it, like an itch that has to be scratched or a scab you just can't leave alone. He has to play that same fragment of that same song again, and again, and again.

Crazy talks about writing a book. He even starts typing it. You read the first couple of chapters… and it's good. But, to him, something's not quite right. He rewrites those first few chapters again, and again, and again. And then, inevitably, it all goes into the trash. He lies in bed. The next day he's back at the kitchen table, chain-smoking cigarettes, listening to the same song, drinking cup after cup of black coffee, one foot tapping under the table.

The cigarettes and the coffee help quiet the voices down. Beer sometimes makes it better before making it worse. Medications get switched around. The damn Head Shrink thinks he knows a good combination that'll work a little bit better; it doesn't. Crazy gets crazier. Crazy once got put on Valium, and Crazy got really crazy.

Crazy's gone now, living in a group home as a ward of the state. He thinks if he goes out the back door he'll end up in the woods where he camped as a child. Camping and hunting in those woods was likely the most peaceful time in Crazy's life. Crazy wasn't crazy then. He was a boy in his element.

And then one day, the boy turned seventeen. He was young, immortal, and only just starting to become Crazy. He enlisted, and he learned how to hunt more than just squirrels and deer. He also learned about beer, weed, and acid—not today's pansy-assed LSD, but the real, Timothy Leary/Albert Hoffman-created acid. Hello, Crazy.

He was not the same boy when he returned on thirty-day leave. Playing around while out hunting with his best friend, they forgot the hunter's cardinal rule—there is no such thing as an unloaded gun. He lost his leg, but not quickly, in a trauma ward. There were no trauma wards in 1972, except maybe in Vietnam. All it took was a single .22 hollow-point shell, the same kind of bullet that nearly killed Reagan, and his belly and upper leg were, effectively, Swiss cheese. Months were spent trying to find a fragment here, a fragment there, trying to patch arteries in his leg so they would carry blood. He watched as every effort failed and his leg started to die.

Crazy was first diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic/manic depressive with psychotic tendencies. But today, forty years after the first diagnosis, hardly anything is left. Crazy is a shell of what used to be there; a shell of a man who could create, who could write really, really great stories; a shell of a man who camped and sculpted and built the most amazing things.

Months after the accident, Crazy finally came home from the hospital for good; one leg whole, the other leg amputated just above the knee—a magnet for the eyes until you would (sort of) get used to it. And it was then that Crazy gradually sank into that loop of chain-smoking, of black coffee, of tapping his foot to that same piece of music over and over and over again. He could never find his way back out.

Camera

Jenny O'Grady

Thinking of beautiful things
makes me think of you,
in the ground, seven years,
and I think it's kind of beautiful
how much I hate you for it.

I feel the light on my lids
lying beneath a thin sheet on Sunday morning,
beneath the weight of my husband's arm,
and I think of you, I think boy that was stupid,
boy, what a dumb decision.

I think you would have liked
the way this shallot fell into
perfect epaulettes in the oil.
You would have appreciated
this beet – its dirty, bloody, Cheshire smile.

I found the Tiger Beat sticker you put in my book.
I found your last e-mail. That
crazy guy wasn't wearing a shirt
beneath his coveralls, I know, I know!
And that lady with her big fat mouth:
she sure gave you the business, didn't she?

Boy, what a dumb decision.

On film, you were fine.
On film, I absolutely hate
how beautiful and fine
you look.

A Sound

Kerrin Smith

there was a sound
in the abyss
in it
there was depth
neither lightness
or darkness
it was
it had no look
or face
but breathed like
the gasping whistle
of a rocket
that does not explode
does not owe
sending color
into the sky
or vanishing
into shadow
and still
means to be heard

Four Boys

Ian Humphrey, Esq.

"Now boys," Mother Morgan said, "Now boys, I want you to repeat back to me what I've told you so many, many times. Can you do that?"

Four boys, nearly men, lined up before a rusted mobile home. They were dressed in a variety of colors, Gawain in an amber yellow varsity jacket, Agravaine in a long black overcoat and black tie, simple Gaheris in dull green flannel, and little Gareth, the only of the boys too young to shave, well his red windbreaker seemed to whip in the weather in a still room. They clasped their hands behind their backs and stared up at their mother with absolute attention.

"The mayor's a traitor, mother," said Gawain.

"And a philanderer," said Agravaine.

"And a bookworm," said Gaheris.

"And a bad, bad man," Gareth piped up, and they all laughed.

"Yes boys. And so much more." She leaned over, her bosoms near falling from her lace nightie. "And what are you going to do to the mayor?"

"We'll burn down his office," said Gawain.

"And cut off his sausage," said Agravaine.

"And ring his doorbell," said Gaheris.

"And pee in his pool!" Gareth cried, and they all laughed.

Except for mother. Mother Morgan, she hissed and they were silent. She eyed each of them with a long hard gaze, until even Gawain was shivering and Agravaine had a slight bulge in his pants.

"That's right, boys. Now go." She spoke in a whisper, and on the word "go," they scattered like children, though as I've said, they were nearly men.

Out in the street, they jostled each other as they ran, and they nearly left poor, simple Gaheris behind. Gawain was usually the swiftest, but Agravaine had a fire of fury in his legs, and little Gareth was growing up fast. They skidded to a stop outside town hall.

Solemnly, the three perused the marble pillars and the oak double doors. Gareth started to take off his cap, but Agravaine smacked him in the belly. Finally, Gawain sighed.

They broke away as one. Gareth shimmied up the rain-gutter, Agravaine slipped around the corner and hid beneath a window, Gaheris turned around twice then shoved searching hands into his pockets and sat on a park bench. Gawain, broad-shouldered Gawain, he walked right up to those double doors and knocked twice.

A seneschal listened with feigned interest. Gawain told the story three times, and finally the seneschal nodded and took the young kid inside, led him down the long, tall hallways, and into a corner office. On the desk sat a plaque: MAYOR ARTHUR BRIGHTON. Behind the desk sat a young man, too young for public office. His election had been a scandal, and he'd drawn the votes as if from stone. But he'd been a good leader, a natural some said, and he gave every man on his staff the honor they were due. He was going to change the town, the papers said. But Gawain's mother, well, her maiden name was Brighton. And she'd loved her father so. Until he found another wife, and Morgan found a life in the trailer park.

"What can I do for you son?" the mayor said. "Come in, sit down. I hear you've some grievances, or rather your mother does. Hasn't been receiving her welfare check was it?" He didn't have a clue who the brothers were.

The mayor had a wide grin, and pearled teeth. Such an honest face. Gawain had never known his father, but he'd heard the stories of a wild haired man with crooked teeth and a tendency to drink. He'd been a dishonest man, and a powerful man as far as trailer trash can be.

Gawain bared his teeth. His father wouldn't have loved this man, with his fitted suit and his soft hands. Gawain knew he could trust this man. He hated him for it.

"She hasn't been getting her due."

"Well! That doesn't seem fair now does it?" The mayor's face turned to concern. "Ordinarily I'd pass this along to go through the proper channels, but you seem like a solid young boy. Strong, sincere, and nearly a man I believe!"

"I'm nineteen sir, not that it's any of your beeswax."

"I see. Are you in school?"

"No, sir."

"Well then! Are you gainfully employed? Because I'll tell you what, I'm looking for police officers right now. I'm sure you've heard, I had to drop over half my force. Corruption charges, protection rackets. It's a dirty town, and you… well, I can see you're angry kid. And I'm angry too." He'd lost his way, ranting like that. The mayor slammed his hand on the desk and stood, turned to face the window. "Sometimes I'm too angry." He shook his head.

Gawain thought of his poor mother, cutting coupons, dancing to mo-town in a tattered slip. His cheeks grew hot. Gawain was sick of stealing lunch money and all the other bullshit his brothers had to do to get by. Agravaine pushing cocaine to old ladies, Gaheris stealing barbecues, little Gareth running con games on convenience store clerks for pocket change. And he loved his mother. But he was tired of her too. Gawain checked his watch. It was time.

He leaped over the desk and put his shoulder into the mayor's back. They crashed through the window and for a moment, Gawain's heart froze. How far would they fall?

They landed in a shrub; the mayor groaned. A branch had struck him between the legs.

"Goddamit kid, what the hell did I say…"

Out front, Gareth dumped the gasoline into the gutter, hidden the night before. Gaheris lit the bottle rocket in his pocket. And Agravaine, who'd been prepared to prop the mayor's window shut with a crowbar, he took that crowbar and he charged the mayor as Town Hall burst into flames.

"No!" Gawain said, and he grabbed his little brother from behind.

"He fucked our mother!" Agravaine cried.

"No he didn't!" Gawain said.

"No I didn't!" the mayor said, crab-crawling as fast as he could.

"He wants things better, brother," Gawain said.

"He's a philanderer." Agravaine was shaking, and urine ran down one leg.

"Maybe. But I think we should help him."

"Did we get him?" Gaheris walked around the corner, stooping to pick up a half eaten hot dog.

"I don't think so." Gareth landed gracefully. "Are we gonna get him, Gawain?"

"No." Gawain gave Agravaine another shake, trying to wrest the crowbar away without losing his grip on his brother.

"Oh. Mother won't be happy." Gaheris took a bite of the hot dog, grimaced, and ate another bite.

"Brother?" said Gareth, and he tugged on Agravaine's tie. "It's over."

The four stopped. They sidled up, crossed their arms behind their backs, and stood waiting.

"What am I going to do with you four?" Arthur said.

Gaheris was the first to chuckle, and despite the raging fire at their backs, the four boys were soon laughing.

Mr. Winik Goes to College

Marion Winik

The children of our family lost their historic leader in the fall of 2006, when Hayes went off to college a few states south. It took two cars to fit all his stuff, so brother Vince chauffeured little Jane and me in my car and King Hayes followed in his Jeep. Vince is so excited about his learner's permit. It's exciting for me, too, especially when he does things like darting into the left lane when traffic is so thick Hayes can't follow us. What are you doing, Vince?, I shouted, and a few minutes later, when Hayes still hadn't reappeared, I called him on the cellphone to make sure he knew the name of our exit. He answered with a stream of recriminations, though he knew I was not driving.

Soon afterwards, Vince got annoyed by my direction-giving and began shouting that I was crazy and he would never drive anywhere with me again. Right then, Jane began whining from the back seat that she needed to go the bathroom. NOW! I have to go now! she cried.

A gas station appeared on the right and our maddened group swerved into it. The boys got out of their respective cars.

Dude! said Vince to his older sibling. I'm so sorry about what happened back there!

Dude, said Hayes magnanimously, clapping his back, it was cool. I wasn't mad.

God, Mom is such a freak!

I know, man! Let's go in and get some beef jerky.

In disbelief, I watched them head into the gas station. I'm hungry too! said Jane.

I looked at her accusingly. Didn't you have to go to the bathroom?

In the weeks since we left Hayes in his dorm, things here have been weird and sad. I keep staring wistfully at the leftovers in the fridge; I can't seem to adjust the quantities I cook for dinner, and he's the only one who ate leftovers anyway. Vince is always at band practice at dinnertime and favors pretzels dipped in Tabasco sauce over all other entrees. Jane eats pasta with butter and cheese, and she also eats pasta with butter and cheese.

However, the house is much quieter without the beatings and the rough-housing that are the older brother's purview. And ganging up on Mom just isn't the same. Meanwhile, the other day I ran into Vince's guidance counselor, who exclaimed about how different Vince seems this year. When pressed further, she revealed that he had greeted her in the hall. He never did that before, she said.

Perhaps with Hayes gone, the balance is shifting. I have a friend in Texas who said she never realized how exclusively her family's dinner conversation focused on her older son until he left, and they started to talk to the younger one. They've learned a lot about Dungeons and Dragons.

Last night I stared at a plate of homemade sushi rolls leftover in the refrigerator. Vince, I said, isn't sushi one of your favorite foods? He thought a minute. Yeah, he said, give me that. And settled down beside Jane to watch the Fairly Oddparents. I think Vince has begun to notice a few job openings around here: Eater of leftovers, friend to little sisters, greeter of guidance counselors.

I guess it happens every fall. The parents go around whining about their emptying nests while little brothers and sisters move up a peg in the pecking order, unable to believe at first that no one's swatting them down.

Do you miss Hayes? I asked Vince the other day.

Well, he said. He hasn't been gone that long.

But you lived with him every day of your life for sixteen years, and then he just disappeared.

Yeah, said Vince. That's what I mean.

Laughter

Stephanie M. Henderson

It exploded,
Yet it was kindly familiar,
a darling symphony of engagement.
What joy it brought to this blue cloud.

It sort of rolled over to me
parting the thick indigo-green smoke,
up and over the loud colored suits
and bright bursts of whiskey
braking, crashing into my ear –
startling,
a wave crashing against a rocky cape.
My skin rippled.

It settled, dripped slowly
into my blood stream
intoxicating my senses and nestled
at the threshold of my intimate places.
I wanted to cuddle with it.
I wanted to run it through the curls of my hair – hot oil in the morning shower
Breathe it in through a mouth open wide like menthol before bed.

Let it blow gently over my shoulders,
brushing away any burden.
It was completely satisfying, and I was full beyond measure.

Invitingly delightful,
it reminded me of the Monet that hangs above my bed –
dizzying with color, a mixing depth and light.
Hearty, yet tender.

I wanted to stroll with it, tickling my toes like grains of sand.

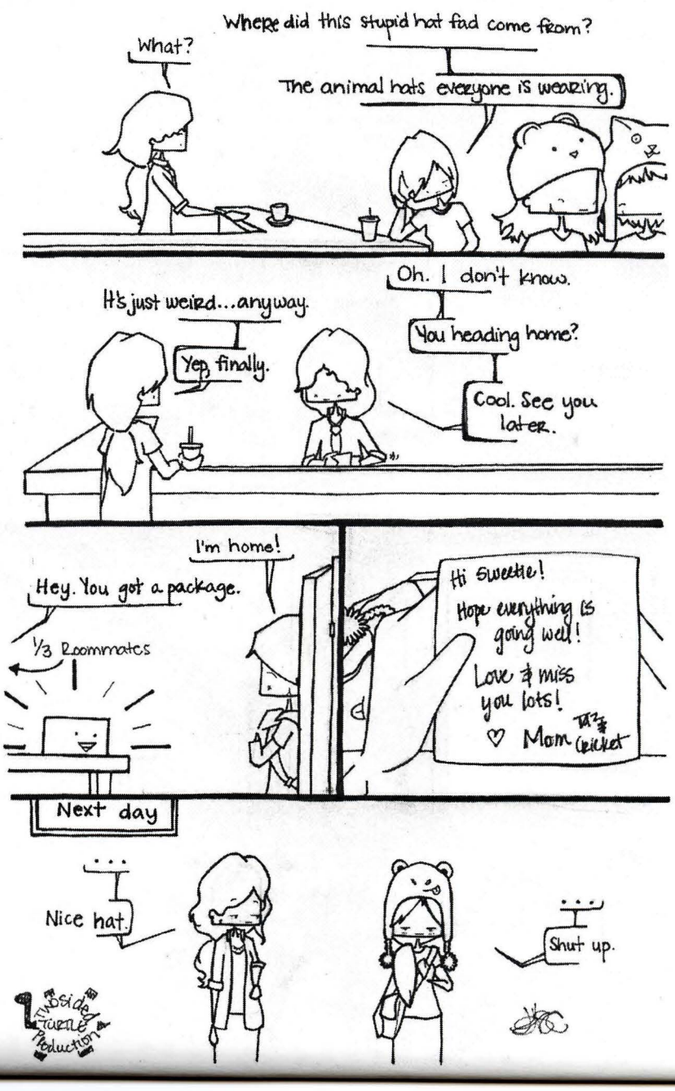
Not wanting to let this feeling leave with the crowd,
I folded your laughter neatly into the corner of a napkin,
and placed it in my clutch.

Since then
I would dab, dab, dab
your laughter behind my ears,
in the crease of my knees,
in the small of my back,
and on the places that make me womanish.

Since then,
when I need to run loose
over grains of sand,
or be rocked gently by waves,
I would unfold your laughter into me...

Minimum Wage: Christmas Cheer

Jasc



Until the Foxes Bring Us Home

Colleen Margot Keehl

Lingering near
a passion so long
disengaged

rusty engine ran feverishly,
screeching with an effortless twang
lusting to be a bird,
bleached red from the dying
sun,

a weeping quiet
earnestly sad
recalled by a folk-singer turned
mad –
but deemed
aimless,

You are an ashen complexion
left singing
with merely remedial connection
to sorrowful worries.

Spinning

David Jordan

I'm teaching junior high in Eugene, living in a duplex with my wife the Bank Teller and my kid the Kindergartner, when Cousin Gary shows up on a Tuesday night with a barefoot, long-haired girl in blue overalls and a white T-shirt. She looks no older than eighteen, but Gary says she has a two-year-old son who lives with her parents in Corvallis. She lives with Gary in her Volkswagen van, which is now parked in my driveway.

"Listen," my cousin says, "You're a smart guy. I told Linda you could help us figure this out."

The girl, seated beside him on our spindly sofa, chortles. She has chestnut hair to her shoulders, merry blue eyes and chipmunk cheeks.

"Thing is," he says, "Linda is a great screw, but we've screwed every way we can think of, and now I have this idea but I don't know if it will work, or how exactly we'd do it. You being a college guy and all, I thought maybe you could help us out.

"What we want is to rig up a deal, like a harness maybe, that would hang Linda in the air over my dick so she can spin on it," He illustrates with his index finger. "You know, just spin and spin, like a top."

Linda throws back her head and laughs. My wife rises from her chair and says it's past our daughter's bedtime and leads her from the room. Gary doesn't seem to notice.

"So what do you think?" he asks. "Could that be done? If we had the right straps and ropes and stuff? Like a block and tackle, sort of?"

Grinning, the girl rests her head against his shoulder and gazes at me.

"You'd need something to hang it from," I say.

Gary nods.,"Yeah, a tree or something like that."

I arch an eyebrow,"You're going to do this outside?"

Linda snickers.

"Well, maybe not," Gary muses. "Inside might be better. We could use a barn! Hang ropes and stuff from the rafters! But how would we make it? What parts do we need, exactly? What tools? Is there some design we should follow? Come on college guy!"

Gary is not a college guy. He worked in a plywood mill until he broke his leg pulling on the green chain. Now he draws worker's compensation.

I shake my head.

"I majored in English literature," I say. "Dickens didn't write about how to build sex harnesses."

Gary nods and settles for a few beers and asks if he and Linda can stay the night in her van in my driveway. I assent. They exit, giggling. I join my wife in our bedroom.

"That was interesting," she says.

I agree.

"You know Gary," I say.

We go to bed. But I can't sleep. I keep thinking of laughing Linda hanging by a harness from the roof of her van in my driveway, spinning on Gary's dick. Spinning, spinning, spinning, spinning.

The van is still there in the morning when I drive off to face the seventh grade.

The Archaeologist in the Garbage

Chelsea Rebekah Grimmer

The archaeologist chips
away at the skull.
Was it human or raccoon?
At this point, it does not matter.
She chisels and shapes
the bone itself subconsciously, striking
to know or make an existence.

The dirt flies away from each chip
on bone, flinching as the skull
surfaces, like a raccoon
out of waste. To us, it does not matter.
To him, it is the shape
of his subsistence. Let's strike
a deal about the garbage of existence,

throw some chips
at the skull
and grant the raccoon
a seat at the bidding. It does not matter
if you have hands shaped
like paws, here; strike
up some conversation and exist
for a moment together. Don't chip
away at who eats what, which skull
has more brain — human or raccoon.
One man's waste does not matter
to another, but the shape
of it does. It is getting dark down here, so strike
a match to illuminate the past existence

lying awake underground. Ignore where the chips
of rain-bowed skull
fall on the earth; raccoons
will gather them up. It does not matter
if the archaeologist makes the shape
they choose to chisel; the strikes
do not change what it means to exist.

Remember, Forget

Heidi Gabrielle Nobles

Their softened consonants and long "r's," the verbal expressions I've come to expect—all these linger in me long after I've said good-bye.

I began volunteering with the Abilene, Texas, branch of the International Rescue Committee in August 2010. I wanted to be more involved with international issues and relief efforts, and I imagined filing paperwork, maybe editing a newsletter, learning about program development—safe labor, all performed at a distance, while the professionals did the hands-on jobs. Instead, I found myself working with Iraqi refugees, helping with employment applications and tax forms, sleeping in the hospital for days after one woman's surgery, performing basic home improvements, and updating personal computer settings.

My American "if it's broken, fix it and move on" instincts make concrete tasks like these especially satisfying. But I also spend a lot of time listening to stories, reflections, and perspectives on current events. I'm keenly aware during all these moments that listening is a privilege, that I am getting a kind of backstage pass to world events that most Americans witness only through the media, if at all. I ask lots of questions. My energy surges and falters as I absorb what they tell me.

I find it rather elegant that out of the dozens of nationalities relocated to our town, I was matched with Iraqis. I've always felt closely tied to the military, having spent my whole childhood on military installations around the world. My father's military career meant he was closely involved with the Iraq war from the very beginning; he was stationed in the Pentagon on September 11 and subsequently assigned to prepare for war in the Middle East. By the time I was in high school, I was helping edit documents and presentations for senior military personnel. After college, I spent a summer doing research related to defusing IEDs in Iraq. So yes, it feels elegant, and maybe even inevitable, that I would meet and work side-by-side with these people, whose lives I helped change forever, mostly in tragic ways.

I sit with my Iraqi friends in spare apartments that house a mish-mash of furniture, mostly donated or bought second-hand. Nothing matches. The wall hangings don't reflect the personalities of the people living in these places; random pictures are affixed at intervals only to keep the white space from taking over, to say, "Our lives are not blank." I know they had houses and gardens of their own in Iraq, and I wonder what those were like.

I ask, "Did you go to libraries?"

"All the libraries have been destroyed."

Silence.

"When you were younger, before the war, did you go to libraries?"

I never did get an answer to that question, or any others. It always comes back to 2003. "Since '03, we don't go out," "Not since '03." It's as if the last eight years of war have nearly obliterated any memory of life before the Baghdad invasion.

I know a little about their careers. All the Iraqi refugees I know in town hold college degrees; at least two have PhDs and worked in high-level positions before fleeing the country to escape death threats to themselves and their family members. Now they stare around our shabby little town, safe and friendly but with little economic opportunity and an ethnic landscape far different from that of their homeland, and they're obviously disoriented.

But the things I know most about are their stories of trauma. One woman was arrested by an Iraqi police officer prior to 2003, questioned for hours, and intimidated with physical threats until she passed out under the pressure and woke up in a hospital. Years later, she would drive her adult son across the Iraq border in the trunk of her car, to save him from death, before applying for refugee status herself. Another man who served as an interpreter for the American forces, and whose brother was killed by insurgents in retaliation, trained his own six-year-old son to stand guard on the roof of their home with an AK-47, ready to shoot if anyone tried to attack while he was at work. One woman found a family member's body delivered to her doorstep, in pieces, as a warning. Another man hated America for what we've done in his country, yet he relocated here because it was the best place for his nine-year-old daughter to receive medical treatment for her cerebral palsy.

They are vibrant, fiery people, trained to fight but now without a war up-close. This little city is no place for children to carry guns. I've had to tell some of them repeatedly that I can't call or email daily, that even if they don't hear from me, I'm alive, I'm safe, they'll see me again. I can't tell if they really think I might die or if sending urgent messages demanding assurances of life is just a long-ingrained habit now.

When we are together, they fill me up with hummus and elaborate fried rice. When we are apart, they fill me with a longing for a homeland I never knew, one they never really knew either, one held captive in their lifetimes first by a heavy-handed dictator and now by the desolation of war. I watch their children playing, radiant with newness and joy, calling to each other in perfect American English, and wonder what they will remember and what they will do when they grow up.

Seattle Memory 44

Breean Lowe

Why not your old confessions?
Why not the loneliness of our imagined love?
They were the beauty of youth.

Me and you in a sticky bar booth
so much sound, walls were not.
Like flames behind the bar,
melting bottles making drinks like bartenders.

Unraveling me
like tracking uncontrollable clouds,
either building up against you.

A chance hand,
yours with mine,
just as your innocent proposal
still hovers here in me, invisibly weighted.

Mist, rain:
Man, woman.
Midnight dance on cobblestone
Midnight sky like sea-bottom.

Quiver (for Mohammed John)

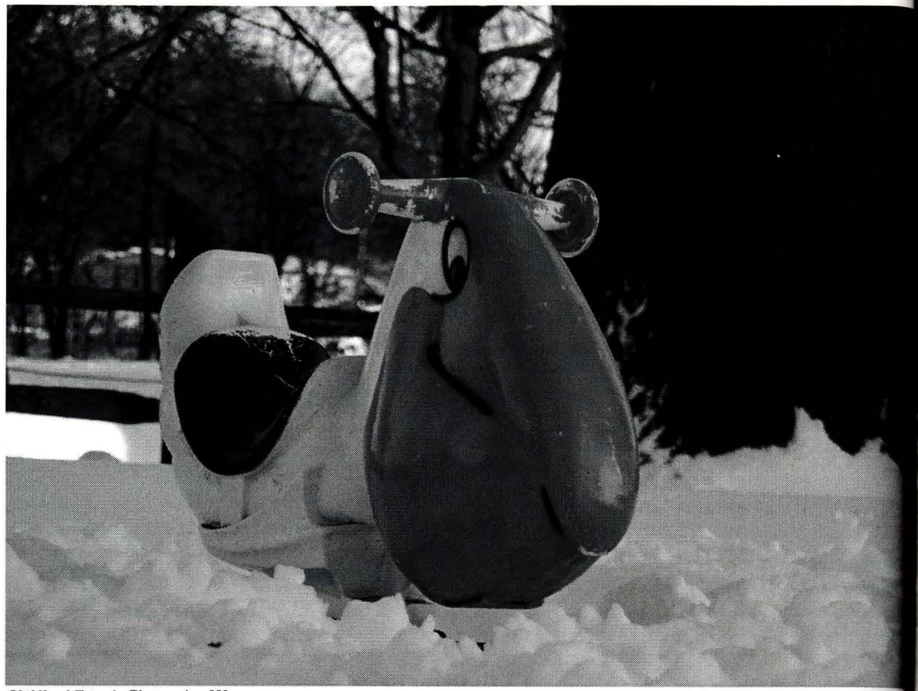
Victoria Wambui

In the first moment, I knew I wanted you,
as I absorbed white linen sleeves rolled
against bronze arms. Locks of Persian lamb
framed your round forehead and the square
set of your jaw made me swallow hard.
It was too soon to grasp the fullness of
your manhood, as you flirted awkwardly
in halted English. You eased onto the crowded
sofa and tried to speak over house party sounds:
Yellowman, small-talk and clinking ice cubes.
You were Mohammed, in a room dominated
by Johns. The smell of cigarettes and
Guinness on your breath enhanced the foreign
appeal. You had Kenya all over you and
I had never been so far from home.
Nipples stiffened at the touch of the Mother
tongue caressing my ear. Kiswahili with rolling r's
made me quiver at the feel of its flutter.
The scent of patchouli assaulted my sensibilities
but my curiosity had a stronger pull. I gravitated
to a rhythm, a kinship lost across time and visions
of virgin flesh encasing coffee skin while we swayed
to Lovers' Rock. I wanted you to be first.

Budgeting

Chris Compson

Around the campfire, everyone agreed
cuts had to be made. Each watched the other's
eyes as one man stood and approached
the fire. They knew they wouldn't make it
much longer without giving up something.
They started with small concessions, things
all thought they wouldn't miss. After each,
they gathered again to assess the damage.
Each time, another stood and moved
toward the fire. Each time, the eyes
shifted around the circle. They had parted
with the frivolous, but they needed more.
Warmth and comfort were debated.
Though opposed by some, eventually both
found their way into the fire. Still more
was required. They gathered. They cut.
They gathered. They cut. Nothing sufficed.
Finally, when they cast their eyes around the fire
and saw nothing left to give, they turned
to their children and slowly loosened
their grasp on the tiny shoulders.



Childhood Friends, Christopher Warman

Circling

Danielle Ariano

When my mother first hears the squeaking of her daughter's shoes on the floor, she thinks Alexis is behind her, dancing. This wouldn't be completely unusual. Both my sister and I inherited my father's inclination toward silliness. We all do things like break out into spontaneous and unsolicited dance moves. Even though Alexis, at thirty-one, is a clinically depressed drug addict, she still manages the occasional bit of goofiness.

My mother and sister are in the basement giving the dog a bath. It is a good day, given that my sister is out of bed. My mother is bent down, pouring cups of water over the dog and rubbing shampoo into his fur.

The basement consists of two connecting rooms that form a circle. The floor is concrete, and the crumbling walls are a source of angst for my father. The only adornment in the larger room is a makeshift bar that my parents built in their early years. The front is decorated with a collage. Images of naked women, bottles of whisky, and famous icons – Marilyn Monroe, Liza Minnelli, Cher – cover the surface. The bar was once a central piece in my parents' furniture collection, but they banished it to the basement as they ascended into yuppiedom. They went up, it went down.

As kids, this dingy room was our preferred play space. Alexis, four years my senior, took on the responsibility of inventing the games we used to amuse ourselves. Under her direction, we transformed the basement into a countless number of nightclubs. She hung different materials over the lights to give each club a special aura; it sent my father on angry tirades.

When we weren't opening up a new club, we put on roller skates and whirled around the perimeter. For a thrill, we'd turn off all the lights, put on sunglasses, and skate as fast as we could, blasting Michael Jackson or Cyndi Lauper from our tape recorder. Our only rule was that there was no crying in the basement.

One of our more brilliant games took advantage of the circular layout that also existed on the first floor of our home. Alexis and I would start in the kitchen standing back to back with pillows clutched to our chests and then simultaneously tear off in opposite directions, running full tilt until we crashed into one another. We would roll around on the ground reaching for injured body parts with one hand, while clutching our stomachs with the other, as howls of laughter and groans of pain roared out of us.

Today, however, these games are distant memories. My mother, kneeling by the basin, glances over her shoulder to watch the dance she imagines Alexis is doing. What she sees instead is her daughter sprawled on the floor, fists clenched, body seizing violently, her rubber-soled shoes rubbing against the floor.

At the very moment this is happening, I am on vacation in Maine with my partner and another couple. We are out on the ocean, cruising at 35 miles per hour on a boat packed with tourists. The sun beats down, but as the land turns into a speck on the horizon, a chill enters the air. The swell causes the boat to rise and fall. A few people are getting sick, but I am savoring every peak and valley. Dolphins surround the boat, dorsal fins slicing through the water. Crowds swarm to the side to see. I breathe a deep lungful of salt air. I feel lucky to be alive.

When we reach the whales, I am awed. All around me cameras click and people speak in hushed voices, but I feel alone. I hear my breath, calm and steady; I feel my chest rise and fall. Everything is unfolding in slow motion, one magnificence after another. The massive humpbacks break the surface, revealing their barnacle-covered bodies. Deep shades of blackish purple glide smoothly back into the sea. Their tails rise up, water coursing off, streaming back into the ocean. They are larger than I ever could have imagined.

The captain's voice sounds over the intercom, naming the whales' movements and explaining their behaviors. He says the bond between calf and mother is the longest association that whales maintain, lasting up to a year. Beyond that, they form very loose social structures called pods that stay together for as little as a few hours or as long as a couple of days before parting ways. They are creatures of serial solitude. Nothing lasts.

"Alexis had a seizure," my mother will tell me later as I sit on the bed in my darkened hotel room. It's from drugs, I think immediately, but I don't dare say it. My mother still believes in the better parts of her daughter. I don't know whether this is beautiful or pitiful. My mother tells me a story like so many others I have heard over the past five years. Distress and rescue.

Weeks pass before I see my sister. When I arrive home, we greet each other with a brittle hug and sit in the kitchen. A blue and yellow stained glass light fixture hangs above our heads, the bulb emitting the faintest buzz. Alexis's spoon clinks against the side of her mug as she stirs her tea. I pick my thumbnail and steal glances at her. I study her pupils, her teeth, her weight – all the things I have come to rely on for the truth that no one will speak.

Waking Late for the Night Shift

Jeffrey C. Alfier

Wind buffets her filmy bedroom window
from which a bowed figure is seen moving down
the street, going door to unanswered door, a street
named for flowers not found within miles of the city.

Looking skyward, she can't question metallic ash
soiling icy clouds above the refinery she works in,
nor freight cars at the edge of vision, laboring
slowly as if to give rail cops and switchmen the slip.

As her lover stirs, he can only offer her a weak,
drowsy kiss, so she moves downstairs to the kitchen,
her nude form shivering from a draft as she inhales
coffee steaming out of a cracked porcelain cup.

Leaving in work dungarees, a streetlight throws
her jagged shadow across the dark entryway
then down the front steps worn to anonymity,
snow falling softly as the door behind her.

In the end it's nature's butchery

Larry Eby

Snakeskins nailed to the picket fence where the legless man
sits – highway side – watching the crows pick at the coyote
tuft driven into the asphalt by motorists as they stare at his
pigflesh stubs glistened in the sunlight sweating: distracted
from swerving away from the sharp bones begging to pierce
Bridgestones humming over his humming when he keeps
the beat with his lips smacking toothless gums saliva in the
dry socket that he rubs from the outside, split fingernails
over curled muttonchops unevenly cut and greasy like plastic
doorways in a butchery stained with fat deposits, torn loose
and disregarded, sounds of thin plastic trash bags crackling like
shank cuts sticking to the pan and broken free and flipped by
hairy-knuckles on the spatula-melted-deformity-of-negligence
from the kitchen window facing the highway where motorists
promote widowhood among the crows.

Sons

Steven Leyva

A woman is breast-feeding in the snow,
old snow. Reluctant? Sunning herself between
clouds breaks her only repose. Then back to work.
At windows neighbors pause in reflection.
Of course there is no baby. Pause?

Hear her cry out, a pair of voices, one an Atlantis
of sorrow sunk in a woman. She is discovering it.

One an Amistad slaving her childhood. Father went
dead when she was noon – over a TV and smack.

Her mother married a married man, then worked backwards,
sorted out new housing, kept the daughters, escaped being warded

to the state of Louisiana. Her imagination kept recreating
father. Her body could make only sons.

The Yellow

Yance Wyatt

We stood at the stove with our backs to the world. She was hard-boiling them and I, in turn, was dipping them in dye with a soup spoon. Other people's kids barged through the kitchen asking when the hunt would start. I told them it wouldn't start until they stopped asking.

"Kids," I said.

When they left us alone, I resumed the fight I had picked earlier since I resented spending this particular Sunday with her side of the family, who went to church twice a year and who were fractured by so many divorces I couldn't keep their hyphenated names straight. At least my folks had stayed together through the years, even though my dad was as good as gone, as my mom often called him, whereas he called her Woman and me Oops, a nickname that came not from my first words, but from his in the waning moments of my conception. We remained vigilant and vague and tried to seem cordial since her uncle kept passing through to pepper his bloody Mary.

"What if?" I asked.

"What if?" She shrugged.

"That's what I'm saying," I said. "What if?"

"It won't happen," she assured me. "Not to us."

"I know that," I assured her. "But what if it did."

"It won't."

"Hypothetically speaking."

"I don't want to speak hypothetically," she said. "You're always doing that."

"You have to be ready for anything."

"You can't be ready for everything."

"You can be ready for this," I said. "This is something you can be ready for, mentally, at least. In case it happens."

"It won't," she said. "As long as we're careful."

"You have to know what you'd do."

"No I don't," she raised her voice, then looked around and lowered it. "Not if it's never going to happen."

"Even if it doesn't," I pressed her, "you have to know what you'd do if it did."

Her uncle wandered in for a refill and stopped and said he hadn't seen her since she was this big. He measured to about his crotch. My, how she had grown. My, my, he said. I wondered was he related by blood or marriage.

The water began to boil over, seething when it splashed and evaporated on the flaring red eye of the stove. She tended the eggs through the boiling. They were perfectly white, trembling and turning over like they were about to hatch. Uncle Whatever

stirred his vodka in with a celery stalk and left again for the moment.

"Even if I did decide," she said when she could see him through the window, "I might change my mind between now and then."

"Now and when?"

"When it happens."

"It isn't going to happen," I said. "You said so yourself."

"Hypothetically speaking," she said, and I said that there was no need to mock me. "I'm just saying," she said.

"What are you saying?"

She shrugged her shoulders and said that things can grow on you, you know. By "you," she meant "me." By "me," I mean "her." I told her that that was the point. You don't let it grow on you.

She stopped hard-boiling and looked me in the eyes.

"So that's what you would do?" she asked, but it wasn't a question.

"I didn't say that," I said, and she said, "That's exactly what you said."

"Don't put words in my mouth," I said. "All I was saying is that it's a necessary evil."

"So now you're calling it evil?" she asked. Another question that wasn't a question.

"I'm calling it necessary."

"Going through with it?"

"Not necessarily."

"What then? What's necessary?"

I explained that considering it was necessary. I explained that it was always necessary to consider your options. And by "your," I meant "our." In case something happens.

"It won't!" she said with an air of finality. I could tell, as far as she was concerned, the argument was over. But I couldn't let it go. I had to say something. I said she couldn't say for sure, and she stood there silently for a while before she said that there was one way to be certain. I didn't know what she meant by that, but I wasn't going to ask and give her the satisfaction, so I stood there blowing them dry and pastel until I figured out she was talking about sex. Celibacy, to be exact.

"You're no nun," I said and she tried to cry so I would feel like a bully, but she couldn't muster the tears so she changed her mind and fought back.

"I could be."

"Be what?" I asked.

"A nun," she said. "I could drop everything and be a nun."

"Drop what?" I asked. "Me?"

"This egg for starters," she said. She said she could drop that egg and be a nun. I couldn't care less if she dropped the egg but I told her not to since we were arguing.

"Give me the egg," I said. "Don't make a mess."

"You made the mess," she said.

I said there wasn't a mess. Not yet.

She said there most certainly was a mess and that I had started it. "You started it," she said. "Not me."

I told her she sounded like a kid. "Why don't you hunt with the other kids," I said, "down on your hands and knees?"

"If I drop them all," she said, "there won't be anything to hunt."

I couldn't care less about the hunt, much less the egg, but the egg gave her leverage somehow and I didn't know why. "Give me the egg," I said. "If you're not going to boil it, I will."

I tried to take the egg but she held it above her head, but my arms were longer so I caught her hand and started prying fingers until she dropped it on purpose and blamed me for it. I knew it was on purpose because I know her and because I felt her grip give up all at once. We stopped arguing and just stood there looking down at the floor. I was wearing loafers and she was wearing heels, which she always wore so she would be as tall as me. The egg was out of its shell in a neat little puddle of clear stuff that turns white when it's hot. The yellow of the yolk was still intact. She bent down and tried to pick it up without breaking the yellow, but there is no way to pick up an egg without breaking the yellow, so the yellow broke all over her hands, which she held under the faucet like some failed surgeon, and I knew we wouldn't be sticking around for the hunt, but suddenly I wanted to. I wanted to stay and start over and be a part of her fractured family. I wanted to start over before the first time we ever argued, when the slate was still clean. I wanted to be a boy again in my Sunday's best, crawling on all fours until I found one there in the grass, the grass my dad hadn't mown for the occasion.

Bird

Eleanor Paynter

He wants to believe her, which makes the believing easier. She believes him out of the habit she has learned to call love. He is in love with this habit of hers, which he believes to be deep-seated trust; she, in turn, trusts that he believes her. Neither knows what the trust is really about, or why it sometimes rises to the eyes instead of dwelling in the heart. They buy a canary but don't want to keep it caged. The whereabouts of the bird are constantly in question.

Kimura

David E. Yee

Eben had a habit of swallowing too early, never giving his food a thorough, contemplative chew. He was separating the middle joint of a chicken wing, cracking the cartilage with his greasy hands, when three sharp knocks on the front door interrupted his meal. He collected himself, wiping the remnants of marinade from his lips and fingers on a white cloth napkin. In the mirror, by the front door, he checked his beard for crumbs and his teeth for spare meat.

Without looking through the peephole, Eben swung the heavy door open to his shoulder. The man outside had made a point of standing too close to the house as he knocked, his white dress shirt reflecting the midday's Sun. Eben, wide eyed, stepped forward while the man barely budged, his hands tucked to the cuff in the pockets of his pressed black slacks.

"You're not supposed to be here," Eben said quietly, shutting the door behind him.

The man waited a moment before taking a half step back, making sure his breath grazed Eben's beard before he moved.

"How did you get my address?" Eben asked, looking up and down the block. His skin itched under his olive wool sweater. He felt sweat pool underneath his thin arms.

Two inches taller and a few years younger, the man had cold brown eyes and a cleanly shaven, angular jaw.

"I asked," he said.

"That's ridiculous," Eben tried his best to keep his shoulders back and his neck upright atop his spine, "It's confidential."

"I asked, correctly."

He seemed too comfortable under the bright light of the sun, looming directly over their scalps. Humidity clung to Eben's neck, his beard, suffocating him. Twice, his tortoise shell glasses slid down the bridge of his nose and twice he pushed them back into place with his thumb.

"I need my position back," the man said. He punctuated his phrases with blinks and Eben found himself counting the seconds between the moments the man briefly closed his eyes.

"It's impossible," Eben said quickly, rushing the words as if, by chance, the man would not hear him. "You were dismissed. Your spot was filled."

"I know. You took the spot."

"No, I took Alan's spot. He took yours."

"I know. But I need you to step down." Eben wanted to go back inside to the crisp air conditioning. He didn't want to eat anymore, but he could not stop thinking about cleaning the dining room table. Moving the dishes to the sink. Wiping the table with soap and a white rag.

Itching his wrist, Eben felt a drop of sweat run down his side. His ribs.

He said, "They will fire me for backing out this late."

The man was still.

Eben pleaded, "Why does it have to be anyway? Why not Alan?"

"Alan has kids. I need you to step down."

Eben exhaled through his nose, suddenly determined, "I won't."

A car passed on the road behind them as the man said, "Then I'll tell your wife that you've been sleeping in hotels downtown when you say that you're traveling for work."

Eben shrugged, "Go ahead."

Removing his hands from his pockets, the man's arms hung to his sides.

"Is that it?" Eben asked, fighting the urge to smile. "There is nothing more important to me than this flight. Nothing."

The man pursed his lips for a moment. He crossed his arms in front of him, saying, "Then I'll kill you."

Another car passed behind the man's back and Eben leaned slightly towards the door.

The man didn't raise his voice. He didn't take a step forward or clinch his hands into fists. He simply said, "Look me in the eye. Look me in the eye, Eben, and tell me I'm not capable."

For a brief moment, their gaze was matched, and Eben saw the man's eyes, brown the way bricks darken when they are old and worn. The heels of his black leather shoes dug firmly into the concrete.

In the driveway of the house next door, a gray sedan parked and a young couple walked into their home, carrying a conversation as they went. The sun loomed over head.

"I can't," Eben said, "What reason can I give? What reason can I give that they won't try and fix for me?"

The man shrugged. Eben watched the couple enter their home.

"They would only ground me if…if…" Eben lowered his head, closing his eyes.

"You're incapable," the man uncrossed his arms and shifted h weight to his right leg.

The air felt still and heavy in Eben's throat. He thought abo grabbing the door handle behind him and running. But as pan flooded his mind, the man reached forward with his right han and took hold of Eben's left arm. Eben pulled away but the m grasped tightly, squeezing the ball of his wrist. His eyes slowly brimming with tears, Eben stuck his jaw out, breathing quickl and loudly through his nose. The man placed his left hand on

Eben's shoulder and bent him forward at the waist, as if bowing. He slid his left hand over Eben's shoulder and took hold of his own wrist, forming a circle with his arms and trapping Eben's left forearm behind his back.

Eben stared at the cracked asphalt of the street.

He said quietly, "Is there another way? There has to be another way."

Sniffling, Eben used his free hand to pinch the top of his nose at his tear ducts.

"There's not enough time," the man responded, adjusting his grip on Eben's wrist.

"Maybe if we – "

The man pressed down on his shoulder and at the same time brought his right hand, engulfing Eben's wrist, upward. He pushed up with his heels and almost pulled Eben off the ground until he heard a loud pop and the sickening grinding of loose cartilage on bone, like falling rocks rattling quickly against each other.

Spit curdled in the back of his throat as Eben yelled out. The man released his grip, and Eben slumped to the porch, holding his elbow close to his body with his other hand.

"There isn't enough time," the man said turning towards the street, as Eben, his back on the warm concrete, kicked after him. "There isn't enough time."

Rib Tickler

Jenni B. Baker

Will you come to bed?

Will you come to forgive
a seed that won't take root,
the absence of pitter pats

and the silence of no jokes?

Why is six afraid of seven?
What's this fly doing in my soup?
seven ate nine, the backstroke

the song that doesn't end.

Cloud Shroud My Vision

Julie Ann

The night it was eclipsed
I saw a moonwhite dog
he was nice.

It was the dark dog formed
on mindshadows who wanted
to chase me, bite me.

A knight he was eclipsed,
ghost erratic tissue
hung on his tree.

Looking skyward revealed
a button-to-button
glowing dark moon.

The night it was eclipsed I chased
the peeking moon
accidentally kicked a pinecone.

There was lichen on a mailbox
the clouds moved
like fast orb rising.

The night of the eclipse
big February daffodils
dipper of water.

The next town over saw it all
I saw what cloudy earthbound
eyes allow.

The night is now clips,
a white belly squirrel
dead, done with acorns.

Signs read: found shaggy brown,
lost: retriever
golden.

Variations of a Brother War (Voices Triptych)

J.A. Tyler

For This Crying

Gideon hears a soldier next to him crying for his mother. Mother he cries. Gideon cries for Eliza. Gideon does not cry for his mother. Eliza Gideon cries. The difference between a muscle and a memory is that only one remains within soldiers. And the smell of Eliza's hair, the sound of his mother's heartbeat, they are tumbling together down the deepest part of him, a well. And beneath the rocks, under the water that runs, there is an imagined concept of Gideon living happily ever, holding Eliza's hand instead of puncturing his brother's head with a soft round bullet.

To Be Heard

Miller hears a soldier next to him crying for water, and there is no water to give. Water he cries and Miller looks away, to the trees without birds, to the sky through leaves, towards the sun. Miller would blind if Miller would stare, but instead he speaks. There isn't water he speaks. And the soldier next to him calls with a gurgle or a pop, or a bullet fired from around him, from outside of where he is resting, hidden behind a log. Until there is Eliza on the edges of all that is Miller, and she calls out.

By Which This Means

Two soldiers say to Eliza Yes. Two soldiers say to Eliza Now. Two soldiers say to Eliza Here. And she is a broken wagon-wheel. And there are grey skies. And there are no birds in the trees. And Eliza's cabin, amongst the cabins in this valley, Gideon and Miller's own mother one above, the stove baking bread. Because there is no predicting where rifles will take men or where boots on soldiers' feet will go. There are places with birds and places without birds, places with Eliza and places without Eliza. There are two soldiers. There are Miller and Gideon.

Elegy for Ben

Tasha Cotter

Ben died last night.
I heard he lay in bed
beside Jean watching Jeopardy
and when his body shook
she took him in her arms
and fell down to the ashes.
Yes, she was knuckle-clenched,
strapped-down screaming

Come back –

This afternoon my rose bush
gave a thunderous applause
to the unnaturally cool weather.

I think of you as a mute picture:
an arrow of rain among reverie,
a shiver on this summer day.

Tesla Poole's Dinner Party

Sean C. Wilson

Aaron Eitemiller wondered if the centerpiece was the same. The last time he had visited Tesla's, the centerpiece was an empty ceramic vase. From its place on the table in the small dining room, the vase had seemed to dominate the apartment. People had watched it as if it would wake from somnolence or slumber. They had talked about it, stood near it – then whispered as they talked about it – and, when it had been time to eat, they sat around it and couldn't see who was on the other side. Eitemiller remembered holding a spoon and having nothing scoopable on his plate.

He was in his car and looked outside, at the mansion-turned-apartment building. Many lighted windows shone. He thought he had forgotten to turn off a light. That light warmed him. Upon his return, he would open the door and stare down the hall and see the light's shining from his room. The warmth was the thought that someone was waiting.

The spoon was silver. Eitemiller looked up at the lotus-shaped lamp, which hung above the table. Then, as if light had become visible, he sighted a path from the flower to the vase and considered its highlights and shadows. He found Tesla. Her brow was uneven. At everyone else's insistence, she sat at the head of the table. She was covering her mouth as she chewed and watched someone who was talking to her. Tesla nodded dissent. She didn't want to exasperate herself, and, besides, she was eating, so she didn't bother to tell him he was wrong. As she lowered her head, she saw Aaron. He was near the middle of the table. She saw his face in semi-profile. The slope of his nose was long and strong. His eyes – she never knew what to say about their depth, their immediacy, their shallowness, or th contradiction. She smiled. Tesla's smiles were always slight. He mouth was small, pink, and straight. Eitemiller had learned to watch her brow, which she had raised as she moved her lips, to discern the feelings the lower part of her face couldn't show. H narrowed his eyes and suppressed his involuntary smile, which formed because he thought Tesla's was real.

From the hills of both sides of the two-lane, two-way road, skinny trees arched and blocked the street from the sky. He almost missed the right turn. He was accustomed to coming from his apartment and having to make a left. The tires crushe rocks, snapped twigs, and packed the dirt that formed the unpaved path, which meandered through the tenebrous woods Darkness had fallen to the earth where it swelled and became heavy. Then it couldn't find its way through the tops of the tre He parked. Tesla, who was hosting another dinner party, had shown him the way through the woods.

Each time Tesla opened the door to let someone into her apartment, she felt something tighten inside.

"Oh, hi," she said, then let in the guest.

"I brought really good wine."

The ends of Tesla's mouth curved to something. She didn't know what. She thanked the guest and told him to put the bottle on the table in the dining room. He hesitated. Then Tesla closed the door and tried to move her lips. There was only the tightening inside. She was panicking. Her face was grotesque. The guest grinned. Standing in her apartment, looking at the host, hearing the sounds of her party, he was happy. He thanked her, then joined the other guests. It was just another party for her friends.

She had shown to him the cliff and the mountains at the end of the path and the sky above it all. Without birds, the sky looked empty, but there, built on a mountain in the middle of the range, which the cliff overlooked, there was the house she had shown to him. Light shone from their house. There, she wouldn't have to host parties.

Having checked everything, Tesla left the kitchen. The food would soon be ready.

"Tesla," a soft-voiced guest said.

She was pleased to see it was Ai. Then she was relieved to hear Ai was enjoying the party. She never doubted Ai's feelings or her effortless full-faced smile. Ai looked wonderful in her violet sundress, which made her light-olive skin glow. She was lovely.

"Is Eitemiller coming?"

"Aaron would be the one to talk me into hosting this party, help me plan it, then show up last, wouldn't he?"

Ai laughed and looked lovely. Tesla knew there was nothing hidden in Ai's narrow eyes, so she focused on the laughing girl in front of her and tried to forget the slight, involuntary twitching of her brow, which only Aaron would have noticed.

He knew what everyone had thought about Tesla, and the sentiments of the guests at her latest party would be the same. In her white jumper dress, Tesla had moved from group to group, and once she moved on, there was a noticeable sense of loss. She was the centerpiece.

Everyone was gone. Tesla stared at the glass fruit bowl on the table in the dining room. The fruits were gone, too, but, remembering Aaron had told her she could see light if she tried, Tesla realized the fruit bowl overflowed with it. She looked at the front door. The party for her friends was over, yet the tightening was the same.

He opened the door to his apartment. No – it was just a party – he hadn't left on a light. Tesla turned off the lotus lamp and emptied the fruit bowl. It didn't matter that they had graduated or that she had no plan or that Aaron wanted her to have his. He walked in the dark and imagined the cliff. He imagined her body strewn, but not bloody, on the mountains. Tesla thought she felt something. Yes – the centerpiece was the same – there was nothing at all.

Editors in Ironic Gray Flannel Suits

Elizabeth Kate Switaj

never ask to be equal unless blood
pulses down your face, your breasts,
your supple thighs – don't complain
if we told you thinner, thinner still
unless we chewed the fat right off your bones

never ask to be equal until stones
have stolen all the words but 'no' and 'stop'
from what your skull was meant to protect
and don't think we'll publish anything limited
to those terms

if you survive
be grateful to your rescuers
don't ask again
to be equal
don't cover your skin in petrol
unless it's part of a mask
to reduce your blemishes

be grateful
if you can access such things
you are not starving
never ask to be equal
don't whine
don't cry

don't say you've been abused
we won't print that
it's only women over there
who'd have reason for rage
if only they c(oul)d speak
instead of needing men like us
and sometimes, yes, and you

Polish Flag

[Insert_Name_Here]

My dad catches me sneaking
downstairs to the washing machine
so I could have washed my red
Power Ranger jammies and Polish flag
which have a big dark smelly spot
after I wet the bed.
He bends me over his knees.
Between each spank, I whistle
the Polish National Anthem
while my dad rants about
not stealing money from him
and not buying that flag.
A crowd of dust bunnies gather
underneath the fridge as they hold
their mouths from laughter
and settle for squeaky chuckles.
One mouse holds its paw out,
but I refuse the pity.

Poland is home,
but my dad forgets that water,
mountains, and valleys could never
part us from home –
even old turtles lick their front feet
tasting the sand from the beach
that they hatch from.
I hug the flag until
we merge into one;
Poland, the Polish flag, and I
are white on the top,
red on our bottoms,
and soak in my pee.

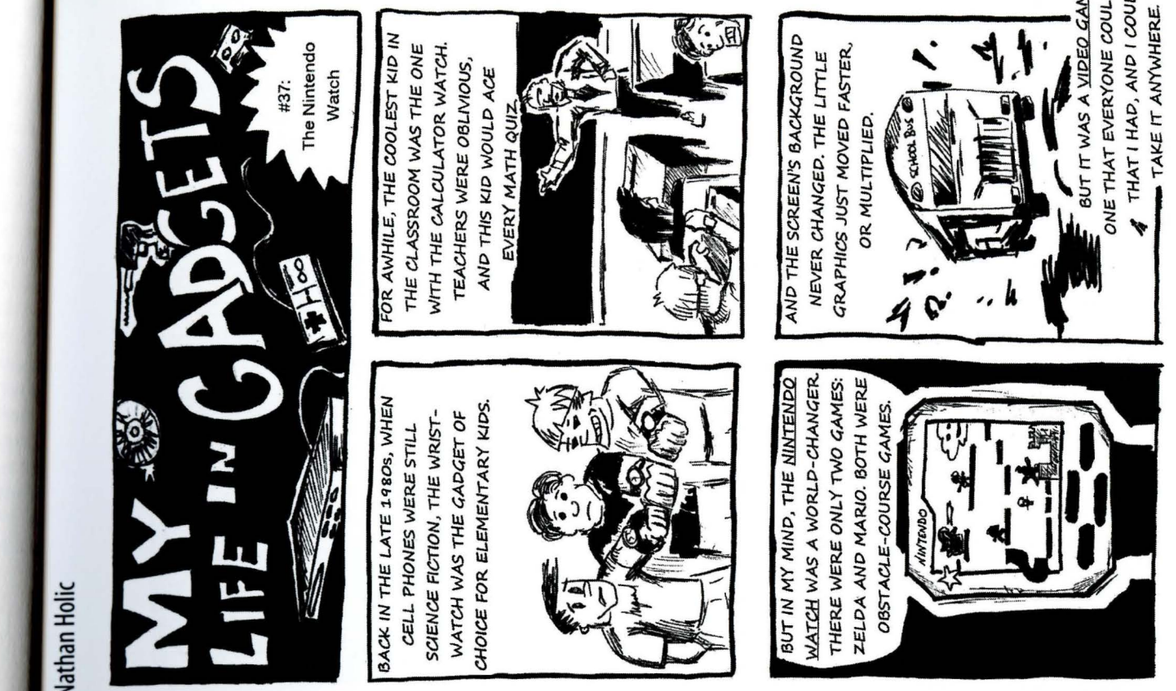
Stuff

L.E. Towne

Stuff multiplies. It grows like kudzu along a Mississippi fenceline. Stuff hides in drawers and closets and shoe boxes, a nefarious creature overflowing itself into your house. You can go through everything once a year and think you've gotten it all; the unwanted, useless, unnecessary stuff.

From my chair I can see just a tiny portion of it. Like an iceberg, nine tenths of it is under the surface; one black glove, a small Christmas ornament, a rock with a hole in it, a souvenir from the Space Needle, something from that charming boutique in Sausalito. Stuff you cannot live without. We keep it to preserve our memories, our hearts, our loved ones, until we no longer need it to sustain us.

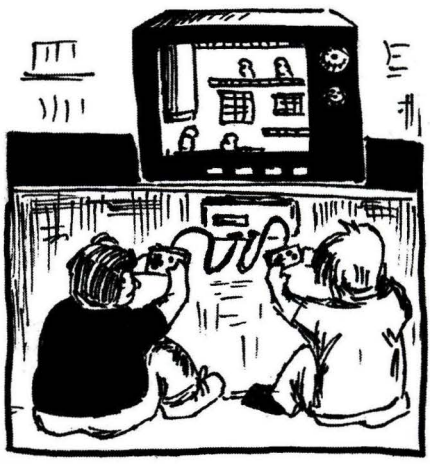
Lives are meant to be a collection. A collection of moments, of emotions, of people known and of lessons learned. Not a collection of stuff. I wade deep below the surface to the larger unseen berg and hack away at it, throwing away a lot, but preserving a few attachments.



BUT THERE WAS ANOTHER REASON I LOVED THE WATCH, ONE THAT I NEVER TOLD MY FRIENDS.

MY PARENTS WOULDN'T BUY ME A NINTENDO.

SO I'D GO OVER TO A FRIEND'S HOUSE TO PLAY MARIO OR TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES.



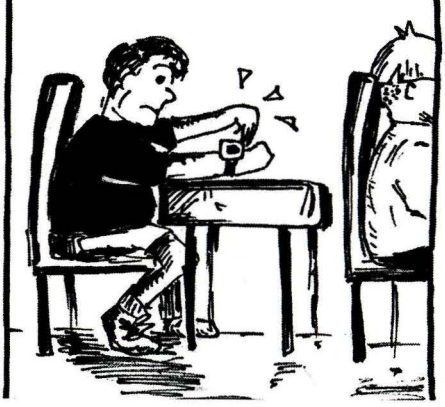
I'D DIE IN SECONDS. ALWAYS. THEN I'D HAVE TO WAIT TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE I GOT ANOTHER SHOT. THEN I'D DIE AGAIN.

I SAW THE NINTENDO WATCH AS MY REVENGE. THEY COULD PLAY ALL THEY WANTED AT HOME, BUT I COULD PLAY IN CLASS, DURING RECESS, ON THE BUS.

BUT LATELY, I'VE WONDERED IF ANYONE ELSE EVEN HAD A NINTENDO WATCH. HAD THEY OPTED FOR WATERPROOF CALCULATOR WATCHES, WHILE I SAT ALONE AND PLAYED BY MYSELF?

ALWAYS ON THE SIDELINES DURING RECESS. CHUBBY. ASTHMATIC. ALLERGY SHOTS TWICE A WEEK.

WAS IT THE GADGET OF CHOICE? WERE THEY JEALOUS, OR DID I JUST HOPE THEY WERE?



The Harbor

Price Roberts

The hazy pavement crawls down,
beneath cruel bouldering stones.
Greasy dead water awaits,
while city and nature mate.

Three mocking gulls parade,
through Inner Harbor's place.
Docked vessels paint pictures;
tall proud buildings cast shadows.

A drunk woman stumbles upon your shores,
dressed in tight purple with wild black hair.
"Hon, take me to the Point,
Hon, dance upon the dock."

Sick water strangles a crab,
two ducklings beg for bread.
A siren screams, then sings,
churning with distanced speech.

Your gentle waves wash over broken glass,
used syringes, and dirty trash.
Our city greets you with sewage waste,
quietly, graciously, you absorb this toxic space.
You welcome the anxious, the addicted, and the busied.
We eat by you, we drink by you, and we grope by you.
Rich and poor, old and young, weak and strong walk beside yo
Even the sun dips slowly, into your silvery wet gown.

The harbor signs its name on this city's bare head.
Our harbor gives beauty to dull air.
Our harbor lavishes our languid eyes.
Our harbor washes over the scars in our hearts.

Remembering Details

Charles Rammelkamp

"So how's the chinchilla working out?"
I asked Karen, the pretty blond
towel girl at the gym,
less than half my age.

Flattered, I'd remembered
the new pet she'd mentioned
a month before,
her clear blue eyes shone with gratitude,
their warmth inspiring
a brief middle-aged fantasy
of a tumble on one of the workout mats
with this lovely athletic girl.

But then her eyes clouded
with the memory
of another detail.

The poor animal had died
in a freak accident
involving a vacuum cleaner.

Drains

Kevin Walls

The paper edges of her microwave meal were burnt, however the food inside the tray was cold.

"Let's hope this hospital's X-ray machines aren't run like this, huh, Mom?"

She didn't answer me. I watched her chest flutter, but not fully rise, as she slept. She looked weak, and yet I was happy she had these moments at peace. I walked into her bathroom with the food and stared down at the toilet, falling into a memory.

I was six years old. I had big eyes for food back then, but a bird's size stomach. One evening I attempted to eat seven sausages for dinner. I missed my mark by three. In our house only clean plates ever got dessert, so I discovered, through experimentation, that our dinner napkins (the pink ones that looked like jellyfish) concealed uneaten food with a near magical eloquence. I stuffed my napkin with the sausages and slipped them into my pocket, all while preparing a monologue showcasing my acting skills.

"I gotta poop," I said as I leapt from my chair.

Like a camera's flash my mother's voice popped out the words, "Leonard Beezlee, don't you put food down the drain. You'll get us seamonsters in the plumbing."

I froze. I was six, and anything related to monsters both sca and fascinated me. The oils from the sausage in my pocket touched my palm, burning it slightly, but still I turned and sai "What seamonsters?"

My mother finished washing her large three-pronged servin fork and said, "Leonard, you know how if you leave out food i attracts animals? Well if you put food down a drain just what type of animals do you think we'll get?"

I thought for a moment before I responded with, "Goldfish!

She didn't return my goofy grin.

I had never come clean before, so when I pulled the sausage from my pocket she stepped away from the sink. I pulled the napkin down, revealing the meat tube, its oily coating giving a faint glimmer, and I took a bite. I still remember the mixed look on her face. The one filled with shock, satisfaction and disbelief.

"I am not getting rid of it, Mom.I just didn't want to eat it cold."

I ran for the bathroom before she could answer. I lifted the sausage above my head and dropped it into the bowl with an echoing splash.

Nothing happened. No bubbles popped up. No eyeballs peaked out. No tentacles squirmed up, searching for whoever provided the meal. The toilet's dark hole remained just that,

I went over to the sink to wash the oil from my hands. As the water gushed out a sound came from out the drain. It wasn't a voice, or a call, but something deep like the sound of a throat being cleared. I came to the only logical conclusion available to me at the time. A seamonster had just belched up my drain.

My obsession started the next day. I found drains and shoved food down them. Each morning I threw half my lunch into the sewer. I shook a whole can of bacon bits down the kitchen sink. I stored bits of brussels sprouts in my cheeks only to spit them down the toilet after dinner. I listen for the seamonsters crying to rise up through our pipes. I imagined their thin flippers pushing their slim bodies through those tight underground pipes.

I decided to open up a dialogue. I began whispering into the drains. I asked the seamonsters if they were alone? I asked about how that felt? I asked about feeling afraid, and if constantly roaming the ocean was enough of a life for them? I started to sit on the toilet (lid down) and talk to the bathtub. I asked them about being different, about how they lived, about what they believed happened after death? They only replied with gurgles and grunts. I never understood it, but was happy to receive a muffled answer.

I grew out of it, as young people do, and haven't thought about it in years. Yesterday, I arrived at this hospital. My mother told me not to worry in a polite, detached tone. I told her about the wig I bought her. She just looked out the window. We sat in silence until she asked me where her cream cheese was.

I told her I wasn't bringing her any. That it was bad for her heart, and she pounded her tiny fists on her sheets. I'd forgotten how angry she could get about food. We argued. She's dying, but I don't hold back. Maybe I liked making her mad, making her engaged, forcing some kind of emotion through her system. I liked seeing it on the surface at first, but then the guilt hit me when she finally fell asleep.

I walked her cold dinner into the bathroom and as I dumped the food I whispered, "Should I have done things differently?" A garbled sound echoed back from the drain, but even after all these years the language of seamonsters still eludes me.

It is still too much the mystery, our love *(Belize, July 2010)*

Robert Jacoby

It is still too much the mystery,
still too much like fusing suns
coming burning and mirrored split
across the sea's table
where we know to tread cool, melodic waves
and dare to sip to slake the thirst
that madness brings.

See the jellyfish seethe beneath; I point to the canopy.

Your red toenails at the end of our bed
exhort me to my kingdom.

A Heart Stops Aging

Kelsey Ann

Just once, I wish I had let him kiss me. (I'm in big black sunglasses and my hands are shaking.) I should be holding onto some sweet, awkward memory rather than the real one: a giggle as I pushed him away. He'd laugh. "Just kidding, just kidding." Even now, from here, I catch his glances… we're still at a crowded party and he still keeps one eye on my 10-20. Thick as thieves. He is loud music, and sweet smoke, and tanned skin.

It never became an issue. We never addressed it: the way we had so many conflicting affections tangled up in each other. He was my best friend, a constant guardian, a lullaby. I was his tagalong sister, his fierce chaperone. I was the picture he kept safe in a wooden box.

It was my first day taking the school bus. He rode his bike in circles around my cul-de-sac until I came out to play. I grew up to kiss his friends. I drank too much vodka, and he rubbed my back until I fell asleep. I wrote long letters to him in prison: stick figures and "I love you always" in pink marker.

And then we were both so busy again, so separate so often. We celebrated my twentieth birthday with all of our best friends. I wore a red dress, and he wore a white shirt, and we took a really nice picture together. I drank champagne, and he drank soda. He said he needed to talk.

Four days later and it's a crisp spring morning. He stepped into the flower garden beneath his mother's kitchen window and shot himself. He was 19, and I was 20 and four days. It's a sunny spring morning. (I'm in a black dress and my eyes are burning with the image of eight young men carrying him away.) I was 20 and four days. I'll always be 20 and four days.

Talk Show

John Hayes

From his soapbox in Roosevelt Park
the preacher shouts for God
six people listen
walk away.
He curses them to hell.

God's work done
he decides to have a drink.

Committal Spiders

Marty Cain

They've been in dreams a long time now,
swarms of spiders with bristled legs,
eight stilts traversing your hardwood floor,
from the infinite voids in your stinking futon,
from the broken cups in your high tea visions.

You ask why I infected the connection between us.
It wasn't your words that bit, swelled black and oozed,
it was a spider crawling from your hair down your face,
between your eyes to the freckle on your nose,
the one that keeps telling me to kiss your mouth
until a hairy leg sticks out.

When you tell me to fuck myself and leave your bed, I
follow the spiders down the street, tarantulas swarming
in headlights and lamppost halos,
ten foot tall shadows as I stumble back home,
following the glow of the neon bars,
sneaking from necks of brown whiskey bottles,
crawling from dance floors with sorrowful bands, from

the teary eyes of every brown-haired girl I see.

73/72, Carrie Beall; 8x10 mixed media

Channeler

Melissa Chichester

Of the energy of peach sundresses –
Matching, side by side, on the beach blanket.
No matter to grains of sand, only salty aired lips
Guarded air kisses not ready to display
You (plus)

Me. (isolated; shamefaced)

cotton bottoms, lace tops, matching lipstick (raspberry ice)
All underneath in imagination, or a frilly invention?
I want to be you; on
only me – silently subservient, curious and debriefing in open air

Suburban Mothers
in wide-brimmed straw hats and Chanel sunglasses,
applying zinc oxide to small noses, while holding Mercedes
keychains from
Corporate Husbands – Soon, this will be

You (minus)

Me. (without delight)

Please
do not repeat vows

Before we match in fluttering cadence
On this beach blanket.

On the Subway Walls

Orman Day

Away from my apartment, pollinating firs,
I sit on a bed sea-breezed in Virginia,
uncurling a pocketful of paper scraps,
inky tinder ready to flare into a poem
about torment and forgiveness.

But before I write on my pad,
drooping with low blood sugar,
my Muse and I walk the main street,
deserted in the blustery off-season,
enough sun to cast glints into her chestnut hair.

I tap a sign taped to a shop window:
five dollars for foot-long sandwiches.
We tell the woman we both want the special.
She shepherds two buns of honey oat
along the countertop: meat, veggies, sauces.
She wraps them to take away.
No sodas, no chips, no cookie.

She asks for seventeen dollars and change.
"What?" Firmly she repeats the number.
Should we ruin our vacation stroll,
carry our hunger elsewhere?
We grimace, I pay, our jaws tighten,
down the street we can't find a receipt.

The bread seems more air than grain,
the meat leaves an acrid aftertaste. We seethe.
On the laptop I fill out an on-line complaint,
e-mail it to customer service at corporate.

I stand on our balcony, inhale wafts of the sea,
discover my scraps of paper have turned to ash
without kindling into flame.
My Muse opens a book with a sigh.

Days later, an automated e-mail,
our case is under review, don't reply to this address.
Weeks and weeks I wait, wondering if I should
phone the customer care team, squander an hour,
just so they can tell me that we misunderstood,
you can't put roast beef in a foot-long special,
peppers and olives will cost you extra.

Four decades ago, I picketed grape growers,
refused induction, but now when I face an injustice
like this, I react the way I'm expected to,
weighing my dwindling time, opting to forget.
But a poem and a vacation day
are dear losses I have to protest.

One night I awaken with a vision of revenge.
Pick the lock, spread out felt pens, spray cans,
a fire extinguisher sloshing red paint.
Splash images of gore-splattered wheat rolls
snapping incisors into Langston, Emily and Walt.
Strut to Ice-T, swirl to Dr. Dre,
pumping blood and ketchup there and there.
Then in interlocking letters, blocked and bold,
become a prophet writing on the Subway walls,
"Bitches better know it, these 'wiches chew up poets!"

I don't own a spray can, an extinguisher,
I don't want to circle a cell in a county jail,
but I have a keyboard, and I'd spend my last dollars
on a sheaf of paper, a cartridge of indignant ink,
even if I have to butter a crust of stale bread,
sit on a curb, call it my friggin' lunch.

Fame in Words

Bryan Gamble

When I sit down to write, I often try to think back to the elements of my past that stab the back of my brain. The tip of the memory, sharp, vivid against the back of my open eyes. I think about these moments lost of meaning, I give them context. I weave these lost bits of truth together with fantasy. I weave them together to tell a story. It's called fiction, or as I call it, my suicide note. I have been trying to work this idea, shape this word-clay into something pleasing to anyone other than myself. I often wonder if the poor souls who are ready to end it all think about this kind of shit before they run the blade down their wrist or slide the cold leather belt around their neck. I want my note to be read, interpreted, loved in some small way. I wonder if the boy willing to end it all stresses the fact that he used lined paper over solid white to express his final thoughts.

Just thoughts I guess, things left for pondering...

My name is of no real importance, but for the too curious to let it go, name's Harrow. I was born in the early eighties with little remembrance of the decade. The big thing is my name is one of those old fashioned names that never suited the era I'm a part of. I developed into a writer. A rather important one to note. For some reason people actually give a fuck, they care what I have to say. I wrote one novel, one manuscript and it accidentally got mailed to a publisher. I didn't think I'd get a call. Fuck, was I wrong... Those people ate it up. Called me with a contract and a color pallet for the dust jacket. That was the start of it, next thing you know I'm shaking hands with "Johnny-Thinks-He's-Important" on the red carpet of the film adaptation of my book.

Many people look at my success with green eyes. They break their necks looking up at me on the pedestal with saliva oozing from their gapes. They are the future of writers aspiring to be where I am. They don't know. They have no fucking clue. They are the Salvation Army draped youth, the ones with the late 1800 model typewriters tattooed to their flesh. They have no fucking clue.

I think about the time I was seven. The time my father told me to join him in his study. Some study, it was a spare bedroom with a shabby desk and a few books with more cobwebs than words. He said that life was a lesson that we already have knowledge of through and through. He said we just forgot it. He said it was up to the forces around us to bring it out. He said that life was about to hand me something that I had the smarts to handle. I was seven. I was standing there with my clothes in a pile neatly folded on the floor. I was kneeling against the old wood desk with the deep ridges of fingernail gouges. I was no longer seven. I had a violent, repetitious shove from behind into early adulthood.

They have no fucking clue.

I wove that little piece of truth into that first manuscript. I didn't spare one detail of that memory. The sharp tip twisting at my retinas. The tip sending 98.6 degree life down my arms and over my fingertips onto the keys. I wrote that in a novel to be read by all. I didn't have a purpose or really wanted responsibility for what the people would do in reaction. I'm writing a new something now. I don't know what it is yet but I'm hoping it will be my way out. I'm a gambler by obsession. I know the rules. I never leave on a winning hand. I'm hoping the readers will finally wise up and dismantle me limb by limb. I hope they replace me like the Romans did when they overtook Greece.

I can't figure out why, but I always pictured my death as a grand event with hundreds of eyes surrounding the occasion. I close my eyes and imagine every detail. I feel the course fibers of the rope piercing and dragging through my wrists and ankles. I feel the tension in my hips as I start to be pulled. I smell the acrid sent of burnt hair from the horses. I hear the roar of the crowd and the cries of the horses. Finally, I feel the tearing of the tendons and flesh that surrounds each one of my limbs. I feel the grit of the ground as my ragged torso smacks the ground. I smell the blood and I drift away. I open my eyes, my smile giving me away.

They have no fucking clue.

I look at my manuscript on the table. I wonder if it should have been printed on a different color paper other than plain white. I worry about this shit. I wonder if that girl from back in grade school worried about the number of folds in the notebook paper tucked in her tight jeans as she tied the extension hose of her shower head around her neck before dangling for a while. I stress over this shit. I went to her viewing. It was in a quiet old funeral parlor. It was an open casket. The embalmers had to glue her chin to her chest to hide the ligature marks. I later found out that makeup can't hide everything. Another piece of knowledge re-remembered.

My father was right.

I decide that my latest manuscript should be wire-bound in copper. Something out of the ordinary. I have the contract for it sprawled out next to it on the desk. The desk with the same fingernail gouges on the side. A constant reminder. They have no fucking clue. I have the page open to where I'm supposed to sign. I have a blade in my hand. I run the knife along the skin. Lightly at first. It doesn't draw blood, just raises the skin. I stress over the copper. I sign the contract.

A Bunch of Crow

Thad DeVassie

Peacocks will not peacock, nor will
a bison ever bison, yet we insist
the crow crows.

Far from being a culinary delight,
many claim witness to seeing others
eat crow.

Demonized bird, as if one isn't bad
enough, the pack conjures up
a murder.

You, with high avian IQ, streaking
across the sky as only the crow flies,
defining our geometry, tell me:

the dressed-up straw on a stick
in fields below... it's futile, isn't it,
with all that crowing about?

Accident

Steve Matanle

Most of the time I felt
like an accident
waiting to happen,
dumb luck taking the night off
and leaving me
at the mercy of the next moment,
like that time in the bar
when a man looked at me
and said, you're asking for it.
Whatever he thought
I had done, it had jump-started
his stare, and gave me
the tongue-tied feeling
of an angel, with a halo
like a hubcap that's flown off
a car slamming into a tree,
the one I used to climb
when I was a boy,
climbing into the sky.

The Hobby *Doxy Marshes, Stafford*

Peter Branson

Late August daylight crumbles into dust,
the cemetery behind, the marsh ahead;
above, in feeding mode, vast teeming shoals
of double sickle-shapes in silhouette.
Then suddenly this larger form appears,
a lithe stealth-jet slip-streaming nimble shrill
spitfires. This deadly symbiotic dance
of insect, swift and falcon must reprise
at watering holes both here and Africa,
points in between, throughout the turning year.
A random pick, or willful choice perhaps,
within a blink this conjurer can craft
a fallen angel broken on the rack,
a rag doll from a tumbling acrobat.

My Little Village

Genevieve Anakwe

Forest and water dominate the quiet village of Ndoni. It leaves civilization behind and sits in a cocoon of mystifying lights and otherworldly creatures. You can hear the leaves whispering, birds chirping and trees dancing in the glimmering light of day. The sunlight shyly peeks through the canopy of trees; monkeys jump from one tree to another. At night, it wraps itself with the silence of crickets and owls. It is like standing at the edge of civilization and looking across time into an older natural world.

The River Niger disappears in a large, slowly swirling, tree-lined pool. After appearing intermittently in scattered sinkholes, the river rises three miles downstream in a big boil. The native people are deeply connected with this river. Their deity is a water goddess called Ezeagana. She is revered as the giver of life, symbolized in the reptilian creatures that roam the entire village. It is a taboo to kill or harm these creatures. This tradition still holds even in the 21st century. The landscape seems untouched by the cruel hands of civilization. There is a dreamlike aura that emanates from every corner of the village. This is the land of my ancestors.

The village of Ndoni, Rivers State, in the Niger-Delta region of Southern Nigeria was one place I was supposed to have visited a long time ago but I strangely never did, until now. This is my maternal village, the village of the "children of water." Over the years, while growing up in the northern town of Jos, my mother and maternal grandmother would tell my siblings and me stories of their village. Stories that were deeply rooted in the traditions and superstitions of the water goddess Ezeagana, they often sounded interesting but farfetched to me. I remember my mother saying, "If I should ever fall in the River Niger, I will not drown because I'm a child of the water." I was fascinated that my mother subscribed to such superstitions despite her exposure and attainment of higher education. She regarded me with a knowing smile and continued her story. She revealed that my late grandmother had given each of my siblings, including me, a bath with water from the River Niger. This was a tradition that had been passed down from generations. I found it hard to reconcile my religious beliefs with these tales of superstition.

My first visit to this village happened a few years ago, ten years after the death of my grandmother. It was going to be my first encounter with this mystifying village and a visit to my grandmother's grave. We drove through the newly constructed road surrounded by lush, green vegetation, cocoa and palm trees lined the landscape in a welcoming gesture. Then we turned into a narrow corrugated red mud road with what seemed like endless potholes with red dust that seemed to cloak the car. The driver stopped in front of a tall, jaded, wooden gate. My mother and I got off; she told the driver to wait and we entered. As we passed through the gate, I saw a brown, two-story house with a balcony in front. It seemed almost out of place in the midst

of the earthy, green backdrop. We walked towards the back of the house and were greeted by a middle-aged man with a deep baritone voice – my uncle. He greeted us, "Kali!" He and my mother talked up a storm in their native dialect. I gave up trying to understand what they were saying. Instead I looked at the nearby river. There were stands of miniature palm trees in the still waters. Walls of dense river swamp rose before me; there were sprinklings of cool ferns and mosses. Farther from the river, expanses of tall palm trees stretch across rolling hills. The soft, cool waters of the Niger seemed to stretch her hands to eternity. I envisioned that canoeing down this river would feel like traveling backwards in time. There were many shrines along the river that honored their water goddess, whose aqueous essence was made manifest by the river running through the trees. I felt entranced by the sheer beauty of this evergreen landscape.

My mother's voice jarred me back to reality. She directed me towards a pathway that led into the forest. We walked for what seemed like an eternity, ending up in front of a big Iroko tree. At the foot of the tree rested an imposing bronze-like statue of a woman: the goddess of water herself. The giant bronze effigy had huge eyes and long arms. There were food offerings at her feet. I looked closely into her eyes, and it felt like she was looking right through me. That sent chills down my spine. Then I remembered what my mother had told me before we arrived at her village: "the crocodile lizards will always appear to welcome a child of its soil." And eerily, from the corner of my eye, I spotted the creature. As I turned to confirm, it disappeared into the thick, tall grasses. My mother nodded as if in confirmation.

Then we walked further into the forest, which dripped with humidity, and wraiths of mist wandered between the big trees. This trail led us into a small, secluded row of huts. The huts were a dark hue of brown, carved from the nurturing hands of Mother Nature. The walls of the huts were like hurdles, and the thatch projected so that its owner might sit beneath it in sun or rain. The door was low – one had to bend in order to go in. There were no windows. The hut was a single room. In its midst burned a fire which served as the focal point. For it is a light in darkness, a servant, a companion, and a guardian angel; it purifies the miasmatic air. The roof and walls are smoke-dried but clean. In one corner was a pile of wood neatly cut up into billets, and in another was a large earthen jar filled with water on which floated a *calabash* - a vegetable bowl. Close to the ashes which were becoming grey and cold was a mat woven from palm tree leaves. A red clay pot rested on one corner of the hut; ropes and cutlasses hung at the other corner. The owner of this hut joined us inside. He was a frail looking man with wrinkles all over his face, and he had a chewing stick in his mouth and a walking stick in his hands. He was barefoot, dressed in the traditional bright red "George" wrapper that was wrapped around him like a toga. But his posture commanded attention. We greeted him in the native language. He is one of several chief priests of the water goddess. He offered us palm wine from the clay pot. I felt out of place, almost like an intruder.

After taking a few sips of the palm wine, I stepped outside the hut. The air was damp and cold, and the trees and grass were heavy with dew, but the sun continued to shine. The dewdrops fell heavy and large as drops of rain, the birds chirped, and the flowers expanded their drowsy leaves and received the morning calls of butterflies and bees. The forest seemed to buzz and hum like a great factory awakening to its work. To the left of the row of huts was a small farm with tall, red tufted maize plants. I breathed in the cool, crisp air and closed my eyes. Here I was, standing in the middle of my ancestral land; I could feel their presence everywhere like a cool breeze. The sun was shining brightly, the air was pellucid, and the birds sang in chorus with the trees and the great River Niger. What more could I possibly ask for? I was in awe of its natural beauty and strong traditions that have managed to stay undiluted from the pressures of the modern world. Who was I to oppose their beliefs? Yes, modernization may try to change people, but their beliefs will persist. These are the traditions and customs that preserve the cultural integrity of river people.

Palliative

Adam Shutz

My little girl fell
Off the fire escape.
There was no fire,
She was pretending.
Playing w/ regulations
And pre-burnt matches.

She died & Jesus!
Came knocking at my door:
"She was ice,
And not enough money.
Soon you'll drink again
And look for a cheaper heaven.

Forgive me. That's all I can do."

Field Notes Regarding My Father

Mary Elizabeth Mays

As a child I was merely a magpie you threw stones at
Given the choice
I am sure
You would
Have sold me for 20 pieces of silver

I hid my pleasure from you
Under mattress and corroded springs of metal bed frame
– A jelly jar liberated before Wednesday trash
Harbored your villains
They were
Only words
Removed from newspapers you never read

Waiting for the sound of your slumber
A prayer call
Signaling pilgrimage
Sliding from my bed
Across the Berber landscape of my bedroom
To my own Moulay Idris
Licked the carpet burn of right knee
And created my own version
Of religious purpose

SHAKE
SPILL
ARRANGE-REARRANGE
REPEAT

The fluorescent light buzz of bathroom glow illuminated
Sprawl of sentences
I could never push from my lungs
This Ritual became my worship
Prostrate on my stomach
Blue and busted like a fallen robin's egg
Whispering every dirty word I could think of

When I was twenty-seven
I watched as you struggled
To read a cartoon from the comic page
Felt the seas I had drowned in during childhood
Swell inside my chest
Like wedding rice eaten by birds
Guilty of scavenging
The realization of your hatred for me
Has bruised my talons
I do not trust myself on high ledges

This Crooked Inheritance

Tracey Vaccarella

What if bitterness is inherited
and somewhere beneath my skin
in small capillaries
or behind veins
it's there
waiting
for the right moment.

Will it be simple?
Like pricking an index finger –
all of a sudden I forget
how to smile.

Or is it more like a destiny
and over time I'll turn.

Being alone will become a stone
in my stomach

I'll cackle in an empty house
at soap opera romances
look at wine glasses
half empty
tell my daughter
there is no hope.

Then let it be a battle

I'm going out tonight
let the moon spur me
with lust.

Dumb Birds

Kenneth Pobo

Ask my neighbor Lenny

his favorite TV show and he says
"Mannix. There hasn't been
a good show on since then."
As for animals, he prefers them all
extinct, especially pets.
"They mess up the yard. Birds
are the worst. What's dumber
than a bird?" Lenny

is like a suitcase
with nothing in it.

I think about telling him
About the great conversation
a cardinal and I had yesterday,
quite a learned cardinal,
not one to be imprecise.

The flashing red wings,

Bah, Lenny would say –

and then go inside
to watch the Weather Channel
tell him the weather
every 8 minutes
every 8 minutes
every 8 minutes.

Fish Wives

Jeffrey Eugene Rowe

Now and again drifting back beyond a summer's distant green
too even deep to think we could still call it from reach...
dreaming so far from shore for dying cod caught by liquid starlight,
then splayed and stiffened on the sun-burned beach

And with always you: blue, salt-aged and algae skinned
we breached and agiled every treasured cove and skimmed
bright coraled petals beneath unmeasured angles of light,
singing to the forked-tunes of our strident, marbled tongues

Those times we sank and surfaced like Selkies trading shells for skins,
scuttled furtively among dank and rotting sea shacks with
jade-foamed ambivalence yet buoyed by the scaled and netted waves
of fish wives who dived head down under red ancestral tides

Once upon the oldest we found, anchor impaled yet floundered intact,
her slime-black and barnacled tail trailing a line through brackish time...
It seemed to us so safe to swim then, but easier still to wish to drown
floating upward and immobile, swallowed by the immense iron sky.

Something Deep, Amelia Meman

The Yellow Taxi

Adriana Paramo

It's sometime around four a.m. The six of us – Mom and we five girls – are awakened by loud banging on the door. The first bang shakes the house. The second bang loosens the nails that hold down the planks of our wood floor. The third bang, the most dramatic of the three, makes them spring out of place, the nails leaping and rolling with a metallic clink-clank sound. My youngest sister grabs hold of my wrist under the covers, like she is drowning, and bolts out of bed and into the closet. A whimper comes from the belly of our oak armoire. Silence. Then something trickles out; something liquid, warm and yellow, that smells of ammonia.

Hurried noises slither out of Mom's bedroom: a shuffle of her feet searching for her old slippers, her hand scanning the wall for the light switch, a throw of her beige shawl over her shoulders, the tapping of her hand on her chest commanding herself to remain calm as she comes downstairs and toward the door that is beginning to burst open at the hinges. Before Mom reaches the door, a drunken kick unbolts it; she moves out of the way, out of Dad's way, drunken Dad's way, and lets him pass her by as if she is invisible, like a pocket of air.

The following day, as soon as Dad disappears behind the bathroom door and Mom goes downstairs to fix him breakfast, I jump into their bed. Dad's side smells of nicotine, cologne, farts, and stale coffee. I crawl away, scouring the bed with my bony legs, looking for Dad-free spots where my body can't catch his cooties. I slither onto Mom's side so I can bury my head into her pillow and inhale her love into me.

I dig my scrawny seven-year-old toes between the mattress and the headboard. I hear a rustle underneath Dad's side. I lift one corner of the spring mattress and discover a stash of magazines with pictures of women that don't look at all like Mom. Mom is dark and homely with dark circles under her eyes and silver streaks all over her hair. But boy, these women. One of them is blonde, naked, sitting on the edge of a bed, and staring right at me. Her tongue sticks out like she is trying to catch a fly; her legs spread apart to expose a body part that resembles a fresh wound. I compare it to mine and find no similarities. I wonder if Mom knows Dad keeps pictures of wounded women under his side of the bed.

An hour later, a yellow taxi arrives and blows its horn twice like a signal. Dad flies up the stairs. He drags a suitcase to the end of the corridor, passing me by without seeing me, and goes downstairs. Mom follows him, asking, "What am I going to do, huh?" He makes two more trips. Mom and I follow him up and down the stairs – each wooden step, with the passage of years and the weight of our lives, worn to concavity. Mom looks just as worn.

"What about the girls? Huh? You're abandoning five girls?"

Mom asks, shaking her right hand with outstretched fingers. I want to ask him about the naked women under his side of the mattress but the air is tense and heavy, like the sky is about to crack open above our tenement. Dad is far-gone and doesn't hear Mom; he has peeled himself off from our lives, his heart shut down to us like an unpaid utility. Mom looks around, panic settling across her face, and just when I think she is about to scream or collapse or both, she grabs me by the hand and draws me close to her as we stand by the door. Her apron smells of onions.

Dad leaves in the yellow taxi. By the time the cab reaches the end of the block, Mom has buried her fingernails deep into my right shoulder. It hurts but I don't move because I know she is hurting more. She covers my eyes, but I can see everything. The taxi takes the first bend and disappears into the sun. Mom looks old and wasted. I fear that the burden of the last twenty years will crush her at the shoulders. I won't be able to catch her if she collapses, I think, as she squeezes my head against her side and lets out a whimper.

The Dig

Angie Mullen

There was a bathtub
planted in the backyard
at our old house on Genesee.
A white oval ring exposed
after a hard rain. A half-shell
of some prehistoric egg
that needed excavating. I dug
my fingertips into the wet earth
and with a paint brush
carefully uncovered,
smooth porcelain curves
buried beneath topsoil. I imagined
a woman with goldfish hair,
sheer skin and bathing,
like some land-locked mermaid
unaware this was Kansas,
smiling hundreds of miles
from ocean. I dug deeper.

There were earthworms
and centipedes, a handful
of beetles trapped inside
white walls. My body
crouched, hands moving
simultaneously, I reached
the bottom – a silver drain, plugged
with an ancient rubber stopper.
I turned on the garden hose
and submerged my naked body
into the cold pool and searched
for hidden truths etched
into its walls.

Into the Room

Carol Blattau

I took in the aura of the room almost immediately. The dim light of a floor lamp as it cast pale shadows on the green tile floor, the creaking of the bare walls as the wind outside whistled by the edges of the building, the rattling of the lone window hidden behind a pair of heavy curtains. Nestled against the back wall stood a single bed covered with a rumpled wool blanket and a small nightstand, its only occupant a clock clicking a tired rhythmic song. The room had a stale smell as if something once bright had long since died, leaving its scent to forever stain the air.

A single high back chair faced the window and as I tentatively approached, I strained to hear signs of a living person. Any soft breath, any small sound, any single movement would have eased my mind. I rounded the chair and saw the woman with her ash-gray head leaning against the back, eyes closed, blue-veined hands folded across her lap. To my relief, she was breathing, a soft whistle coming from between her thin lips as her bosom rose then lowered in uneven rhythms, contrary to the clicking of the clock.

"Grandmother," my voice was barely a whisper, and I wondered if it could be heard above the wind that was now raging to a crescendo outside. "It's me, Lucy."

I wanted her to wake, but I was afraid of what I would find. My fears were answered when I touched her thin shoulder and her eyes fluttered open revealing no more than a blank stare. There was no recognition in those eyes, only confusion at having been awakened from an uneasy slumber. I felt my heart drop.

"It's your granddaughter Lucy," I said as I knelt down in front of the chair.

It had been a long time since I'd visited my grandmother, and as I viewed the aged face before me, I worried that I had waited too long. I knew she had been ill lately, unable to care for herself any longer, but the reality of her decline still came as a shock to me. The loving and laughter-filled grandmother I knew had shriveled away, leaving this worn graying body with faded eyes. Holding back my tears, I put my hands over hers, feeling the coldness of her paper-thin skin against my own.

She had been a kind, silver-haired woman with steel blue eyes and a contagious laugh that, when in full eruption, caused her to close her eyes and tilt her head back as if she were offering those festive moments to the heavens. I could still see my grandmother in her colorful checkered dresses with white pressed collars, her forties-style buckled shoes, and those tan stockings that she would roll down to her ankles if the weather was really hot. I remembered how she kept a never-ending supply of tissues nestled deep in her bra or the sleeve of her crocheted sweater. And I remembered her hearing aids that when she was trying to adjust would whistle louder than the

teapot she used every afternoon.

I lowered my head, the tears falling as I grasped the chilled hands. I would never hear her laughter or look into her sparkling eyes again. I had come too late.

"Goodness, Lucy, whatever is the matter with you?" her voice boomed into the room, startling me from my grief. "You scared me half to death, sneaking in here like that."

Confused by my tears, she leaned forward and reversed our hands, taking mine into her cool grasp.

"Why on earth are you crying?" she asked.

"I thought..."

"You thought I was dying?" she chuckled. "No, not yet. Although, if God were to take me today, I would be fine with it. But in the meantime, there is too much to do."

She released my hands and pointed to the boxes hidden in the corner I neglected to see in my silent stupor.

"Your brother's on his way to help me unpack," she said. "I'll be glad to have my own things in here to brighten up the place. Right now, this room feels too much like a tomb."

Then, as she settled back into her chair, she wrinkled her nose and added, "For heaven's sake, Lucy! What is that awful smell?"

Seven O'clock Appointment

Natalie Shaw

When time steals my youth,
And nature saps my energy for entropy,
I want to keep my 7 o'clock appointment

At a tiny table in the library, nestled against
Panes of glass overlooking the fountain or
Under the ancient willow in the park
Who bears witness
To many a game more intriguing than ours.

When my sight fades to darkness,
And my touch turns slow and brittle,
I wish you will keep your 7 o'clock appointment

Because playing chess alone
Just emphasizes the isolation
Of my solitary life
Whose cycle is broken
Only by our Tuesday evening meetings.

When the brakes squeal in the thunderous downpour,
And the siren breaks the steady patter on the library windows,
I anxiously seek a clock to deny my fears.
Tuesday night.
7:01 p.m.
Your first broken appointment since the birth of your last grandchild ten years ago.

When the weather breaks,
And the sun shines again,
I will initiate a new tradition.

7 p.m.,
Tuesday night,
Plot 1B,
St. Martin's Cemetery.

I'll bring the donuts, the board, and the strategy;
You bring the conversation.

Once

Jane Blanchard

Well, I'll never do that again,
and I do mean never.
When the man of the family
went missing again,
an agent at the airport
called the home phone
to say that his baggage
should be picked up
before it's disposed of.
My first thought was
he's screwing around again,
and my next thought was
who's gonna pay to replace
all those clothes.
So I drove to the airport,
and I claimed that baggage
and dragged it through the parking lot
and heaved it into the minivan
(bought at a discount to carry
the last child around with the rest)
and hauled it across town and into the house,
and then I picked up the home phone
and cancelled every joint credit card.

Redemption Road

E St.

The first time I ever felt like I was really getting to know my father was at a gas station on our way to Baltimore as we drove all the way from a tiny farm town called Ranch Country near Houston, Texas. We were both leaving Ranch Country, but my father was also leaving everything he had ever known in the hopes of keeping his prideful promise to be around, "from the womb, to the tomb," as he'd say. I was convinced this move, with the addition of my father, was exactly what our family needed to feel whole. This time, with him, was different because my mother, older brother, and older sister had moved nearly five times since I had turned five; never far, just to a slightly larger space. I can still remember one vividly hot move-day back in 1994 as we hauled our giant swing set, by hand, through the neighborhood with all our friends.

My mother always made sure to keep us in a house, never an apartment. She believes a house makes more of a statement as to the stability of the family; she also liked to grow her roses, and apartments weren't conducive to the lifestyle of a potential gardener. We had moved out to that cow-heaven farm town because my father lost all his good sense and started selling the household appliances. Clearly it was time for us to go, and as far as my mother was concerned, anywhere my father couldn't easily find us was where we needed to be.

When she speaks of the day we left, I swear I can remember being draped over her one side while she ushered my brother and sister to the car. She says we each had a backpack, but we left with nothing else. I was only two, so I'm sure it's impossible that I could actually remember it happening, but when she tells the story I feel the pull on my memory, some type of ownership. She says I screamed for my father for a whole year after we left him. Not a wet-eye kind of cry, just a loud, painful holler.

Despite the start-over and the desperate attempts to maintain normalcy, my father found us. My memory of him was compiled of pockets of experiences where he would show up when my mom was out of town and my older sister would have to sweet talk him into leaving. To this day, I can tell how proud he feels as a father knowing that he found his family, even though he was the reason we fled. Either way, he eventually got good at finding us, so my mom stopped hiding. After all, they had been married seventeen marvelous years before his misstep and she didn't want us to grow up without knowing him. So he was included in the big move to Baltimore; it was my mother's way of offering him one last chance to press the redo button and make everything better again.

The way I look back on it, at least they both made the effort. About fifteen hundred miles in, my father started to realize what was actually happening; it was as if he awakened to find we had kidnapped him. He pulled the U-Haul into a gas station and started complaining that he changed all my diapers when I was

a baby. He ranted that his life was still on hold so my mother could reach all her dreams. I was twelve. This was the first time I could remember being in the same space as my father for more than three hours. I watched him as if I was studying myself. Every word he said, every move he made was observed as if I was preparing for a quiz. Learning him became knowing me. He watched me watch him and began to weep; not slow tears creeping from the side of his eyes, but a fast-flowing, soak-your-pants, hands-dripping-with-snot-and-watery-salt kind of crying. Had I known him, I probably would have cried with him, but I was too busy getting to know him. To this day I still don't know what triggered his breakdown, whether we are talking about when I was two or when I was twelve. To me they represent the same scared man, attempting to restake his life with broken means. The older I get, the more I realize that while his attempts are many, he only grows weaker.

My most recent opportunity to know my father came at his father's funeral. This time, I hadn't seen my father in almost four years, but he was coming to pick me up from the airport, quite inconveniently, right in the middle of the funeral processions. He arrived in a blue suit that was clearly drowning him. His head was scabbed up from the quick shave he had given himself. He said his nerves were so bad he had to remove all his hair; it was his first time seeing his scalp. As we pulled away from the airport, it started pouring so hard the roads began to flood. I took pictures from inside the car in amazement; a foot of water had accumulated within 30 minutes. As soon as the church came into sight, the rain cleared and was replaced by a rainbow. We had missed the entire funeral procession. But as the burial grounds were located at the church, we walked over to my grandfather's casket before it was lowered into the ground.

My father was much calmer than I expected even though I could tell he was completely freaked out; his eyes were shaken like he saw a murder. As I stood there and tried to formulate an appropriate mood to handle my grandpa's death, my father started unhitching the locks to the casket. Within seconds I was watching my father as he unwrapped and stroked his father's hair, speaking of how long it had grown over the century that it had been left uncut. I quietly watched my father and saw his pain in letting go; he almost missed his last chance to say goodbye. Now, he seemed to be more concerned with finding normalcy in this bizarre situation than in grieving.

His way of coping was familiar to me; I recognized myself in it. I felt like I was getting to know him, again, as I saw myself in his actions, and felt closer to him because he was so similar to me. As I watched him stroking my grandpa's long hair, I could see myself at his funeral one day. I felt a strange comfort with the physical body of my father; a sense of entitlement to being wholly comfortable with him, even as a stranger.

Cape Town 8:36 p.m.

Daniel Aristi

Tonight
Someone's lobbed
Again
The Moon over
The skyline and
Into the sea.

Look
There goes something
For everyone
You could argue:
This Pearly Indifferent
After all
She shines equally
For rich and
For pauper…

(But)
At the walled up bungalows
On the rich hill
They'll entrap Her
In swimming pools
Among quivering barbwire
And they'll look down with
Martinis at
Their own
private
little
moon

(Whilst)
In the townships
She whirls
Naked
For all to see
Beer-breathed
Aimless
And the hoi polloi…
Obscene globe
You
Communal
Pale-skinned
Whore n'
Mother
You

Moon.

Going Home *Israel, July, 2006*

Karen Levy

The Israeli airport official is young, her hair as curly as mine only darker, no gray snaking through it yet. The sun has barely had time to warm the day, and her face already shows signs of boredom. I smile warmly, a habit adopted from my American husband, a way to charm even the most disgruntled government employee. Good morning! I announce in my heaviest American accent, offering a fistful of American passports through the narrow opening in her cage. She eyes me suspiciously, mistrusting early morning cheerfulness, thumbs through the paperwork, and stops so abruptly that I know she must have arrived at mine. I have been caught again, trying not to be me.

Your identity number, she commands, weariness gone from her tone. She is awake.

What do you mean? I ask innocently, trying and rapidly failing to keep the Sabra tucked out of view, the daggers out of my eyes, the edge out of my voice, the anger I know is on its way out of the shaking in my knees. And I am seeing myself repeating a scene which has become a familiar dance between two countries, both claiming me as their own, yet one does so more aggressively, unaccustomed to losing her battles.

Your identity number is in your Israeli passport, the clerk explains, impatience creeping into her voice, her eyes holding mine as if to say she's giving me one last chance.

I don't have one, I lie, my expired Israeli passport pulsing slightly in my purse, trying to give me away. I clasp the bag closer to my side, as if the document inside could wiggle its way out and expose me, ruin the decision I had already made on the ride to the airport. The clerk eyes me contemptuously, turning to the phone hanging on the wall of her cubicle. I hold her eyes with mine as she switches to Hebrew and summons reinforcements for the problem standing before her. I dare a glance at my husband whose eyes are rolling at what he knows is sure to come. And as if on cue, a tall woman rushes towards me, determination stamped on her tight-lipped face.

Your identity number! She yells in my face, as I straighten myself for some extra height.

I still don't have one, I hiss back, and you don't have to yell, I add, ignoring my husband's attempt to catch my attention and my children's wide-eyed stares.

I'm not yelling, she yells. But if you want to leave today I need your Israeli passport!

I am beginning to notice the gathering crowd staring intently as this early morning drama unfolds. The threat of detaining me has done away with my last attempt at polite American control, the thought of that plane leaving without me unbearable.

I'm an American citizen and I don't live here, I declare. I haven't lived here for twenty years, and if you threaten me I won't be coming back! I want to go home, the thought hitting me with clarity it has never had before.

With this kind of behavior we don't WANT you here! she retorts, and the hand I plunge into my purse has figured out what it has to do before I have a chance to think this through. I pull out the Israeli passport and throw it at the angry stranger.

Take it. Keep it. I won't need it anymore. I've switched to Hebrew without noticing, measuring out my words carefully so their meaning will not be lost on either one of us. I don't want to make a mistake in the language I no longer live, taking the official and myself by surprise as she stomps away with my claim to citizenship in her hand. I refuse to meet my husband's eyes, knowing too well the disappointment I would see reflected there, the words that would be sure to follow if I gave him a chance to say them, which I don't. But I can hear them anyway as I stand facing the clerk whose eyes look almost regretful for the mess she could have avoided. You're such an Israeli, my American husband is silently saying to my back, his favorite insult when I've misbehaved and slipped into my former self, the one I took so long to wake and don't really want to shove back into the genie's bottle. The one I allowed out in my father's garden the night before, when the sadness of the next day's good-byes spilled out using all the wrong words and turned into anger he translated as weakness; anger he no longer needed once he had found his place in the world. But I was still searching, for the land that would feel like home, for the people who remembered what had been before it changed, for the voice in which to say it all. Anger seemed to keep the tears at bay, and I could not afford tears right now.

The official has returned our documents in hand, wordlessly offering them back, my Israeli passport included in case I change my mind. We're free to leave and I stride ahead, not looking back, trusting that my husband and children are in tow. The faster I walk the less chance they will see the tears that are now coming hot and furious. I make my way to the gate where a tall man is wrapped and swaying in his prayer shawl. From a far corner, cigarette smoke pours out of the smoking section where the door has been propped open for air by the very same people polluting it. Idiots, I mutter as I throw myself into an empty seat, although I'm also grateful for the added cause for anger, making leaving that much easier. My husband and children have been following at a safe distance, him placing a hot cup of coffee in my hands, while they glue themselves to the large window to watch the planes. The coffee helps, warm liquid washing away tension that had been gathering for the last three weeks, even when I didn't know it. I thought I could face old friends, old haunts, introduce the present to the past, not realizing that the past was present in every turn – not just when I chose to bring the two together. History was in the handful of items I recognized on my father's shelves; a statue here, a vase there, pieces from a past life surprising me in new surroundings. The past was in the voice of my grandmother's

oldest friend. Karushka! Her endearing name for me a sound I had forgotten. Still sharp, no nonsense, like all the women her age who suffered more than any human should. I had to escape into her tiny kitchen when the phone rang and she switched to Polish. It was as if no time had passed and she could have been talking to my dead grandmother. Even the kitchen offered little refuge, everything about it reminding me of other kitchens. Old dish towels worn to threads, pots predating the war that brought their owners to this land. Everything saved by women who knew what not having meant. These reminders were too sad, not because of what they represented, but because I hadn't been given the choice of saying goodbye, never allowed to decide what I wanted to be. Was I the Californian returning to her native land? The Israeli exile pretending to be American? A tourist bringing Middle Eastern souvenirs to hang on American walls?

Minutes before boarding would be announced, the tail ends of my anger evaporating around the corner of the terminal, I finally thought I knew. There would always be a place for me on this side of the world: a bed in my father's new house, a plate at my best friend's table, people including me in their thoughts and hearts, missing me when I was gone. But I had become more visitor than resident, my camera ready to capture images I no longer assumed I'd see again. I now relied on photographs, on notes carefully recorded in a journal packed for the occasion. These tools would help me stop time, preserve it before people moved and strangers' faces looked out of familiar windows. Before loved ones died, their images dancing away, buildings in which I'd spent my childhood demolished. Before change came and I'd forget while becoming someone else, joining that life I was waiting to begin while it had kept going without me. The balance had shifted, and when the plane touched down in San Francisco, the official checking my passport would welcome me home, and I'd be there.

Movement Poem

Colin D. Halloran

Squirrels move trees.

Move into them, move them, are moved by them. But a squirrel can't move a tree with roots that anchor it forever down to earth.

Nuts!

They can hoard, hoard, hoard, but fuck independent wealth, I want to be independently symbiotic with this world. To write words so rich they fill the poor souls' coffers. When they ask, I'll tell them my wealth is in my words and let my poems speak freely, the trickle down, and move them.

And never use the word "detritus" even though I just did.
And remember my roots so the squirrels can't move me, can't add me to their hoard, their stash, their...

But I move. I move my mouth to speak these words, my hand to pen these riches.
But I can't move: I had to pull over to write this.

Stop

Christopher Warman

Stop
Just
Stop
This is all there is
This is the moment when the air stands still and the trees choke on gravity.
This is the instant where that second hand makes its last tick, booming into place with an echoing absolutism.
This is the point where the breath that so easily wandered in isn't sure if it will surface again.
This is the microcosm of dark royal velvet blooms between my eyes and the sun.
This is the space between you and me and him and her and everybody.
So please
There is no more
Stop
Just
Stop.

Voyeurs in Love

Greg Leichner

"WAS IT GOOD FOR YOU TOO?"

Contributors

Jeffrey C. Alfier is a two-time *Pushcart*.

Joel Allegretti is the author of a chapbook of poems and poetic essays. He is all about musical instruments.

Genevieve Anakwe is a native of Nigeria, hailing from the south-eastern tribe of Igbo. Her mother's rich cultural heritage rooted in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria inspired the writing of this short story. She is passionate about writing stories that reveal the complexities and nuances of the African experience.

Julie Ann loves motoring around island nations and collecting museum guidebooks.

Kelsey Ann strives to live by the words of great writers; lately, these from Hemingway: "Write drunk and edit sober." Her passions include magazines, semicolons, naps, aphorisms, breathing, snuggling, the intersection of Choice & Charter, and cheese. PS- Hi, Mom!

Danielle Ariano makes a living as a cabinetmaker but hopes one day to support herself through her writing and let cabinetmaking move into the hobby category.

Daniel Aristi was born in Spain in 1971, so he just turned 40 and feels slightly distraught at his age, let's face it. He hates instant coffee, idolizes Kerouac, and loves Reshma (wife) and Ria (daughter). Daniel writes whenever baby Ria decides she wants to have a nap.

Jenni B. Baker enjoys Lunchables and giving money to homeless people on the street. Dislikes include people who clang their spoon against their bowl when they eat and the way Scotch Brite pads feel against your hands.

Carrie Beall is in her junior year at Towson University, majoring in Fine Arts.

Jane Blanchard is a native of Charlottesville, Virginia. She currently divides her time between Augusta and St. Simon's Island, Georgia. She writes both metrical and free verse.

Carol Blattau spends a ridiculous amount of time looking up grammar and punctuation rules, and has come to terms with two things: 1) periods and commas almost always go inside quotation marks—unless you're from Britain; 2) she still doesn't understand semicolons.

Peter Branson has been published.

Marty Cain thinks spending her developmental years cramped in tiny communities has made her fascinated with the intricacies of human relationships and emotions.

Melissa Chichester secretly wants to be a princess – okay, it's not that big of a secret. She works from home to support her habit of dancing around in layers of pink silk and tulle.

Jack Combs has this just to say, "I have had sex with your wife upon the pristine sheets of your bed, the woman you probably thought was devoted to you till death do you part. Forgive me, she was amazing, so sweaty and so warm."

Chris Compson's awards and accolades are numerous and prestigeous, including the Home Economics Student of the Quarter received during his senior year of high school. The plaque still hangs in his kitchen where he spends large portions of his time indulging in candy-coated happiness. He enjoys teaching seventh-grade, running, coaching and weather both as an occupation, hobby and hazard.

Tasha Cotter is anxiously awaiting the day her agent tells her someone wants to publish her books. Besides sitting around in the Bluegrass state, twiddling her thumbs, she's also busy planting flowers that attract hummingbirds, teaching, and grilling out. She is in the market for a pickup truck.

Orman Day's adventures: spending a night in jail at Mardi Gras, witnessing a sky burial (two corpses, three-hundred vultures) in Tibet, bungee jumping off a New Zealand bridge, and paddling a canoe down the Mississippi River, a grueling two month journey from St. Paul to New Orleans.

Thad DeVassie's also is Smythe Peters, president of the International Flag Preservation Society and J for H Day (Dec. 23), fronts the air band The Translucent Experience, and hosts *The Poncho Via Variety Hour That Lasts 30 Minutes*, which is coming to a cable network near you.

Larry Eby is a 23-year-old, open beer bottle in a dusty garage. He spends all of his time behind the oxidized dryer wishing for recycle-bin comfort. He's accompanied by a mud-covered garden shovel, a pubic hair, and his old crown.

Bryan Gamble hails from Baltimore City and has recently decided that he is going into the business of manufacturing dreams for those poor souls who find themselves too grounded in reality.

Lenore Glover is a digger of dirt, artist, user and abuser of certain social networks, and disturbingly obsessed with tomato porn.

John Grey as one of the world's largest collections of non-collections. He owns one of so many different things that they could be construed as a collection by disinterested parties but interested parties know better.

Chelsea Rebekah Grimmer has a deep love for the dash – but not necessarily the "Em-Dash" – and uses semi-colons far too frequently; this is mostly an excuse to avoid ending a too wordy sentence. Her cat stares at her with profound confusion when she speaks one of these drawn-out sentences, which usually end with a desire for some form of food – most commonly ice cream or tea.

Colin D. Halloran was once a human being. In his wanderings he came across some fading graffiti declaring, "human being is illegal." He breathed a sigh of relief and is now a poet.

John Hayes developed the ability to project from his body into outer space while performing as a corpse on the TV show, *Homicide*. He occasionally returns to Earth to submit poetry to *Welter* and other magazines.

Stephanie M. Henderson "feels that she's 'a strong black woman.' People had been telling [her] this her whole life. She supposed she was lucky that way – there were worse things to be told. But the fact remained: as a sentence it was really beginning to bore the hell out of her." —from Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*

Nathan Holic is amused/perplexed/happy/saddened that his "Top 25 Most Played" iTunes songs include "I Ran (So Far Away)" by A Flock of Seagulls, "Notorious Thugs" by Bone Thugs N Harmony (ft. Notorious B.I.G.), "For All the Cows" by Foo Fighters, "Drive Slow" by Kanye West, and "Save Tonight" by Eagle Eye Cherry. He refuses to acknowledge whether Nicki Minaj has made the list.

Ian Humphrey, Esq. has a required slay rate of one hundred zombies and a dozen redcoats every season. And not just any old brits either: genuine lobsterbacks.

Layne Humphrey is a queer femme dyke with four amazing young adult children – all straight – go figure...! Two cats, tiny house in Hamden, senior research program coordinator at a preeminent medical institution... going steady with a totally bad-ass butch... she is wildly happy despite being in a union marginalized by the dominant heterosexual culture.

[INSERT_NAME_HERE] is aroused by reading Shakespeare's plays, sonnets, and Shakespeare himself.

Robert Jacoby pursues happiness in Maryland.

Jasc's comics can serve as good friend control, when you can decide how they're drawn. Awkward silences, make some of the best laughter. Chewy macaroons.

David Jordan, who lives in Bend, Oregon, is a happy man.

Colleen Margot Keehl is a true Michigander. She lives in a mitten and can shovel snow just as well as any man. While she sometimes balks at an eternity of anything, Colleen records her findings tangibly, in the form of poetry, for all to take solace in.

Greg Leichner, CEO of "Citizens For A Poodle-Free Montana," ran for president in 1996 and received less votes than Donald Duck. He blames his dyslexia on the fact that, when he was a child, his parents removed half the letters from his alphabet soup.

Karen Levy is an American-Israeli writer whose work reflects the color and texture of two cultures: the Israel of her childhood and the America of her youth and adulthood, both worlds shaping her writing and her life.

Steven Leyva has been known to throw elbows – poignant ones full of enjambment – fully convinced that his poetry comes from there and not the crotch. Ha!

Breean Lowe is not the kind of redhead that can tan. A poet, editor, and copywriter, she lives in the Oakland area with her scientist husband and two fighting fish.

Steve Matanle used to spend a lot of time in emergency rooms with those like himself to whom one thing had happened, and then another.

Mary Elizabeth Mays enjoys turkey sandwiches and calling John Boehner, "John Boner." She is currently studying the difference between upper and lower case morons and a new found interest in the martial arts prompted her to enroll in a Venetian Blind Fighting class where she savagely got her ass beat.

Amelia Meman is not a chair, and she is not a chinchilla. She is not in between the two either. She is not a balloon factory. She is not a princess. She is not "that one Asian chick with the nose ring and the glasses and the hair".

Angie Mullen is currently working on her M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She received her B.A. in English from the University of Iowa.

Heidi Gabrielle Nobles has lived in and out of the Baltimore area. In and out. In out. In out in out inoutinoutinout.

Jenny O'Grady isn't any of the things she says she is.

Carl Palmer now lives in Washington without wristwatch, cell phone or alarm clock. Long Weekends Forever.

Adriana Paramo is an anthropologist, therefore a gypsy, who's found: magic in Colombia, peace in Alaska, love in Kuwait. Among her most precious possessions are: a thick accent, a useless PhD, a box full of discarded dreams.

Summer Patton is an all the time writer and sometime table dancer. When not writing at, or dancing on said tables, she spends her time in a secret tree house on the river with her pit bull and fiancé. If it sounds like she's slurring her words, it's probably because you're drunk.

Eleanor Paynter grew up in Texas and learned to dumpster dive for art. She now teaches and explores utopian landscapes.

Andrea Phillips is still happily married to the alcoholic's son and is working as a marketing manager, while actively seeking a position in full-time motherhood. She says that despite not having a father, or maybe because of – her life has turned out pretty well.

Kenneth Pobo is one of the world's great authorities on Tommy James and the Shondells. He knows little about vegetables. Someone recently said the word "iPad" to him and his response was: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Charles Rammelkamp, while neither a jock nor a gym rat, notes many dramatic occurrences at the gym, from the octogenarian in the steam room who shadowboxes in the mist, remembering his glory days in the ring, to the homeless woman who sleeps on a chaise lounge by the side of the pool.

Price Roberts moved out west, looking for truth. He found it. Price moved down south looking for love. He didn't find it. He moved back east, still looking for love. He met her. He married her. He's a family man. He sells stuff. He writes stuff. He drinks Mountain Dew.

Jeffrey Eugene Rowe hangs out with known morphene users and can be found in the dim stairwells and dark corners of the LAP Building with ink dripping from his chin.

Natalie Shaw was showing off her rain boots to Jack and Christopher when she realized their pleasant rapport constituted a "shared experience," so she wrote it down in her diary to revisit at a later date. In addition to that moment together, the three of them have also seen Vanessa Hudgens naked.

Adam Shutz tells people that the name of his lit mag, *Artichoke Haircut*, comes from a story about the Italian painter, Caravaggio, throwing artichokes at a waiter's head while drunk. But it is actually the rough translation of a line from a dirty Portuguese limerick, *ela alcachofra necessário um corte de cabelo.*

Kerrin Smith is an English student going into her third year of college. Her last name is perfect.

E St. (Elise Victoria) is a very busy tree planting machine, the type who keeps a pile of dirt in her pocket. When she's not playing in dirt, she's obsessed with writing lyrics. Writing allows her to leave a piece of herself with the world, forever. Document everything and maybe someone will document you.

Elizabeth Kate Switaj prefers cheap whiskey to cheap subversion. Her first taste of absinthe came in an earthquake after an evening of cherry-blossom viewing concluded with naked men climbing the trees. Last summer, she drank coffee with James Joyce in Pula and won a sparkling Riesling chugging contest in Trieste.

Caitlin Elizabeth Thomson is a poet and professor from Canada, who currently resides in Brooklyn, NY. The poet Tom Lux once called her the strangest person he had ever met.

L.E. Towne is chief cook and butler for a highly intelligent mixed-breed dog and ADHD afflicted cat. Seriously, he's on meds and everything. When she's not walking, feeding, grooming, or reading to her housemates, she writes occasionally. The dog enjoys her stories – the cat doesn't sit long enough to listen.

J.A. Tyler has in front of him three cups. One is a takeaway cup for chai tea. One is made to look like a takeaway cup but is actually plastic and reusable and filled with coffee. One is not actually a cup but a small metal thermos full of more of the same coffee from cup number two and is used to refill the plastic cup that is meant to look like a takeaway cup when the plastic cup that is a takeaway cup is emptied.

Tracey Vaccarella received her B.A. in English from Virginia Tech and is happy to finally earn her MFA in Creative Writing & Publishing Arts in the Spring of 2011.She wants to thank *Welter* for publishing her poem. It's a nice way to leave the program thinking maybe this writing dream is not just a dream.

Kevin Walls keeps a jar of sarcasm next to a cup of wonder on his desk. He is currently developing single word sentences, called ____. He splits his time between noticing things and not. He dislikes hypercranialoquy, but enjoys cultivating contradictions and growing absurdities inside and outside prose.

Victoria Wambui is the alter ego for a writer/singer still in search of herself. When she finds her, she'll be in for quite a pleasant surprise.

Christopher Warman is a bastard, and a lucky one at that. He doesn't need much aside from violet skies and girls with wolverine blood. He doesn't want much aside from being able to create and being able to love. He may be mild mannered in appearance, but he is a true wombat at heart. It's been swell.

Sean C. Wilson notes these words people have used to describe him: arrogant, black, smug, invasive, broccoli, brilliant, mean, evil, chartreuse, smartass, uninsignificant, wicked, nice, provolone, apathetic, quesadilla, nonchalant, pro-life, raunchy, liberal, articulate, illiterate, awesome, okay, staccato, douchey, anathema, seventeen, empty, opinionated, uninconsistent, picky, needy, clever, fickle, facetious, fastidious, insidious, lovely, anchorman, enigmatic, devourer.

Marion Winik belives that no matter how many children she sends to college, this UB professor seems to have more at home. Not to mention all of you little pitsels.

Yance Wyatt is a lay psychologist with self-diagnosed obsessive-compulsive disorder, which compels him to repeat certain things four times, four times, four times, four times. His latest theory: we are all insane in our own special way. Even you. And if you don't have a problem, your problem is denial.

David E. Yee is [eventually] graduating from the University of Baltimore. He writes because he can't sing. He is in love with simple.

The text of *Welter* is set in Adobe Caslon Pro. This font was designed by William Caslon and based on seventeenth-century Dutch old-style designs, which were then used extensively in England. The first printings of the American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were set in Caslon. Adobe Caslon Pro is a popular choice for magazines, journals, and corporate communications.

The headings of *Welter* are set in Myriad Pro. Myriad is a humanist sans-serif typeface designed in the 1990's by Robert Slimbach and Carol Twombly for Adobe Systems. Myriad is easily recognized due to its special "y" descender (tail), slanting "e" cut, and rounded curves.

Welter was published and bound by Indigo Ink, Maryland.